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Artists as reflective self- learners and cultural communicators: an exploration of the qualitative aesthetic dimension of knowing self through reflective practice in art making.

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Abstract

This paper tells a story of how a group of women artists, with a passion for the media of fibre came together and through individual and group reflective practices used the visual arts as a learning platform to negotiate social and cultural meanings and inform understandings of self. The epistemological basis of the arts and the imagery of vision to 'see' offered for these women a way to access their qualitative world and a platform upon which to negotiate constructs of self. For these women reflecting through imagery was an essential validating tool of self -understanding. Over a number of years they refined and developed individual and group reflective processes that informed their own cognitive mythologies and refined their art practices. The longitudinal study draws on 10 years of artistic practice by 7 Australian women artists. It examines their art making processes, concepts, symbolic meaning making systems through image analysis and insights gained through being an active participant in their reflective discourses. The research reveals over time the artists' refinement of intensions in meaning making and the evolution of their aesthetic dimensions of self shaped using personal reflective practices. They engaged in new cultural discourses which actively contributed to an emergent cultural script and art making which was ultimately emancipatory.

Introduction

Artists are the inventors, creators and maintainers of culture in any society. Collectively and individually they critique and constantly engage with issues that inform their own and audiences constructed vision of themselves as participants in society. An art exhibition reveals for the observer glimpses of insights into the artists world, and informs his/her own understandings of self and society through the process of interpretive and critical reflection. An effective artist is able to position himself/herself as both creator and audience and through critical reflection validate self-knowledge and allow audiences to engage with a multiplicity of interpretive positions they present. Artists ask questions about cultural discourses which are often as much about who they are as what they know. The paper presents a story of how a group of women fibre artists through their group exhibitions, reflective group practices and individual reflections explore the scope of metaphoric imagery and their unique 'seeing', and reflecting in making. It has refined their epistemological and otological understandings of themselves and their worlds offering them emancipatory possibilities.

Subjectivities as central to meaning making

It was Heidegger who first challenged the idea that there could be 'a fixable and self-aware entity called the subject' (Mansfeild, 2000). Notions of empirical truth and the self, (as an unchanging essence), have subsequently been challenged by a range of critics from various fields of study. It is now acknowledged that identities are constructed and 'free-floating' (Featherstone, in Rhode & Platteel, 1999) and that we create our own beliefs and values (Rhode & Platteel, 1999; Magolda, 1999; Barker, 2000). What may be defining therefore about a postmodern society is the ability to be more reflective (Barker, 2000) or for Habermas (1976) it is the rejection of an ego identity and the development of a reflective position by the individual that allows for interrogation and discursive positioning on self. It has the potential for an individual to obtain free access to multiple interpretive communicative possibilities of cultural and aesthetic traditions (93). An individual should therefore be imagined in terms of many and mobile relationships (Mansfeild, 2000, p.147) and assemblages. In rejecting the idea that we can ever separate things from one another or find a 'truth' we return to the idea of identity in construction relative to history, culture, beliefs and interpretations and that individuals must now navigate a range of presented truths as they journey towards understandings and personal meaning making.

Artist have traditionally derived much of their understandings of the world from affective positions such as an autobiographical knowing linked to personal feelings, experiences and opinions informed by and beyond self to transpersonal understandings. Neitzche (1973) reaffirms this presenting the ideas that nothing is 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions. Phenomenological experiences therefore are able to inform the creating forces of self, and one is referential when constructing intersubjective meanings that define an individual. One can draw not only on the experience but a critical positioning (Habermas), where self-reflectivity, requires 'a balance between attendance to the more necessary forms of a structural technicity and the desirability of a more aesthetic reflectivity' (Lovat, 1999.p. 123). For artists reflective orientations are essential between the affective self, engagement with their medium and their socially discursive constructed ways of knowing. Contemporary artistic practice presents as a medium able to offer scope to experience these endless possibilities of insight. These practices inform the very nature of ones being which is intensely personal, but often shared through a broader cultural script and common imagery.

