Extreme weather conditions in regional Victoria: 
A reflection and response through painting and sound

An Appropriate Durable Record submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of The Master of Fine Art (Research) MR208

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Extreme weather conditions in regional Victoria: A reflection and response through painting and sound

Belinda Wilson
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the Appropriate Durable Record is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Belinda Wilson

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Thank you
Belinda Wilson
Drought year

Judith Wright

That time of drought the embered air
burned to the roots of timber and grass.
The crackling lime-scrub would not bear
and Mooni Creek was sand that year.
The dingo’s cry was strange to hear.

I heard the dingoes cry
in the scrub on the Thirty-mile Dry.
I saw the wedgetail take his fill
perching on the seething skull.
I saw the eel wither where he curled
in the last blood-drop of a spent world.

I heard the bone whisper in the hide
of the big red horse that lay where he died.
Prop that horse up, make him stand,
hoofs turned down in the bitter sand
make him stand at the gate of the Thirty-mile Dry.
Turn this way and you will die-
and strange and loud was the dingoes’ cry (Wright, 1953).
Abstract

Through the creation of paintings, drawings, digital images and sound art, I combined my own memories of regional living with selected personal and historical accounts of others to create a body of artworks that investigated extreme weather conditions, especially those such as bushfire, drought and flood, that have taken place in North-East Victoria. In recent times, the issues surrounding extreme weather conditions in Australia have come into stronger focus, as many regional communities are being battered by the devastating impacts of challenging and harsh weather conditions. How weather affected inhabitants, and the emotional impacts of extreme weather have been a critical aspect of my research project.

Themes that were investigated in this project include; memory and belonging to place, change and time and the landscape painting genre to develop a particular narrative of living in regional Australia with a focus on the townships of Wangaratta and Milawa in North East Victoria. Change and time focused on a transformation of an environment changing over time from green pastures with fat livestock, to a drought-stricken barren waste-land. This occurred during a fourteen-year drought known as the Millennium Drought or Big Dry (1996–2010) in many regions throughout Australia including North East Victoria where I was living at the time. This drought made a strong impact on my family and I, in particular the realisation that water was a precious commodity and the lack of water during this time was a struggle. However, what did emerge during this drought period was a strong community spirit which supports the theme in this project of belonging to place. This relates to my own sense of community and connectedness to home. In this project, I have explored the emotional effects of environmental alteration and its subsequent challenges. These themes correlate to memories of my childhood home and intimate familiarity with regional settings.
The objective of the project was to portray memories of the Millennium Drought period through the development of artworks and this was initially undertaken with a photoshoot in January 2014. Though four years after the Millennium Drought had broken, the land of South Wangaratta was dry and brittle by the scorching summer heat. The photographs were of my father Michael Wilson (1941-) and documented the change in temperature over a period of six hours as shadows moved across the land, the sun’s glaze became hotter and the light on the ground transformed from darkness to intense light. These photographs began a process of my capturing the terrain and impressions of the terra firma in North East Victoria and working through the narrative. I captured on audio my father retelling his thoughts on the region, and his lived experiences of the impacts of extreme weather. The project saw the creation of oil paintings, mixed media drawings, digital drawings and sound works. The sound recordings were undertaken in the township of Milawa, situated thirty minutes from Wangaratta in the King Valley during gusty dry winds where I recorded a soundscape of the environment.

The project marries fine art methodologies with digital media and contributes to contemporary art practices that re-imagine the ways that weather can impact the environment and inhabitants living on the land. The artworks created are overall a documentation of my stories and memories from North East Victoria. The project has become a personal narrative of my own time spent in a regional community and my interactions with witnessing changing environmental conditions. The practice-led research examines perception and relationships to changes in weather. The focus is on personal recollections of living through changing and challenging weather conditions rather than climate change. Through the four years undertaking the Master’s part-time, the project has allowed for discovery and exploration both artistically and through a reconnection to my past. The project has resulted in an exhibition that portrays painting and drawing and is complemented by sound works which convey feelings of solastagia.
The research question

In what ways can I create paintings, drawings and sound art that respond to memories and emotional connections to my home in North-East Victoria and the challenges of extreme weather conditions faced by inhabitants of the region?
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This practice led research emerged from a studio-based approach to landscape painting and drawing. I have considered themes of emotional memory and lived experience in relation to my own recollections of events, living in regional Victoria along with selected personal and historical accounts of others. For this research, I concentrated on the locations of Wangaratta and Milawa in North East Victoria to narrate experiences of living through difficult weather conditions and how this affects emotional well-being. This concept was first initiated through a sequence of photographs taken of my father, Michael Wilson in a dry, barren paddock at the foot of the Warby Ranges in South Wangaratta (2014) where I documented a change in climatic conditions over a period of six hours, with the intention of capturing changing weather and temperature patterns.

The photoshoot was undertaken in January on an intensively hot summer’s day and established a creative vision for the project. Alongside the photographs, I recorded an audio narrative of Michael recalling his thoughts on the impact of weather and how this affected the farming community around him. These photographs and audio recordings taken, inspired a series of paintings, drawings, the development of digital drawings and animated drawings with sound. Sound was used to strengthen the project outcome through broadening my artistic range. Additionally, I wanted to engage an audience with a visualisation of the landscape and for them to hear the environment that envelops it.

Developed over a period of four years1, the project includes a suite of drawings, paintings, digital media artworks, animations and soundscapes to complement the digital works. The development of this body of work led to investigations that I initially thought would be a documentary study of regional issues and a body of landscape paintings to support this. However, the project became condensed to a more singular focus on how extreme weather impacts on one’s emotional well-being. Aiming to move away from the stylised painted landscapes that I had created through early artworks that had been exhibited at Artistry Gallery in Melbourne (2003-2007) and the Muse Gallery, Milawa (2008-2013), the research unearthed a deep connection to my spiritual homeland of Wangaratta, memories of growing up in regional Victoria and exposure to extreme weather conditions (drought, bushfires and floods) that were at times unfathomable. The experience and memories of living through extreme weather conditions and the expectation that environmental catastrophes were to happen, formed the foundation of the project.

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1. This is due to undertaking the Masters’ part-time.
While perceptions of colour are somewhat subjective, there are some colour effects that have universal meaning. Colours in the red area of the colour spectrum are known as warm colours and include red, orange, and yellow. These warm colours evoke emotions ranging from feelings of warmth and comfort to feelings of anger and hostility. Colours on the blue side of the spectrum are known as cool colours and include blue, purple, and green. These colours are often described as calm, but can also call to mind feelings of sadness or indifference (Cherry, 2018, para 14).

Additionally, the research revealed that weather has been an important factor in my living circumstances but it also had made a significant impact on my art practice. The intention of the project was initially to depict changing weather conditions in regional Victoria through the application of paintings and drawings. Rather than the project being focused on climate change, the research investigated the weather's impact on regional inhabitant's emotional well-being. What materialised in the project was the element of the human condition in response to the weather. Transparent figures and weather symbols such as isobars were blended into the landscapes paintings, and the use of a monochromatic colour palette suggested how people feel emotionally in difficult weather conditions. The colour palette incorporated deep blues to symbolise melancholy and gloomy pinks to embody the sadness we may feel when challenges arise. The intense earthy colours of the land were replaced with a subtle and sensitive palette to reflect the inhabitants of Wangaratta feelings and emotions regarding living in regional Victoria. In the article The Psychological Effects of Color by Kendra Cherry (2018), author of The Everything Psychology Book (2010) writes about the impacts and perception of colour and notes:

> While perceptions of colour are somewhat subjective, there are some colour effects that have universal meaning. Colours in the red area of the colour spectrum are known as warm colours and include red, orange, and yellow. These warm colours evoke emotions ranging from feelings of warmth and comfort to feelings of anger and hostility. Colours on the blue side of the spectrum are known as cool colours and include blue, purple, and green. These colours are often described as calm, but can also call to mind feelings of sadness or indifference (Cherry, 2018, para 14).

Though colour has the ability to symbolise people’s moods, the weather has the capacity to destroy families and uproot communities through its unpredictability and destruction of homes and lives, such as the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria in February 2009. The bushfires were fueled by extreme weather conditions including drought conditions from the Millennium Drought.

The Black Saturday fires were Australia’s most devastating bushfires. They occurred in the state of Victoria on Saturday 7th February 2009. This day coincided with the worst bushfire weather conditions ever recorded. Extreme heat, high winds, low humidity and severe drought were all factors in fanning the flames on that tragic day. These fires also caused the greatest loss of life for a bushfire and wiped whole towns off the map. On a global scale, this was the world’s worst fire event” (Black Saturday Fires, 2012-2018, para.1).

