

Chapter 4

Twelve Lives

This chapter presents summaries of the twelve graduates' experiences, constructed from the words and views transcribed from the interviews. These summaries describe the graduates' current positions, how they have arrived there, and how and where tertiary visual art education was situated in the course of their lives. From time to time these summaries also indicate features of art-school experience and the influence of these features in the lives of the graduates.

Each summary has been constructed by selecting those passages from the interviews that give most insight to the person and their experience in art-school. In providing these summaries my aim is to present, as best as possible, the person, attitudes, art-school experience and the graduate's life as it has developed in the post art-school period.

In the course of these stories, from one to the next, insights arise that bear upon the collective experience of art-school or art-schools and on the other lives under examination. This is very much the way insight into art school culture was revealed to me during the sequence of interviews.

This chapter, then, provides an opportunity to examine a large body of experience contained in the twelve graduate-artists' lives. From this information it is possible to form an overall picture of participation in art school culture and its impact in later life.

The twelve lives that follow are recounted in the order that the interviews took place. Hopefully, this will assist in following my inquiry in the order that knowledge was originally gained on various topics. In this chapter, my intention is to allow the words of the graduates to complete a picture, a picture composed almost entirely from the

raw data of the research project. It is also my intention to reserve comment and analysis, as much as possible, for the subsequent chapters. By doing this I hope, by limiting my role to selection of text, to build as accessible a picture as possible of the twelve different lives and the place of visual art education with each life.

The first participant attended art-school several years before the other graduates and is the only participant living in regional Australia.

Mary

Mary went to art-school directly after completing Year 12 college. After art school she worked at the art school in a support role, before travelling overseas. Mary engaged in various other art workshops and short courses, since graduation, before returning to full time study to become a teacher of Rudolf Steiner education. Mary was working as teacher in Steiner education, at the time of interview and enjoyed her work:

I think one of the blessings of Steiner education is that I actually get to do a lot of artistic things and that is one of the reasons I'm drawn to it. .. I'm able to do something creative every day which is really wonderful !

Concern for aesthetics permeates other aspects of Mary's life. Here she is discussing where she lives, originally the servants quarters of a grand old house:

I love that feeling of space and shape. Like everything's beautifully made and wood and cedar doors and railings and it had this horrendous wall-paper on the walls, which we've removed. ... I spent a lot of time thinking about things, like what things look like.

Mary is quite occupied with artistic concerns. There is a way things should look, not only at home but also in the workplace:

So I went and painted all the pin-boards - not white - although it looks white or cream compared to the colour ... what would go where - what would be practical as well as visually harmonious ... I don't know if you can say that's from my training or that's just innately in me.

In becoming a teacher Mary completed two years of study in Steiner education, some years after her time at art-school. The art-school experience had a bearing on this training:

I wasn't afraid of using art materials whereas a lot of people...weren't comfortable and I was really comfortable with it, and not afraid of using colour, and some people were very timid about using colour...

At the same time however Mary qualifies the experience;

...that in some ways my artistic training was a hindrance, because I was wanting to form something, whereas we had to learn to let things come from the experience, more soul colour experience.

In the time between leaving art-school and training as a teacher, Mary managed the art-school's art supplies shop, travelled overseas and returned to the art-school again to work in the cafeteria. During this time she continued to take additional art courses. Her original tertiary study had been in Gold and Silver-smithing, but she is not interested in making jewellery at all.

Mary had gone to art-school straight from Year12 college:

I had an enthusiastic art teacher. He encouraged me to apply to art school and I did. ... I didn't get into -[hesitates] the actual subject that I wanted to that was print-making. I was chosen for gold and silver-smithing which was my last choice. And in my youth I persevered with that even though perhaps it wasn't the best medium for me. ... So, I embarked on that.

Mary wanted to change programs but it was not possible:

... lecturer we had was very controlling, like for me to have changed I would have had to be a very strong person to have changed disciplines. He was very [facial distortion] - he held us very very tightly.

When Mary began running the art-school shop her professional art practice faded away, in preference for earning a living:

I ran the shop ... and I also did some artwork during that time. I was part of an exhibition, but I didn't have the same drive to - as I saw my peers to pursue, or some of them - but I mostly really focussed on getting out into the workforce. I always presumed that you'd never really get, - be able to make -so much of a

living from your art - just completely. You'd always have to do something else.

During this time she was of course in contact with students and former lecturers, and this changed the experience of art-school:

It was kind of weird - like sometimes it would feel a bit like I had failed that I wasn't doing it for making a living, but there is that in me, especially to do with the lecturer that I had. I would feel judgement or maybe yeah I felt that I had failed perhaps, that I wasn't actually doing it [but] I also knew that I didn't have it enough in my heart to do it. ...

When Mary reflects on the benefits of her time in art-school this is what she says:

I don't know.. just being able to look at things and talk about them and ... I guess it's about constructive criticism. ... Actually learning about changing things or being open to looking at things. Maybe being more, looking at balance and harmony and colour and shape and form and I'm really a visual person, like I just look at things that's balanced or not

Mary believes she could have benefited from art-school more, had she been older:

... if you come right out of high school into art school like I did and you're pretty immature and maybe don't make the most of it that you could.

The interview with Mary was conducted at the end of a school holiday. In asking her for a vision of the future this is how she sees it:

Somehow getting enough money to live and do what you want to do and then somehow create as well. It's hard to get the balance right. ... I mean it's interesting thinking about being at home and trying to do artwork and having children or whatever. I was so enthusiastic about ... it, than thinking about going back to school.

In summary then Mary values the visual critique process learned in the art-school but she also wished her experience had been different:

I don't regret it. I sometimes wish I had more strength within myself to be able to maybe change to maybe another discipline really. That's if I had moved into - that's left the gold and silver-smithing and moved into something else. I would have been quite a different person. I would have gone into something else more strongly, I imagine.

Mary is almost a closet artist, ' Most people wouldn't see me as an artist. Not many people would see that side of me. Only people that have known me for a long time', she says. Art however, 'doing it' as she calls it, does play a central role in Mary's sense of being, Mary concludes:

I'd like to do some classes here ... do life drawing or just have that freedom, or -like- just, the models provided and I have the stimulation of others and just having a go again at doing it. For me to feed my soul as a teacher.

Mary's life after graduation has never been far removed from art practice, but this practice has most often been in the form of additional courses, or in related activities such as teaching. Important features of Mary's relationship to her art school education are; her induction into a discipline that was not her first choice, her immaturity at the time of study and inability to take charge of the situation and perhaps change to what she really wanted to do. Mary does not see herself as motivated in the necessary way to become a full time artist. The failure to practice art full time after graduation is viewed from a personal perspective, rather than an industrial or environmental perspective.

Darcy

Darcy is a successful glass blower, in so far as he is able to enjoy his work and live reasonably well from what he does. Darcy tried to leave high-school early, intent on becoming an apprentice builder, but eventually returned to complete Year 12, and entered art school rather fortuitously. A significant aspect of Darcy's career has been to work in the U.S.A. where he has access to an established market. Let us begin Darcy's story a few weeks after his arrival at art-school:

What really hooked me on the whole thing like.. and its probably a cliché but what was life changing was going to watch glass blowing for the first time. And I went in and - I arrived late - the glass blowing instructor ...was like "you're a very naughty boy" - cause ... I arrived late and he thinks instantly I'm just, I'm a punk who's useless, and I get to go last in the class, so there's a class of 13 or something and so he takes some glass out of the furnace, rolls it on the marver sits now and pulls out a little stem for a wine glass and he says this is what I want you to do and I get to go last. ...

...It's like week two of the course. So we had introduction to other techniques and before that I was thinking I want to change department because we were just bending glass you know. I'd never actually seen glass blown. And I'd signed up for a degree in glass. ... I hadn't seen molten glass yet, and the molten viscous stuff and when I saw it was - I was pretty blown away. But then the thing that got me was ...and I watched and nobody else could do it - and when I came up to it, it was like I'd done it before, I mean it was easy, I did it, and like - well as soon as I saw [the instructor] make a piece, I thought "I can do that" I just watched him do it and I thought "I can do that" it was ... that was my second week of first year in 86 and by the end of that semester I was working every afternoon I could, into the evening. I worked with [the artist-instructor] and a number of other people in the evening as an assistant. We'd work from 4 till midnight.

Blowing glass and working in the glass studio had taken Darcy in a direction that was to continue virtually without pause straight to his current practice. Yet the chance of this even having occurred seems incredibly slim, when we take into account the events immediately prior to his arrival at art school. Darcy had tried a pre-apprenticeship in carpentry, and worked for a builder in the school holidays, but he went back to school, where he did some ceramics and a little stained glass. He and his friends were looking for what to do next. As it turned out he went to an open day:

I was interviewed by a very charismatic guy ... and he just said - he just saw a young lost bloke from the South Coast - and said "look, if you're prepared to work hard, Glass is very young here in Australia you could probably make a go of it. We need people like you." And that's all I needed to hear!

From this almost immediate conversion, from lack of commitment to a passion for a glass craft skill, Darcy tells a story of a series of adverse events turning to good opportunities. For anybody else any one of these events may have ended the career, but it is worth noting them in detail.

The art school glass-studio folded halfway through the second year; 'that was more amazing that I stayed on at [art-school] ... so we had to rebuild the facility at ... it was actually the back of a trailer, there was a small furnace on the back of a trailer'. Darcy went off to work in a Queensland production studio and he returned late into the 3rd Year.

Adversity was turned to opportunity, but it was the disorganisation and weaknesses in the program that created the flexibility which allowed Darcy to gain work experience in another State.

Darcy did not complete art theory in this year. He had to take an extra year to complete the unit. He used the extended candidature to gain addition access to the studio, a key factor in opening up opportunities after art school:

I did one day a week trying to finish these theory units. I still had access to the glass workshop...and in early 1990 an American ... came to Sydney ... and I knew a lot about him when I was an undergraduate I got to meet him in January of 1990.

This artist became something of a role model:

I was very interested in [his] work at that time. [He]'s only 4 years older than me and he had an amazing amount of success and he's the only craftsman I know who owns a Porsche 111, and like he's really ... I mean he was just incredibly successful at an early age.