Seeing, Reflecting, Imaging, Knowing and Meaning Making

Historically we have expressed our understanding of the world and self as imagery of vision, and this continues in discourses on science and philosophy and expresses itself strongest culturally through the visual arts. Delauze and Guattari (1987) use the metaphor of rhizomes to present

their ideas on the instability of truth and the multiplicity and complexity of self and identity. They challenge imagery that presents self as growing and emerging in a prescribed linear fashion from childhood to adulthood, with fixed characteristics and within a formed social construct towards an absolute or hierarchy of truth. The randomness of the new imagery has given us another way to imagine and examine ideas of self. The conditions of this knowing taking the form of a self-consciousness ironic knowing, characterised by 'aesthetic self-consciousness, self-reflexivity, paradox...uncertainty, intertextuality' (Hutcheon, cited in Barker, 2000. p. 285) and a blurring of many boundaries.

Eisner (2001) further informs how artists use this reflective knowing. He sees artists using imagery to 'literally see in our mind's eye' (Eisner, 2001, 8). Image creation is thus a process of stabilisation of an idea (as image) which subsequently makes possible a dialogue with it. The temporary durability of the image or form for the artist allows one to critically reflect, edit and refine a position to be communicated as reflection in action. For the artist this reflected connectedness bridges the individual life, family, society and the world. The meaning of self is constructed through an interrogation of new image possibilities. These possibilities are relentlessly processed through a transpersonal mind (Denson & McEvilly, 1996) and transcognitive processes. A process where the self and others are parallel and vital agencies of mind that inform each other through analysis and critique (Sullivan, 1998) and all images therefore, undergo a personal validation. Similarly the viewer as critical interpreter will also engage with the endless range of possibilities of meaning.

Positioning the seeing

The large picture may therefore be best viewed from somewhere in the particular. Seeing in the particular therefore represents a position rather than a rationalised fusion or truth. Contemporary artists position themselves thus and from this position they begin the process of interrogating endless discourses permeating society. The unexplored territory in imaging possibilities provides the artist with spaces that have meaning potential. These spaces represent the 'gap between itself and what it is trying to express' (Brady, 2000, p.3). It is through the making of images that one is able to explore 'being' through the world of metaphor and communicate to audience concepts that transgress rational meaning. What is important is consciousness of the process of concept emergence and how one reflects on the difference and possibilities presented. While the image is not the perceived dominant communication medium like text, it is becomingly increasingly the preferred mode of metaphoric messaging in contemporary society, thus an examination of how artists critically reflect through imaging is a timely investigation.

Art making as reflective imagined becoming

Current artist practices are inclusive of the complexities of society. They are a platform that is 'less constrained by the 'prison house of language...', one more appropriate to the inbetweenness which is our real situation' (Brady, 2000, p.2). Art making can thus be presented as a platform for the negotiation and construction of meaning, where meaning is emergent from hermeneutic and critical cycles of reflective practice (Grushka, 2002), *Art Inquiry: Construction and Negotiation of Identity*: see diagram below.

ART INQUIRY: CONSTRUCTION and NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY

Grushka (2002): Adapted from Magolda (1999) , Sullivan (1998), Habermas (1976) and Csikszentmihalyi, (1996)

Art Inquiry: Construction and Negotiation of Identity illustrates the dynamic active components of the construction of identity as simultaneously emergent within the act of making an artwork. The cycles must be viewed as a dynamic form with multiple entry positions and reflective perspectives upon which to begin the process of art making. At times an artist may critique from the position of audience, and at other times as artist be immersed in a level of interpretive meaning making beyond the accessibility of audience. It is a process where by the artwork, the essential concrete form of the knowing is simultaneously both the subject and object of reflection. It is a process that allows one to achieve a knowing that has been referred to as communicative knowing (Habermas, 1976) 'where ones own identity is not really self-identification, but intersubjectively recognised self-identification'(p.107). Its form or knowing is unstable and susceptible to change and new meaning making possibilities. The making process can present its self as having little overt intentional direction, yet be a platform of intense self critique, a place where ones very self is exposed at the heart of this making experience. Art making for the individual may inform ones understandings of truth, in the same way that our intellectual and cultural work assumes a knowable world.

