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An Early Painter’s Persona As Metaphor

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Abstract
This article analyses the marketing of an early Australian entrepreneurial female painter as metaphor in the exploration of the brand concept. It does so through the extension of her persona to her art, through examination of her diaries, letters and public documents. The use of the metaphor as a means of promulgating the ‘brand as person’ is discussed. Thus, the buyer of art chooses a painting with confidence because of the personality projected by the creator of the art work, in the same way as a successful brand of another product might be purchased. This article places the analysis within the context of social change of the time, giving some indication of the market and competitor positions and her motivation for differentiating herself from others. It highlights the conflict that the painter’s brand caused to the artist’s competitors at the time and how that affected her long-term reputation. The artist’s idiosyncratic approach to painting and her vigorous self-promotion as an artist sought a reappraisal of the genre of lowly flower painting in the late nineteenth century.

Metaphor

Metaphor is considered the engine of the imagination, an aid to thinking and innovation that illuminates identity and work life. This author agrees with Cornelissen (2002) and Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2002) that the notion of metaphor—in this case individual metaphor—as a concept has not been adequately investigated. This article fills this lacuna. Metaphor connects profoundly as a means of understanding, not so much organisation, but an early female painter operating as a ‘public woman’. There is an increasing interest in the history of the ‘public woman’ (Frisken 2000), of which metaphor is a part. Marian Ellis Rowan (1848-1922) was a woman suffrage icon during the late 19th century in her art work in Australia, while also achieving fame in New Guinea, New Zealand, India, England, the United States and Europe. Using an interpretivist paradigm for analysing metaphor, this article asserts that the individual female artist’s life can be viewed as a metaphor for herself as a brand: the ‘public woman’, a position she held not only with honour but also with opprobrium from opponents of suffrage.

This article was developed using an historical approach to research. Extensive use of archives and primary sources developed the work. Biographies and autobiographies, writings on artistic exploits and historical records gave a picture of development of the artist in the society in which she is located. The results of historical data have been matched by contemporary analysis of metaphor, marketing and branding (Hermann 1997; Morgan 1997). Following Herman (1997), the reader will see modern references as explanations of earlier artistic developments, and as such illuminate both
the origin of practices which are now taken for granted as well as allowing understanding of earlier sophisticated practices which have gone unrecognised. The juxtaposition thus allows an enriched understanding of development and practice of the artist as metaphor. Biographical materials, such as the art work itself, the autobiography and other written materials, written for different purposes and for different audiences, are used to provide thick descriptions of content and context. They provide evidence of Rowan’s acute sense of awareness of audience and of herself thus providing the authenticity, corroboration and persuasion necessary for their inclusion (Roberts 2002).

Metaphor: Rowan, artist, persona and value

Given the potential value of the metaphor in other disciplines, already recognised by authors such as Davies and Chun (2003) and McWilliam and Dumas (1997), it is time to extend the value of metaphor to artists. This has been done once before with an early modern writer (Herman 2003). Now this author applies the model to a painter who also reinforces her brand image through the written word. To illustrate this point, Table 1 presents an explication of the artist as metaphor, celebrating the artist as metaphor with its multi-level possibilities for exploring individual experience as artist, as persona and as value indicators, using brand as differentiating mark, as person and as asset and sub-metaphors derived from metaphors.

Table 1: The artist as metaphor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Sub-Metaphor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Brand as differentiating mark</td>
<td>Brand as name</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as logo or symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as emblem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persona</td>
<td>Brand as person</td>
<td>Brand as personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as relationship with stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as national identity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand reputation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand national narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Brand as asset</td>
<td>Brand financial value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as early female entrepreneur</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as social capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand as social caché</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: modified Davies and Chun 2003

