Social and Cultural Realities

Adam Lee
Master of Fine Art by Research

2006

RMIT University
PORTFOLIO OF DESIGN AND SOCIAL CONTEXT
SCHOOL OF ART
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 thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Adam Lee

February 23rd, 2006
I would like to acknowledge several people for their commitment and support throughout this research project. I especially acknowledge Associate Professor Peter Ellis for being so generous with his time and for his valued advice throughout the supervision of this project. I would also like to thank Greg Moncrieff, Dr. Phillip Edwards, Alan Roberts, Joy Hirst and Dr. Irene Barberis.

I would also like to acknowledge my family for their continued support, especially Alan and Kerrie for their belief in my work and Laurine for her steadfast encouragement and strength.
SECTION ONE

Research Proposal
Pages 1 - 9

Bibliography
Pages 10 - 15

SECTION TWO

Selected Research Material
Pages 16 – 31

SECTION THREE

Selected Works on Paper
Pages 32 – 39

SECTION FOUR

Slides, Digital Images, Catalogues and Articles
Pages 40 – 43
Section One

Research Proposal
Section One - Research Project

SUMMARY

The visual exploration of different social, cultural and spiritual experiences and environments in both the Third World and the West, as a metaphor for the human condition.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

This project involves the investigation of the human condition, in relation to the experiences of people living in various situations of poverty and hardship in both Western and Third World communities. Issues surrounding the lives of people living in the Third World, such as poverty, homelessness and sickness are compounded by a massive lack of resources needed to meet their basic needs. This and the ever increasing gulf between rich and poor, means that these issues are as serious and crucial today as they have ever been. Although these issues and needs are widely acknowledged in the West, they seem to be largely ignored by most people living in Western society, often overshadowed by the comfort of Western life and the issues commonly perceived as a threat to that comfort.

In a similar way, many people living within Western communities also experience situations of extreme poverty and hardship. Issues such as homelessness, family breakdown, youth suicide and drug abuse, are increasing in our Western society at an alarming rate. Although these issues may be very different from those experienced in the Third World, they remain extremely relevant to today's Western society. Author and journalist Phillip Yancy comments that:
"We in the West elevate dotcom billionaires and gorgeous supermodels. For chasing a ball around a field, we reward our professional athletes with more money than it would take to run dozens of hospitals in a country like India. Meanwhile many slum-dwellers in the West, who have electricity, running water and other luxuries beyond the reach of village India, live in a state of greed, resentment and unrest. By elevating the rich, the beautiful, the powerful, what have we done to the dignity of those who do not measure up?"  

It is my intention through this research program to create a series of visual works, which explore and question many of the different social, cultural and spiritual characteristics of groups of people experiencing situations of extreme poverty, neglect and hardship within both Western and Third World societies. The main research for this project will involve creating crucial links between my art practice and my ongoing involvement in humanitarian/aid programs in Andhra Pradesh, India, working with people in impoverished Third World conditions, and social welfare work in the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne, Australia.

By drawing on these two specific areas, I aim to explore the theme of poverty as a valid subject for the visual artist in establishing a broader metaphor for the human condition in the 21st Century. This will involve testing new insights in this area in relation to contemporary fine art, including the examination of artistic representations of poverty in fine art, the relationship between poverty and contemporary visual art and the investigation of the artist as a documenter of real life experiences in situations both inside and outside of the typical Western experience of living.
Through a series of studio based visual works, including paintings and drawings, I will explore these issues by making links between Third World experiences of poverty, including abandonment, the family, caste/social divisions and indifference, and similar experiences within a Western context, such as homelessness, youth issues and social segregation in everyday life. This will involve drawing on my involvement in humanitarian/aid projects in the Third World and social welfare work in Melbourne through the development of visual research, whereby I will document aspects of the situations I am witnessing. This visual research will take the form of drawings in order to develop visual ideas and concepts, which will then be worked into more developed, resolved paintings.

The purpose for this work is to create more awareness within Western and Third World society regarding the needs and experiences of people living in situations of poverty and hardship within these different contexts.
The project asks the following questions:

* In what ways can figurative painting be used as a tool of social and cultural change in the 21st Century by challenging current thinking towards issues of the human condition?

* In what ways can figurative painting be used in the 21st Century as a documentary device in order to explore and present the experiences of people living in conditions of extreme poverty and need?

