Matter and Ghost
An exploration of the idea of the sacred in ordinary things
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.

Honor Bradbeer
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The focus of this project will be to explore notions of the sacred through the study of functional, unadorned forms and the processes by which I translate them into drawn images. My objective is to observe and represent what I see as visually essential to ordinary objects such as bowl, egg and rag. My intention is to engage aspects of archetypal simplicity, providing a visual starting-point for contemplation in the viewer.
My art practice draws on forms from the manifest world to symbolise inchoate aspects of liminal consciousness, that is – areas of the imagination that are just beyond the reach of rational comprehension, but are nonetheless compelling and meaningful. The apprehension of the sacred is one of these liminal territories that are difficult to define verbally but possible to approach through art. I wish to explore the apprehension of the sacred beyond its usual association with defined religious orientations.

Central to this project is the concept of archetype, or original matrix, in the psychological make-up of humanity. I regard the experience of the sacred as belonging to this primal, transpersonal aspect of our imagining.

My choice of subject matter will be limited, for this project, to forms which have evolved, or are built, according to their environment or functional purpose, and which are not adorned by ornamentation or artifice that is extraneous to their functionality. In other words, forms that approximate the generic, without the distraction of culturally encoded styling.

Detached from specific liturgical contexts, the notion of 'sacredness' is not necessarily anchored by traditional icons. The logic behind the austerity of my 'generic' subject matter is to make a visual connection to the otherwise formless concept of a primal imprint of human consciousness, to anchor my exploration of the sacred. Such subject matter could include common household objects, such as bowl, cup, rag and organic, inanimate forms, such as plants and eggs.

My objective is to observe and record what I see as visually essential to the recognition of familiar objects, and to become attuned to the intrinsic structure of such forms as bowl, cup, rag and leaf. This will benefit from the refinement of my drawing method to approach realist figuration. However, I also intend to afford more presence to the abstract elements arising from the drawing process. The pursuit of intangible concepts through tangible forms presents an invitation to emphasise the binary relationship through the integration of abstract and realist forms of representation.

I aim to discover a position between abstraction and figuration that can communicate what I see as elemental to the subject of each drawing, concentrating the arena for contemplation within the bounds of the form depicted. By subduing contextual narrative in this way, I intend to amplify the tiny events of light, line and texture within the drawn form.

I work primarily with ink on heavyweight paper, using a process of erasure to reclaim passages of light from ink-stained surfaces. The nature of this method is alternately abrasive and caressing, destructive and reparatory, as the paper is by turns blackened, scratched, rubbed, repainted, soaked, washed and burnished. These qualities echo stages of the conceptual research, and leave a visible history of process. The physical enactment of delving for buried 'light' provides a useful metaphor to embody the elusive, metaphysical search for the sacred.

Technical challenges may involve experimentation with the use of colour and with different applications of ink; and finding effective spaces and systems for installation of the work.

The outcome will be a series of ink drawings that give visual presence to notions of the archetypal sacred in human imagining through the considered representation of unadorned forms.
In 1998, the National Gallery of Victoria presented *Beyond Belief – Modern Art and the Religious Imagination*, curated by Rosemary Crumlin. The exhibition brought together works by over seventy international artists, all dealing with issues of spirituality. Although many of these works are explicitly religious, or make use of familiar religious narrative and symbols, many others, such as Mark Rothko, Lee Krasner, Francis Bacon and Daniel Goldstein, demonstrate the breadth of possible forms outside religious narrative that can be vessels for the numinous aspects of our imagining.

My project centres on trying to convey the conceptually elusive, but vividly apprehended experience of sacrality through drawings of ordinary things. It is important to acknowledge that various notions of the sacred have been the focus of artists and art movements worldwide, throughout history. One ancient example is the totemic embodiment of spirits in the plants and animals of native Australian art.

However, the artistic pursuit of sacrality in detachment from specific religious contexts is most common to the multifarious artistic manifestations of spiritual disorientation in the modern, particularly Western, consciousness. It is a relevant and important area of research at a time when increasing globalisation and mutual cultural awareness is challenging existing cultural metaphors and belief systems.

The works of Andrew Wyeth frequently engage the use of everyday forms for the purpose of referencing or anchoring nebulous areas of consciousness, as do the urban interiors painted by Chinese-born Melbourne artist, Zai Kuang. Both artists make effective use of objective realism in their pursuit.

In a different genre, 1999 film *American Beauty* (Mendes/Ball) also raises the possibility of apprehending the sacred in ordinariness. This is most explicitly described when a young man is moved to tears by a plastic bag animated by the wind.

In contrast, Andy Warhol’s images of Campbell’s soup tins and Brillo boxes make a similar leap between the everyday and the iconic. However, his project is to deliberately satirise the notion of the sacred, binding it to consumer culture and mass-production so that it loses currency.