Metaphor offers a way of better understanding what brands denote, how they can be used and of identifying and clarifying the issues surrounding them (Davies and Chun 2003). For an artist, such as Ellis Rowan, the theoretical challenge is to identify patterns of emergence of metaphors and link them to brand. In doing so, a new approach to thinking about artist as metaphor is offered in Table 1. The table shows metaphor as linked to brand in the differentiating mark of the artist, the person as brand and brand as asset. Brand is allied to metaphor (following Davies and Chun 2003), and it distinguishes the sub-metaphors specifically for the artist analysed in this article. This leads to six new sub-metaphors: brand as relationship with stakeholders; brand as national identity; brand as national narrative; brand as early female entrepreneur; brand as social capital and brand as social caché.
Each one of the new sub-metaphors is innovative and important due to their expansion of the existing sub-metaphors outlined by Chan and Rosa (2003) and their applicability to the arts. Notions of brand have been expanded from the individual (reputation and personality) to the broader sphere (national identity and narrative) and from the notion of asset being purely financial (financial value and investment) to having social implications (social capital and social caché).

The sub-metaphors recognised in the second Indicator set of Persona are concerned with the metaphor of Brand as a person. In the sub-metaphor Brand as relationship with stakeholder, the implication is that the stakeholder does not simply purchase a work of art based solely on the merit of the work but that purchase can be affected by the relationship the stakeholder feels they have with the artist. Davies and Chun (2003) state ‘People we are involved with mean more to us. We are interested in them, notice things about them and react differently toward them compared to those we feel we have little to do with.’ When we relate this to the relationship between artists and buyer, we can see that those who feel more knowledgeable about the artist as a person will see this reflected in the art produced by the artist, and be more attracted to purchase. This is demonstrated when a collector may follow the career of an artist and purchase work throughout.

Brand as national identity and Brand as national narrative are both extensions of the concept of Brand as person. Rather than the personality of a particular individual, it is the ‘persona’ of a nation that is identified. The works created by the artist and consequently exhibited by institutions assist in the creation of a national identity and become embedded in the national narrative. The buyer may then be attracted to participating in national identity building and narrative by the purchase of such works of art. The concept of ‘brand loyalty’ may also relate to the notion of nation, with considerations of patriotism and commitment to local artists and subjects of national significance such as the exotic flora and fauna painted by Rowan. These notions then become a factor in the purchase of work.

The sub-metaphors fall recognised by the third Indicator set of Value fall under the umbrella metaphor of Brand as asset. Traditionally the notion of brand asset has been specific to economic asset. The new sub-metaphors of Brand as social capital and Brand as social caché, are vital in recognising that the value or asset of a brand is not solely confined to the economic domains but can have implications in the social domain. Brand as social capital refers to the branding of the networks, values and norms that create cohesion and build community identity in society. Community cohesion and identity can be enhanced through acquisition or exhibition of works of art and this in turn can be marketed as a brand. Brand as social cache refers to the social cache created through the association with an art generally or individual artists specifically on behalf of individuals such as collectors. The premise that greater association will led to greater levels of social caché harks back to early notions of art being for the elite and requiring certain privileged knowledge to participate in it. This is a marketing tool often employed by commercial galleries.

It is proposed that artist as metaphor is poetic in its ability to differentiate her art and life; rhetorical in its ability to articulate the extraordinary aspects of the person’s life; and aesthetic in its ability to articulate an asset as part of an experience of an early female entrepreneur whose work has both financial and artistic merit. It should be
noted that while the brands are put forward as separate they are not construed as mutually exclusive. There are obvious overlaps.

Differentiating mark This indicator holds that metaphor contributes to the fluidity of meaning in the name, logo (through artist’s signature) and emblem (through the art itself). The art and artist are so strongly embedded in the psyche that the name, logo and design become emblematic.

Person This indicator is rhetorical in its ability to enhance personal image by branding it as a personality, part of national identity, building a sound relationship with its stakeholders in government, business, the arts and the general buying public. The brand becomes part of national narrative about art, life and citizenship in a newly emerging nation seeking its own place in the world, outside the umbrella of Empire.

Asset The artist as asset metaphor brings the experience both closer to emotive or sensual experience as well as to the need to purchase the art work for its intrinsic value. The complexities of metaphor here hold characteristic similarities to evoking a sense of value in the investment made in art, through linking it to social capital and social cachet. The aesthetic function of metaphor lends substance to abstract or elusive concepts (Walters-York 1996) not otherwise so linked.

