Conventions of Pictorialism (Iconic Imagery, Perceived Space and the Picture Plane) Deconstructed and Reconstructed as Alternative Models of Perception, Embodied in Paintings and Drawings

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This exegesis is submitted in support of the thesis and is not intended for separate assessment. The thesis in conjunction with the exegesis constitutes the total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by research.

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September 1993
I certify that the thesis (together with the supporting exegesis) entitled Conventions of Pictorialism (Iconic Imagery, Perceived Space and the Picture Plane) Deconstructed and Reconstructed as alternative Models of Perception, Embodied in Paintings and Drawings, and submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Research, is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my Principal Supervisor, Rodick Carmichael, and to my External Supervisor, John Miller.
# Table of Contents

Summary of Thesis and Exegesis .................................................. Page 1

Introduction to the Exegesis ....................................................... Page 2

     Catalogue Section 1. .......................................................... Page 11

Part 2.  Self Portraits - Posture as a Means of Expression. .......... Page 18
     Catalogue Section 2 .......................................................... Page 18

     Catalogue Section 3 .......................................................... Page 29
     Field Studies ................................................................. Page 34
     Catalogue continued ....................................................... Page 39

Summation .............................................................................. Page 42

Appendix A. Critical Essay - Gareth Sansom ......................... Page 44

Appendix B. Critical Essay – Modigliani ............................... Page 49

Appendix C. Critical Essay - John Miller .............................. Page 54

Appendix D. Critical Essay – Utamaro .................................. Page 60

Bibliography and List of References ........................................ Page 68
Summary

This thesis is concerned with conventions of pictorialism, viz. the surface of an artwork or the plane of denotation (in my case paper, canvas or wood); and iconic imagery and the depiction of perceptual space that is connotated by marks, colours and forms upon that surface. Most importantly this thesis is concerned with the relationship between these elements and the deconstruction of them. That the reconstruction of the deconstructed language can create expressive iconic structures that perhaps contain conflicting information and elements, but are simultaneously single and self-contained perceptual models of seeing the world, and the things in it, in another way; is a major focus. The thesis is embodied in the paintings and drawings which are documented in the exegesis that follows.
Introduction

Focus and Context of the Thesis
I set out to demonstrate in my thesis, which is embodied in the paintings and drawings, the function of the visual language, and my comprehension of it as a dynamic interaction between the surface, the iconic imagery and the perceived space of an artwork. The significance or meaning of a painting or drawing is contained in this relationship between, the picture plane (the actual, tangible plane of denotation) and the figure field (the field of envisagement and connotation), and the manner in which they relate to the ‘real’ world and the things in it. I have explored the notions of absolute appearance and fixed space through the investigation of paradigmatic ideas of depiction. By this I mean the deconstruction of formal elements of pictorialism such as the signifying marks on the surface of a painting or drawing and the painted shapes and areas of colour that our minds ascribe meaning to and give form and/or space to. Particularly I have explored and deconstructed Japanese conventions of pictorialism (and devices used to signify space and form without denying the surface), reconstructing new ways of depicting things in the world by combining elements of both Japanese and Western conventions.

Having an understanding of the language which I have explored and deconstructed, viz. understanding pictorialism (a legacy from the Modernists who rediscovered it), and using this understanding of pictorialism to create new models of depiction, the paintings and drawings which make up the thesis have to be viewed in the context of late twentieth century art - Post-Modernism. Paintings and drawings still have the ability to make apparent alternate and convincing ways of seeing the world and the things in it: as Richardson says, “the word ‘reality’ is the only one that has no meaning at all without quotation marks around it”, [p.175].
We live in a multi-dimensional world, infinite and complex. Traditional ideas of time, matter, object and logic, for example, have been questioned as a result of such scientific discoveries as Quantum theory, out of which emerged a radically different world view, [1975, p.14]. New knowledge about nature and the way things, are place demands on the artist to put into a painting more of what is known, viz. that the surface or the appearance of a thing is a limited view, and a human construct. It exists only in our minds and does not have any other reality, [Hawking 1988, p.10].