2. “Australia is the driest inhabited continent on Earth, with some of the world’s most variable rainfall and stream-flow (DFAT 2014). The country has been deeply affected by drought throughout history, with significant droughts such as the Federation Drought (1895–1903), which led to the loss of millions of cattle, and the World War II drought (1939-1945), which contributed to plummeting wheat yields and disastrous bushfires (BoM 2014a; 2014b). The ‘Big Dry’ of 1996–2010 (also called the Millennium Drought) went down in history as one of the worst droughts on record for Australia, with devastating impacts” (Van Dijk et al. 2013). (Steffen (2015), page 2)
The ramification of the drought and bushfires period, resulted in dislocation and placed an enormous pressure emotionally, physically and financially on many families. The regional community of Wangaratta is a place where I grew up (1974-1987) and later returned to live as an adult (1999-2010); it’s a region that constantly endures long periods of extreme weather with cyclical invasions of bushfire, drought and floods. My own first-hand account of seeing farming and regional families struggle was through the Millennium Drought or Big Dry (1996–2010) and the loss of livestock and obsolete pastures was heartbreaking as farming families had to question if they would stay on the land and continue their livelihood or move into town and start a new career and life.

My family had a small property in South Wangaratta at the foot of the Warby Ranges and after thirty-seven years of living in the region, my parents relocated to the city of Geelong. The ongoing threat of bushfire and the struggle with lack of water led them to re-evaluate country living and they decided to leave the region in 2016. Wangaratta’s weather has extreme hot temperatures during summer and icy cold weather during winter, and this was a strong factor for my parents to move to a city locality. Alongside the issues with water or lack of, the realisation of growing old in a hostile, isolated region made the decision for my parents to relocate to a city location.

Relocating isn’t always an option for many regional farming family’s due to financial commitments or deep emotional family ties. Having to stay and live in these challenging conditions can cause emotional effects on inhabitants. The aftermath of experiencing extreme weather has been documented by scholars, such as Professor Glenn Albrecht who was “Professor of Sustainability from Murdoch University in Western Australia (2014) and is now an Honorary Professorial Fellow in the School of Geosciences, The University of Sydney” (Dean, Faculty of Science, 2016, para 1) and Dr. Helen Berry from the Australian National University who has undertaken extensive studies on the impact on one’s emotions to the exposure of extreme weather conditions. What was most fitting to this project was the phrase ‘Solastalgia,’ “coined by Professor Glenn Albrecht in 2003, which depicts how weather impacts negatively on inhabitants and was based on his work in the drought-afflicted coal mining communities of the Upper Hunter Valley in New South Wales” (Chan, 2012, para 5).

Albrecht defines Solastalgia as the distress or sadness a person feels when their home environment is desolated in ways they cannot control. Solastalgia has since been applied by other scholars to communities all over the world, such as the experiences of survivors of Hurricane Katrina returning to their homes in New Orleans. The concept is also referred to by writer Richard Louv in his best-seller, Last Child in the Woods, in which he coined the term ‘nature-deficit disorder’ (Chan, 2012, para 7).
Dr. Helen Berry is a leading contributor to the research of rural adversities and climate change, and she examines “how weather affects well-being in rural and regional communities in Australia” (Berry, 2012, p.453). Berry acknowledges and examines the risks placed on communities in regards to how “climate change may threaten mental health” (Berry, 2009, p.453).

Through Berry’s research, there has been significant awareness and a call for action “within an acceptable political and budgetary framework. A leadership role has been proposed for the health sector and may be particularly effective in primary health care settings” (Berry, 2009, p.454) to support communities in regional and remote areas in Australia.

Climate change will affect mental health directly through increased exposure to trauma, and indirectly through harming physical health and damaging the physical environment on which economic opportunity depends. Disadvantaged people and communities, especially in rural and remote Australia, will be hardest hit (Berry, 2009, p.453).

Helen Berry, John Plain and John Hoskin’s wrote an important article for the Australian farming community titled, Rapid change, climate adversity and the next ‘big dry’ Older farmers’ mental health (2011) which closely links climate to issues of mental health in rural communities and found there is significant evidence of how the ongoing challenges of extreme weather is impacting not only on the livelihood of farmers but also on their emotional well-being.

Climate change is likely to increase climate variability, bringing more frequent, intense and prolonged weather-related disasters such as floods, storms, fires and droughts, with likely adverse impacts on agricultural livelihoods. Prolonged and multiple adversities is a risk factor for mental health problems, including among farmers. The recent Australian drought brought such adversity, compromising the health and well-being of farming families and communities (Polain, et al 2011, p.240).
Through the research project I have unearthed a connection to how people's well-being is affected by weather and the effects of extreme weather conditions. This is interpreted through my art making. I come from a practice of landscape painting and therefore, the project referenced the work of the landscape-painting genre through my exploration of artists such as Sidney Nolan (Australian 1917-1992), Fred Williams (Australian 1927-1982), Elizabeth Cummings (b.1934), Rick Amor (Australian b. 1948), Jan Senbergs (Australian b. 1939), Dianne Boyer (Argentina b.1948, arrived in Australia in 1980) and David Hockney (British b.1937) who are noted in this field. However, my experimentation with digital media led to further investigations of how fine art methods such as drawing and painting can be enhanced, manipulated and reproduced to explore the theme of extreme weather and emotional well-being. The animated drawings of William Kentridge (South African b. 1955) led to investigations and possibilities where I could extend my practice. Kentridge’s short film Johannesburg (1989) inspired me to add sound to my animated drawings and led to explore the works of sound artist Dr. Leah Barclay who is an audio artist and composer.

The project has resulted in a number of exhibitions, a group and solo exhibition through gallery representation by Anita Traynor Fine Art, Melbourne. The solo exhibition was titled, the ghosts of Mr. Wilson and was sponsored by RMIT University student arts union, RMIT Arts Link (2017). The artworks were also exhibited at The Other Art Fair in Sydney in March 2018 (figure 142-159).
Figure 44

Background information
The weather may evoke sentiments and memories of when I was growing up in regional Victoria in (1974-1987) but it also has the capacity to change landscapes, wreak havoc on communities and transform a sustainable environment into one of devastation. The harrowing threat of bushfires, flash flooding that wipes out crops, severe droughts that turn green paddocks into dry wastelands dominates lived experience of those inhabiting in country towns and regional farming communities. The evidence to suggest weather’s impact on the disposition of regional inhabitants was particularly apparent when I lived in North East Victoria firstly as a child during the years 1974-1987 and then when I reconnected back home in my thirties (1999-2010).

Like many teenagers, the desire to leave a country town is compelling and I left when I was 18 years old and moved to Melbourne to study at University. I returned to Wangaratta in my thirties for family reasons and during this time I encountered the onset of the Millennium drought (1996-2010) and challenging bushfire conditions that were then followed by flash floods.

The punishing impact of this extreme weather is unmistakable on the well-being of many people living in North East Victoria. When the Millennium Drought affected many parts of regional Victoria severe water restrictions were put into place as an arid dryness rested on the land. There was a sense that this dry spell would only be short term, however, days turned into weeks, then months and years. Many people had to reassess living in regional Victoria and I knew of some farmers who moved away from the land into the regional towns and to the city of Melbourne. Having to destroy livestock due to lack of food and water became an extreme and heart-breaking reality.

Experiencing extreme weather conditions such as drought, fires and floods have been a significant part of growing up in regional Victoria. For me, nostalgic memories of living a country life were at times overshadowed by the heaviness of high temperatures or the threat of bushfires. It was not uncommon in summer to be engulfed by constant 40°C+ days that turned into hot intense weeks of endless aridity. The weather has a significant effect on me personally as living through these seasonal impacts also influenced my art practice. In my landscape paintings, the environment was portrayed as a sense of place but in actuality, through the research project, it has been a reaction to the extreme weather conditions that surrounded me.
Key themes of this project include memory, change, nostalgia and experiences of living with extreme weather. The notion of changing weather and the volatility of nature was initially explored in 2015 through a series of time-based photography, taken in South Wangaratta. Gaining an understanding of memory and change in connection to my own first-hand accounts of extreme weather was initially an unconscious act; I could see and feel change happening with the intense seasons of Wangaratta and remembered how I felt during times of uncertainty, if a bushfire might strike or if rain would come. I have since connected these to an ecological thinking through the seminal work of Dr. Mitchell Thomashow who addresses these matters in the book, Ecological identity – Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist (1996).