The complexities of metaphor rely on concrete projections through concepts, ideas or physical attributes of otherwise elusive properties. The original metaphor is used to attribute substance to the primary subject: here the artist. Hence, indicators are linked to metaphor and sub-metaphors (which themselves have been used to denote substance in the original metaphor). Metaphor allows expression of concepts which may otherwise be inexpressible. That is, the metaphor allows word use in a new way to fill a gap in understanding of new concepts or concepts applied to new arenas, such as the artist. In addition, by locating the text closer to art, the rhetorical image and the aesthetic experience, these very qualities present new codes for understanding experience.

Metaphor as a Means of Conceptualising Artistic Reality

Metaphor is an appropriate way of reconceptualising reality for artists and their art work, as artists are concerned with creating something new each time they produce art. Metaphor is one type of symbol used to make the world concrete and give it a coherent form (Arndt 1985: Morgan 1997). Meaning, then, is provided by language, symbol, myth and art as tools for understanding the world. In this view, the world is viewed metaphorically through these concepts which provide a frame for analysis of an essentially subjective reality.

This article suggests that Rowan served as an exemplar of the artist as metaphor—a ‘public woman’—who used her image to promote herself and her art in a time when such words were not known. Rowan aggravated tensions between proponents of the status quo for women and the drivers of change. She challenged the male-dominated artistic elite, reconfiguring herself (with considerable success but also with notable failure) as a representative of the nineteenth century woman-adventurer. The following quotation is but one of many denoting her adventures around the world:
‘My love for the flora of Australia, at once so unique and so fascinating, together with my desire to complete my collection of floral paintings, has carried me into other colonies, Queensland, and some of the remotest parts of the great Continent of Australia.’ Rowan 1897 preface for 1898:v)

Born into a well-to-do family in rapidly expanding Melbourne, Australia, she epitomised privilege. However, she used her talent as an artist and writer and the mood of the times to develop herself as a brand. This study focuses on the techniques that Rowan used to develop herself as a brand. The techniques entailed her art, her travels to remote locations, her writings about travels and her representations to notable public figures for due recognition of her art as part of nation building and her public spats with the male artists about her due place in the art hierarchy. It was due to these techniques that Rowan redefined the narrative of the ‘public woman’ in Australia in the late nineteenth century.

**Artist as Metaphor**

Metaphor is central to this article. The complexity inherent in the development and creation of art makes metaphor appropriate. Through the artist’s use of her personality as a marketing tool, the author examines the relationship between artist and art work, and the strategies used for the successful marketing of her work. Further, the author examines the complicating factors arising from the use of artist as metaphor and the criticisms made of her as an artist, as a woman and due to her use of metaphor for herself and her art. In this climate, Rowan became inseparable from her persona.

**THE ARTIST: MARIAN ELLIS ROWAN (1848-1922)**

Born in 1848, the eldest daughter of seven children of Charles and Marian Ryan, Marian Ellis Rowan (as she was called after her marriage), personified the transforming power of the new woman. Perhaps enticed by the stories of her botanist grandfather on her mother’s side, she and her new husband, Fredric Rowan, set out for New Zealand as newly-weds in December 1873. They left their home, their family and friends and headed to New Zealand with the lure of opportunity, a career for Frederic and painting for Ellis. Not long after their arrival, Rowan became pregnant with her one and only child, Eric, called ‘Puck’, born in July 1875.