Darcy goes into great detail about the artist's work, but as he says that is the artist's story not his. In one sense though this artist is very much part of Darcy's story:

I guess when workshops happen they get advertised at schools they're aimed at students or recent graduates so that's how I got to meet [him] and [another professional artist]. And then I mean, I just - I don't know - I'm just presumptuous I guess. I just said "I need to come over and help you."

Darcy followed the American artist and a number of other glass masters to New Zealand, his first overseas trip and shortly after this trip he attended and assisted in the artist's summer school in the USA.

The extra time in the art-school, the contact with the visiting artist program, and Darcy's focus and determination to follow up contacts and opportunities set him apart from his peers. From this point on Darcy has continued a regular migration to the USA, the main market for his work, although more recently an Australian market has begun to open up.

We can trace much of Darcy's more recent history and the American experience from the next interview of Janet, his spouse and co-worker.

In Australia Darcy's practice is more complex. He says he 'can be a terrible snob' because there is 'only a handful' of glass blowers he considers as his peers. But even in this work it is not easy to make a living. He makes both exhibition work and production glass in order to survive:

... the reason we have been able to survive and pay the rent is because I make pieces that wholesale for under \$50 and can retail for under \$100 and they are high turn over . So you make the work, I send it out and I get paid in 30 days. But when you send work out on consignment ... it's more like a sculptor or a fine artist- all the rules change and the delay between sending it out, having the work sold, waiting endlessly for the gallery to pay you and then finally pay you its like a year.

He can see how difficult it must be for artists in other media.

Darcy's career works because of a kind of intensity, what Darcy calls commitment. He attributes his success to hard work and commitment. Of the latter he says:

I was a committed surfer because I grew up on the South Coast. And I was a totally committed surfer before - you know all through high school - much to the detriment of my study but that was sort of - I had that passion for sport I transferred on to glass for a long time. The last few years I've started to - I've gone crazy about bicycles so I race bicycle and I train like crazy for racing bicycles but my commitment to the craft is now that its been 11 years. I feel I can ease off the accelerator a little. Like, I was sick for the glass. If you'd spoken to me in 91,92,93, like, my life was in total imbalance because all I wanted to do was blown glass and all I wanted to talk about was blown glass it was total submersion but any way...

Commitment then, is a significant feature of Darcy's life. In glass there is something of a tradition created by the master-craftspeople. Darcy looks into the future in this way:

I'd like to build my own studio like a small factory that's I would imagine that what will happen unless the price of gas goes through the roof, and we can't afford to melt glass. Unless something really dramatic changes. No it's definitely a life long - yeah I'm a total romantic as far as - that's what my

aspirations are. I mean I'd like to form a team of glass blowers and we would work together for -you know - every day till we retire [laugh] and that's - it's the traditional way - its the Venetian way. And that's how I'd like it to be.

At the time of interview he had been teaching in art-school one day per week, and was preparing to return to America and Europe for the next migration. Overall, Darcy is a practising artist, but in making production work his world is still different from the kind of life practising artists are supposed to enjoy in theory. In this life insight is also gained to how Darcy worked with the real, traditional structures of the glass discipline in order to develop a career. Flexibility and willingness to change, even to the point of disregarding art school requirements are key features of this particular life.

Janet

Janet and Darcy work together, however, they did not attend the same art-school at undergraduate level. Janet's story is quite different, in that Janet tried a number of other studies before finding glass a possibility through art school. Janet works with glass casting and cold glasswork. Unlike Darcy, she did not fall into art-school by any kind of accident. Janet had been searching for something meaningful in life:

I went to university for a year and did philosophy and archaeology and Arabic. I was a bit confused I knew I wanted to do something that was interesting, I had no idea what it was. Have you ever felt like that? It's a very awful feeling.

She left university and did: ' the usual round of part time jobs, waiting, and working in a hotel as a chambermaid'. When Janet discovered glass it still took her quite a while to arrive at art school:

The thing is with glass I really knew I wanted to work with glass. And I'd gone to TAFE and asked them about glass blowing and they said "Nothing. It's impossible" ...at that stage figured glass was going to be something I was going to have on the back shelf and I was going to love it from a distance. ... I met this English girl who was studying glass at Middlesex in England. I couldn't believe it when I was talking to her, I was beside myself. I couldn't believe that someone had actually managed to get a class going and like someone at University like 'Art School!' with glass and I'd think then I knew then it was possible and I had to do it ...

Once inside the art-school, Janet realised that she must make a change in her ambitions. It was possible for Janet to change within the same department:

My problem was not being focussed enough, and now I know what being focussed is . . . I had gone to art school wanting to be a glass blower but I realised that, that's not [how it was going to be] - its funny how it works out, but its completely not suited to my nature and I can't stand the heat. I can't concentrate in the heat and I work well in a group, so as it turned out, I think I'm meant to work glass, but I was meant to work with it in a different way to the way I had anticipated.

As 'it turned out', Janet became a caster and carver of glass. She laughs about it now because these are exactly the skills used to complement the work of her husband.

Even with this resolved, and Janet working well in cold glass, she did not anticipate the future as working with glass for a living after graduation:

I left art school with the same notions that most graduates come out with and that is that I was making art. I didn't expect to make a living from it, and I had these incredible notions of how I suppose I was going to go around in my practice. But I still wasn't taking it very seriously I still thought I'd make my living doing something else. like bar work or waitressing and um I thought the glass was always going to be something, esoteric...

At this stage Janet's brother appears to have intervened, by sending her an airline ticket to New York where he worked. The experience of America changed everything for Janet and Darcy.

... you have to come down to tin tacks really quickly because there's no dole, if you can't make any money there's no network- no safety net and [Darcy] was able to kind of make money from blowing glass and objects you know intermittently - not regularly and I suppose the reason I say this is because I think this was when there was a real shift in my thinking and a real turn about in how I started to think about my practice. I started to see the skills I had as a whole range of skills I could apply to any situation as a way to make a living and not being so precious about every thing I was making ...

America provided a rich learning environment, and Janet began to see art from a business perspective:

I think that we learnt, a little a beneficial lesson in how to approach business well. it may be I finally saw, as a graduate from art school if you looking to deal with a gallery , you want them to like your work , its like “this work, this piece here is about sunset, and I’ve got certain feelings about this piece, and I you know I want you to like this piece, and if you're going to sell it I want you to like it” and that was always my attitude, whereas of course galleries are business, its a business arrangement , they will like your work if they can sell it because they want to make money.

Janet also realised that she could apply her art school experience more broadly, once she had left art-school behind and was dealing with her new situation in America:

... I’m a very slow learner but now I’ve since seen those skills as being very broad. You can see it as being very aware of colour and composition and decorate anything . You could do set design with that if you if once you get skilled with line form composition you can do, you can really put your hand to anything, but whether or not you want to is another thing. So but at that time I thought my skill were things like grinding glass, dealing with the surface, much more hands on stuff.

There were more lessons in America as well, especially in the way the arts community conducts itself:

...being around so many immodest people. It still staggers me, every year over there, at the moment,[I’m] just floored. American people and to all the students and graduate, practitioners of the field we work in, a majority of them have no real idea of the quality of their work, in a context of their colleagues and they far exaggerate their own skills and their own success and it's because success is so highly valued in that country. I would imagine that and there’s nothing like good publicity, so if you talk about yourself, in such a positive frame of mind then other people do warm to you and it's a little bit artificial because of where we were. And I do think I was learning those lessons in the same place but I could have learnt those - it wasn't necessarily going to be the case - but I just happened to learn those lessons at the same time.

We just learnt to be honest about what we were. We’d always say, “ oh no we're not very good , we don’t make very interesting things. You know that kind of [thing] it seems a very Australian thing , you've got to put down what you do. Whereas eventually you say,“you know my work is quite interesting and I like it, and I like it for these reasons and I think you’d be interested” which is you know; Power of positive thinking ! Yeah, very very un-Australian in a way.

Janet paints a graphic picture of the rapid transition her thinking underwent in America. Later Janet and Darcy received a 3 month fellowship. Acceptance at this level made it possible to continue developing the artistic career. This was the first time since they were working together that Janet could concentrate on glass casting, her own specialisation. Most of the time their work is combined and this can create some problems:

... I don't think I'm paranoid about this; I do think its sexism and I think, I've seen it a lot over the years that we've worked together, and people will say, - and I'll be standing next to him, "I really love your work" and they won't acknowledge that I'm standing there and had anything to do with it and I think in the first place people who work with glass, glass blowing 's so much more interesting. ... I don't take it as personally as I used to because I really used to think that my contribution is overlooked, but by and large I don't care, and it doesn't happen as much as it used to but I do think that some people do it for sexism reasons and there's others who do it because, people love a good glass blower. It's like hanging in with the cool crowd.

Janet has lived and worked very much in the shadow of the glass-blower, patiently engraving the raw work that he produces, giving it a finish and identity that sets it apart from other artists' works. Janet says they used to 'argue a lot over whose name went first', but not any more. They now promote both. Janet sees their work very much as business:

I do think if someone's going to be a practising craftsperson or practicing artist they need to address it as a small business because that's what you are ultimately, but that's been my experience, whereas it may not be somebody else's. I just - I suppose when I give lectures to students I tell them to be much more aware about the business.

However, Janet might not take her own advice:

I don't have the answers, but I don't let that stop me doing something stupid ... for example when I went to the States I had a hundred dollars, see I don't know what I was thinking! ...

But as Janet says,

I am a very experiential learner, and unless I have to cross that hill, I don't really look at it. Whereas, a lot of other people wish to educate themselves about how they might get ready for certain demands or challenges, but no, I kind of deal with the challenge as it arises.

Janet's life after graduation, has been fortunate in that her relationship with Darcy and her brother's invitation to go to America resulted in influences very different from what might have occurred had she tried to pursue the life that she originally believed visual art graduates should lead. She is much more of a business person than she might otherwise have been.

Alfred

Art educators frequently confront students and audiences, who believe, that to make art, one has to have 'talent'. Although many art educators know artistic skills are regularly learned, it is not often one comes across such an extreme example as that of Alfred. We pick up Alfred's story, when he was lecturing at University. At the time he is in his fifties and already held a doctorate in a discipline totally unrelated to visual art. Until this time he had shown no interest or 'talent' for art whatsoever:

My youngest daughter was doing HSC, was majoring in art. Up till that time I had really no interest in art, whatsoever, and I started fiddling around with her paint brushes you see, and I thought "I can't draw, but I appreciate colour". So I started doing sort of abstract representations in acrylic and a... my wife probably trying to think what she could get me for a Christmas present decided she would pay for me to go to an artist for a term. So I suddenly found myself conscripted into going to an art teacher, one morning a week. So I went there, expecting to be painting, but she said you have got to draw for a term. I won't take people for painting unless they've done drawing, so - and I was hopeless with drawing, and she said, "nobody's hopeless in drawing, its just a matter of getting your eye and hands coordinated, actually seeing what you see".