My interest in locating what is elemental to forms through abstraction will benefit from the study of Western artists who have pursued a similar objective, such as Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso (especially in their Cubist period), Giorgio Morandi and Alberto Giacometti. I will also research Eastern – particularly Chinese – ink/brush painting traditions, which reference notions of the sacred through the use of symbolic abbreviations of familiar forms. Artists such as Shih-T’ao (Chinese, 17th Century) and contemporary Korean artist Song Changae, amongst many others, exemplify this tradition.
Research Questions

1. In what ways can I identify and give visual presence to ideas of sacredness in human imagining through the representation of unadorned forms?

2. In what ways can I employ aspects of realism and abstraction to communicate the generic, elemental nature of certain objects through ink drawings?

3. What visual elements activate a sense of the sacred in our apprehension of ordinary things, and how can these elements be translated into drawn images?
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Petrol Blue, 104 x 112cm, 2007

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Bowl, 104 x 154cm, 2007

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Shoe II, 104 x 96cm, 2007
In Gestation
Three head studies, ink on paper, each 75 x 35cm, 2005

Two head studies, ink on paper, dimensions variable, 2005
A Note on the Figure Drawings:

My initial intention was to include the human figure amongst the “ordinary” subjects of my drawings, treating it as a form of no greater or lesser consequence than a paint brush, a folded shirt or a sea-urchin.

In past projects, the human subject has been integral to my inquiry. However, with the opening of my 2006 exhibition, The Dust You Seldom See, which contained object, figure and landscape drawings, it became apparent that a natural and immediate identification with the human form, for myself and for viewers, had the tendency to derail the central emphasis of this particular project, and engage us instead with narratives and associations quite at odds with the experience of “luminous silent stasis” which had become pivotal to the project.

Although I remain interested in representing the human form in such a way that it does not induce a clamouring plethora of mental associations, such a challenge presents its own discrete set of concerns, and would be better attempted in a separate project.

With this realisation, I turned my full focus upon inanimate objects, and abandoned my concern with the human figure.

James Joyce, cited in Campbell, J. The Inner Reaches of Outer Space, p.135

This page and opposite: Rain Figures, ink on paper, each 30 x 18cm, 2005
Four bowls, ink on paper, each 40 x 30 cm, 2005
Apple, ink on paper, 30 x 35 cm, 2006

Rag I, ink on paper, 35 x 65 cm, 2006
Rug II, ink on paper, 35 x 69cm, 2006

Bowl, ink on paper, 35 x 72cm, 2006
Rag III, ink on paper, 35 x 69cm, 2006

Rag Pile, ink on paper, 35 x 65cm, 2006
After my exhibition The Dust You Seldom See, I began to use coloured ink in addition to the black ink I had been using almost exclusively.

I kept the palette minimal, in order not to overwhelm the simple visual communication of forms. I introduced only primary red and blue, which, along with black, could be mixed to produce a varied but limited range of colours.

At the same time, I began to increase the scale of the drawings to accommodate the full gesture of my arm and to reflect, in my mark-making, the movement of my whole body. This enabled a closer conceptual connection between myself and the objects with which I was engaged. An almost human scale emphasised the analogy between the nature of the still object and the nature of the viewer.

Both the change in scale and the addition of colour demanded a greater physical effort. The act of erasure was more difficult and less precise. The materiality of the paper surface became a stronger visual component, as abrasions, torn patches, and textural variations were more visible and frequent. This activated a change in my approach to understanding the objects themselves: the changes in my method did not lend themselves to meticulous realism, and I was obliged to approach each object at a more fundamental level; as a formal mass incorporating an interior as well as a surface, and surfaces apart from that which I could see. I began to use line to acknowledge structures and masses invisible to the eye: concealed, imagined, felt.

In this way, I began to translate into drawing, not only the appearance of the object, but the way it inhabited its physical space and its place in my consciousness.

Top: Detail from Urchin, Stones
Bottom: Kate’s Urchin, ink on paper, 35 x 55cm, 2007
Opposite: Urchin, Stones, ink on paper, 45 x 45cm, 2007
“In its own space, the object or composition is set apart as a thing of beauty in its own nature, which [can be] experienced as akin to that of the witness.”

– Joseph Campbell

1 Campbell, J., The Inner Reaches of Outer Space, p.132
The Studio and its Contents

My studio provided parameters by which I could delimit the broad themes of sacrality and ordinariness for this project. Acting not only as location and materials for making drawings, but also as the core subject matter for my inquiry, the space and its contents became pivotal to my research.
Studio interior. Clockwise from top left: brushes and work in progress; rolls of drawings; Urchin II in progress; more rolls.
“He gazes with the eye of a believer, and the innermost bones of these things... appear to him in their most consoling guise: in their everlasting aspect. Thus he shares in the great lyricism created by the latest and deepest European art: The metaphysics of the most common objects; those which habit has made so familiar to us that, however wise we may be to the mysteries of appearance, we often look at them with seeing yet unknowing eyes.”