Rowan was armed with paintbrush, paper and social connections as well as social graces. Remarkably, the status of women was being transformed by the politics of the pressure group—others’ actions, from which Rowan was able to benefit. Rowan’s activism was in her inquisitive nature and her combined artistic and scientific talent for recording plants, birds and insects. There was a campaign afoot to change social attitudes to women. Like all such changes, it had small beginnings. People like the philosopher, John Stuart Mill, were opposed to the subjugation of women. The view Mill expounded was a minority view, but discussion of the position of women was a lively debate at the time:

‘...the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes — the legal subordination of one sex to the other — is wrong itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement...it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other’ John Stuart Mill — *The Subjection Of Women* — 1869

Academy of Marketing Dublin July 2005
But it was only in the 1870s that the campaign against women’s subjugation gained enough momentum to enable women like Rowan to sway public opinion. Her visibility as artist and author led to her denigration as an ‘icon of infamy’ (Frisken 2000). This was fuelled by the success she experienced in numerous exhibitions in which she received a total of 29 gold, silver and bronze medals in recognition of her artistic skills and her placement above other established artists including ‘heroic’ male painters, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin.

Rowan used the power of the word as well as the brush as metaphor for her cause. She published diaries purportedly telling her life stories and exploits, but in reality promoting her persona the way she wanted to be remembered.

She also published a children’s book and magazine articles recording her ‘adventures’ in remote locations where she recorded the flora and fauna, as well as promoting her desire for the nation to purchase her art work as part of its national collection (Rowan 1905, 1908, 1912). Her children’s book, *Bill Baillie: The Story of a Pet Bilboa*, about the relationship and exploits of an artist, Tabitha, and her new found pet bilboa, depicts the experiences they share and the environment they inhabit.

‘It was truly a paradise for a painter. In this land of dreams, there was no day long enough for Tabitha’s busy brush. ... There was mulga country still—miles of it, which was carpeted now with patches of white everlasting, with here and there among them tinges of pink and streaks of yellow, button-shaped flowers’ (Rowan 1908:25).

Rowan’s colourful history as intrepid explorer was integral to her skillful sensationalising of her personality, deliberately distinguishing herself from her contemporaries. Hence, consideration of the artist from an aesthetic standpoint alone is inadequate. It reveals only part of the truth. The role of metaphor reveals another form of truth used in this article to present Rowan in her time as interested in marketing her persona in order to underscore the importance of her art.

In her latter years, Rowan approached the Australian Government to purchase her collection of paintings. Her offer precipitated over eighteen months of robust debate in Federal Parliament and is recorded in the parliamentary record, Hansard. Considered ‘vulgar’ art and a ‘deplorable commentary on public taste’ by Norman Lindsay, he was only one of a number of her artistic peers that objected to the purchase of over 900 works (Lindsay 1923:6; Hazzard 1984: 141). Prominent artists including Julian Ashton and W. Lister Lister were against the payment of an initial asking price of £21,000 in February 1921 for her collection of paintings and recommended a figure not exceeding £2000 (Hansard 1923: 3665). On the other hand, Sir Elliot Johnson argued that the works by Rowan could be viewed ‘...as a national collection of special value’ and likened Rowan’s collection to Gould’s birds, reproductions of which were owned by the Government and ‘had enormously increased in value’ (Hansard 1923:3667). Finally, in 1923, the collection was acquired by the Commonwealth Government ‘as a mark of appreciation … to this woman of unflinching courage who suffered in health and strength in order to be able to present to her country representations of its flora and fauna, and something of their beauty in their natural surroundings’ (Anstey, Hansard 1932:3668). The sum of £5000
paid to Rowan’s estate was less than one quarter of the initial asking price (Hansard 1932:3669).

Rowan was an unabashed self-promoter, using her image as much as her connections to further her cause. And why not? No doubt she needed the money after 1892, when the economy collapsed, her husband died and her family lost their fortune. She was then without income. As well as wanting to be remembered by having her works held in a national art institution, she needed to earn money. She also wanted to promote an image of the artist as persona so that only her metaphor is left for posterity. In this she was successful. Developing art as metaphor was integral to her success as painter and writer.

In many ways, Rowan was an enigma. She had the skill of an artist, the knowledge of a scientist and stamina and perseverance which enabled her to experience ‘the excitement of seeking and the delight of finding rare or even unknown specimens’ (Rowan 1898:v). This thirst for adventure enabled her to be

‘acquainted with many strange phases of colonial life; it has carried me into the depths of jungles, to distant islands, to wild mountain districts, and has brought me in contact with the aboriginal races, often in peculiar circumstances’ (Rowan 1898:v).