This was the beginning of a four year journey that brought Alfred progressively into contact with art and art-schools, first a private teacher, then TAFE and finally full-time study. Alfred showed a good deal of respect for the teachers who encouraged the development of his painting and drawing skills:

The Head of the painting department ... She was an excellent drawer, still is, fantastic. I've not met anyone to equal her, and she was ruthless with students, if you couldn't draw you were out, so I struggled right through...and I passed the test.

Alfred continued to improve in drawing and other art subjects, while at TAFE. Art became more and more appealing with each new demand:

I really became more and more involved in that, and less interested in what I was supposed to be doing ... When it came around to the end of 86 ... I'd done my sums about superannuation and the lot, and I thought I can survive if I take early retirement.

Alfred then faced a choice of which art-school to apply to. Interestingly he ranked them in preference according to the school least like that which he had already attended part-time:

I was interested in going there because I was told they were not that interested in how well you can paint its more like a conceptual art college, although they denied it. But in fact it proved to be that way. They were, the art, the painting department was less interested in painting than installations and such type of art. So it was interesting...

The conceptual orientation of the school proved something of a different challenge. Alfred with his Ph.D background was more than capable of undertaking theoretical study. He found the environment was very different from what he was used to either at university, or in the TAFE art classes:

...the rigour that was required there was absent here, and the rigour that we had at ...TAFE Certificate was absent. Students came and went, very casual many of them, and I think many of them probably live to regret wasted opportunities they had, because they were passed regardless of how they performed

Alfred seems to have taken on the position of antagonist in culture of the art school. He also had altercations with students on philosophical matters. In this instance, Feminists from the Sculpture department were interfering with his right to paint nudes, and the staff did not interfere in the argument:

I related fairly well. What I found a difficulty was the feminism was very strong in the [art-school]. Now I had spent time with feminism of a kind at University, in the radical times, then I'd seen a change until this time where I suppose at Art-school it was anti-male...so I had difficulty relating to that, because being older and I suppose 'cause I was ultra conservative - so to speak - and I - Being Christian it put me off on a limb with a lot of people. So they'd

say "Oh you know he's one of those weirdos, one of them." And because I was older, and because I didn't take drugs and I would call into question the values they were [holding] I'd call into question the values of Freud. I would just say, "Freud has been disproved we are wasting our time." Freud worked well with the drug scene.

...I found that I ... probably tended to have more to say, than a lot of others, so I was categorised...what they were getting from the Feminist movement was - sculpture department - was I should not paint female figures, it was quite strong, and I'd have to say "bugger them" I'll do my own thing I'm an artist, I [artists] should be able to do their own thing" and this is what they couldn't see. So I said "You cannot restrict an artist, and artist must do what is within him or herself" and to say to somebody " You are restricted you cannot paint that".

It came to a feud with five students who decided to target us, as feminists do, and we had a tutor there and he just let it go. We lost our tempers, and the poor female students [the defending figure painters] were really cut to pieces, and that made me angry. So I struck out at them, and probably swore, and then one of them said " I'm not really into this, I'm giving this feminist movement away!" So it was terrible and I made a few enemies.

Alfred protected a right to his own personal development, which the others sought to deny on ethical grounds. In art-school he 'learned a lot of technical things...mixing mediums and that sort of thing' and he also 'learned a lot about life because the students were so different.' At around sixty years of age, these were the things he was learning:

...the [art-school] emphasis was to let you do it your own way. A lot of the students got into drugs. They'd come back from the weekend on crack. They could hardly talk. Heroin- we had one girl who was a superb painter but she was spaced out a lot of the time. It was pretty sad to me as a Christian and seeing the potential. I don't know what happened to these people.

Alfred was not ready to finish art school, he tried to apply for a lower level course at a different art school, but 'they [the prospective school staff] just said, " Listen you've just got to get out there and paint"', which he thought was true.

...1993 I went around to look at some galleries to see how I'd go and I found that rather demoralising. I thought " this is going to be really difficult to sell yourself ... and I sold a couple of paintings in 1993. I went and exhibited at the Showground and at Mosman, whatever it's called the Mosman Council Art Awards, sold paintings in both of these. So it looked as though I could have a future, if I really worked hard.

Alfred sold work at various shows and functions for prices between \$200 and \$500. Luckily he had his retirement income and did not have to live from his work. Alfred gives an idea of the kind of work he was making:

I was painting in a number of different styles. But what I'd done was one distinctive style that -by myself- that was frowned upon at art-school, using Jackson Pollock style of what I'd call flicking the paint on, with stick, but instead of fully abstract-semi abstract. Having an image and very often I would use a brush to make a silhouette image and I decided I would do a Sydney icon the Sydney harbour bridge was to be the theme.

He departed further from "art-school values" in some of the work he sold. During this time he also suffered a major illness but Alfred overcame this, and returned to painting. He has not returned to his former academic discipline, although he does help out with teaching English as a second language with his local church group.

Alfred's artistic career has now spanned just the last 15 years of what is now a seventy-year life. It is almost incredible that there was no evidence of artistic interest in the first 55 years. It seems never to have occurred to Alfred to make art, despite what seemed to have been all the right preconditions:

... no I can't think of any interest. There was no interest in art galleries or not really no..no.. I can't say. I was interested in ... I liked the real bush, you know what I mean ? ... That was the nearest to art that I liked, I always liked, I liked observing nature. As a child, I would sit and watch ants for instance, they came along and see what they would do, and lizards, grasshoppers all those sorts of things were interesting to me, whereas, I noticed none of my friends could ... I noticed my attitude towards the other sex was different. They wanted to build up relationships I..I liked girls in the general if you know, its quite hard to explain but not personally , I couldn't relate. It could be because I had an older sister that I was quite attached too, was killed in a train accident when I was nine and I suspect that this had something to do with it but I'm not sure. Just having read later on how it effected artists, who had had mothers and sisters that were killed and had an effect, so I suspect it did.

Alfred is beginning to re-interpret his own life in terms of other artists' experience. His sister's death and relations to women, and the argument over feminist issues, learning about life are all part of his post-retirement experience in which art-school has played a major role. He has become an artist.

Stefan

Stefan enrolled in art-school shortly after arriving in Australia. He already held a degree in mechanical engineering, gained in an Eastern European country.

Establishing Stefan's principal occupation proved to be something of a mystery. He begins the interview by tabling two business cards. One was for freelance video-camera work. The next card read *turn your special day into a work of art*, indicating that Stefan also video-records weddings and social events, in a way that is above average, in its artistic merit. Stefan explains this in the following way:

I feel that there are no big- no people in this sphere, with this qualification, doing the service, and if you go to a fair, or something where you can see all these videos presented, you can see that there's a lot of not too artistic things going on. So what I provide is the dedicated eye. I mean this is not my dream obviously, but I need to find myself in society and sustain-to make myself sort of sustainable and earn a living and that's one way of doing it, but I think it's not going to be the end of the line.

He recognises in himself, a 'dedicated eye', someone skilled in the visual arts, with a B.A. in Visual Arts, Photography and Post-Graduate Diploma in Sculpture. He justifies this work as "service", that is a 'service to the public'. He also dismisses an interest in news camera-work, a world in which Stefan does not feel comfortable either:

... I can tell you I'm better than the average news cameraman but that doesn't need much skill - quite honestly, but they earn good money. I don't feel like squeezing in there because - umm - if I was offered a job I would take it, but otherwise it's a big stress and it's a big issue to squeeze or get in that circle and I don't think I'm right to do that anyway.

Stefan has not found himself in Mechanical Engineering, news, or other camera-work. In the interview he describes what he is not, rather than what he is:

I'm looking for something that is more entertaining and more rewarding in my life. I was persistent not to take up jobs, and I was on the dole for like - quite a few years waiting for the right opportunity, and I felt that my lifestyle and

expectations of life changed. So I moved to the Mountains two and a half years ago.

Up until the second year after moving to the mountains Stefan remained unemployed.

Stefan says this about the period:

I didn't seek employment as a cleaner or I feel it would have been a waste of time because I, the government invested money in me and I feel I'd rather be patient and take the hassle. And take that sort of inconvenient situation going on between me and the Social Security Department, and I did that.

Fortunately there was another break, Stefan got work with a multi-media studio that handled government work, and began using the skills in which the government had invested:

I got taken on as an assistant, and production photographer. I did the lighting because I've, my profile was studio lighting and so I went underground and did some mining corporate stuff, I did lighting for them, special gear, quite heavy, quite physical work, but I did some second camera work there and also in Media-100 [video software] which is a professional tool used by ABC as well as other studios. It was a great period, but then I left.

For Stefan, there is a history of intense work and then breaks. It is as if none of Stefan's work opportunities match up to 'the dream' which is 'entertaining and rewarding'. Rewarding for Stefan is used in some other sense than financial. Stefan is motivated to the search for a certain quality of life, which does not seem to be found even where income might be quite good:

You can't separate life from my life - uh - art from my life. I don't have to refer to Joseph Beuys or Marcel Duchamp or other people, John Cage you know, "Art is life. Life is art" or whatever. It's quite well known. So I believe that, and John Cage is my favourite, and Marcel Duchamp is my favourite, I think they are great ones so, in this century - and quite a few following up. So I'm on the spiritual side. That's why and actually I did seek, and I am seeking calmness, a full-mindedness, way of life there, so I wake up with my birds in the forest and in the bush...

The knowledge of these artists and their example, together with the evolution of theory gained in art-school has led at least in part to Stefan's move out of the city. He has gone in search of an artistic way of living, 'Art as life and life as art' as Stefan quotes the John Cage maxim. Stefan says:

...I think it's the right way, because something is sick in society, I mean this kind of society, metropolitan way of life and people just seek remedy for it. So I'm interested in self-healing and so on. So my art in the future if I can afford it - I haven't given it up, I'm just doing living and using my artistic eye or skills. If I have the time and I can afford it later on, I want to make a comeback. Not for my own egotistic desires, rather just to share what I have. And I think I've partly had to stop. I would have had to stop it anyway, even if I had the chance to produce art. I think it was too much just on me, because it was on my ego, coming out of my- I wanted to be someone. I wanted to be something. You know, I wanted to reach other people and have admiration like. Now it's reversed and I think if an artist gets through that stage in his or her life, I think the life is get more sort of valuable and then art that it can produce can be much more valuable to others, because the artist matured.