– Giorgio de Chirico on Giorgio Morandi

Studio interior.
Above and right: studio paraphernalia and materials
Opposite: sketches and experiments
the dust you seldom see
Top: Paper Boat, ink on paper, 25 x 30cm, 2006
Above, left: Folded Rug, ink on paper, 25 x 32cm, 2006
Above, right: Paper bag, ink on paper, 25 x 32cm, 2006
Opposite: Detail, Paper Bag
Top: Folded I, ink on paper, 34 x 68cm, 2006
Bottom: String and Bottle, ink on paper, 34 x 69cm, 2006
Opposite: Detail, String and Bottle
Top: Blackened, ink on paper, 34 x 68cm, 2006
Bottom: Folded II, ink on paper, 34 x 69cm, 2006
Opposite: Detail: Folded II
Left: Paper Plane I (ink on paper), 104 x 66cm, 2006
Opposite: Paper Plane II (ink on paper), 104 x 108cm, 2006
Left: 2006 Pietà, ink on paper, 104 x 85cm, 2006
Opposite: Dove, ink on paper, 35 x 29cm, 2005
“By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently... nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transformed into a supernatural reality.”

— Mircea Eliade
Stages of process

Duck Eggs II, ink on paper, 25 x 32cm, 2007
Stages of process:
Strawberry Hulls

ink on paper, 04 x 96cm,
2007
Installation photographs from *The New Breed II*, a group exhibition held at Dickerson Gallery, Richmond, in February 2008.

Exhibited: Strawberry Hulls, Studio Essentials, Shoes, Garments, Brushes II and Urchin in the main gallery, and Nail Dish, Glass Bell, Studio Floor, Jar and String, Garments II and Brushes in The Paper Room (not pictured).
Part Two
Matter and Ghost
Final collection for Masters exhibition, School of Art Gallery, RMIT
Pitcher, Cloth, ink on paper, 104 x 12cm, 2007

Brushes A, ink on paper, 104 x 86cm, 2007
Above: Urchin, ink on paper, 104 x 96cm, 2007
Opposite: Detail Urchin
Above: Garments, ink on paper, 104 x 96cm, 2007
Opposite: Detail, Garments
Top: Nail Dish, ink on paper, 35 x 70cm, 2006
Bottom: Jar and String, ink on paper, 35 x 70cm, 2006
Opposite: Detail, Nail Dish
Above: Treasures, ink on paper, 104 x 96cm, 2007
Opposite: Detail, Treasures
Clips, Cloth, ink on paper, 104 × 96cm, 2007

Knot, ink on paper, 104 × 96cm, 2007
Above: Urchin II, ink on paper 104 x 96cm, 2007
Opposite: Detail Urchin II
Bowl, Cloth, ink on paper, 10.4 x 14cm, 2007

Shoes, ink on paper, 10.4 x 14cm, 2007
Above: Shoes, ink on paper, 104 x 96cm, 2007
Opposite: Detail, Shoes
Curriculum Vitae

Education
2004 – 08  M.A. (Fine Art) by research RMIT University
2003    B.A. (Fine Art) (Honours) RMIT Completed with High Distinctions
2000 – 02  B.A. (Fine Art) RMIT. Completed with High Distinctions
2001 Intensive Oriental Painting Course, SungMyung University, Seoul.
1999  Short Course in Drawing and Painting, L’Accademia Italiana, Florence.

Relevant Employment
2008 Life Drawing Instructor RMIT Fashion Design dept.
Drifting Instrucor, L’Froide College of Art and Design, Melbourne.
Drifting Instructor, Summer Intensive Drawing Course, RMIT
2007 Drawing Instructor, Summer Intensive Drawing Course, RMIT
2006 Drawing Instructor, Summer Intensive Drawing Course, RMIT
2005 Second Year Life Drawing Instructor Drawing Dept., RMIT
2002 English-speaking representative for Keumso Gallery (Seoul) at the Melbourne Contemporary Art Fair.

Awards and Prizes
2003 Winner Smorgon Contemporary Art Prize
2001 Exchange scholarship to SungMyung University, Seoul.

Solo Exhibitions
2006 The Dust You Seldom See, Hogan Gallery, Collingwood, Melbourne
2005 Draw Us Near, Moor Street Art Gallery, Fitzroy, Melbourne.
2001 How The Light Gets In, Moor Street Art Gallery, Fitzroy, Melbourne

Group Exhibitions
2008 New Breed II, Dickens Gallery, Richmond, Melbourne
2006 Omnim Gatherum, Dame’s Upstairs Art Gallery, Fitzroy, Melbourne.
2002 Four Points Perspectives, Cattle Depot Artis Commune, Hong Kong
2001 Robert Jacks Drawing Prize Exhibition, Bendigo Art Gallery, Bendigo.
2001 Surface, Span Gallery, Melbourne.
2000 Wimbledon Exchange Exhibition, Wimbledon School of Art, UK.

Commissions
2000 – 08 Twenty-five portrait commissions for private collections in Australia and the USA.

Publications
2004 Soul Cry, Cal Sang Poetry, Paul Mayfield, Artwork Karon Bredaer
2003 Four Points Perspectives, Catalogue published by Artist Commune, Hong Kong
2002 Surface, Exhibition catalogue published by RMIT Drawing graduates.

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2006 The Dust You Seldom See, Hogan Gallery, Collingwood, Melbourne
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