The reconstruction of a deconstructed language, and the understanding of the significance of an artwork being contained in the relationship and the interaction between what is denoted on the surface of the structure (ie. canvas, wood or paper), and what is ‘seen’ in the figure field, can create self-contained iconic structures that perhaps embody conflicting information and elements, but are simultaneously single, self-contained perceptual models of seeing the world in another way.

**Methodology**

I had to devise a method that would encompass the above, in an empirical rather than a theoretical way. The thesis is embodied in the resulting paintings and drawings; In the first instance (discussed in Part 1) I made paintings and drawings of the reproductions of great works of art even though I may not have seen the original work. In the second stage (discussed in Part 2) I took an empirical approach, as in drawing from the nude in a ‘life’ situation, but with portraiture, specifically self portrayal. I made paintings and drawings (both on paper) using myself as the model (artist as model). The third stage of the research was carried out in an empirical manner to begin with, making drawings on paper, using a clothed female model as the subject matter (the artist and the model are separate in all drawings except for two). Also discussed in Part 3 are the paintings on wood panels (door blanks) that combine elements of the drawings of the female model, with depictions of the elements of Japanese pictorialism.
This exegesis is a documentation of the thesis, in that the methodology was constantly being tested in practice. In Part 1 – Transcriptions as a Way of Discovering the Function of the Visual Language: Quotation and Appropriation, I discuss the way that taking as my subject matter, original works by other artists (in reproduction), freed me from the problem of making a ‘picture’ of ‘something in the world’, because a reproduction of an original artwork is so far removed from that original artwork in terms of scale, intent, the means by which the image is achieved and the surface it is on. Having removed this option of choosing subject matter, I could concentrate on the surface of the canvas, the shapes, the colours and the forms, and the relationship between them. I was striving to find an equivalent for the reproduction of the original image, trying to make equivalent forms that existed independently of the original image but at the same time still containing the meaning that I perceived to be embedded in the original image. (Included in the appendices is a critical essay, written at the same time as making these paintings, on Gareth Sansom’s exhibition, at the Ian Potter Gallery, in August 1991, as an example of work in which this relationship between the pictorial conventions was not always evident).

This line of enquiry led me through transcribing Gericault’s Embracing Couple and Italian Family, Michelangelo’s Ezekiel from the Sistine Chapel, Raphael’s Madonna and Child and Rembrandt’s Jacob Wrestling with the Angel. These works were chosen for their figurative content. I wanted to discover if by paring the images down to simple shapes, the potency of sentiment contained in the figures still existed. I researched this in more depth with the self portrait drawings and paintings, discussed in Part 2.

In Part 2 - Self Portraits - Posture as a Means of Expression, I wanted to discover further the way the visual language of painting and drawing could create these perceptual models that refer to an expression or sentiment contained in a human form that is unspecific, in a way that did not deny the very
process of discovery, viz. the relationship between the surface, the perceived space, and the forms. To do this I turned, for want of a constantly available model, to myself and the convention of the self-portrait to pursue this line of enquiry.

I wanted to use the visual language to make paintings and drawings of my head, to find out, not only about heads and headness in a way that was uncluttered with past experiences, that went beyond portraiture, and therefore appearance and likeness - but the possibility that by so I would develop perceptual models that were convincing ways of seeing and understanding the head. The means of expression or denotation were deliberately restricted to line and in the case of the paintings on paper, simple colour differentiations, to create the perceptual models. I include in the appendices a critical essay on three works that I have seen of Modigliani (two paintings and one sculpture) in which I explore the notion of non-specificity of features in achieving expression (the gaze) particularly the ‘empty eye’.

In Part 2 I also discuss the way our learned experiences and visual knowledge acquired in the past affect what we know about the sentiment expressed by a certain posture (the way the head is held, the stoop of the body) will affect the way a face is perceived. ‘Knowing’ influences seeing, as well as vice-versa. Also included in the appendices is a critical essay on John Miller, whose exhibition in March 1992 included a number of featureless and non-specific heads and was relevant to my own work at this time.