The Social Context

In Rowan’s lifetime, Charles Dickens wrote Bleak House and other biting criticisms of the Victorian age; the Australian female authors Henry Handel Richardson and Miles Franklin (both with androgenous names) wrote tales of personal or national development under their pseudonyms; and Beatrix Potter wrote her Peter Rabbit books and produced realistic paintings and drawings of fungi and other flora and fauna, the more scholarly of which were not exhibited nor published during her lifetime. (http://www.literarytraveler.com/europe/potter.html)

The social context moved from confident, late nineteenth century Melbourne, Australia to the changing and dislocated European stage of the early twentieth century. In all this, in some senses Rowan remains a nineteenth century woman. She saw the birth of an expanding, self-assured, urban Australian society, where plants were even then becoming extinct. In this place, Rowan practised what is now recognised as an early form of marketing, not only recording plants and birds for posterity but promoting herself as part of that process. Fillis (2002) has recognised the artist as marketer in other contexts. Herman (2003) has identified the early author as a brand. Fillis and Herman both identify the artist as often engaging in marketing, although not labelled as such by themselves or their peers. To put this argument into historical perspective, we only need recognise the changes going on in Victorian society in this far-flung British colony. This period was one where society was undergoing considerable change in attitudes, beliefs, self-confidence and attitude to women—particularly women painters (Ambrus 1984; Cannon 1966; Hammond and Peers 1992; Kelly 1983).

Nineteenth century art is well documented, but the position of the ‘public woman’ and woman’s art as metaphor still needs to be more clearly depicted. The celebration of
landscape had eclipsed interest in portraiture, figure painting, interiors, still life and genre (Hammond and Peers 1992), not to mention botanical art. Women’s place was undergoing rapid change, with new ideas pushing through the conventional interpretation of science, religion and art. As a painter of flora and fauna in situ, Rowan occupied a unique place as artist.

‘The excitement of seeking and the delight of finding rare or even unknown specimens abundantly compensated me for all difficulties, fatigue, and hardships ... ’ (Rowan, 1897:v)

As travel became more accessible in the late nineteenth century, some men encouraged women to document flora and fauna in a variety of far flung places. For example, Baron von Mueller, director of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne, encouraged Rowan and others in their explorations. These women were often financially independent and were certainly independent of mind. The Melbourne-based Rowan is an interesting example of the place accorded to women within the broader art establishment of the time. Rowan recorded rare flowers, plants, birds and insects. Her independent means (at least until mid-life) and talent for self-promotion gained her financial success and recognition.

It has become almost commonplace today to consider the opening up of educational, social and political opportunities for women in the late nineteenth century. There is growing appreciation of the importance of political, social, institutional and educational opportunities and equalities in encouraging ‘the woman question’. But how was it that Rowan did so well in many respects as artist, intrepid explorer and entrepreneur, but failed in her quest to have her artistic legacy recognised suitably by the state? Is this the area where her branding exercise was resisted by her detractors in society?

It is quite conventional thinking nowadays to consider that, on balance, Rowan’s work is ‘art’ and to consider it only from an aesthetic standpoint. Other art historians have done so (Fullerton 2003). Probably the main reason for this assessment is the artist’s own idiosyncratic approach to painting flora and fauna and her vigorous self-promotion of herself as an artist. However, this only tells half the story. This matter is no longer a question of contemporary judgement alone, but it is also vital to be seen in light of the status of women in late nineteenth century Melbourne, Australia, as well as broader social issues which saw a new alliance of art and science with a Victorian Wanderlust for self-improvement. Rowan documented her exploits which enabled her to be ‘acquainted with many strange phases of colonial life’ (Rowan, 1898:v).

The Need for Differentiation

In Rowan’s time, flower painting was seen as marginal and therefore posed no threat to the dominant mode of traditional academic British and European style ‘noble’ landscapes and portraits. Marginalisation was assisted by flower painting being classified as women’s painting, as well as using the medium of water colour, considered a less august medium than oils. Rowan was thus doubling jinxed: she painted flowers and mostly in water colour. As painting was distinguished by type in art hierarchies, and women’s representations of contemporary aspects of life were
considered more utilitarian and less powerful (Wolfram Cox and Minahan 2002), Rowan’s work was easily dismissed by her male artist colleagues.