Thomashow describes the importance of connecting place to identity and reveals how “the stories of environmental experiences link people together and through these stories recall memories and impressions of nature and unlock the basis of their values and commitments” (Thomashow, 1996 p.7). He acknowledges that environmental change does have an impact on one’s well-being and that “the purpose of witnessing the transformation of those places is to appreciate the magnitude of environmental change, to understand and feel the impact of change” (Thomashow, 1996, p.10). In addition, Thomashow’s focus on childhood memory and relationship to ecological habitats provides a clearer understanding of how these concepts are intertwined in my project. This connection of memories of my childhood home in country Victoria provides sentimentality and fondness to the region of Wangaratta.

They have fond memories of a special childhood place, formed through their connections to the earth via some kind of emotional experience, the basis of bonding with the land or the neighbourhood. (Thomashow 1996, p.9)

Connection to place and environmental change is key to not only my art practice but also my memories of growing up in challenging climatic conditions and how the weather impacted on our day to day existence. Sitting in a hot car without air conditioning, riding the school bus with sweaty passengers and sticky flies buzzing around our hair or wearing layers to bed with hot water bottles in the freezing, cold winter night whilst trying to keep warm, are all memories of growing up in regional Victoria. However, the positive memories and experiences outweigh the negatives and my childhood memories were filled with running under a sprinkler to keep cool in the summer heat, eating homemade icy poles or swimming in the dams trying to avoid yabbies’ biting our toes. These memories impart a fondness to country living. Most summers, however my parents would wonder if the dry scrub land in the hilly Warby Ranges would catch alight. My family lived in at the foot of these ranges and in that time, we only had one close call of a major bushfire in 2015. During this Master's project, a stronger bond to my home town has occurred through my own understanding of the impact of weather and my connection to nature and my spiritual homeland of South Wangaratta.
Lack of rain has always been a concern in summer when you live on the land or in many regional areas in Australia. In the summer, my family knew rainfall was always a problem but the Millennium Drought was also accompanied by extreme fire dangers as bushfires ravaged communities in Beechworth, Stanley and Myrtleford in regional Victoria (2008-2009), and many people lost properties and livestock because of this, a cycle of rebuilding the townships needed to occur. Wangaratta was considered lucky compared to other areas in Victoria where lives were lost and families destroyed due to the punishing bush fires of Black Saturday that occurred in January and February 2009.

According to the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the 2009 bushfires in January and February ravaged many parts of Victoria and touched directly and indirectly many millions of people in the State, across Australia and internationally. One hundred and seventy-three people died, thousands of homes and other dwellings were destroyed and over 400,00 hectares were burnt.” (Country Fire Authority CFA, n.d, para. 1)

Watching and experiencing the effects of this extreme weather in Wangaratta and surrounding districts was an unfathomable occurrence during this drought and bushfire period. Although no lives were lost in Wangaratta compared to the losses in towns of King Lake and Marysville; the land was extremely dry and brittle from lack of rain, and the air was thick with smoke and ash from the fires in Beechworth and Stanley. The greyness of the days reflected the heaviness that the inhabitants were feeling and our moods changed from positivity to passive anger. There was distinct quietness across the community as if people were resigned to the endless dry. However, there was also private anger, anxiety and people feeling ‘fed up’ with the longevity of the drought and the uncertainty that was caused.

In North East Victoria, the threat of bushfire and lack of water due to low rainfall emerged every summer. Most summers my family brought water and it would be trucked in from the township. The sentiment of waiting for rain was the impetus of many of the artworks that I created for this project. The anticipation of rain was a constant topic of conversation and watching weather forecasts became the norm and almost an obsession in Wangaratta during this drought period. I drew upon this difficult time for this project and inserted images of weather symbols including isobars, weather fronts, temperature gauges and surface maps as mark making in my artworks. Painting in this context depicts a narrative of a changing landscape.
The artworks I created to reflect this period also depict ghost-like figures emerging motionless and immobilised in the landscape. There is a sense of stillness and isolation in the figures with the colours of blue hues reflecting melancholia that the Wangaratta community was feeling. The colour palette became an echo of frayed emotions of regional Victoria. However, there is a stoic attitude to living a country life when faced with extreme climatic challenges. Many regional inhabitants have a pragmatic get-on-with-it attitude, as if this is their lot in life, accepting of the natural forces that they are up against.

Figure 46
The setting of a dry parched land in North East Victoria is reminiscent of John Steinbeck’s novel The Grapes of Wrath (1939), in which he captured an authenticity of extreme environmental challenges that faced a community and the struggle for many families to stay on the land. In the novel Steinbeck documents the “Dust Bowl migration in the 1930’s” (Steinbeck, 1939, page 5) of farming families relocating to California in search of a better life, moving away from the environmental and economic struggles of Oklahoma due to the Depression. The experience of farming communities as depicted in The Grapes of Wrath is similar to the experiences some inhabitants of Wangaratta faced during the drought period. Whilst Victoria from 1996-2010 wasn’t in a deep depression as America was in the 1930s, the similarities and plight of farming communities can be drawn upon. In this novel, Steinbeck conveys, “a land that is changing due to climatic forces, as the dry winds sweep across farming communities and engulf the terrain and affect the people living on the land” (Steinbeck, 1939, p.5). This pivotal novel conveys an emotional hardship as a fight for survival occurs against environmental elements. Narrating a strong bond that connects regional families together in times of extreme challenges reveals how the human spirit can survive the most harrowing of nature’s experiences. I remember my mother and father being very united when the Millennium drought occurred in Wangaratta. There were unspoken exchanges between my parents that bonded them during this drought period, and I liken their commitment to each other to the families in Steinbeck’s novel.

The people came out of their houses and smelled the hot stinging air and covered their noses from it. And the children came out of the houses but they did not run or shout, as they would have done after a rain. Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, drying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. The men were silent and they did not move. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men – to feel whether this time the men would break (Steinbeck, 1939, p.5).

This quote and memories of my family living through drought, inspired a series of charcoal drawings depicting communities banding together in times of catastrophe. I composed this charcoal drawing of a family after reading this novel. It shows the connectedness of the group, young and old banding together looking over the vast skyline they stand before. Using charcoal as a medium allows a sense of dryness like fire and ash embedding itself into watercolour paper, or a parched, dusty terrain settling on the surface of the land during a dry spell. (Figure 47)

What is revealing through the research and my experiences of living in a regional community is that human strength has the ability to regenerate in times of catastrophe and this is particularly evident with farming families that I knew from South Wangaratta, Longwood and Milawa in North East Victoria. Many families were at breaking point as houses, crops, livestock and livelihood were lost due to the Millennium drought and bushfires seasons. What I attempted to portray in this project is the emotions of a collective community spirit in the face of extreme environmental challenges.
Community of practice
Through this practice-led research, I have explored the significant contribution artists have made to interpretations of, and connections to the way regional environments respond to the land as both a narrative and emotional reaction. My research into Australian landscape-painting unearthed a complex and multifaceted relationship between inhabitants in regional settings and their home environment, through exploration into how artists both past and present have responded to weather influencing their lives, and how this has informed their art practice. The artists I researched created landscape paintings influenced by their surrounds. The project references Australian art history commencing with early Australian colonial artists such as John Glover (1767-1849) who reveals in his paintings a picturesque and atmospheric account of a Tasmania countryside; to the Australian impressionist including Tom Roberts (1885-1900) who captured the spirit of Australia in his monumental paintings and finally to contemporary Australian artists such as Jan Senbergs (1939-) who created artworks in response to his experience of witnessing bushfires on the outskirts of Melbourne in 2014.

In this research, I avoid commentary on early settlers’ responses to Australia's Indigenous population and concentrate on the settlers' initial reaction to the occupation of an Australian wilderness. I examine settler’s exposure and uncertainty of extreme weather conditions and how they portrayed this through painting. This is to ensure my project examines artists responding and reflecting on their experiences to weather and my inexperience in commentating on Indigenous history and art practices. Additionally, for this project I have not included information about artists who respond to the theme of climate change in their practice and aimed to concentrate on selected artists who have lived through and witnessed extreme weather conditions and how this informed their art practices.

The many artists I investigated informed not only the imagery of my painted landscapes but also my introduction to using digital media and sound works. The selected artists were chosen due to their use of innovative technologies to narrative hardship and to document weather conditions. Adopting David Hockney's (UK, 1937-) ability to employ an iPad inspired me to create digital drawings and paintings with an immediacy and velocity that oil painting didn’t provide. I could create a drawing on the iPad in a few days and it had the look of a painting or drawing but could be repeated and editions could be made. The investigation into sound art was a new media that I had always been fascinated with and interested in how sound can transform an environment. I found a connection to Leah Barclay's ecological sound works as she “specialises in acoustic ecology, environmental field recording and emerging fields of biology exploring environmental patterns and changes through sound” (Leah Barclay, 2018, para 2.) and I aimed to convey my own narrative of the environment with familiar sounds in my own regional setting.
A common thread with the artists who have informed this project is their response to weather affected landscapes, the challenges of nature and how this is interpreted through art making.