* By what means do we highlight aspects of hope in the midst of poverty and injustice within the societies and cultures of today?

* Can contemporary figurative painting have more of an impact in conveying real-life human concerns than the mainstream media?
RATIONALE

This research project explores issues related to real-life people living today in situations of extreme poverty and need. It therefore raises questions in regards to issues of poverty, social/caste divisions, the family and the ever increasing gulf between rich and poor within society. These issues are extremely relevant to both Western and Third World communities in the 21st Century, particularly in relation to current world events and the state of world affairs today.

The project aims at promoting a greater awareness of the needs of people in situations of poverty and need within our communities and encourages people to question not only their perspective of these issues, but also their role within the community to assist such people. It is particularly relevant to people living in Western society. By focusing on the experiences of people living in situations of poverty it attempts to highlight some aspects of Western life, which are taken for granted. These include running water, homes and good health/education systems. Each of these issues is extremely relevant to life in the 21st Century and also become a powerful metaphor for issues related to the human condition.

This project is relevant as a research study because it examines issues not regularly represented by fine artists within the context of contemporary art. Aside from documentary filmmakers or photographers, very few fine artists have examined these issues in a contemporary context. This has resulted in these issues being viewed as unimportant and underrated within the context of contemporary art. Therefore this project attempts to explore new areas of research within fine art by addressing a much needed investigation of issues of poverty in relation to the human condition and the interface between poverty and Contemporary art.
METHODOLOGY

The nature of this project will involve ongoing research in Third World nations, including rural areas of India, and suburban areas of Melbourne. This will involve developmental drawings, documenting aspects of humanity and poverty by referring to the experiences of people I work with through humanitarian/aid projects in India and social welfare programs in Melbourne. This will also involve written documentation gathered from the ongoing relationships I will keep with these people. This will include personal diaries and sketch books, which I will keep throughout these experiences, and a record of observations made in regards to the experiences of people I will be working with. The research outline is as follows:

Stage 1 (January 03 - June 03)
* Library research - reference material for proposal and practical work
* Development and refinement of proposal
* Photographic research - social welfare work throughout the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne. (This will involve the verbal consent of all parties involved and will only be used as research material in the development of resolved work. These images will not be used in my final exhibition of work).
* Production of paintings and drawings referring to photographic research
* Begin development of Durable Visual Record
* Preparation for India trip scheduled for late November, 2003
Stage 2 (June 03 - December 03)
* Photographic research - Northern Suburbs, Melbourne
* Development of paintings and drawings referring to photographic research
* Preparation for exhibition in early 2004 to show current work
* Development of Durable Visual Record
* Final preparations for India trip
* Travel to India for one month for humanitarian/aid work and research for project.

Departing on the 20th of November, 2003

Stage 3 (January 04 - June 04)
* Exhibit current work
* Catalogue and organise research material collected in India
* Photographic research - social welfare work throughout the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne
* Production of paintings and drawings referring to photographic research
* Development of Durable Visual Record
* Preparation for exhibition in late 2004 to show current work
* Preparation for trip to India and possible trips to Cambodia and Africa, late 2004/early 2005

Stage 4 (June 04 - December 04)
* Travel to India for one month to rural villages and towns for humanitarian/aid work and research for project
* Possibly travel to Africa and Cambodia for humanitarian/aid work and research for project
* Production of paintings and drawings referring to photographic research
* Development of Durable Visual Record
* Exhibit current work
Stage 5 (January 05 - June 05)
* Catalogue and organise research material collected throughout travels
* Production of paintings and drawings referring to photographic research
* Development of Durable Visual Record
* Planning and refinement for final exhibition of project work
* Planning for trip to India, late 2005

Stage 6 (June 05 - December 05)
* Travel to India for one month to rural villages and towns for humanitarian/aid work and research for project
* Refinement of final project exhibition of visual material
* Preparation of Durable visual record of research material
* Final exhibition of project

Stage 7 (December 05 – March 06)
* Finalise Exhibition
* Submit Durable Visual Record
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Texts


**Periodicals, catalogues and magazines**


Jose, Nicholas. *Fang Lijun*, Art Asia Pacific, no. 15, 1997, p.93, 94.


The Big Issue, International Network of Street Papers, no.175, Melbourne, 2003.