The work I discuss in Part 3 - The Japanese Model of Space: the Wall, not the Window, is the point in the program where I wanted to discover further the concept of how perception of virtual space is created on a flat surface other than having the figure define it. Because of my interest in Japanese wood-block prints, I turned to the Japanese model of non-perspectival space and the way that this interacts with forms and the surface to create iconic images that are both referential and
representational and entirely self-referring, with their significance and meaning contained in the relationship between the forms and the surface.

I wanted to pursue further the idea of deconstructing pictorial conventions as a way of reconstructing new models that I had developed and explored in the practical work discussed in Parts I and 2; that is the deconstruction of images and the depiction of space contained in Japanese art. I made the decision to go to Japan (in November, 1992) to make a study, and examine more closely the wood-block prints (ukiyo-e prints) and the paintings (mainly pre-twentieth century) that I had seen only in reproduction. I include in the appendices a critical essay on five prints of Utamaro, selected for comment from an exhibition of around forty ukiyo-e prints, viewed during the trip, in Tokyo.

**Critical Essays**

There are four critical essays included in the appendices of the exegesis that discuss and analyse the work of the four artists mentioned above: Gareth Sansom, Modigliani, John Miller and Utamaro. The paintings (or prints) discussed are ones that I have viewed in the course of my program, with the exception of two of the artworks included in the essay on Modigliani. They were viewed in 1988 and 1989 while travelling overseas. Each essay was written at a certain stage of my research, and explore the themes and concepts contained in the artworks viewed, and the relevance of them to my own work. None of essays is intended to be an exhaustive survey of the artist and his work, but an analysis of the significance of the artworks chosen to my own research, both at the time of writing and generally.

(All measurements given throughout the exegesis are in centimetres, height before width).

The words ‘quotation’ and ‘appropriation’ are well entrenched terms in the art world today. The idea of using an original artwork by another artist as the basis for a new work is an ancient one and is too huge a subject to deal with in depth here. However, I would like to briefly discuss two artists (among many others such as Van Gogh, Picasso, Bacon and Manet) whose studies and transcriptions of other artist’s work have informed and influenced my own approach to using original complete artworks as a basis of practical research. I turned to the transcription in an effort to establish the methodology I would use to explore the function of the visual language, and how it can make evident that the world that we see and the appearance of things in it are paradigms rather than facts. As Kuhn says, “at any period in history Man sees the world in terms of a particular ‘paradigm’. He defines a ‘paradigm’ as being: “an apparatus of perception (which brings into focus certain aspects of our existence) and a framework by which the many different facets of the universe can be related to one another”, [Waddington 1969, p.1]. Therefore, as Paul Klee says, “in its present shape, it is not the only possible world”, [Read 1969, p.45]. It is virtual - a construct of our minds. Paul Watzlawick puts it another way: “we relieve our existential state of disinformation by inventing an order, forget we have invented it, and experience it as something ‘out there’ we call reality”, [1990, p.120].

Frank Auerbach, the British painter (1931-) places great import on the transcription. He often went (and probably still does) to the National Gallery in London to study and draw from such paintings as Rembrandt’s Portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels (the structure of which often finds its way into his own half-length portraits, [Hughes 1990, p.204] ) and Deposition from which he made two paintings where he reduced and schematised the scaffolding of crosses and the figures at the foot of the
Rembrandt, Deposition, 1640, paper and canvas on panel, 32 x 27, National Gallery, London. (Gerson 1968, p.245).

cross [Hughes, p.150]. He worked from these paintings, he said, often simply to “remind myself what quality is, and what is actually demanded of paintings”, [Hughes, p.7].

Imants Tillers (1950 -) is another painter who makes use of appropriation. He is well known for his use of “second-hand imagery” since 1973, [Kaldor 1984 p.17]. He composes his paintings almost entirely from reproductions of original works by other artists, mechanically shrinking or enlarging images to the scale he wants for his composition and then, using a grid, redraws them onto his canvas boards (that are of uniform size - 10” x 15”). According to Kaldor, it is Tillers’ way of turning to advantage the artistic inconvenience of living in Australia. To Tillers, it is a vehicle of detachment, especially the use of
Auerbach, *Study after Deposition*, 1961, Oil on board, 180 x 122, private coll.  
(Hughes 1990, p.46).