The five key areas explored in the research are:
1. a survey of Australian landscape paintings
2. documentation of lived experiences with extreme weather
3. concepts of memory, place and belonging and connections to a regional setting
4. the application of digital media to accompany and enhance the materiality of painting and drawing
5. a response to the impact of extreme weather on regional communities and how this has informed contemporary art.

**A survey of Australian landscape paintings**

The exploration of extreme weather in Australian landscape painting is informed foremost by a historical milieu dating back to colonial times (1770-1850) when British settlers arrived in Australia and were confronted by the sights of an unknown environment and considered how they would survive in the Australian wilderness. For this research, I explored Australian landscape painting to gain an insight into the early adaptations of the landscape painting genre, to understand how paintings were depicted and how then landscape paintings differ from today’s contemporary painting practices. I wanted to view the changes in the genre and to see how paintings concepts developed over the decades. Landscape painting has a particular interest to me because of my experience of living in a regional township and exposure to the open terrains in North East Victoria (1974-2010). The depiction of painters of the colonial times conveyed a romanticism of a bush setting and their witnessing of changes to regional environments. The artists depicted a particular Australian identity; firstly, of the experiences from settlers arriving in Australia (1788), to a foreign land with expansive vistas plagued by extreme weather conditions and more so through to contemporary artists who explored the effects of living through extreme weather and how this has affected them.

In examining the early settler’s response to the Australian landscape when they first arrived, Professor Tim Bonyhady (a cultural historian and academic at Australian National University) noted that “the early settlers were ambushed by the difficulties of the physical terrain” (Bonyhady, 2002). In his pivotal book The Colonial Earth (2002), the colonalist response to the Australian landscape was initially one of estrangement and hostility to their new surroundings. I can imagine the wild terrain, the challenging seasonal climate and little infrastructure that the settlers would have encountered when they first arrived and how difficult it would have been.
Early colonial artists during this period included several skilled British painters who depicted accounts of early settler life and a European view of the landscape. There is little evidence of the earliest colonial artists such as John W. Lewin (1770-1819) and George W. Evan (1770-1852) creating artworks that demonstrate exposure to extreme weather conditions that they may have faced including drought, bushfires and flood. The development of Australian landscape paintings during Colonial times (1770-1850) saw European stylised formations of what was witnessed in nature and the portrayal of a romanticised narrative of early British settlers yearning for their homeland. John Glover (1767-1849) was one of the artists who departed from the romantic vision of the British homeland to depict an accurate account of the sentiments of the Australian landscape. Creating atmospheric landscape painting of Tasmania, Glover depicted a pictorial account of Tasmania’s hinterland. One example of Glovers landscape painting is titled ‘Launceston and the river Tamar’ which is part of the Art Gallery of NSW collection and is typical of the artist’s “desire to capture the unique environment he encountered” (Art Gallery of NSW, 2018, para 1.) The purpose of the early settler artist according to authors Susan Bruce and William Splatt who wrote 100 Masterpieces of Australian landscape painting (1981) was to “illustrate and map the Australian terrain as information for scientists and explorers” (Bruce and Splatt 1981, p. 4).

However, the artist Eugene von Guérard (1811-1901) created majestic panoramas of Victoria regions such as the Dandenong Ranges with elaborate and scientific versions of the topography, which moved beyond painting a European sensibility to encapsulate the vastness of an Australian landscape. An exhibition review by Paul Fox in the journal of Australian Historical Studies (2012) states that “Eugene von Guérard’s strongly influenced by the great German scientist Alexander von Humboldt’s belief that a painter’s role was to observe nature accurately” (Fox,2012, p. 303). The review was for the exhibition “Eugene von Guérard: Nature Revealed at The National Gallery of Victoria in 2012. Von Guérard was an artist who went beyond representational paintings of early British homage terrain, to portraying punishing weather of the land. This was aptly represented by von Guérard in his painting Bushfire between Mount Elephant and Timboon 1857, a painting noted by John Schauble, (Director at EM Resilience, Emergency Management Victoria), who wrote, Red Steers and Exploding Houses: Cultural Interpretations of Bushfire and Community Understanding (2008) that ‘Eugene von Guérard was the first notable professional artist to depict bushfire in Australia’ (Schauble, 2008, p. 33).

The depiction of bushfire in Australian painting in the 19th Century was critical, for not only conveying an emotional scene but artists created bushfire paintings as a way of communicating. In the online Vimeo recording titled, Interview with John Schauble: Fire Stories Symposium (2014), by the Arc Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, Schauble speaks about bushfires and art in Australian history and comments that, “bushfires in 19th Century painting were very powerful, as they helped to inform people about what they should do when there was a bushfire” (Schauble, 2014). Schauble speaks about the artist William Strutt (1825-1915) in the interview, who’s painting Black Thursday (1851) “was a source of information as it tells people what they should do when they are confronted by a bushfire” (Schauble, 2014). The painting Black Thursday depicted the 1851 Macedon bushfires and conveys a horrific scene of people and animals fleeing the onslaught of a menacing bushfire. This painting according to Schauble “reinforces, that flight is an appropriate response to escaping a bushfire” (Schauble, 2014).
Judy Cannon, a freelance writer in Queensland who wrote The Artist who painted words (2004) also provides an account of William Strutt creating this monumental painting Black Thursday:

Strutt wrote a deeply moving and vivid account of the Macedon bushfire in February 1851-of its dreadful destruction, of intense heat and stifling smoke and of the deaths of people, animals and birds. It makes daunting reading; his pictures are powerful and dire. He was also moved to paint the event and titled the work Black Thursday (Cannon, 2004, p 4).

The development of the Australian landscape-painting genre from Colonial times to Australian Impressionists in the late 19th Century saw a shift from early artists’ depiction of a new land to a narrative revealing story-telling and hardship of inhabitant’s living on the land. Frederick McCubbin (1855 -1917) and Tom Roberts (1856 -1931) became the quintessential pioneers for artists living on the land and observing the terra firma that they were immersed in. The move to how Australian landscape conditions affected inhabitants and their relationship to living on the land emerged during the Heidelberg School period (1880s-1890s). This was reiterated by Splatt and Bruce who writes on the shift in landscape painting from early Colonial painters to the Heidelberg School period in the formative book 100 Masterpieces of Australian landscape painting (1986). They outlined the role and development of the landscape painter and the significance this genre had on an Australian identity. Providing an insight into the artist's relationship with their own bush environment, Splatt and Bruce note that Roberts and McCubbin as well as painters, Jane Sutherland (1853-1928), Arthur Streeton (1867-1943) and Clara Southern (1861-1940), embodied an Australian uniqueness in their paintings of life in a rural landscape (Splatt and Bruce, 1986, p.50).

The attention paid to the mood of the bush is quite different to the observations of earlier painters. It is not so much that they were wrong as that they selected those features of Australian landscape that recalled Europe. The new generation of artists had grown up in Australia and lived in the landscape they depicted. To them it was Europe, that was exotic. While Australia was still regarded by them as a new land, they themselves saw their future to be in it (Bruce & Splatt, 1986 p. 50).

My research has uncovered the notion of the landscape painter as a social commentator, who provided an insight into the challenging and changing environment of an Australian topography. The genre was an important device in epitomising an Australian spirit and marketing an identity of a hard working and resilient nation overcoming difficult landscape conditions. Two significant paintings by McCubbin and Roberts exemplify this Australian spirit, of living on the land and battling the elements.
McCubbin’s Down on his luck (1889) and Roberts’s The charcoal burners (The splitters) (c 1885) narrate impressions of Australia as a difficult territory; a land that embodies hardship and of people battling the untamed terrain. Recording the topography like the early colonial painters is an important exercise, but embodying an emotional response and narrative of living in rural Australia were themes that McCubbin and Roberts became renowned for and this connects and informs my project because of my interpretation of regional inhabitants experiences of living through extreme weather conditions and seeing how the human condition is responsive and resilient.

Capturing extreme weather conditions and rural living was explored in the survey exhibition Ocean to Outback, Australian Landscape Painting 1850-1950 at the National Gallery of Australia (2007-2009). Beatrice Gralton, (Associate Curator, Australian Painting and Sculpture), recounts the number of artists in this exhibition who employed the landscape genre to narrate tales and experiences of living in extreme weather conditions. She writes:

> Encompassing colonial through to modernist works, the exhibition spans the great century of the Australian landscape. From 1850 to 1950 landscape was the most painted and celebrated theme in Australian art. As well as images, which convey the geographical extremes of the continent, Ocean to Outback includes works that reflect significant events that transformed the social fabric of Australia - droughts and bushfires, the gold rushes, the Depression, and times of war (Gralton, 2017, p.55).