When drawing on the full range of knowing to make meaning personal concepts often merged with broader social agendas. Latent ideas, concepts and thoughts intersect with current thinking and working as meanings emerge with a randomness and flux described by Deleuze (1987). They come from tangential connections and can be revealed through material understandings, critical readings by audience as well as drawing heavily on ones personal critical semiotic meaning making system fuse. When asked, artists are often able to trace these lines of interconnectedness, and at other times are lost for any rational reasons as to why a particular image or art making actions were able to trigger powerful awakenings and present as new images and forms with emotive communicative power. For Csikszentmihalyi, this phenomena emerges within the 'autotelic' experience (1996, p.123) and reveals deep personal understandings about the world and the satisfied self. The process requires 'involvement and detachment' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 248), with detachment containing reflective cycles. Artists approach the process often from posing questions about personal, social and cultural problems to be researched as artistic problems (Berger & Luckman, in Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000) often from a methodological position as autobiographical, self-reporting or variations of documentation (Sullivan, 1998) requiring personal validation of all imagery.

Mode of Inquiry

The longitudinal research is grounded in the field of qualitative inquiry. The research will embrace both a philosophical hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001 & Plager, 1994), combined with the field of inquiry of the critical discursive psychology methodology (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). It will draw on the increasing acceptance of various types of data representation that resonate the nature of the phenomena, rather than conceptualise it (Eisner, 1991; Sullivan, 1998, Neilsen, 2000) It is also acknowledges that research about art practice is locked in a process of concealment (Brown, 2001) and that it is not unusual for artists to deny artistic influences or demonstrate indeterminacy in the way they practice.

Participants

The 7 female persons upon whom this article is based are participants in the 10 year longitudinal study that began in 1990 when the fibre art group first began. The group consists of female fibre artists whose ages range from 75 to 28 and who have been practicing as crafts people or artists for at least 8 or more years. All have a formal tertiary qualification in the arts, although they vary from commercial design, printmaking, sculpture to traditional weaving. On top of domestic commitments all of the artists had either part-time or full time jobs reflecting other substantial professional skills as teachers (Lyn, Taryn, Elizabeth and Dianne), nurse (Anne), accountant (Helen) and retailer (Una). The study describes the participants from within their frame of reference as female fibre artists and within the context of emergent mainstream artists who fit the profile of most practicing artists in Australia, who must seek full or part time work to sustain their art practices.

Data Sources

The research has drawn on a wide range of data, sourced from within the group and from without. A primary source of data is the interpretations of the researcher as participant observer. This allowed interpretive meanings of art works privileged to the researcher by the artist, but not accessible by the viewing public. The data contained recollections and insights into the artists personal and group lives. It took the form of formal minuted documentation, philosophical statements, exhibition catalogues, published review material, critical writing on the group and image(s)/object(s) produced by the artists. Combined with these data is a set of informal conversational interviews exploring the personal history of the artists, their motivations for becoming artists, and in particular fibre artists. All data has been triangulated in an attempt to valid the interpretive position presented.

Results: Artists as reflective self- learners and cultural communicators

The cognitive mythologies and the artists' evolved reflective knowledge constructs will be revealed through a narrative. It tells the story of .how they came together and formed a group of critical friends, how they positioned themselves as women artists and how concepts emerged with tangential relationships for each group member.

'Art is created in the tension between that contingency, a necessary instability, and the order, the meaning, the pattern, that graces it. As in a garden. Or a well –lived life.'

(Modjeska,Drusilla, 1995. *The Orchard*. p.257)

They came together as individual exhibitors at a regional fibre art exhibition and later moved towards a formalisation of their artistic relationship as a group. A philosophy emerged where they committed each other to explore their personal and collective aesthetic boundaries unrestricted by commercial pressure and escaping the confines of domesticity (group member, 90). The act of 'show and tell' on that first weekend meeting was unsuccessful. All the artists reluctantly showed something, but gave very little. They concealed and withheld visual and verbal links that would have given insights into aesthetic process of on another. They spent the following ten years engaging with this cognitive mythology surrounding aesthetic originality. Yet they participated in a range of reflective practices that resulted in the emergence of a discreet and original constructed group aesthetic.