...separate boards. It distances him from the overall image and lets him concentrate on “the layering of details”, the process becoming more important than the result. This was made clear in his 1992 exhibition at the Monash University titled, “A Life of Blank” which was mainly made up of his large scale interpretations of pre-existing images of deChirico’s Metaphysical paintings.

For me, transcribing the work of artists such as Gericault (1791-1824), Michelangelo (1475-1564), Rembrandt (1606-1669) and Raphael (1483-1520), served the purpose, as I stated in the introduction, of freeing me from the idea of making a picture of something in the world. Having removed the option of choosing subject matter - the subject being already a picture, I could concentrate on the surface of the canvas, that is, the picture plane, and deal with my subject matter which was, in
each case, a colour photocopy of a reproduction of a photograph of a painting. The fact that I was looking at a mechanical reproduction and not the original image made it more feasible to look at it simply in terms of shape and colour, disregarding (for the time being), the way these shapes and colours configured.

When I say I disregarded the way the shapes and colours configured, (that is the iconic elements in the painting identifiable as referring to ‘real’ things in the world) I mean that once the picture was chosen I was able to do the disregarding. The choice of picture to make a painting from was in no way arbitrary. All of the paintings that I selected (Gericault’s *Embracing Couple* [1816-17] and *Italian Family* [1815-16], Michelangelo’s *Ezekiel* from the Sistine Chapel [1508-12], Raphael’s *Madonna and Child* [c1512-14] and Rembrandt’s *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* [c1660]) were chosen for their figurative content, that is, their depiction of the human figure and the expressiveness contained in the forms. I wanted to discover if, by paring the images down to simple shapes, the potency of sentiment contained in the figures still existed.

I had therefore, the expectation that the shapes and colours I was dealing with would configure to mean more than just an arrangement of shapes and colours on a flat surface. I was hoping for what Wollheim calls ‘seeing-in’ and ‘twofoldedness’: “seeing-in’ is a distinct kind of perception and is triggered off by the presence within the field of vision of a differentiated surface”. ‘Twofoldedness’ is when ‘seeing-in’ occurs - “two things happen: one is usually aware of the surface one looks at and one discerns something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind something” [1989, p.105]. I wanted the forms to be recognisable as a representation of a figure or figures, but not at the expense of the picture plane. I was attempting to have the meaning contained within the painting, not just what it represented; in other words in the relationship between the denotative plane and the field of connotation As Susanne Langer puts it , “a work of art is an expressive form, and therefore a symbol, but not a symbol which
points beyond itself so that one’s thought passes on to the concept symbolised. The idea remains bound up in the form that makes it conceivable”, [1957, p.67].

Therefore the transcriptions were to be more than mere copies. I wanted the significance of the paintings and drawings to be beyond verisimilitude, and also beyond the appearance of the reproductions. I was striving to find an equivalent for the reproduction of the original image, trying to make equivalent forms that existed independently of the original image but at the same time still containing the meaning that I perceived to be embedded in the original image. Because the intent of these transcriptions was similar for each one, I have chosen to discuss two of them - Transcription of ‘Ezekiel’ and Transcription of Jacob Wrestling with the Angel’, as well as documenting the further research that came from this initial work. This research led me to the line of enquiry that I researched in more depth with the self-portrait drawings and paintings, discussed in Part Two.

**Catalogue Section 1.**

**Transcription of ‘Ezekiel’ (oil on canvas, 91 x 121)**

When I saw the original Ezekiel in 1989, the strength and solidity and the movement contained in this painted figure made a great impression on me. These qualities that were embodied in the figure came from, I believed, the shape of the body - the posture and gesture, and the shape of the garments, rather than such details as facial expression. When making the transcription of it in 1991, I wanted to discover if this was true - if by removing the detail and concentrating on the colour, shape and form on the picture plane, the new painting would embrace these qualities.