The history of Australian landscape painting can be summarised firstly as a way of communicating one’s surroundings through documentation being employed as a geographic device to map out the terrain. However, the genre then shifted over decades to depict the authenticity of climatic hardships and a relationship to the land through lived experiences. Twentieth Century artists such as Russell Drysdale (1912 -1981) and Sidney Nolan (1917-1992), transformed the genre to include photography as a way to recall the harrowing visions of the damage done by extreme weather conditions such as droughts and bushfires. The significant artworks of drought by Drysdale and Nolan have been described by the Australian historian Bernard Whimpress as a “depiction [that] goes beyond the pictorial to express an unsympathetic reality of living on the land” (Whimpress, 2013, p.15-21).

**Documentation of lived experiences with extreme weather**

Nolan and Drysdale linked their painted narratives to an authentic realism whilst documenting fragilities of drought-affected communities. The artists observed the hardships that extreme weather had on humans, land and livestock and then recreated these as artworks. The changing environment of abundance to desolation is caught in a fleeting moment on canvas or through a photographic lens and these images are still relatable in today’s climate conditions particularly when we face drought conditions such as what is now occurring in New South Wales.
The ABC news reporter Adrienne Francis states (12 April 2018) about the current drought situation in NSW.

The situation across NSW is sobering, according to modelling by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), which says 10 percent of the state is already in drought, including the Shoalhaven. “These areas have had critically low rainfall and the situation is acute,” the department’s Anthony Clark said. There is no natural stock water remaining and they are carting water” (Francis, 2018, para. 10).

In a series of emotive black and white photographic works by Nolan (1952), dying cattle and horses decay in a dry, vast territory. The photos of drought-affected country signify the severity of the 1952 Queensland drought; livestock can’t escape, they stand petrified in the land, fired in clay-like states. Steve Meachum who is a senior journalist and feature writer described in The Sydney Morning Herald (2011) that Nolan’s photos of hanging cattle, flung across trees, littering dry pasture beds as “haunting images of desiccated animal carcasses [were] inspired, he said, by the petrified human remains he had seen at Pompeii” (Meachum, 2011, para. 7).

The realism of drought in Nolan’s photos can be likened to the drought-inspired works by Russell Drysdale a decade earlier that recorded the desolation of drought in western New South Wales in 1944. Drysdale's work transformed landscape painting from a narration of living on the land to conveying a hardship that Australians experienced. Like Nolan, Drysdale was also commissioned by a newspaper, The Sydney Morning Herald (1944) to document the dire drought conditions. The Drover’s Wife (1945) was one of the paintings that resulted from this experience and describes the desolation and isolation felt by inhabitants in the dry state of New South Wales during the 1944 drought period. The figure in the forefront of the painting can be interpreted as heroic, standing tall, stoic and resilient, this representation is comparable to many families I know. The Drover's Wife is currently in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia and confirms Drysdale as a critical foundation in the landscape-painting genre that contributed to an Australian identity. In an article written by Anne Gray for the National Gallery of Australia (2002) she writes:

Drysdale created a new vision of Australia. His subjects are not pioneers struggling to tame the bush or outback, but resilient women and men seeking to find a relationship with the ancient landscape (Gray, 2002. para.3).

Landscape painting can conjure a variety of imagery and narrative about living on the land and responding to climate. In my work, I portray the landscape as a sense of place and belonging, a connection to the community as well as a land that can be cruel and demanding. The basis of my project is not only examining the devastation that extreme weather has upon the environment but to embody inhabitant’s encounters with extreme weather and living in regional situations.
The depiction of landscape painting and how extreme weather has been portrayed in regional Australia has been inspired by a number of contemporary artists and art projects that draw upon personalised accounts to document the reality of being in a traumatised land. The selected artists for this research have drawn upon their own experiences of being exposed to the terror of bushfires, they have seen destruction first hand from drought and bushfires. Drought is a great catalyst to ignite fires which ruin lives through loss of property, livestock and creates fear of death and economic insecurity in communities. Fred Williams (1927-1982), Rick Amor (b.1948), Jan Senbergs (b. 1939) and Elizabeth Cummings (b. 1934) are some Australian artists who have encountered bushfire situations and created artworks in response to what they have experienced.

The gouache painting titled Approaching bushfire (1968) by Fred Williams is in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria and depicts a burnt land with a distant bushfire blazing under the skyline. This painting is more than a depiction of a bushfire, as it documents “Williams first-hand account of being exposed to a nearing bushfire at his home in Upway in the Dandneong ranges on the outskirts of Melbourne” (1963-1969) (Schauble, 2008, page 47). Williams’ encounter with bushfire (1968) led to the creation of paintings and drawings such as Burnt landscape (1969), Burnt ferns (1968) and After bushfires 1, 2 and 3 (1968). These artworks are in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria and depict a land that has been through distress. The colour palette is charcoal greys, ashen browns with tinges of orange and fleck of whites. Williams depiction of the landscape is abstracted with colour stains and splodges over the canvas to create a vision of a landscape in trouble. John Schauble in the thesis, Red Steers and Exploding Houses: Cultural Interpretations of Bushfire and Community Understanding writes about Williams’ first-hand experience with bushfires:

"It was a bushfire in February 1968 that fundamentally altered Williams’ vision of the Australian landscape. The fire front was halted just 100 metres from Williams’ home, where the artist had begun to pile up paintings on the lawn, outside. Williams was both terrified and fascinated by the experiences, liking it to like being in the midst of a war” (Schauble, 2008, p. 47).

Bushfire paintings are important to this research as they exemplify meaning and connection to my own experiences with bushfires and the threat of my family having to evacuate when a surprise summer bushfire in 2015 ignited the Warby Ranges which is in close proximity to my family home. “The Warby Range bushfire destroyed more than 5000 hectares of land, 2300 head of livestock, and hundreds of kilometres of fencing on December 17” (Morgan,2015, para 3). This threat was now a startling and frightening reality. Fortunately, the fire didn’t destroy my family home and my parents and family members were safe. My parents did evacuate into town, but the fire was kept under control by the local fire brigade.
Senbergs, like Williams encountered the threat of bushfires enclosing his homes on the outskirts of Melbourne. Senbergs in response to this experience created a series of thematic paintings of bushfires circa 2014 which consisted of brightly coloured acrylic works on paper. These works were bold orange, red and yellow coloured paintings with raising flames and engulfed with thick, dense smoke. Exhibited at Melbourne's Niagara Galleries in February 2015, the body of artworks highlighted the close call that Senbergs experienced during a bushfire circling and threatening Melbourne. One particular painting Code red day 2, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 113 x 145 cm signifies the confusion and chaos a bushfire can cause as cars busily escape fire engorging the landscape. Senbergs notes in his catalogue essay in the online review in The Conversation, by Sasha Grishlin, (Adjunct Professor of Art History, Australian National University) that:

In January 2014 in Melbourne, we had four days of forty plus degrees of intense heat – with bushfires raging in the countryside casting a pall of acrid smoke over the extended city, and all around ominous skies that seemed to portend an inferno that would be all engulfing. That oppressive atmosphere and that sense of threat at the edges of the extended city seemed as if an overwhelming and merciless force was at the gates and ready to break down the barricades (Grishlin, 2015. Para. 9).

Stenbergs's paintings document the intensity of the bushfire season in Victoria during 2014; a season that again saw the destruction of what fire can do to communities. Closer to my region in North East Victoria, bushfire devastation was a focus of a series of works that Rick Amor painted in 2003, to express the aftermaths of the Mount Buffalo bushfires. Four of these works are now in the permanent collection of the Benalla Art Gallery, which validates the region’s support for the arts and acknowledges the effect bushfires have had in my local area. These works are titled Mt Buffalo; Near Buckland Bridge, Mt Buffalo; The Arc – Aftermath of bushfires in the North East and The Arc in the bush Mt Buffalo and reveal a somberness after the intense Mt Buffalo fires on the 8th January 2003 which were known as The Eastern Victoria alpine bushfires. The monochromatic palette of charcoals and blacks highlight an ashen landscape, tumbled trees and the destruction of the region.

The threat of bushfires on communities is likened to a natural disaster according to the scientific journal, Disaster declarations associated with bushfires, floods and storms in New South Wales, Australia between 2004 and 2014 (2015) and in examining Australia’s relationship with bushfire there is evidence to support the resilience of regional communities within Australia that can be found in times of turmoil. The following came from an article in The Age (2013) newspaper that acknowledges the fighting spirit that emerges through this adversity.
Moving into the 20th Century, fire became increasingly tied to the nation and resistance. When a fire threatens people’s property, towns and lives it is like a micro war on Australian soil, one that acts as a call to arms for members of the community to fight for their own and their neighbours’ safety (Soderlind, 2013, para 15).