This is Stefan's theory as it has matured so far. Art is inseparable from life and in its application it is guiding lifestyle. Art is part of spiritual development leading to maturity. Living in this way is also a remedy with the intention of 'healing' society and the metropolitan lifestyle that has gone astray. Stefan gives an example by describing an artist who has not graduated from art-school:

He's fantastic, he lives in the village, he's on the dole and he's got his own film festival going on 'Wild Spaces'. You know I just honour him you know because he chose a way that I didn't choose and I wish I could do it. On the dole and he's generating all this money, and he's just giving it out. He's just one who actually creates the whole process and that's really - and he's not even officially educated as an artist, he's just catching up, he's just doing workshops at Metro Television and so on. And I am the one who could just like that, do it, like that and um, I'm not doing it. I feel sorry about that, that's nice.

There is a regret here. It is not just sufficient to live, Stefan believes he should be making his own art. However Stefan has a problem with making money from art:

So it's a big issue. If it's a commission it may not be for your liking, because it's for money so - you want to make a living. This is a nice opportunity to take money for your artwork. But your artwork, I think your artwork, is an artwork when you feel it has to happen. It comes from within and it means that you want to share something so if you get, if you get commission and it's the same thing that's very lucky but I think it could be not even 1 % of the chances that. But that's life isn't it? Yes? So what? you feel it's not quite valued in that sense. Who knows? I wish to make something that is artistic exclusively for non-commission I feel so I am trying to produce, or make, or generate the basis for it.

Eventually it is discovered that Stefan has a third occupation, he is setting up a health-food business with New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) support. NEIS will support this business, but not any of his photography or art practices.

It seems that Stefan's life is one where the material world is constantly being manipulated according to theory and spiritual purpose. Lifestyle is important. Art school was not the start of this process, but it was a stepping stone on the path, an invaluable introduction to Australia. The position of art-school in Stefan's life is demonstrated in this revealing comment:

I'm a mechanical engineer, and I could have done that and I, by this time I wouldn't be broke, I would have house and so on, but I didn't feel like doing engineering. It's personal, I think it's boring, although it's just my judgement or just my sort of evaluation of that kind of thing. It could be quite nice, but I think it was boring for me, so that is why I took up art.

There is a strategy here, one which in retrospect, looking at the new immigrant, at least paid a dividend in part:

I was doing arts ever since [he was young] -I was longing for some formal education to see what the big people think about art. What doors one could [open] - to actually teach something called art- obviously art cannot be taught but something that is common all around in those circles. And also I wanted to get in those circles, which means that you have to go through. I thought that doing this process is the easiest and fastest way to get in. That's the fastest way and if you are young you get your knowledge as a complement through doing the art school. And there are very nice exercises there you can use later on, and all the methodology, what we did. I mean there are nice features there with experience.

Stefan had gone to art-school so that some doors might be opened. He seems to have had in mind the door to the art world. As it turns out he seems to have come out a door leading to concern for spiritual development. He seems to have shut other doors that may have led to the kind of life he saw as attractive before art school. These changes in values came about during his time in art school.

Anna

Anna was living at home, working casually from time to time, and caring for an adopted child. She had made two attempts to study art, the first attempt abandoned when she became pregnant. Many years later, when there was time and space in family life she finally completed a degree. On the phone she believed it would take 'less than 10 minutes' to describe the benefits of art-school, and was generally dismissive of the value of art school experience. In face to face interview the situation proved to be more complex:

Well it was very very strange. Very strange things happen there I thought and I still think of it as a very odd hiccup in a painting life. I don't think of it as the way it should have gone. I actually think had I stayed at home and painted by myself for a few years, I'd have been a lot better off. I'd have established a lot of things for myself and in a way I view art-school as a place to go and show off not a place to learn. Its a place to go and show them what you can do because it's kind of useful for contacts, it's useful for getting yourself up in galleries and things like that.

In this way, Anna largely dismisses the role of the art-school in her life as a painter. Her life at the time of interview was much the same as it was before attending, except that:

It's left me with a nice bunch of friends, I think. I got to know some people, there were some other mature age students there when I was there, and I value those people enormously because they are now my art contacts. They are the only ones I have and that's really valuable. That really mattered to me a lot.

Much of Anna's life surrounds her family, husband, children and aging mother. This has been the way for a long time, but a painting career seems to have been interlaced between all the other family roles and earning a living. Anna's mother was a painter. Anna had previously tried to do a fine-art degree, but gave it up when she became pregnant. Eventually there was a break:

... I managed to have 8 weeks off work and during those 8 weeks I started painting and drawing and gradually started not going to work because I'd stay up till , like you know 4 [a.m.] because I couldn't stop doing it. And then I couldn't get to work for seven. So I just wouldn't go, and gradually I didn't go, and didn't go and then I decided well I'll have to do something about this. I'll have to permanently not go. So I left work and I started working on a part-time basis and -got a folio together and got into the [art-school] and went and just worked part-time.

Despite Anna's misgivings about the course, the art-school provided some excursions for former students:

... They were a real galvanising thing. I really loved that feeling of being with a group of people who were kind of roaming the countryside, all with their easels and setting up and just being one of those was, dunno, was great, it was the happiest time of my life. I thought, "this is perfect"

In some ways Anna was already in a kind of art world before art-school, and evaluates the art-school in relation to prior artistic experience. She says, ' In a funny way it's like I needed to go there to see that I didn't need to go there. I don't actually need them to teach me what I need to know. That kind of painting search.'

Family background seems important to Anna. It seems to have guided an ability to reach this view of the process. A Russian Impressionist whose work hangs in the Louvre taught painting to her mother. There was a book under production about his teaching. They met the author when they visited Latvia.

Anna exhibited her art in the period after art-school, but as always it was interlaced between her family obligations. In this incident the schedule was very tight:

There was a year of painting, I painted for an exhibition, yeh and I had an exhibition, ... and it was quite good, it was really a good thing to do. It was kind of [my husband's] turn and then my turn you know to have free time. So he was a full time student ... I looked after the baby and the baby went into child care, and he went to work a bit and to Uni a bit and I painted full time. So when he came from work he looked after the baby, while I was still painting. I always felt like painting. I never, I didn't go and work in the pasta shop because I wanted to. I worked in the pasta shop because we needed to get to Columbia. There was no question about what you could do then. But I always felt like painting. In there was this big frustrated kind of thing. And then after that, well we had the exhibition and the night after the opening we were going to Barcelona for 3 months because [my husband] was going to be doing Spanish there. And it was the most appalling opening, I mean you could, it just felt dreadful, because we hadn't packed a thing, for going away for 3 months with a little baby, and I was just beside myself [laugh], I just got really drunk, had a lot of champagne and thought "I can't think about this, I can't stand it". It did no good at all, getting drunk of course but, but anyway so it was.

For Anna then the desire to paint, ' this big frustrated thing inside', has somehow fitted in between trips to Spain, Columbia, Latvia and working to pay for it all in the pasta shop. The dismissal of the value of art school is interesting in itself, and seems to colour how Anna sees her skills and capacities for the future.

Christina

Christina began to study art as a hobby while she was a full-time nurse. She moved to part-time nursing to support full-time study of art, and then back to nursing, before moving on into nurse management, education and consultancy. She is fairly concise in the description of her current situation and can attribute it directly back to her art-school experience. It is not, however, the precise result of studying painting, but rather more to do with the acquiring the means of support to study:

I'm a registered nurse I did my nursing training well before I went to art school and I've been working in aged care in nursing homes for about the last 8 or 9 years . I began working in aged care when I was at art school because it was easy to get part-time work there, but then when I graduated from art school I was offered the job of deputy director. So I was in management in the nursing home, and I've done that in a couple of places and I've recently moved from management in nursing homes to consulting in nursing homes. I've formed my own company and I'm working as a consultant.

Christina made a transition from full-time nurse with an interest in art to full-time art student, supported by part-time nursing and back again to full-time work in nursing, although at a higher level. There was in fact something of a plan to return to art school, but it seems Christina's interests had moved on:

...I thought I'd do that for a while, thinking I would do it for a year or so, and then go back and do post grad. in painting, but as it turned out I just really liked , I liked working in management in aged-care, and got quite involved with it so it was- it went up - which is very interesting because I was never a very conscientious nurse, it was one of those things I did for a job and wasn't that interested.

Christina wasn't very satisfied with nursing at the time before she entered art-school. Gradually she moved towards the idea of full-time study:

I was working as a nurse ... and I just started doing some evening classes in colour and design, ..., and I did those for six or twelve months and I just really enjoyed it, I really enjoyed just creating things and painting in particular and that was when I started toying with the idea of maybe I should go and study this full time. So I did it more out of just as something I really liked doing, rather than something that was going to be a career move or anything like that.

Inside art-school the experience contrasted significantly with her former work:

I really enjoyed it. It was a really - a big change in terms of, - it was a lifestyle change firstly, in terms of I wasn't earning as much money, secondly in terms that I was meeting very different people, to the people I would normally meet through work, and they were just extremely stimulating...

... most people were there because they were doing something they really wanted to do, and quite enjoyed it whereas I think with nursing it was kind of O.K. it might have been a good thing, but most people were there because it was very easy to move out of home, earn an income...

These changes in outlook travelled with Christina through the transition back into the nursing sector after graduation. Christina talks about her art-school experience and the role it plays in her nursing management career:

I guess, really my management style is quite creative any way. I don't know if it would be anywhere as creative if I hadn't been through art school, just in terms of I don't tend to do things by structured management method that are tried and proven and all the rest of it. But I'm a bit more flexible than that, and particularly the work I'm doing now, [it] involves education of staff, both registered nurses and assistants in nursing and other people in nursing homes and a lot of it has to do with motivating people to become involved in this process of accreditation. Which means that all staff need to work together and I think that my education style or the way I motivate people was probably helped by having been through art school, just in terms of I think my vision's a little broader than it would have been without doing that.