The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art gallery, Brisbane, 1996.


Films


Section Two

Selected Research Material
Conceptual development from visual diary, April 2003
Selected observational notes and drawings from diaries and note books compiled throughout research work in India, December 2003
Selected observational notes and drawings from diaries and note books compiled throughout research work in India, December 2003
Study sketch for *The New Family (Brothers No. 1)*, April 2003
Selected conceptual development for *Orphan Profiles* series, August 2003
Study for *Orphan Profiles* series, September 2003
Selected conceptual and visual development for *The Children Pray No.2*,
May 2003 - June 2004
Selected magazine editions and articles used for conceptual and visual development for
The Big Issue series.
Selected conceptual and visual development for *The Big Issue* Vendor series, March - June 2003
Preliminary drawing (left) and final painting of *Big Issue Vendor (Michael)*, September 2003
Selected conceptual and visual development for *Punk* and *Goth*, August 2003 – July 2004
Selected study sketches for *Punk* and *Goth*, March 2004
Selected conceptual and visual development for *Youth of the Nation (Revolutions)* series, February 2005
Selected visual development for *Youth of the Nation (Groupies)*, February 2005
Selected visual development for *Youth of the Nation (Groupies)*, February 2005
Section Three

Selected Works on Paper
Details of works from *Youth of the Nation (Groupies)* series, watercolor and ink on Arches paper, February 2005
Youth of the Nation (Groupies) series, six watercolor and ink on paper works,
each 12cm x 15cm, February 2005
Orphan Profiles series, 14 profile images of orphaned and abandoned children from around the world, watercolor on Arches paper, each 25cm x 35cm, January 2004
Details of works from *Orphan Profiles* series, watercolor on Arches paper, January 2004
Study for Goth, charcoal on paper, 54cm x 76cm, April 2004
Lamb’s Blood, charcoal on paper, 54cm x 76cm, December 2004
Blossom, pencil on paper, 45cm x 52cm, June, 2005
Section Four

Slides, Digital Images, Catalogues and Articles
Slide List

1. *The New Family (Brothers No. 1)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 240cm, 2003

2. Installation view of *The New Family (Brothers No. 1)*

3. *Big Issue Vendor No. 1*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 188cm x 245cm, 2003

4. *Greg, Cliffton Hill*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 193cm x 245cm, 2003

5. *Jim, Bourke St Mall*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 190cm x 240cm, 2003

6. *Tom, QUT Brisbane*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 190cm x 245cm, 2003

7. *Big Issue Vendor (Michael)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 190cm x 250cm, 2003

8. *Ashok, 4 Years, India*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 175cm x 175cm, 2003

9. *Me, 4 years, Australia*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 175cm x 175cm, 2003

10. Installation view of *Ashok, 4 Years, India and Me, 4 years, Australia*

11. *The New Family (Brothers No. 2)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 240cm, 2004

12. *The New Family (Sisters)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 244cm, 2004
13. *The New Toothbrushes*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 174cm x 125cm, 2004

14. *The Children Pray No. 1*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 260cm, 2004

15. Installation view, the artist and *The Children Pray No. 1*

16. *The Children Pray No. 2*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 260cm, 2004

17. *Gangu Baby*, acrylic on canvas, 45cm x 52cm, 2004

18. *Daveedu*, acrylic on canvas, 45cm x 52cm, 2004

19. *Ashok*, acrylic on canvas, 45cm x 52cm, 2004

20. *Rani*, acrylic on canvas, 45cm x 52cm, 2004

21. *Manni*, acrylic on canvas, 45cm x 52cm, 2004

22. Installation view *The New Family* solo exhibition, Smyrnios Gallery, Melbourne, July 2004

23. Installation view *The New Family* solo exhibition, Smyrnios Gallery, Melbourne, July 2004

24. *Lollipops*, acrylic on canvas, 52cm x 88cm, 2004

25. *Grace Boy With Flower*, acrylic on canvas, 88cm x 110cm, 2004

26. *Punk (from Youth of the Nation series)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 180cm x 120cm, 2004

27. *Goth (from Youth of the Nation series)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 180cm x 120cm, 2004
28. *Punk (from Youth of the Nation Groupies series)*, watercolor and ink on Arches paper, 15cm x 25cm, 2004

29. *Goth (from Youth of the Nation Groupies series)*, watercolor and ink on Arches paper, 15cm x 25cm, 2004