Elizabeth Cummings is an abstract painter who creates energetic painterly landscapes that convey her affiliation with the bush. In an article in the National Trust magazine (2017) curator from S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sioux Garside writes about Cummings in an interview with the artist:

I also love watching the ambiguity of water. The sudden flood of heavy rainwater rushing through the rocky dry gully below my studio last year was the stimulus for a small work which led on to Flash Flood (Garside 2017, page 18).

However, it was Cummings experience with the destruction from a bushfire in 1994 that destroyed her studio which she built in Wedderburn south-west of Sydney (1990) that aligns her to the selected artists for my project. I am also drawn to her energetic abstract painting technique and a strong drawing ability that she presents. She recreates the landscape with movement and emotion and layers the paint, which is a technique I like to use in my paintings.

Environmentalists may say that fire is needed to regenerate the land, to allow for regrowth and rebirth; however, it is a harsh reality to see houses and livestock destroyed due to the punishing forces of a bushfire. Bushfire and drought, two extreme environmental conditions, are two realities that many Australian communities face and embody memories that are not easily forgotten.
Concepts of memory, place and belonging and connections to a regional setting

Memory, place and belonging are central to my project because they link my childhood recollections, which are intertwined with nature, weather and home and form a basis for my art practice. It was memories of growing up in regional Victoria and how significant the weather made me feel that has awakened the project's vision. Additionally, the writing and art practice of Dr. Judith Tucker, (Senior Lecturer in the School of Design, at the University of Leeds) and author of Painting Landscape: Mediating Dislocation (Tucker, 2007) wrote about connecting landscape painting with personal memory and this provided inspiration for my project. Tucker writes:

> When I playfully replaced the word ‘place with the word ‘painting in this passage, I realized that I hit upon a useful way of thinking about painting: as a “layered location replete with human histories and memories”, combining past, present and future. Painting is about “connections”: who made it? What will happen in the “place” of painting when it is viewed (Tucker, 2007, p. 198).

Connecting painting to place is further realised through a number of community art projects that have taken place in regional Victoria which celebrate and acknowledge the regional connectedness. In 2011, after another extreme bushfire season in regional Victoria, a group of artists consisting of filmmakers, performers, photographer, academics, writers, historians and visual arts banded together to create Illuminate by fire, stories of experiences in surviving bushfires near their homes, an environmental force both needed and feared. The Illuminated by fire project (2011) links well with my project as it connects art practice in a regional setting and focuses on people who have experienced loss and pain through extreme weather.

The *Illuminated by fire* project was presented at the Fire Stories conference (2013) through the Australian Government, ARC Centres of Excellence and The University of Melbourne and the conference included an address by Dr. Danielle Clode Senior Research Fellow, Flinders University who discussed inhabitant’s relationship to bushfires and advised “that there is a general amnesia in understanding and planning for natural disasters”. (Clode, 2013) We know that every summer in North East Victoria when the weather reaches scorching temperatures that there is a threat of bushfires. However, are we ever really ready for a fire to strike? I relate this experience to the threat of bushfires in North East Victoria (2015) when the hilltops surrounding my parent’s home caught on fire and the need to evacuate was questioned by my parents. Luckily, the fire did not near our home but the readiness by family members posed some difficult discussions whether to stay or leave. Clode questioned our response to the threat of fire in her keynote speech at the conference.
Why is it that our bushfire history is filled with stories of people being taken by surprise by fires? How can our history be seared with the scars of past bushfire disasters and yet we still seem to have learned so little? We certainly have an ambivalent relationship with fire. Fire has kept us warm, cooked our food, lit the dark and cleared the land throughout human evolution. Fire also regularly wreaks unimaginable destruction and death on our communities, threatening our safety within our own homes in a way that has profound psychological consequences for survivors. Yet despite our long history with the destructive force of fire, we remain perpetually underprepared for disaster. Understanding our fear of fire and how fear has evolved within the human brain provides a powerful insight into the way we respond to fire and why some people respond effectively while others respond in a way that seems quite counter-productive. Understanding fear explains how we prepare, respond and recover from fire. Overcoming that fear provides a path for a future of living safely with the flames (Clode, 2013, page 4).

Human emotions and connection to bushfire and extreme weather is a complex issue. In documenting the association of bushfire and drought on regional inhabitants in my art practice, I did not undertake a literal interpretation of a devastated land but attempted to convey an emotional response to living in a regional community and being exposed to extreme weather conditions, through digital image making and audio. Using sound to capture extreme winds on a dry day unraveled the essence of my hometown. Winds were always a factor in telling when seasons would change. Gusty, dry winds in summer caused us concern if a bushfire would strike as winds can fuel the fire to spread quickly. Icy cold winds carried down by the mountain ranges signify another cold winter. The sound recordings of the wind-swept terrain were undertaken in the township of Milawa, in North East Victoria. These recordings captured not only the sounds of the winds but birds calling, chirping cicadas, feet walking on dry, crackling lands and tractors passing by and in turn, provided a soundtrack to the animated drawings. Documenting the sounds of strong winds that had plagued North-East Victoria were undertaken through an audio App on my iPad. It was an intense experience to record the windy weather with the intention that the experimental audio will complement the digital drawings. The result of this audio is the creation of a short animation titled, Where the wind blows (2017) (figure 69) and features an array of pastel drawings documenting the change in temperature through shades of light and darkness with the sounds of the land echoing in the distance. I also added to the animation another layer of sound from the free sound website Sound Bible to enhance my crackling recordings and to add depth to the artwork.
The application of digital media to accompany and enhance the materiality of painting and drawing

This project is informed by artists who employ digital media to create changing landscapes, social commentaries and narratives of living on the land. Artists who use evolving digital technology to support and complement their art practices, include David Hockney (UK b. 1937), William Kentridge (South Africa b. 1955), Leah Barclay (Australia) and Diana Boyer (Australia b. 1948), though quite different in their image and audio making have similarities that can be measured through their utilisation and innovation of technology such as iPads, film, drawing, animation, audio recordings and digital image making.

The inclusion of David Hockney in this study is two-fold; firstly, for his connection to the landscape painting genre notably through the series of ‘en plein air’ artworks consisting of paintings, digital iPad paintings and film of the Yorkshire Woods, (England, circa 2006) which were exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2012) in an exhibition titled The Bigger Picture. The exhibition was the creation of Hockney’s iPad paintings which led me to discover the possibility of this mode of practice. In many ways, the iPad imitates painting techniques with the ability to change brushes, colours, and even styles to mimic processes such as watercolour, oil painting or aerosol spray painting. The result of using an iPad to create ‘en plein air’ paintings is affirmed by Simon Bayliss, artist and writer for the blog The Painting Imperative, International Contemporary Painting in which he writes about Hockney’s digital artworks:
There are numerous advantages to using a tablet computer instead of the usual plethora of materials. The screen lights up making it a glowing sketch pad which can be operated just as easily in the dark. When using the Brushes app, the background can be filled instantly with any colour, meaning a white ground is not a prerequisite. The marks are immediate; there is no drying time of course. Results can be endlessly erased, layered and adjusted for opacity after application. As Hockney affirms; the light can change quickly in the upper half of the northern hemisphere, and for him, the iPad captures it much faster than watercolour. The tablet computer, therefore, can solve many of the problems landscape painters have been grappling with for centuries. As Hockney has said, “Turner would have loved it” (Bayliss, 2012, para 4).

Hockney has been exploring and researching new ways to explore and incorporate technology for decades, be it the photocopier in 1986 with experimentation of self-portraits or a fax machine sending images to friends in LA circa 1989, his use of technology is remarkable and innovative. Cory Perkins (2013) writer for the online website Wired states:

Hockney’s broader concern, which he’s explored extensively throughout his career, is how technology has allowed artists to experiment with new perspectives, and thus create new ways of considering the world around them” (Perkins, 2013, para 5).

When considering artists who document the ‘world around them’ this reference can also be made to William Kentridge who has captured the legacy of Apartheid in his homeland of South Africa. His animated charcoal drawings demonstrate layers of erasing and mark making to build up a visual story which is filmed. The process of drawing and filming is simultaneous as they are intertwined in the process of creation. This method of drawing with filming is an important device of capturing the plight and bleakness of the history of his country. Kentridge completed a series of short films between 1989 and 2003 using the charcoal and filming method. One of these films titled Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City After Paris (1989) captured the hardship and oppression of living during and post-Apartheid in South Africa. The marriage between drawing and technology is a fine example of Kentridge’s short films but more so the emotional impact that the film Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City After Paris (1989) provides from witnessing the trauma that oppression, intolerance and bigotry causes.
A response to the impact of extreme weather on regional communities and how this has informed contemporary art.