Part of Christina's role is to introduce new practices to the workplace, brought about because of new legislation governing the aged-care sector. New practices had to be discovered and adopted. Christina gives an example of this creative role:

... quite a few registered nurses that had been there for a long time, were used to doing things a certain way. Didn't like the idea that more documentation. [It] was required for residents because the documentation makes a difference to funding levels. If you don't document the care that you give, you don't get the money for. ... I was the deputy director at this place at the time, but I also used to do a fair bit of the education, and as part of the education process for this I introduced a new patient, which was a Bart Simpson doll, just a little

Bart, who went into this empty room and [I] wrote a whole file of in terms of his admission and all the rest of it, what he was there for. He was there for respite care ... and it was quite funny actually the first evening person thought it was a patient and went looking for the person they couldn't find, they rang up the Director of Nursing "I can't find this new admission" but anyway she was such a dag, I got through to her. So what that was, was introducing a humorous aspect of; "OK we need to document about this person" and people ended up being really creative, I mean because, I set it up so they had to write documentation the way you do for a new admission and there are certain points you need to address in order to get the funding, and people - he was there for about a week or two weeks and people really got into it with the points, I mean the whole thing was making it up, and one day I came in he had a bandage on his head because he had had a fall it was all this stuff that people got into in quite a big way. And the documentation improved quite considerably just because it was something that was fun...

Christina's world of the nursing, bounded as it is by procedures and regulation, transformed into the world of the learning organisation, where Christina applied her broadened vision to new and uncharted territory of staff development.

There were specific times in art-school where this broadening of horizon occurred:

I think that in terms of impacting on my life it was like a relief to do it in some ways. It had always been a desire and I think it broadened the way I think about certain things, I can actually remember one of the theory subjects I did, I ended up doing a project on the film-maker John Walters, ... he made some absolutely disgusting, horrible, horrible movies... I ended up doing an assignment on him, and I ended up liking the work he did, after that sort of shock, because he's right into shock value, after the impact of that little shock died down a bit and I saw what he was trying to do. Things like that certainly changed the view something. And I guess that happened a fair bit.

For Christina then there were these broadening experiences in art-school, and she took this with her into her work-life after graduation. Beyond Christina's work-life, the person that wanted to experience art-school still contemplates painting:

I'd really like to set aside like a day every now and then and just sort of start at least a small painting, um, but yeh, its been my long term goal that a - I guess I really didn't put a time frame on it but - 10 to 15 years or something that I'd set myself up so that I would be able to - still with the lifestyle that I want to be able to live, ...

... I don't live an extravagant lifestyle really but I like to live in a nice place with a view, so that means the rent's fairly expensive I like good food, just

sort of you know - I like to be able to, I wouldn't sacrifice that kind of stuff for the time to do painting, at this point in my life.

There is no intention here of compromising lifestyle. After art-school there was also an attempt to exhibit before art gradually lost out to work demands:

...the year after I finished I had a follow up exhibition, so I was painting. I was still painting then, and that was quite a successful exhibition and then the following year I was approached by some ex-art students to put in a submission with them to run a gallery ... and then in the last 1,2,3, 4 years I haven't done any art work at all. I've thought about it, particularly since living here [intimates sea-view] its a nice place to.

Christina has moved on to other study towards a Masters of Education, which related closely to the work she is doing. However, there is a lasting legacy of the art-school, both in the broadening of her work-life and in her continuing desire to paint.

Christina's experience is the kind of experience I had originally sought to find, an example of visual art education resulting in empowerment and capacity in a workplace outside the arts.

Richard

Richard introduced himself this way, 'I'm full-time employed as an urban designer, which is a cross between a landscape-architect, architect, and a town planner. I've got two kids and married. That's probably about [it]. I guess it sums it up'. He also explains how this came to be:

I originally trained as a landscape-architect before I went to [art-school]. So it's basically to do with the form of cities, and it's a shift from town planning which is all - has largely become- a legal and legislative approach to planning cities, to a design based approach to planning and design of cities. So as a landscape-architect, and I guess as an artist there's a lot, a lot for me to do there. There's a big sort of opening for me, I think.

Richard has largely returned to the area of work he was involved in before art school, but there is a difference. He says that as 'an artist there is a lot for him to do'. An 'opening' has been created, which implies it was not possible before attending art-school. He is now much more than just a landscape architect:

No, it's a complete fluke that I'm actually here. And it's good because it's certainly a new career from landscape architecture. For me it had very little future. That's one reason why I went to [art-school]. I found arch- landscape architecture too restrictive. So I went to [art-school] and then tried to work as an artist for quite a few years but I eventually fell back into landscape architecture, because that's where I needed to earn an income basically. And that was the easiest thing for me. So in the process of working as a landscape architect, I was working on a contract, working on contract or freelance, and just happened to end up in this office doing perspective drawings, illustrations for a book. I had a months contract, and its grown from there.

So it basically started out as a two month contract and I've been there for a year now and they've given me more and more responsibility and I've been through the job interview and they've employed me as an urban designer, because I have all the skills that they needed.

After art-school, Richard worked in community arts projects, which added to the skill-base valued by his employer.

Richard could not continue as a community artist. It took him away from his family and the income; 'simply wasn't good enough'. Family is important to Richard, he mentioned his children in his opening remarks and has strong views on the relationship between art and the family:

But for me to find a place in the world and I wanted to have a family, that meant that everything I'd been taught as an artist was not applicable...

... I actually do think that art per se cuts you off from being an effective parent. Yeah. It becomes a seeming impossibility.

There is a struggle between what it took for Richard to be an artist as he saw it at the time, and what it took to support a family. He says of his current work:

... I identified this workplace as somewhere I could be really focused and get quite a lot out of it, but it wasn't going to live with me all the time. Yeh so, backtracking; I don't know how you can be an artist and have children.

In contrast, he explains that his wife is also an artist and there is a problem with having a family:

Both of us, [my wife] and I have been through - having so much trauma over - it's almost a guilt about, while we've only had one child for the last four years

We've only had another one recently - that whole 4 years was spent thinking we really should be artists. How are we going to be artists and have a child?

When Richard looks through the lens of the art-school he sees artists in a particular way:

I lived under no illusion whatsoever, that you could ever make enough money being an artist. I think that that is a fundamental - well as an artist taught in [art-school]. I think you can draw pictures and produce things that will sell and you can make money out of [it], but not in the fashion that's taught at [art-school].

If you are going to be a true artist that's where, you have to work, you have to do particular type in a particular setting without a doubt. Anything less than that you're not really an artist... my wife, she's worked the last few years in partnership with another artist and they have done a number of - very large scale public art projects ... and even they are, those works are considered not to be[art],...there's a slight change going on because there's more public art ... is being funded, but their work has not been accepted as art in the sense of an art college art.

At this stage Richard had not defined 'the true artist' but he says:

... the definition is ridiculously narrow and on a world scale I think it's the same. It's the same. And the biggest problem is, it is an economic thing because the successful artists have to have an income. As far as I can see successful artists have to have an income from somewhere else.

Over the 4 year period Richard went about redefining art for himself, as he took up painting at home:

I think in the end art for me just became about pleasure and so if there is pleasure in something then may be it goes, goes on art. But I think that in the end that probably what -going to after [art-school], being- working through community art, then spending the last - my last gasp spending my time with my son , but painting part-time in the end there, I realised its was just about pleasure, and if I could get pleasure out of brushing some paint on a board then that was, that was art. And that's were it begins and where it ends, I suppose. And anything else is kind of, its out of your control, ... its defined by everybody, that's the most disempowering thing about being an artist, is that art is always being defined by somebody else. ... So you are always kind of chasing this thing that is being defined somewhere or [other] - I don't know.

...its about a particular energy that you get at a particular point in time. I'd be happy to call that art.

Richard has worked out that art is constantly being defined, perhaps redefined by somebody, somewhere else, that remains largely unknown.

The idea of 'disempowerment' stands in stark contrast to Richard's current role where he is determining the shape and look of cities. For Richard, there were major benefits of completing an art-school education, aside from his period of 'disempowerment':

...if I was to reflect on myself now, and the person I was before [art-school], I was a very constrained person, really. Thought there were a whole lot of rules and limits to what you could do and that you always had to work full time, you always had to - you know- things related to what a "man" did, and responsibility. It's your sense of self in the world. If I look at myself then and now I know I'm a much freer person and less limited by other people's idea of what you should do, or my own idea of what I should do. And I am more open to change.

Richard has moved from being "rule bound" to an attitude where he is more open to change. Art-school provided Richard with a confidence and drawing skills that he has applied in the workplace. He has since made a transition back from artist to designer. Here Richard discusses the difference between the artist and the designer, and the role in which he feels happiest.

One of the biggest difficulties for me, - well for me and I am sure every other artist- is that, identifying the problem, then working through it so , where as what I do now is - well -I do, I solve problems . You have a brief and a limited - yeah you have a brief or you have something to answer and its kind of controlled in that sense, so that you can focus your efforts on that - within that range - although it might be large scale its still a very focused activity. I think if I was to assess myself I think I'd probably say that I - that's where I feel happiest.

Richard is then no longer frustrated, he is happy in the role of designer. However, life is a 'process' as he says and that in twenty years he might move back to being an artist.

John

John has started a new picture-framing business under the NEIS scheme. He specialises in frames for a market based on his experience and contacts from art-school days. Picture framing began as part-time employment during art-school-days. In addition to this he has casual work in film industry pre-production, buying props. This work also came about through an old art-school friend, who went into the film industry on leaving art-school.

John's original discipline was glass. He graduated from the same art-school, in the same year as Darcy, though had studied in the year below (Darcy graduated late). John's experience immediately after art-school was very different:

I basically stopped using glass when I left [art-school] and I was doing mixed media work, and I guess when I left [art-school], when I finished my post grad, I considered myself a full time artist, for may be about 2 years after I left [art-school] . And then I had family demands and stuff ... And I started working two days a week, and had my art practice and then I started working 3 days and I gradually ended up full-time...

The art-school experience was important in founding the picture-framing business:

I actually learnt how to frame a picture when I was at [art-school], so as far as the technique goes. I mean my knowledge of art in general, contemporary art helps me a lot when I'm dealing with artists, generally painters and stuff. So I can speak to them on the same level, yeah. So in that respect it helps me a lot.