Seeing and Reflecting on ones own making as self knowing

The group maintained an unspoken ritual of nondisclosure of personal reflective practice, yet engaged openly in critical discussions about aesthetic issues on a collective platform. At no time did the group formally deconstruct their aesthetic making techniques with specific reference to one of their artworks. The reasons for this nondisclosure may be varied, but the ritual remained an aspect of the groups dynamic. They talked deeply about topics, but remained secretive about their works.... 'We don't see each other's work before we get it to exhibition, but we discuss the theme and our interpretation of it' (Group member, 94). Reasons for this fear or vulnerability about sharing their work in progress were multiple. One was the continuing genuine concern about the legitimacy of their artistic activity (fine art verses fibre art or legitimate verses illegitimate art activity. Secondly the works were not revealed too early for fear of influencing others or others influencing them. It was not an issue of stealing ideas, but an awareness that with the closeness of the group, this could happen subconsciously. They were aware of an empathetic communication between themselves (Group Minutes, 1994). They were also aware that much of the reflective awareness of each artist is bound within the act of making as reflection and can't be separated out as words or text. To reflect on the experience(s) requires a grasp of all

appropriate meanings embedded in the experience. It required a suspension or pause and the development of a more contemplative position. To attain this required one to remove oneself from making. Like many artists when one positions themselves thus, they are outside of what Csikszentmihalyi, (1996) describes as a 'flow' state and hermeneutically positioned. They struggled to find a disposition allowing them to focus on their cognitive processes.

While deep personal feeling may trigger the creation of images, and produce a wide range of images, the artists selected carefully what they are willing to reveal to an audience, even the audience of the group. Ironically in the act of maintaining this ritual, they developed a range of verbal and written reflective practices that over time gave each member an almost intuitive aesthetic understanding of each other's practice. By working as a group 'maintaining a focus...beyond ... traditional ... fibre, while... honouring traditions... unity and explore hidden concerns...difficult to express verbally...head into the territory about yourself that you do not travel to very often' (Group member, 1990) they had created a common point from which to begin personal and group self reflectivity

Seeing as Critical Reflective curatorial meaning making system

As professional artists they knew the strength of a well curated exhibition that had both conceptual and aesthetic unity. The act of working together was a means for them to co-exist within a multi-unitary format (Sumner, 1990), a format that was unified by theme and fibre to explore the possibilities of the aesthetic relationship. The first major group show, titled 'contained uncontained' (1991-92) emerged from a 2 year sustained period of conceptual investigation.

'The works explore notions of containment, whether it be the physical presentation of the works or the ideas expressed by them. Containment can be restrictive and confining. It can represent a safe place, a haven of peace and contemplation, a protection from outside forces.....

Containment can represent that universal truth by which we are all contained and enveloped'

(exhibition statement, 1991)

In this exhibition they accommodated a variety of positions, as they worked in a reflective design loop towards resolution of their ideas. The rigour of a format, the establishment of clear physical limitations proved a successful way of maintaining cohesion aesthetically while still allowing great flexibility to conceptually explore ideas and the medium. For this group working with restrictions was a skill they had already learnt well " This seems to be a particular problem with women artist, who can find something really important has to be relegated to a secondary position because of

their primary roles... they seem to work around restrictions' (Huston, 1991). It appeared a natural conclusion that they would use containment as the seeing position. Making meaning within conceptual, physical and media limitations became a group objective.

The content of the following exhibitions was evidence that the group was taking a critical positioning (Habermas, 1976) and refining their aesthetic reflectivity (Lovat, 1999). refining the seeing. The exhibition 'Torque' encapsulates the tension and different polarities or 'twists of insight' in the form, content and scale of the works that the artists have utilised to resolve to sculptural elements in each piece' (Taree. 1995). In the final exhibition 'Limited Shelf Life 'the group was able to 'piggyback the conceptual framework, controlling the polyphony of the whole while preserving the character of the individual pieces...This resolve, to protect and support the integrity of each practitioner while functioning as a cohesive group is at the very heart of the groups decade old mission statement this' (Ryan, 2000, p.107).

For the artists, they lived it, shared the collective and individual aesthetic experience. Their individual and group epistemological reflective knowing was an essential validating tool of self – understanding.

Seeing as critical colleague and working partner

The products of the group's exhibitions, their artistic engagement and collective knowing emerged from a critical perspective. It was revealed in the interconnected nature of business issues, theoretical concerns, traditional and contemporary fibre issues. It was used to rise above the mundane of domesticity and commit to intellectual engagement; 'knowing that we are having another exhibition keeps me going', 'its sort of a necessity, I think I'd dilly dally around and probably knit jumpers...then I'd get frustrated and not know why' (Una). These external agents became catalyst for critical engagement and the exhibition deadlines necessitated the elements of regulation and rigour in their reflections. Under the business umbrella they carried on a dialogue with their aesthetic knowing and their clarity on philosophy was emergent but clear... 'representing innovative and articulate practice at the vanguard of paper, fibre, dye, pigment, medium and plastic construction' (Group Statement, 1998). They would commit to paper only collective statements reflecting the 'boundaries and challenges that contemporary women face' (Group Statement, 1998). There would never be the personal act of 'show and tell' disclosure...but resolve around how to best express the evolving nature of the groups philosophy.