Closer to home, the focus of my project which lies in regional Victoria, is Diana Boyer who works with animation and watercolours to reflect climate change and drought in regional NSW. Diana’s art practice has direct synergies with my time-based work through it’s focus on the Binalong district. Boyer’s most significant artwork is a series of watercolour landscapes which respond to the impacts of climate change on the environment and daily farming life. The watercolour images have been transformed into a short film titled Time Change (2006). The sound component to the film has a soundscape of day-to-day life of being on a farm; an early morning alarm clock erupting, farm animals calling, wild bird cries, tractors humming which act as a backdrop to beautiful watercolour drawings. This work has inspired my artworks including Where the wind blows (2017) and Controlled and out of control (2017) which have animated drawings with audio of bushfire sounds, gusty winds and birds calling recorded in Milawa in North East Victoria. The soundscape in Time Change reflects a distinct regional Australian sound, one that I am very familiar with as it connects sounds common to the environment of my hometown in Wangaratta.

In comparison, Leah Barclay creates unique soundscapes with a focus on “river, reefs and rainforests” through research based in “acoustic ecology and environmental field recordings” (Barclay, n.d, para 1). Barclay’s soundscapes are an interesting contrast to the sound works of the dry, rural land and farming compositions of Boyer’s work because of the intimate, personal nature that Boyer’s practice contains, whereas Barclay’s soundscapes convey a wider lens to explore audio ecological on a global scale. “Barclay’s work has engaged with communities in Vanuatu to presentations in Times Square in New York City” (Barclay, n.d, para 2).

Barclay’s interest in the environment and climate changed was discussed recently in an interview with Zoe Madonna (2016) who is a “writer, amateur accordionist and yarn hoarder” (Madoona, 2016. Para 13). Barclay outlined her intention to “bring awareness to acoustic ecology as a socially engaged, accessible, interdisciplinary field of study that can inspire a culture of listening” (Madoona, 2016. Para 7).

When remembering weather affected areas in North East Victoria during the Millennium Drought and bushfire seasons, the challenges of extreme weather was a community focus. The concerns confronting regional areas revolve around how communities can flourish and survive when significant external factors such as changes in climate and financial sustainability are challenging the day-to-day existence of local inhabitants. I have demonstrated how artists throughout Australia’s history have captured changing weather conditions and regional challenges. My use of sound art and drawing through an iPad have documented weather affected landscapes. The landscape painting genre and sound art have a long and exciting narration, one that has been inspired by actual events and commentaries of daily life. These fields of practice depicts captivating relationships between inhabitants and nature, connection to place and belonging in regional communities and is informed by a community spirit that has bonded inhabitants when a natural disaster strikes.
Aims and objectives

The aim of my project was to reflect the impact that weather had on my family and inhabitants in selected regional communities in Wangaratta and Milawa and to relay this through a series of artworks. This was undertaken through time-based photos in South Wangaratta (2014), oil paintings and drawings (2014-2018) and sound recordings in Milawa (2017). These photographs were expanded into a series of oil paintings and digitally manipulated images which were created into animations. Sound linked the animated drawings with an audio sensory experience of regional noises such as wild birds crying and uninhabited winds rustling through the dry paddocks in summer. My research also aimed to better understand the genre of landscape painting through the work of contemporary artists as well as an overview of the origins of landscape painting in Australia.

The aims of this project were to:
1. Create a new body of paintings and drawings that increase awareness of regional experiences about extreme weather conditions
2. Investigate and experiment with digital drawing mediums to extend my drawing practice
3. Develop skills in sound and sound recordings to complement the paintings and drawings
4. Investigate artists who involve and explore environmental connections to regional weather conditions
5. Provide an understanding of regional living and the adversities the inhabitants face, through paintings and drawings
6. Develop a creative practice to respond to an environment as a conflict between harmony and adversity
7. Create a series of paintings, drawings and sound recordings that reflect living on the land.
Methodology

For this project, I created paintings, drawings and sound art that respond to and reflect the impact of extreme weather conditions on inhabitants in regional Victoria. Initially, photography was a foundation for the project. A sequence of photographs of my father shot in colour and in black and white, documented temperature changes during a heat wave on 17 January 2014. Standing in a parched dusty paddock from 5.45am through to 11.45am in South Wangaratta, we felt the immense heat as the temperature dramatically rose 26 degrees over six hours. During this time, my father recalled the past thirty-three years of changes in the climate and the surrounding land. It was commonplace during summer periods for dry winds and crackling dirt beneath our feet to remind us that the weather has a major influence on our lives. By 11.45am the temperature was well over 40 degrees and with no shade from barren trees, we retreated indoors, to the comfort of a cooler temperature I took over thirty photographs on that day and these photos then formed the basis for digital images, drawings, oil paintings and animations. These series of photographs became an important focus of the entire research project. These photos captured a dry and parched ground, barren trees unproductive from lack of water in a very ordinary paddock. This differs from the picturesque vista that I remembered growing up in Wangaratta. The sky was piercing blue, and the land looked like another dry, grassless paddock. However, we recalled memories of heatwaves and the high temperatures that would envelop us every summer for years on end after the photoshoot. These memories of my home and the impact of weather formed a critical component to stimulate the ideas for the artworks undertaken for this Master of Fine Art research.

I commenced with small works on beautiful, heavy watercolour paper which were 20 x 20cm and experimented with pastel, inks, conte, and pencil. The work began as a direct observation of the land, however I longed to convey more emotion in the work. Pastel worked well as the dryness of the medium engrained itself into the paper resembled dry soil on a drought-stricken land. When using inks, the bleed of the medium soaked densely into the surface, reminiscent of water soaking into the land after an intense dry spell. Cracks in the earth can convey patterns and decorative outlines and these began forming on the painted surface in the large-scale oil paintings.

However, what was missing in the initial drawings was a human connection to the landscape. A new series of drawings emerged in 2015 of a darkened silhouette figure in response to reading John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath (1939). These drawings and sketches formed a basis for the oil paintings. Two paintings provided a turning point to my practice and for the project. The paintings Promise on the horizon and Ghost community (figure 76-77) both commenced towards the end of 2015, saw the concept of a ghost figure emerge within the land and the application of painterly layers fill the canvas. The colour palette includes blue like hues that reflect an emotional quality that the drawings were lacking.
Undertaking these large oil paintings (125 x 155cm), I realised I needed a more immediate medium to develop these concepts of memory and emotion and was inspired by David Hockney’s artworks which were composed through an iPad. He created images of a changing landscape in the countryside of Yorkshire, England and this informed a significant change in the way I worked.

The digital drawings I created in 2015 allowed for a saturation and intense colour palette and rapid mark makings to appear over the surface. For these drawings, I began to also scan and filter the photographic images taken in 2014 of my father Michael. However, it was the sound recordings in 2017, I made of the weather that united the project and linked the digital drawings with the theme of memory and belonging to place.

Incorporating sound within the project drew upon an audio experience of living in regional Victoria and another dimension to connecting place and memory through listening. Even if one does not know where Wangaratta or Miliwa are located, they can hear the sounds of a country landscape and the impact extreme weather has on the terrain. Harmonising audio recordings of wind storms which occurred in 2017 in the regional township of Milawa with digital drawings and animations of landscape enabled audio to become a partner with drawing and capturing an authentic essence of the land. Sound recordings of weather and wild winds in Milawa, recorded through voice memos on an iPhone and iPad platform enabled a symphony of ecological sounds which realised the final stage of the research. However, after final editing of my recordings, I realised I needed a more sophisticated sound to accompany my recordings and utilised the free sound library website called Sound Bible. Reference has been cited for the authors in the animations. The sounds I downloaded included bushfire and wind. These have been added to the digital animations and provide a clearer sound with my recordings.
Rationale

The project is informed by research examining extreme weather in regional Australia including works by Professor Glenn Albrecht (Murdoch University WA) and Dr. Helen Berry (Australian National University, ACT) who have researched the impact of extreme weather on regional inhabitants in Australia. In the article, Pearl in the oyster: climate change as a mental health opportunity (2009), Berry acknowledges the link between climate change and mental health which has caused significant impact on many regional communities. She writes:

\[
\text{Climate change will affect mental health directly through increasing exposure to trauma, and indirectly through harming physical health and damaging the physical environment on which economic opportunity depends. Disadvantaged people and communities, especially in rural and remote Australia, will be hardest hit. (Berry, 2009, p.453)}
\]

Berry's work makes significant inroads and contributions to the plight of farming communities regarding mental health issues, that has arisen due to climate change and extreme weather conditions. Berry's concerns with mental health is particular to Queensland and NSW farming communities, has provided an important impetus for my research. This is also substantiated in the article, Rapid change, climate adversity and the next ‘big dry': Older farmers’ mental heath (Berry, et al. 2011, p 239-243).