And the same is true for his film industry work:

... the set dressing in particular is quite visual, and I think if I hadn't gone to [art-school] I wouldn't be quite as astute looking at the set probably. You know my eyes have been trained to a degree. So in that sense it helps in the set dressing. Even in the props buying. Because you have to visualise a bigger picture, you see an object and you think "well that's going to sit well".

Before art-school, life for John was very different:

... before I went to [art-school] I always thought I was a bit of an outsider or may be even a bit of a loner. I think growing up where I grew up ... out in the western suburbs , I always felt a little detached. I mean I had good friends but still didn't click in a certain way. So I guess going to [art-school] made me feel as though I fit in.

John valued the informal structure of the art-school:

... the biggest thing for me, was that structure that the institution lends to that. Because it was fairly, in a lot of sense fairly informal. Particularly [this art-school], compared to other art schools, there's not - although again with glass, with the craft based arts there is formal - but apart from that you are fairly free to do what you felt, basically.

John wanted to study photography at art-school but had been accepted into his second choice - the glass studio. He attributed the decision in the following way:

I think the problem initially with my photography interview was that my ideas weren't formed and I didn't know the language and kind of art speak. So maybe I floundered a bit, I'm not sure, you know but I picked it up quite quickly.

John understands the terms of his enrolment differently, when he considers it:

I was there just to make up the numbers, because glass, the craft studios always challenged as far as funding goes, compared to - you know ...because painting the traditional arts always get most of funds- so maybe I was there to make up the numbers initially.

From here we can follow John and see what he has to say about why glass stopped after graduation:

It's really hard to explain because, I can't even explain to you why I didn't work in glass when I left [art-school]. It's just like, I'd said, I'd taken it as far as I could at that stage. I mean I always found glass a difficult medium to work in, but that had a lot to do with the way I was working as well. And I think it happens a lot at [art-school], and that is that students there will produce a piece of work and there seems to be a degree of pressure that you've got- it's got to be strong conceptually, the idea behind it. But generally what happens is that a person will produce a piece of work and then the idea comes. That happened all the time!

John was not prepared to move outside the expectations of the art-school, and seems relieved about the time when he had finally achieved the standard :

... just producing art for arts sake. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, but just in those hallowed halls of [art-school] you weren't supposed to work like that. So it really took me until my third year where the idea actually came before the work, in a sense, so I had the concept and I had an idea that I wanted to express and in the end I had to figure out how I was going to do it using glass. I didn't really start casting glass till my third year of undergrad. And that was a technique that lent itself best to the ideas I was working on which was basically 'masculinity' was all my work was centred on - male

sexuality. And that's why in my third and my postgrad year I felt quite comfortable because I thought at last I was producing so called art, as far as I saw it.

Finally, John's art and John's language matched the values and ideas of 'the hallowed hall'. They have become his art. However his glass production stopped after art-school. John continued to consider himself an artist for a further two years. In this time he also turned down an offer to work in a glass studio:

...because I'd be making his work really, not my own work. I mean I just had to make that split. I mean how do you define what's yours and what's not. I thought well, if I'm not making my own work, then I may as well do something else.

The art-school's concept of art seems to have guided what John could accept as an idea of professional practice:

I just had this may be naive ideal, view of my practice I was kind of hung up on this conceptual thing, I didn't want to produce work just to make money, I wanted to produce something that meant something to me, as an expression of myself, but I mean my ideas have kind of changed to a degree, a degree now, and the stuff ... because I want to get back into my glassware, I'm going to start with commercial glass basically, just producing stuff to sell. but that's the only way I'm going to get back into it because I need to regain a feel. A feel for the glass and the actual practice thing.

For John it has been a long road to come to this point and during the interview he seemed to be developing a perspective on the past and resolving on the future:

I think the positive thing was that ideas were given value, and that's I guess impressed itself upon me more than anything was that; that there was a value in those ideas. And apart from the work itself, the physical piece, they gave value to the concept, and I think that was stronger in me when I left than may be going in.

... its been a financial struggle since I've left [art-school] and I mean there are certain realities that I've got to face now. I just see it, (sigh) because also I haven't practiced for a while... You know, it becomes a habit, and I've got to reform that habit, and I've got to start thinking about what I want to do with glass, and how I'm going to form it along with that certain concepts and ideas I have.

The plan is that John will make small objects to sell. For the moment, he is still picture-framing, working casually in the film-industry and raising a family. His

spouse is completing a doctorate in fine arts. John's story is interesting because firstly, like in the case of Mary, his experience has been coloured by entering art school to undertake study of only his second choice interest. John also has been strongly influenced by the conceptual teaching of the art school, where as some of the others have been more resistant to its impact.

Michael

In contrast Michael was highly able to develop a critical appreciation of art school concepts. Michael had already enjoyed a career as an executive chef, before attending art school. He manages his own art services and building-restoration enterprise, as a direct consequence of the culture he entered through art school.

I'd actually become a chef because I got expelled from school and had to find a job within 3 days or go to boarding school. . . . and chef wasn't even my idea for a career it was somebody else's . I actually chose someone else's career path and ten years later I decided it wasn't really [me]

I was doing quite well as a chef but I just didn't enjoy it. So I came back to Australia and decided I wouldn't work until I found out what I wanted. So it took three months and I was lying in bed one day and my housemate got a phone call and he came and asked me could I make a giant prawn.

This was the beginning of a short journey that led Michael first into the film industry building props, and eventually to art-school to gain a credential. Michael now works out of a cooperative art studio with 17 other artists, where they undertake all sorts of work that can co-exist with art practice:

From there I do restoration work, build other people's commissions, takeover as a sort of project manager on larger sculptural work. A lot of people that get commissions actually have no idea of how to do it. They have an image and a model but they've never actually put in a public sculpture, and don't know how about approaching the industry to build the stuff. So I step in there and do that, plus we have all these various disciplines in the studio that can step in as well.

Michael has resolved the problem of being an artist, by correlating art practice with other income producing work that relies on his artistic skills and past project

management experience as an executive chef. Never the less, it is sometimes difficult to keep a perspective on his role:

... it actually happens quite regularly. If you get a job that goes on for several months that opens it up. House up next to the church that just went on and on. They kept on finding more and more to do, and I thought I'd never get out of there. I really started to worry and of course because we were doing that someone saw it and we got another job straight after that. It was nearly a year just doing house renovations. You start to think, "Well that's it." I've opted for this now for the moment. What am I going to do? Fortunately I was able to take a break and go back to the studio.

... The thing is that you make a lot of money while you're doing house restoration so you know there is that as well. You get lured, and your living standard changes while you are making all this money. You go from putting the money away to thinking, "O.K. I've got two weeks here in the studio to oh no! I've spent all the money. I spent a year working at this job and I haven't got any money left to work in the studio", so that sort of thing. Fortunately there's been things happen. Like one of the others, people in the studio sold a work. Any you think, shit why wasn't I doing that ... so it drags you back, you missed a break.

The role of the artist is clearly valued by Michael. While it is important to make money, he is not happy when he is **only** making money and the role of the artist has slipped away into the background.

A network of friends and former art-school colleagues are important to Michael's work:

I supposed lifestyle is an important part of it. I probably wouldn't still be doing what I am doing, had it not been for the fact that I've got, I've made a lot of friends while I was at art school ...I also have a lot of friends that I made outside of art school and various things, and they've all been quite supportive through the years. So any time there's been a sort of lean time, there have been people to support you, who have actually found work for me if I have needed it. Found exhibitions for me, if they think I needed it. Usually I don't go looking for exhibitions, friends will put me in a position where I exhibit, so I've had a lot of support I suppose in that aspect.

The network is important because it keeps him in a field that is interesting. The need to be engaged in interesting work, or having an interesting lifestyle has a high level of significance to Michael, and he actively pursues this kind of lifestyle. It goes back to a realisation he made while still working as a chef:

...when I was overseas I suddenly realised, well I came to this realisation that, within myself that I wasn't really interested in getting new things. I was more interested in passing my time in a way that suited me, that made me feel satisfied.

Michael discovered that his time and lifestyle were more important than acquiring money and consumer goods, but he still works hard when the projects are worthwhile on his terms.

Art-school fitted in with this 'realisation'. There was a big change in Michael's attitude at the time, and he looks back on his former self:

I didn't think that I was capable of doing any thing else. Lack of self-confidence. I was very confident in cooking. It's just that I had no confidence outside of that. Its sort of like "this is my little world now, I know the boundaries of my little world. I am incapable of operating outside it."

During the time I was a chef I actually got locked into this thing of " Oh I can't do anything else, never, this is what I'm going to have to do for the rest of my life". And I think the liberating thing from that was living in London in a squat, and actually doing up the entire squat myself so it became a really nice place to live, and suddenly realising I could do other things besides cooking.

This liberation continued on into art-school, where Michael's priorities changed still further:

I was working in theatre/film what-have-you, and I'd go to art-school and still work in that industry and when I came out I'd have a qualification related to that. When I got to art school I became more absorbed in other things and decided to give up working in the film industry. I found it a bit shallow anyway. I became more interested in other things I suppose I became a bit more socially minded. Not so much in the party aspect as just in other people. That's probably another reason I got involved in the student politics.

His involvement in student politics took him into a prominent union role during his post-graduate year. Therefore, Michael was well informed on issues concerning student relations with the art-school staff, and was able to talk generally about students' experiences at the time.

It was in this postgraduate year that the artist's cooperative was founded, with another student and her father who was an engineer. Michael recounts his view as a graduate beforehand:

I have to admit that coming out of undergraduate, you are still in that sort of naive idea of being an exhibiting artist and living with your studio, and do some work, putting work in a gallery every couple of months.

What then did Michael consider important about going to art-school? in addition to the importance of his former art-school colleagues:

I suppose from my experience at Art School, you get an opportunity to be locked away for 3 years with similarly minded people, who have a similar focus. And apart from a few obligations that are put on you, like assignments and assessments and making of work. You are just locked away for 3 years with other people who want to be artists. That's really all they can offer you at that, at later life - and a few skills, though very limited skills.

Michael's experience as an executive chef contributed to his project management role in the arts. We could look at it the other way around and say art-school has created the opportunity to apply his project management skills more broadly. This was first evident in the graduate exhibition:

Our final year exhibition revolved around a core group of four people who had experience in setting up about a hundred students. We managed to get together about \$24000 for the venue and had a large exhibition. That meant four people got a really good experience out of that, me and three other people. The other ninety-six really just got pulled along in the slip-stream... but most of those people should have been [involved] - and when we were setting up the exhibition, people were wanting to know what to do. That shouldn't have been the case. They should have been at a stage where they knew what they wanted to do with their work...