Women’s art was devalued for much of the period under discussion, as Rowan’s art fell into the middle category of decorative water colours identified in Table 2. The hierarchy of art has reputational implications. For example, male colleagues referred to her work as ‘vulgar’ and ‘a deplorable commentary on public taste’ (Lindsay 1923) (Hazzard 1984: 141). The hierarchy shows that art, and by implication, the art purchasing policies of the nation (James 1994), reflect a means of marginalising women’s contribution. It is clear from the comments of the male painters of Rowan’s day that they conformed to this view. Consequently, although women were free to explore art unhindered, they were excluded from organisational elites such as art museum collections and the right to be awarded prizes. While Rowan did earn prizes and awards and finally had a large part of her collection housed in a national collecting institution, it was not achieved without considerable criticism and at a substantially reduced price, compared to equivalent male art work of the same period. The commercial press aired these vicious attacks. Rowan was dependent on the press for coverage of her art awards and promotion of her image, which she cultivated carefully.

**Table 2: Art Hierarchy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Subject Matter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oils</td>
<td>‘noble’ subject matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water colours</td>
<td>‘feminine’ subject matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>‘domestic’ subject matter</td>
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</table>

Source: cf Wolfram Cox and Minahan 2002

The hierarchy of art also has branding consequences. For example, Rowan was successful and rewarded for her success with medals. However, artist peers looked down on her art as merely decorative scribblings of a female amateur painter. For example, artist Norman Lindsay stated that ‘While there is so much that is worthy in Australian art—so much with a higher purpose than mere diagrammatic representation—to buy a collection of wild flowers seemed ... a waste of public money and a deplorable commentary on public taste’ (Sun 1923). This relegated Rowan’s art to a more lowly status on the art hierarchy (Table 1).

As the embodiment of ‘art as marketing’, Rowan forged ahead with her campaign to travel to far-off places to record the plants and birds of those lands with ‘excellence of execution, beauty of colouring and artistic grouping...[and] scientific and ornamental value’ (The Calcutta Englishman 1893), before the plants and birds became extinct. Her determination won praise from many but she became the scourge of the self-styled Australian Impressionists, a group of both men and women outdoor painters who used the new techniques of *plein air* painting developed in France. However, it was the men who were vitriolic in criticising Rowan’s fortitude and forthright manner as ‘purely scientific: suitable for a museum—perhaps. But for an Art Gallery—no!’ (A. Dattilo Rubbo in Lindsay 1923) There are no recorded adverse comments—or comments at all—from the female Impressionist painters.

Rowan responded to these criticisms by calling on her powerful friends in high places to respond for her. She did not take direct action. Like Florence Nightingale
(Strachey 1918), she left it to others, well briefed by her, to pursue her cause. Many considered her work 'to be of great historical, artistic, educational, and scientific value, and worthy of securing as a national record.' (Brooks in Hansard, 1923). This approach was political pragmatism. Perhaps, like others of her class, both in Australia and abroad, she had been scarred by direct suffrage. Nonetheless, her cause was at once artistic and political: as part of the rising nationalism in Australia that was to culminate in the declaring of an Australian Federation in 1901, Rowan saw that her recording of flora and fauna had a representation beyond the mere aesthetic. She wanted her collection of painting bought and housed in the national capital as a statement as to the importance of nation building. Rowan used her connections at all levels to fight relentlessly for this goal to be achieved. Political in that Rowan was by her actions in public life and in art fighting for recognition of the valid role of the 'public woman', able to earn her living and be duly acknowledged for her artistic contribution to nation building as Australia moved towards Federation in 1901. Rowan used her talent for self-promotion to further her cause.