Meaning making through critical dialogue with audience and community.

As an emergent new female group, identifying themselves as innovative collaborative practitioners they had plenty to discuss and resolve as fibre artists. The discourses that operate in the art world and in the community about women artists and fibre art as a legitimate art medium have shaped the motivation and ideological positions that underpin female artists (Collet, 1998) and they held true for this group. To the wider audience they were seen as a closed community of moral support for members only which they used to 'push out their creative boundaries and above all practice their art' (Sumner, 1997, p. 40). This inward critical positioning in relation to audience initially allowed them security and strength to explore themes that were very much issues of women: 'lives of women anchored in the everyday world, in their individual careers and families' (Sumner, 1997, p. 40), and not perceived as necessarily popular or legitimate. There were no landscapes, no paintings, no sculptures in the traditional sense but works which had strong craft elements such as weaving, papermaking or sewing and as such challenged most critics and art writers. The group struggled at times with their love of simply doing and creating ... 'I guess it forces me to intellectualise, other wise I would possibly to quite happy making rugs' (Taryn). They demonstrated they could 'meet challenges', 'develop skills' and consolidate the interwoven strengths and shared responsibilities' (Minutes, 1991). Their making, whether intellectual, cutting edge or not, was a driving force.

Aware of professional critique, they established meeting practices that positioned themselves as a critical mass. They set aside their fragility about ideas and aesthetics and their own myths about making. They began personal interrogation of individual themes they traced the group themes of spirituality, sociology and anthropology, personal lived experience, history and temporal issues as well as the general exploration of the human condition. The act of writing about ones art work immediately positions the work as object and an interpretive position is established. The artist is now critical interpreter of her artmaking, relative to the world. Pre and post exhibition discussions revolved around resolution of themes, aesthetic coherence and interpretive understandings collected from group members, audience and critics. One of the most deliberated discussions was about the importance of an artist statement. Was it the artist's role to critic their work from a theoretical or aesthetic position or to attempt to position the viewer on this matter. The group achieved an intimacy of interpretative meanings that would never be accessible to outside audiences. Tentative at first, beginning with catalogue artist statements and introductions they later went on to write articles demonstrating their capacity to reflect

beyond self as artist, to interpret the political moment and to begin to articulate their role as cultural communicators and active makers of meaning.

Becoming aware of audience: critics, critical writing

With national and international success, came greater critical responsibility. The group began to interrogate their ideas and aesthetics with more rigour. Previously reluctant to embrace external critique it now became an imperative if they were to break down one of the lasting critical barriers. The group mantra became 'critique one another and accept all previous critical articles as points to commence reflection and refinement of their concepts and aesthetics'. The next exhibition challenge was set within a strict curatorial mantra of 'balance freedom of expression in fibre based techniques, from thread, fabric, felt, paper, pigment, metal, plastic' (Torque catalogue, 1997). The broad theme of Torque was selected:

'A line of thread becomes a force of tension and stitches create form not decoration. Paradox the working concept for Torque appears in the use of media as well as ideas portrayed. Humour balances this thematic interest in paradox with personal and universal concerns and demonstrates that things are not always as they seem. Physical surface and conceptual interpretation have fluid and diverse meanings that the members of fah grapple with in their sculptures' (Torque Exhibition statement, 1997).

A more critical interpretation is established in their writing, acknowledging audience and the possibilities of meaning making. They had more clarity about the role of writing as critique of their work and position making as the centre of the reflective process.

To us what is real has been created through touch, thought and feeling... While technology can take an artwork to millions it cannot catalyse the depth of experience between the viewer and an object that truly touches the soul. As artist we think this is a striking paradox and feel compelled to address this theme through our work for this exhibition... the exhibition marks the continuous evolution of the group...a chance to witness well established collaboration...'

(Group member statement, 1997)

They also gained greater insight into their audiences

'The work is rich in poetic connections and reverberations. Miniature scale does not mean small in conception'

(Art Critic: Jill Stowell, 1997)‘

They now understood the role of the critic as cultural commentator and manipulator of audience taste. They resolved to select their own critical writers, prepare material for them and contribute to the critique and discourse on their artistic practice.