Michael continues in this role of making things happen, organising and providing skills where they are needed, in some ways so that other artists, can be artists. This story gives insight into the management and organisation of art schools, because of Michael's experience with the student union. It is a broader experience than may have ordinarily been achieved by other students. A strong feature of Michael's experience is his capacity to combine art-school experience with earlier management experience in the catering industry.

Dorothy

Dorothy is working casually for 'a sculptor who is making money'. This work takes place four or five times a year. She lives in a house shared with her mother. It is split into two flats. They are about to move to a new house. Dorothy describes it and outlines a plan:

...a little old house on a quarter acre with a big tree. So I'll be building a studio there. And I've got quite a few ideas, I'm going to get into business again. I've been in business a couple of times, and start again !

Dorothy has been involved in a number of entrepreneurial activities. First, she describes display construction and design:

I did displays for trade fairs so that had an Italian villa or whatever stuff, you know, was in the magazines. They cut it out of a copy of Vogue Magazine and say I want something like this ... I'd make architraves out of foam board and make it this sort of colour. And they'd do it for trade fairs so it was Gift and Homewares trade fair, and those sort. Huge amount of money, huge amount.

... I'd get 1000s and 1000s for that, and I wouldn't work for a little while. ... I built a couple that travelled, got taken over to America and then moved around America for the rest of their lives, being put up and put down.

When asked about what happened to the business, response is terse:

I don't like doing displays any more because they are all bastards.

... It pays well but ... It's not worth the trouble its worth - sorry. And I had a friend helping me that I , it was on a casual thing, and if I wanted to go, if I wanted to keep it going I would have had to get my own premises because its all right to - I was building big things, 10 metres by 5 metres that you could take down and put up again. So I had to be, a lot of it had, to be up when the clients came. Even though you're building bit by bit and it's all right if you've got four jobs a year, that's alright, to share a studio ... But you can't really do it if you're making enough money to live on. I would have to get a bigger premises.

The first impression is that Mary found a compound problem of logistics, costs and personalities made the work undesirable. However another entrepreneurial activity, dress-making was also a relatively short-lived experience:

I gave up dress making, I was going to be a fashion designer sort of thing, but I realised making clothes - I was making clothes for models. I had about six models, and I had eveningwear. So they'd go out for drinks and things wear my clothes but I gave some free and they were buying it. And it went on for about a year and that, but who wants to - I mean the most beautiful exquisite medieval style thing is going on this skinny girl who's going to get screwed by some stupid person who's pawing them that night. I mean who cares what rich people, what clothes rich people are having. And this is the trouble with art too. Art's a little bit of a pretension that isn't on Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Dorothy lists a string of short-lived jobs and enterprises; a stint in the tax office, mending in a laundromat, working in a bookstore, working on youth projects, making and selling bits of art. She says:

Oh if I'm doing art I can hold my chin up, yeh I see it as like saying "You are a Nobel laureate." You see that's my perception. If you are saying you're an artist well that's like being Sir or Lady, it's great for personal self-esteem. So I don't use it when I'm not working, but when I do work that's the way other people see me.

Being an artist, for Dorothy, is a matter of status and self esteem. Art-school is not a single occurrence in Dorothy's life. She undertook two undergraduate degrees, the first at a regional art-school, where she failed a major in painting at the end of the final year. Through this she was still eligible for a second admission to a course where she graduated in sculpture:

I knew it was the drifting away from art that I didn't want to do. Because I'd come back from [the regional art-school]. I didn't know any art people in [the city] particularly and so I went back to art school to get my degree but that's useless isn't it?

The sense of drifting away from art brought Dorothy back to art-school for a second time. The role of art has a very important place in her life. It is not only that it makes her feel like a "Nobel Laureate", in fact art keeps her from feeling the complete opposite. The discourse continued in the Maslowian vein:

... I was very suicidal ... - well I tried to kill myself several times - I needed more than food and shelter in a way. It's a belief. Otherwise you couldn't, so you have to work within the visual arts, work in that area of self actualisation regardless - Well it was my talent, it was visual and I could write you know,

and I was good with my hands generally. So you look for what you are naturally good at. But those were the needs. So the Tax Department and sewing clothes and working in shops, fine, I still could do part-time jobs. I got a job as a concierge once a fortnight though. But if that was all your life was, you know I'd slit my wrists.

Dorothy gives other instances of a struggle in the role of artist. This time it is defining the line between unemployment and taking a commission:

I went to see Peter? What was his name? He's the old Social Security Minister in the Federal - was he Federal? He was Labour- Baldwin, the one that got beaten up by the - any way Peter Baldwin, about 2 years ago or 3 years ago when they were mucking around with the dole and I had jobs, you know you'd get a job and you'd make \$3000 ..., including materials but you'd declare that, and they'd take you off the dole completely and you were supposed to declare before you got the money, which is just ludicrous. And I got into a situation where I went in and said "I've got a part-time job, you know this is a new job coming up", and then they wouldn't give me the dole that week, so I couldn't buy the materials for the job. So I lost the job, so I can get the dole again.

... but this all happened in the day, I said well if you don't give me the dole now, I can't get the job. So you can give me the dole now, and I won't take the job. You are not allowed to knock back a job. So I had to go in and sign a statutory declaration saying that I wasn't going to take the job.

They gave me the dole, they didn't cut me off, I had to write that I wasn't going to take the job, and I took the job, and just called it something else in three weeks when I actually got paid.

Dorothy complained to the Minister who showed no support. Similar attitudes were to be found closer to home:

I went to see him, he's my local member and I made an appointment and I went to see him, and I'd been up all night, staining this floor for this stupid display and Peter Baldwin said to me "I don't think my constituents like the idea of artists swanning around on public money"

That was his response full stop. You know. And I'd been up all night on my hands and knees in the driveway of the East studio so I could get the space, that's the only way I could get the space in the driveway at night which was - ... no interest. And that's the attitude of a lot of people, my first cousins, they've got two kids and it's been a joke since they were babies, you know "as long as they are not artists, we don't mind". You know "they can do anything they want when they grow up, as long as they are not going to be artists".

... it's the family joke, oh no they've been very clear, and I'm the only artistic person they've known, their whole life. That's the response in Australia out there.

Dorothy's repeated difficulty with maintaining the role of the artist in a society that doesn't like artists 'swanning about', prompts the question as to why artists behave the way they do?

I don't know if it's the boredom, or what it is. As I say they are not unusual, but there are people who can't work under other people. And there's people who can't be confined some how, by a job or a position. There are lots of artists that can be confined, I mean all the art teachers they are all married, they have all got a mistress, they have all got their kids, they have all got their 4WD and they have all got their house. Yes they are confined, as if they were working in the Tax Department, they wouldn't be more confined, in their definitions, but they are older ... I think there's heaps and heaps of younger people than me - its like the ferals sort of thing, you know, but their art directed, rather than just living like a feral somewhere. They are actually doing it in a squat, but its called a studio.

Dorothy sees artist graduates as quite distinct from their teachers (who appear to be male). She sees these younger artists as aligned to an alternative culture and she describes it further citing science fiction:

It was written 300 years after civilization, 300 hundred years after the nuclear bomb site, and they find all these bits of ... and they find all these bits of computers and start worshipping them, because they think it must have been the religion that was there. It's like medieval time, its all, they are living on the rubbish of our society that's decaying for 200 years, very interesting. You know that's how art schools strike me and that now, and because of the materials, there's so much rubbish, the environmental thing is a huge movement in art I think - is going- is coming. That's all tied up with the found object, the re-use. Recycling stuff. And so that's all got to be feral doesn't it? It's all tramp-like stuff.

Dorothy graphically described how she sees art schools, but she sees the purpose of art school in terms that would probably make an Education & Employment minister's hair stand on end.

I think its like taxi driving, 50-60% of the population would have difficulty getting on with people day after day in a rotten job. Now people react in different ways. A lot of the people, 40% of them would go into small business, or travelling salesmen or something where they haven't got a box

over them, where they are king of their own castle. Then another lot of them are unemployed like myself. I'm an artist but never stick to something for too long, I need to jump around.

I find it hard to summarise Dorothy's art school experience, and the influence it has made in her life. In some ways the art school culture appears to have trapped her in a role of artist, but at the same time one wonders what life might have been like if Dorothy did not have the role of artist in her life. I can strongly empathised with Dorothy's story and have shared elements of her experience, in my own life. This story more than any of the others brought to the fore the fallacy of looking at art as industry. Here in Dorothy's life we see someone struggling to find meaning in life, art should be central to this process, yet it seems always to be side-tracked by practicalities of survival in a material world. Art as industry seems to sell Dorothy short.

Shelley

Shelley in contrast seemed to have put art in its place. Shelley studied art in America before coming to Australia with her husband. She made the decision to study art in place of family expectations that she would study law. Salaries in Australia, and the lack of availability of art school teaching positions, led Shelley into business management, in which she found a vocation:

I'm the mistress of minutia but initially I found all of that very boring, because it didn't have much meaning, so the position I'm in now does have meaning. I mean I have to think and construct and I build little machines, metaphoric machines to make things happen properly.

Shelley is an American graduate who works in Australia. The tertiary education system in the USA is slightly different to Australia. There is a generalist level of undergraduate degree followed by more specialist degrees. Shelley undertook Masters in Sculpture and in Art History after her generalist program.

Ignoring Shelley's self description for a moment, we can begin her story in the summer vacation. She has completed her undergraduate program in Political and Organisational Behaviour:

I was going to go to law school and had spent prior to last year of University, had spent a semester and a summer in Washington DC working in a congressional office with a lot of people who were all going to law school. And so a couple of things happened. I decided I didn't like any of those people and two, I decided I couldn't stand the idea of being a lawyer at all.

... for the first time had to get a job concurrently with going to school and I'd found a position on the wall at the Student Centre that someone needed a gardener, and so I rocked up and was interviewed by this guy and he ended up being Head of the Sculpture Department. So I ended up being his gardener. And then he and I became sort of friendly, and so he said would you also like to come now I need somebody to work in the studio.