Creating the Rowan Image: Rowan’s autobiographical motivation

Rowan wrote and painted with the audience in mind. She was constructing her life as a metaphor for the early female entrepreneur artist adventurer. Rowan’s documented life is a public one. She did not reveal her inner life, but preferred to relate her experiences and observations without any personal or emotional content. Here, the difficult task is to find the origins or motivations of Rowan’s creative endeavour and to place it in a wider social context. Rowan was exploring a romantic view of herself.

The writings of Rowan exhibit the complex interrelation between her art and her daily life, between fictionalisation of her life, and the processes of creation and recreation of her past, her present and her reputation for her future. Life, art and text interconnect as the artist/author not only invests imagination and creativity in her image of herself through art, as both reality and fiction, just as fiction is a representation of a genre of historical cultural production.

The question of the fact-fiction dichotomy erodes the differences between life and art. A comment by Rowan may be apposite here on connections between her autobiography and her art:

‘I would travel the world in search of flowers rare and wonderful, travel countries inaccessible, as well as those which offered difficulties only imaginary.’ (Rowan, 1905:714)

And again:

“It was a garden of colour. Every possible shade of colour was there—in the fluffy red flowers, the fluffy blue ones, the purple blossoms with deep fringes, bushes with leaves like pure white flannel, and clusters of cotton-wool berries with one white eye. Small patches of rose-colored mesembryanthemums draped the harsh ground. On sticks of stems were bunches of vari-coloured tea-tree blossoms—flowers that shaded from deepest red to palest green and white. It was truly a paradise for a painter.” (Rowan 1908:24)
Exploration of ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ in her art has produced a hybridity in art, at least as related to traditional genre distinctions. So art may share similarities to autobiography in that there are stories related and characterisations present that are not explicitly recognised or developed. Her art and life acknowledge the possibility of merging categories: the artist and the botanist-recorder-adventurer; the individual and the social; the past and the present; fact and fiction. Her written and visual work provides a means of constructing an image, of relations between artist and society which acknowledges the possibilities of merging categories: brand as name; as national narrative; and as entrepreneur. In other words, seeing herself as a metaphor for her art in her stories, and replicating those stories visually. Rowan, through metaphor, constructed her own narrative according to how she wanted to be perceived.

Conclusion

From Ellis Rowan’s emergence as a recognised, feted and lauded artist, she was well positioned as a metaphor for art as a cult of personality.

‘...for anything I had suffered I was repaid a thousand-fold. Some of the specimens most admired, those in my judgement indisputably lending most character and distinction to the collection, were placed in my hands as a reward, transferred to canvas, and live still to remind me—no, to make me forget!—perils past, and discomforts long endured.’ (Rowan, 1905:716)

Culture is a marketable product, with creativity being used to determine its positioning for the artist as brand. Its marketability is based on the personality of the artist, fusing painter with the projected image so that they become synonymous. When this happens, a brand is formed which promotes its value, relationship with national identity and artistic narrative. This case study of artist’s personality as metaphor does suggest that the integration of art and life is taken up by the consumer, the buying public. While marketing techniques were unsophisticated in Rowan’s day, the artist showed herself capable of devising the necessary approaches to ensure her central place in Melbourne cultural life, overcoming loud and sometimes viscous objections by her male artistic colleagues. Her projection of herself as a metaphor for her art illustrates how an artist known for a particular genre follows the same instincts that might prompt today’s advertiser to choose a successful brand.

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**Author Bio**

**Associate Professor Ruth Rentschler** (BA Hons Art History and Germanic Studies University of Melbourne; PhD, Monash) is the executive director of the Centre for Leisure Management Research at Deakin University. She is editor of a number of books and author of articles in the cultural field, including *Cultural and Entertainment Industries Handbook, Shaping Culture, Innovative Arts Marketing* and *The Entrepreneurial Arts Leader*. In 2000 she received the Best Paper Award for her paper entitled Entrepreneurship: From Denial to Discovery in Nonprofit Art Museums’ delivered at the UIC/AMA Research Symposium in Newcastle, Australia. She retains a keen interest in Australian cultural life from her early education in art history. In her private life she is an artist.