Albrecht, developed a theory known as Solastalgia (2002), which refers to an emotional impact that presents in inhabitants if exposed to extreme weather conditions. In the online TEDx Talks piece, Environment Change, Distress & Human Emotion Solastalgia (2 June, 2010) Albrecht discusses, “the relationship between humans, their built environment, the natural environment and their psychological state and retells about loved home environment being destroyed by natural forces that humans don’t have any control over. This is causing significant anguish and mental health concerns”. Albrecht work has inspired this project through confirming and acknowledging the impact the extreme weather has on human well-being. The relationship between human well-being, extreme weather, and Solastalgia are important factors to this practice-led research which were explored through paintings, digital works and sound.

I have found during this project that there are a limited number of contemporary Australian artists who have explicitly addressed the physiological and emotive interpretation of Solastalgia, as well as a lack of digital artists who respond to extreme weather conditions within the farming community. This makes my artworks, which has drawn upon the issues of extreme weather in regional communities significant. The findings from my project revealed a connection between personal well-being and the effects of extreme weather. There can be obvious physical impacts on one's environment through
losing a house in a bushfire and destroying livestock due to drought. However, the negative effects on “mental health due to earth related disasters is rising and being acknowledged”, according to Albrecht (TEDx Talks piece, Environment Change, Distress & Human Emotion Solastalgia (2 June, 2010).

My project contextualises memories and nostalgia of my first-hand experiences of extreme weather events in North-East Victoria with anecdotes from my father, Michael Wilson. I presented the outcome of this research through visual and audio analysis of other artists work and through the creation of a body of work that includes large-scale oil paintings, a series of digitally manipulated images, animated drawings and sound recordings from my home region. The reason why I made this body of work is to represent an ongoing never-ending cycle of extreme weather events in Australia and the impacts this has on inhabitants of North East Victoria. It is also fitting that the project contributes to the growing awareness and acknowledgement of the difficulties that many regional communities face.

The images of individual figures situated in the landscape in many of my paintings and drawings display isolation, which represents a “forced separation from their home” (Warsini, Mills & Usher, 2017, para 1). This can be likened to the following description of Solastalgia:

Forced separation from one’s home may trigger emotional distress. People who remain in their homes may experience emotional distress due to living in a severely damaged environment. These people experience a type of ‘homesickness’ similar to nostalgia because the land around them no longer resembles the home they knew and loved. What they lack is solace or comfort from their home; they long for the home environment to be the way it was before (Warsini, Mills & Usher, 2017, para 1).

The impacts of extreme weather on a regional community may initially be obvious with the changes to the landscape, but the day to day impressions of drying grasslands or dam water levels falling have an effect on one’s emotions which can be unseen and may lead to mental health concerns. The reality of the weather’s impact on our emotions is important, and my translation of this in paintings and drawings was a challenging undertaking. The artworks were not created as literal portrayals of dry, barren landscapes and burnt ashen grounds, but an interpretation of how people feel when exposed to extreme weather. The project addressed issues of extreme climates in regional communities through sound recordings of gusty winds in the township of Milawa. To shift from a visual perspective to audio enabled my memory of rushing northerly winds bending and shifting the branches of the trees. This provided a sense of pending dismay of what occurred in my region. The sounds of the high winds brought back memories of waiting to see if fires would strike or thunderous storms would bring on floods, and slight anxiety if we would be forced to evacuate our home if a bushfire would strike our region.
My contribution to the landscape painting genre is through:

- a production of a body of work that extended the long-standing historical focus of landscape painting in contemporary Australian art
- artworks that integrated digital and sound art with art methods such as painting, drawing and mark making, to address the impacts of extreme weather has on one’s emotions and how memory can be connected to place.
Conclusion

The practice-led research project was informed by my recollections of the extreme weather living in regional Victoria during 2000-2009. Through experimentation and skill development, the project shifted my existing art practice as a landscape painter to a digital medium, creating an understanding of the impacts on inhabitant’s connection to regional communities. With over forty artworks completed and numerous visual diary studies produced during a four-year period, the output ranged from large-scale oil paintings to digital drawings and animations.

Growing up in regional Victoria, I saw the emotional effects that long hot summers and icy cold winters had on my community. It was these first-hand experiences I had as a child which made a significant impact on me personally and through my art practice that aided the development and research for this project. The evidence of extreme weather explored in this project contributes to the growing awareness of climate challenges that face regional communities. My research into the lived experiences of artists such as Senbergs, Williams, Boyer, Cummings and Amor, who have been exposed to difficult climate conditions added a depth to the project through their own first-hand experiences captured through their paintings. The painted landscape was my initial inspiration, however, my integration of digital and sound art into this project extended my art practice and strengthened my contribution to the landscape painting field.

This research draws attention to the emotional fragility of regional communities in Australia and how artists are responding to climate and weather affected environments. Many regional communities in Australia are being affected by the challenges of extreme weather, altered farming practices and access to resources including health and finance. The heightened pressure on regional inhabitants, both economical and emotional, is affecting their well-being. Growing up in regional North-East Victoria, I have a connection to the land and first-hand experience of such issues.

My intention to raise awareness of regional issues is one of the driving factors for the project. This is because of the deep connection I have with the land and my memories of growing up in regional Victoria. The strength provided by knowing people who have experienced great hardship caused by devastation from the weather is both inspirational but also heart breaking and provides one of the impetus for undertaking a project of this nature and to create this body of artwork. The basis of the project is not only looking at the devastation that climate has upon the environment and inhabitants living on the land but it also provides a context for landscape and environmental art which has shifted over the centuries. The essence of capturing aspects of the natural world is still ongoing and a critical part for contemporary art practices. I have used painting, drawing, digital drawing and sound to explore the concepts of memories and perceptions to the affects of drought and bushfires. This was found through the inspiration from artists both past and present who have contributed to the landscape painting genre and the use of digital mediums to portray difficulties from environmental challenges.
The body of work that has been produced for this project is a testimony to what initially was a broad idea. To create, extend and develop new skills and challenge my creative thinking, as an artist was my initial concern with reproducing my homeland. However, what has developed is a wider understanding of art-making and a focus on creating a theme that is relevant to my story.


Francis, A. (2018). Drought conditions loom across large parts of NSW, farmers spending thousands to stay afloat. ABC News. 12 April 2018


ART PRACTICE - PAINTING
Figure 71-72 (From oil painting to digital drawing. A photo was taken of the painting which was then transformed, manipulated and drawn in an iPad, to create a new artwork)
ART PRACTICE – DRAWING
Figure 80-85
ART PRACTICE - DIGITAL DRAWINGS (iPad drawings)
Figure 107
ART PRACTICE - ANIMATED DRAWINGS WITH SOUND
Figure 122

CONTROLLED AND OUT OF CONTROL
ART PRACTICE - EXHIBITIONS AND MEDIA
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Image: Searching for ghost gum | 2017 | Oil on canvas | 100x150cm

Figure 126
Figure 128
BELINDA WILSON

"I build a very light surface colour and when the work is finished, the paint seeps through the top of the canvas at paper. It can be quite fascinating. But the result allows different light to reflect the surface below. In many ways, this simulates the light or land," Wilson says.

Deeply inspired by her childhood in country Victoria, Wilson is currently completing a Master of Fine Arts which focuses on the effects of drought, fire and water. There is often a figurative element to Wilson’s work and her flattened forms represent the farmers and workers whose lives are the fabric of nature. "The figures convey momentary memories of country life, of battling against the extreme weather conditions," Wilson says. "Importantly, it is their stories and emotional experiences that are portrayed in the artwork."

Belinda has been involved in the arts industry for more than 25 years and is currently the Senior Advisor Learning and Teaching, Vocational Education at RMIT University. A selection of her work is set to feature in Sydney’s The Other Art Fair and amidst her busy lifestyle, Wilson still maintains a dedicated studio space at home. Flooded with light and with views to her garden, Wilson strives to paint and sketch in her studio each day and readily admits that her art practice is a “love affair that is consuming and can be quite obsessive.”

If you visit my stand at The Other Art Fair you will find... a body of work capturing the essence of a contemporary Australian landscape, retold through paintings and drawings. Painterly figures emerge through the canvas, as these landscape paintings narrate a story of struggle, passion and connection with the land.

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