... So I pretty soon I was working in the studio, and then he said to me "you know you don't really want to go to law school do you?" I said "I don't want to go to law school" By that time I was helping to cast his pieces and ... doing studio work for him. And he said, "Well you know you have a talent for all this, how come you never did anything with the arts before?" Well the opportunity never came up.

So he said "Why don't you apply for our program and why don't you also apply to the art history program?" because that was when I couldn't decide which one I wanted to do. I was accepted into both programs and did both programs, unofficially.

Shelley was being acknowledged for her abilities by her employer, and this helped influence the change in direction away from law, which she clearly did not want to do. Shelley was responding to, or pursuing an opening created by personal contact.

In gaining candidature, there were some problems because she had enrolled simultaneously in two programs. It is interesting to see how the problem is fixed:

There was a big problem because I had no background in the stuff. I sort of needed to – thought [that] to do art I needed to understand art right? And to do art history, I needed to understand art, so to me they complemented each other perfectly, I mean there are those political things that made it difficult. Because politically, officially, I wasn't allowed to do both degrees at the same time. And I was told that I wasn't to. But I did them anyway. I mean I had to have an advisor sign off all the courses I was taking, and he'd sign off, and then I'd

go away and I'd add other courses to my sheet. And the next semester would come around and he'd say Oh, I don't remember signing you up for that studio class. So that was that.

Shelley seems to have enjoyed the idea and pressure of taking two degrees at once:

Oh it was huge pressure. It was frightening because the other thing that happened was I was immediately on probation, you know when I started in the arts, because I didn't have any experience in it and they didn't want to risk not covering themselves, as far as my not being there, so I really had to perform immediately or get another-find something else to do. So yeh I guess all those cases where I've stopped one area of my life completely and done something else entirely different I guess it's been a huge pressure. I must like it because I keep doing it, although it does make me crazy initially.

This seems to be very much the way Shelley's life runs. At the time of interview she was marketing manager for an office furnishings company, engaged in fit-outs for the corporate and government sectors. What does the work involve?

Well just about everything you can think of. From market research to know exactly what your competitors are offering, so how you argue against it, to market knowledge to how it applies to what organisations are doing, who's growing, who's merging with who. Working out who in the organisation has a say in the decision making process. Knowing what architectural firms are bidding and what projects are in the market place, so you know what's out there, and are able to bid on, and then working through the process, once you have secured where the job sits as far as what architect is working on it and how they're working on it. Just going through the entire process of working your way through. How to approach the architect and how to get them on side and working out who is important in the whole decision making process, the financial controller and getting all the influence with all of those people and trying to influence the decision.

We can see the high level of intelligence gathering and strategic planning in this work. It is interesting to hear Shelley talk about her approach:

...often times, it's very political as well, I mean who gets to make decisions about furniture in a fit out? The designer or an architect who thinks that they have, who thinks that they should have an incredible amount of say in exactly what's going in, and they are going to put the furniture in and it's going to be exactly what they want. And you have a relationship with them and an obligation to them, but you also can't neglect the fact that somebody else over here is the project manager, and might be on your side. You might be able to get in the door through the project manager and have a chance, but if you don't do the right thing by the designer, they may never use you again. They

may bad mouth you throughout the whole system or process. So you have to build these little machines so that you can actually talk to that person and not put that person's nose out of joint.

Shelley has not always had this role in marketing. She started by working part-time after being approached by another artist who was the company's product manager. Eventually she became the operations person, where she first took on the role of 'the mistress of minutia' and from there, there were some readjustments as the company maximised the potential of its various management people.

Shelley again gives a picture of a gradual recognition of talent, and also the importance of being able to fit into a role. Before taking up this more than full-time position, Shelley was an artist. Being a practicing artist created a problem at the start of Shelley's employment:

It happened one day, and I even had one exhibition in the middle of all that. I had to finish work for which was just, in the end the work wasn't finished the way I wanted it finished, but I didn't really have a choice because suddenly ... I was doing this and they were paying me and I had a responsibility to them, and it would have sent a very bad message to them anyway. You know if two weeks into the job I'd said "by the way I need some time off because I'm an artist and I've got this show and I have to finish the work" ...

[Of the exhibition everybody said] "its beautiful, wow" – it was a group show for Amnesty International it wasn't a special show, so that was fine and it was all but finished and I was just casting, actually out of glass, elements to go with the pieces I'd already made, and they would have made the work complete, but no one else knew, except for my husband and close friends, that they weren't there, so it was no big deal.

So Shelley had no real problem sacrificing the integrity of her sculpture, for this particular exhibition. It produced a practical result. She could exhibit and not compromise her new position with the company.

Shelley sees some similarities between the work of the sculptor and the work of the marketing manager:

Probably the way you see the world and probably the way you understand the world. I mean when you're making, ... you sort of work on a lot of different levels that are physical and thoughtful – and material and I think that a lot of work, you have to do all of those things end up applying, it's a way of taking a

body of experience or a body of material and putting them together to come to a final resolution of what you are trying to achieve. I think that that happens in what I do now anyway.

... So I think it's probably the way that I look at the world and the way that sculpture really – well it's not just sculpture, any arts degree gives you this incredible – it opens everything up. It's like there are no – there is no rule about what you look at or what you study, which you avoid. Whereas most of the people that I know are fairly narrowly focused.

In the initial change from artist to operations management the need for this kind of thinking had been restricted. The transition back to fulltime employment proved difficult:

It has to be interesting to me. It has to provoke thought, and I think that's what I initially found-it was very difficult to move from one way of living to another way of living and I had no problem with responsibility and scheduling and being places when I was meant to be places, but to have to be one place, everyday from 7.30 to 8 onwards, with people all of the time, I found that quite daunting at first and (in some ways) I couldn't stand it... because before I had so much freedom.

Just the freedom of , of [who cares] I mean when I was doing – I was doing two degrees simultaneously, which is a big thing, and I also taught for the university, but all of the time, it was sort of non-continuous. I didn't only do those things all of the time. I would do this and then there would be this class and then I would be in the library and then I'd be teaching and then in the studio working, so I was doing all these incredible things, in all of these different places and I found that – it was an incredible freedom.

Shelley's life of the artist and 'incredible freedom' was given over to a new discipline. Shelley not only had to confront the change of habits and work practices, there was also a change of role in her social life. Shelley gives an insight to the arts culture and how its members are treated:

I met a woman who actually I'd been wanting to meet most a good part of my life ... she's an amazing amazing artist and incredible woman, and she's the director of a school in Seattle, and I met her in Japan, and she asked me what I do and I said " I sell office furniture" which is what I do, but I was with my friend ... who I've known for ten years, and [he] said " Oh ..., but she's an artist too, she has degrees" He was apologising, making up for [me] – it was as though being a furniture sales person wouldn't be good enough for her.

At work however, the situation was reversed. Here an instance is given where a business relationship may have been seriously jeopardised had Shelley claimed or aspired to the rank of artist:

Sometimes it becomes quite strange, quite a strange point of discussion, where if I'm dealing with a younger designer they- well quite often they just assume I'm a sales person right, so I have to deal with these younger designers who are outrageously rude to me, incredibly arrogant, they are after all 'the designer', and I am after all 'the salesperson', so by definition they should be rude to me.

Shelley had already indicated how important it is to have designers on side. Being seen as a creative professional, a peer, would have threatened this kind of client-supplier relationship.

In America Shelley was exhibiting as an artist, and giving lectures. In Australia things turned out to be very different:

I imagined that I would have the first exhibition, and I knew I was going to Australia, and knew that I had other exhibitions set up. So I imagined I would come here and that I would find a position teaching at a university and that I would develop a career teaching and making my work and having exhibitions and possibly writing papers.

Well the reality was, when I first arrived, there weren't any teaching positions open and I had to find a job I suppose, and there was the other Museum studies degree hovering in the background that I had to find an opportunity to do an internship and finish that.

Shelley does not really believe that artists should be concerned with business, and neither does she see art within an industry model. She sees it as communication:

I guess one of the things I said was I think it's strange that you would go out and make art. Decide that you could make a career out of it, because it's about how you communicate, look at the world.

[There is] Emily Dickinson who didn't write poetry because she was a career poet. In fact after she published, after she tried to get published and they refused to publish her work, or may be they tried to rewrite, so that it felt better or seemed more proper to the time, she just said "stuff it" She never showed another person another poem for the rest of her life. When she died, there were boxes and boxes and boxes of her poems and writing, and she

turned out to be a poet, because that's the way she was in the world. That's how she communicated.

Art and industry - or business - are quite separate things for Shelley. Her view and approach to life, seems decisive, and very matter of fact, with very little concern for her art school background or ever being an artist. Despite this she moves relatively freely in art school circles; her husband works in an art school. The American art school experience did not seem that different from the Australian equivalent. Shelley graduated with similar expectations, expectations that could not be fulfilled in Australia.

Overview of the graduates' lives

Each of the twelve lives in this Chapter give a unique insight into the influence of art-school in the course of a graduate's life. Each life is different, and yet there are some common experiences, for example great value is placed on the networks, friends and colleagues discovered at art-school. In addition there is the need for adjustment of ideas about professional practice after graduation. There are also contrasting experiences, where the same source of influence, the same form of pedagogy, program or curriculum, has been interpreted differently by the students. John showed continuing concern for the precepts of the art school, while Darcy was prepared to return late to the art school, in favour of production-studio experience. The result of how the student or graduate has been influenced by art school may vary both in nature and duration. The social value of art school is often given more weight than the value of program content, which at first sight seems almost invisible outside of the craft disciplines, like glass.

Art-school pedagogy, programming and art school culture has, then, impacted on the graduates in different ways. In some cases there is evidence of relationships between these varying impacts and other aspects of the graduates' lives, such as the capacity for prior experience to frame or clarify understanding. For example, Michael's prior work experience as an executive chef enabled better understanding of the staff and institution's processes and how to take advantage of them. The comparison of these

resulting impacts, together with how different graduates see the various features of art-school experience, provides more insight to the role and influence of the art-school as a whole. In the next chapter my intent is to pursue these features, by aggregating these experiences into a deeper understanding of the art school experience and its influence.

Figure 5: Validating the label "artist".

Another brief instance from my own professional practice. I was engaged as "community artist" at Walgett in 1995-96. This kind of experience enabled me, as Dorothy might say 'to hold my chin up' as an artist.



*Public Art
Mosaic, Walgett Hospital
NSW
1996*