30. *Groupie – Raver (from Youth of the Nation series)*, watercolor on Arches paper, 65cm x 45cm, 2004

31. *Youth of the Nation (Resurrection)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 240cm, 2005

32. *Youth of the Nation (Revolutions)*, acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 240cm, 2005

33. *William Deng, 9 Years, (M)*, from *Orphan Profile series*, watercolor on Arches paper, 16cm x 35cm, 2005

34. *Emmanual Mutubati, 6 Years, (M)*, from *Orphan Profile series*, watercolor on Arches paper, 16cm x 35cm, 2005

35. *Mbasa Malro, 7 Years, (M)*, from *Orphan Profile series*, watercolor on Arches paper, 16cm x 35cm, 2005

36. *R-Chie Panteriore, 7 Years, (M)*, from *Orphan Profile series*, watercolor on Arches paper, 16cm x 35cm, 2005

37. *Lamb’s Blood*, charcoal on paper, 82cm x 110cm
Brothers (No. 1),
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
191cm x 240cm, 2003
Big Issue Vendor No. 1,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
188cm x 245cm, 2003
Greg, Clifton Hill,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
188cm x 245cm, 2003
Tom, QUT, Brisbane,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
190cm x 250cm, 2003
Peachy,
Watercolor on paper,
64cm x 72cm,
2003
Big Issue (Michael),
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 90cm x 250cm, 2003
Me Aged 4, Australia,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
175cm x 175cm, 2003
Me Aged 4, Australia,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 75cm x 175cm, 2003
The Children Pray No. 1,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
190cm x 240cm, 2004
The Children Pray No.2,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
190cm x 244cm, 2004
The New Toothbrushes,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
174cm x 125cm, 2004
Clockwise from top left:
*Gangu Baby, Manny, Daveedu, Rani,*
All acrylic on canvas, 45cm x 52cm, 2004
Ashok.
Acrylic on canvas,
45cm x 52cm, 2004
Lollipops,
Acrylic on canvas,
52cm x 88cm, 2004
Laughing Orphan Boy,
Acrylic on canvas,
52cm x 62cm,
2004
*Brothers (No. 2),*  
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191 cm x 240 cm, 2003
Sisters,
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 244cm, 2003
Grace Boy With Flower,
Acrylic on canvas,
88cm x 110cm, 2004
Installation view of The New Family, solo exhibition at Smyrnios Gallery, Melbourne, July 2004
Installation view of *The New Family*, solo exhibition at Smyrnios Gallery, Melbourne, July 2004
*Punk* (left) and *Goth* (right),
Both acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
120cm x 180cm, 2004
Youth of the Nation (Groupies),
Watercolor and ink on Arches paper,
each 15c, x 25cm, 2004
Tribal Warrior (From Youth of the Nation Series)
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas, 191cm x 255cm, 2004
Youth of the Nation (Resurrection),
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
191cm x 240cm, 2004
Youth of the Nation (Revolutions),
Acrylic on un-stretched canvas,
191cm x 240cm, 2004
Groupie – Raver (From Youth of the Nation Series),
Watercolor on Arches paper,
65cm x 45cm, 2004
Groupie – Raver 2 (From Youth of the Nation Series),
Watercolor on Arches paper,
65cm x 45cm, 2004
Orphan Profiles,
14 watercolor images of orphaned and abandoned children from around the world,
Each 16cm x 35cm, 2005
William Deng, 9 Years,
From Orphan Profiles series,
Watercolor on Arches paper,
16cm x 35cm, 2005
Girl With Sight Leading a Blind Boy,
Watercolor on linen,
91cm x 76cm, 2005
Widow (2),
Watercolor on linen,
84cm x 66cm, 2005
Widow (3),
Watercolor on linen,
84cm x 66cm, 2005
Widow (I),
Watercolor on linen,
84cm x 66cm, 2005
Orphan Boy,
Watercolor on linen,
84cm x 66cm, 2005
Blossom,
Pencil on paper,
82cm x 52cm, 2005
Man in Black (Ian),
Acrylic on canvas,
122cm x 180cm, 2005
Blind,
Watercolor and ink on Arches paper,
88cm x 65cm, 2005
Balaclava,
Watercolor on linen,
40cm x 52cm, 2005