3. Reflecting and using past experiences

The temporal experience of ten years resulted in an aesthetic and communicative knowing that has allowed them to create symbols of intense personal meaning with communicative relevance to society and themselves. Over time they gained an audience of viewers and critics who were able to appreciate and articulate the phenomena of the groups' public and private artistic journey as cultural creators.

'the group has continued to pillage domestic myths and explore aspects of the everyday....struggle and achievement, dilemma and preoccupation, courage and hard won wisdom, differently expressed... fibre sensibility....unmistakeable'.

(Meryl Ryan, 2001)

With each exhibition and subsequent developmental journey between exhibitions the artists were able to refine their critical understandings and become familiar with the full range of discourses that informed their making. Reflecting, they wrote:

'The drive to continue to create, self-reflection on what I want for me. Support from the group when other supports were not offering, lots of ideas and food for thought at meetings'

(Group member, 1997)

With time they demonstrated their capacity to ‘fully excavate their own lives for the good of their work’, in so doing reveal what has been described by others as ‘an irresistible sense of the confessional’ (Ryan, 2001). They reaffirmed their commitment to artmaking as their preferred meaning making system and articulated the multiplicity of ways to demonstrate this through the

medium of fibre. To us what is 'real' has to be created through touch, thought and feeling and through 'doing' (Group Member, 1996).

What is most interesting about the journey has been the ritual of no explicit articulation to one another about 'how' a particular work was resolved. The exhibition was the only point where artworks could be viewed as a coherent whole for the audience and the artists alike. Exhibitions have temporary lives so constant referral to the artworks was not possible by the group except through photographs. Yet the artists achieved moments of remarkable synergy in their aesthetic understandings and by the final exhibition shared a resolution of presentation.

'Limited Shelf Life' (a metaphor for their own existence) saw critics write:

'exhibition space...piggyback the conceptual framework, controlling the polyphony of the whole while preserving the characters of the individual pieces. This resolve, to protect and support the integrity of each practitioner while functioning as a cohesive group is at the very heart of decade old mission statement'

(Meryl Ryan, 2000, p.107)

The understanding was gathered over time through the wide range of reflective meaning making possibilities open to the artist. They had developed a more contemplative position in relation to themselves as artists and to one another. They have shared ideas, discussed critical perspectives, reflected on audience and critical commentators, written descriptive statements individually and collectively. Some have even positioned themselves as critic while others were content to achieve artworks of recognised communicative value to the community and themselves.

Conclusion: Seeing, Reflecting, Imaging, Knowing and Meaning Making

Art inquiry is a platform for the construction and negotiation of meaning. As the group evolved there was evidence of the construction of personal semiotic systems that demonstrated emergent complexity of concepts, refinement of art making techniques and a unity within a shared aesthetic understanding. They had refined to a high degree an understanding of their interpersonal and intrapersonal communicative knowing. This knowing was mediated in fibre form. They had all shifted to fibre sculpture and had a collective aesthetic knowing that comes from a command of the art discipline and an appreciation of one another's unique use of materials. The selection and placement was in a mantra of strict multi unitary format.

They became increasingly aware of how art making informed their subjectivities as female artist, mother, group member and cultural agent. They were able to access a full range experiences that Haraway (1998) describes as the multi dimensional, situated and critical topography of subjectivity. Conscious of audience they had truly discovered how to see, to know where to see from and they critically utilised the now strong reflective disposition to master vision technologies as a way to refine truth. Creating fibre artworks presented them with a full range of semiotic material technologies able to support the 'seeing' process.

Using a visual arts epistemology and developing a disposition towards using reflection as the process of refinement, allowed the women artists to move forward in their intellectual and personal endeavours. They were able to reflect on the ontological self, to reshape their identities with strength and to use these skills to continue their personal empowerment. For most of the artists in the group the spaces within the making housed a self- knowing, that allowed all the understandings of ones life to collide and intersect, constructing and resolving new meanings as the art object is formed. They were also aware they had achieved a remarkable synergy of aesthetics through an emergent critical reflective and shared meaning making system. For each member sharing the 'seeing' gave legitimacy and emancipatory power to the phenomena of their artistic experience.

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