I had at this point in my program, become interested in the Woodblock prints of the Japanese artists, of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in the way they condensed forms and used bright unmodelled colour. I was intrigued by the
way a flat form could possess volume when put in a context that our mind perceives and gives meaning to. “The mind”, as Arnheim says, “in order to cope with the world, must fulfil two functions - gathering information and processing it”, [1967, p.1]. Dawkins also says that “shape and other attributes are encoded in (the computer model in the brain, or the percept) into a form that is convenient to handle”, [1987, p.34].

Isolating the forms that different colours suggested, I treated them as different shapes and worked within them. For example, the red robe than surrounds Ezekiel’s massive form I treated as simply a large red shape. I worked in the same way for the shape of the head, the hands, the scarf and so on, reducing the complexity of information to fairly simple shapes, using transparent colours and glazes to identify different forms. I thought that by using these glazes and transparent colours and keeping the paint thin, the canvas would have a stained appearance and thereby emphasise the surface, because the meaning had to be contained in the whole structure, in the
relationship and interaction between the Picture plane and the Figure field, not just in the image of Ezekiel.

**Critical Essay 1. Gareth Sansom**

It was at this point in my research that I visited Gareth Sansom’s exhibition at the Ian Potter Gallery in Melbourne. At this stage in my research my interest was in the function of the visual language and the construction of paintings, stimulated by the qualities of acknowledged ‘great’ works of art. My readings to this point (for example Langer, Wollheim, Blocker, Hughes) had convinced me of the manifest truth that paintings were singularities with a single meaning, imposed by the artist. The significance of an artwork was more than a sum of its parts - it was in the relationship of these parts and not just the iconic content. I was interested in the importance that Sansom placed on the subject matter at the expense of the relationship between it and the picture plane.

**Catalogue continued**

Transcription of ‘Jacob Wrestling with the Angel’ (oil on canvas, 140 x 165).

This painting by Rembrandt is an allegorical picture: a representation of figures that do not exist in the real world: Jacob, a character from the Old Testament, and Gabriel, also from the Old Testament - a creature, that if it did exist would be six limbed and very unusual, [Carmichael, 1992]. An angel is a cultural invention. Six limbed mammalian forms do not exist except as a human construct. In iconic terms, however, it looks like and is described in the same manner as a human being. Its
wings are described as bird’s wings. The depiction of an ‘angel’ in ‘descriptive’ form empirically is clearly impossible (“I don’t understand about angels”, said Courbet referring to paintings by Delacroix, “I’ve never seen them. How am I supposed to make a judgement about something which represents a human being?”) [Lucie-Smith 1992, p.294]. Yet Rembrandt carries out this depiction with the same degree of observed realism as Jacob (who may be an historical figure), and this is readily accepted as ‘normal’ by the viewer who has a knowledge of myth. As Carmichael puts it, in “Iconic Language of Painting”, “our mind-picture is predisposed to organise retinal information to match up with retained and learned images which have been apportioned meaning and significance”, [1952, p.18].
So, not only was I looking at a reproduction of a Painting but a painting that was referring to something that only exists in our minds - a myth about the passionate struggle between a man and an angel. For these reasons I chose to transcribe Rembrandt’s Jacob Wrestling with the Angel. That is, to discover if it was possible to convey the sense of passionate struggle between two mythical figures wrestling, in a way that embraced Rembrandt’s sensibility of the human condition and his sense of glowing colour (‘without his sense of bodies lapped in darkness but transfigured by sacramental light, what would Rembrandt have done?’ [Hughes 1990, p.37]) - without resorting to making a copy of it. And at the same time to create a perceptual model of reality out of a subject that was, in itself, a Paradigm.

Because of this - the subject being a Paradigm - I wanted the meaning of the Painting (of the reproduction of the Painting) to reside in the total structure of the work — the surface, colours, shapes and iconic content. As Sontag says, “art is not only about something; it is something”, [1961, p.21]. I wanted my painting to be more than a Painting about two figures wrestling — rather to be something in total: to have its own significance embedded in more that just being about something. So I made the Painting with the same intent as Ezekiel and concentrating on the surface rather than what was connotated, I simplified the implied form into fairly flat areas of colour.
I made twenty small pastel drawings of the reproduction of *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* in an effort to further explore the reproduction (all pastel on paper, 41 x 61, ). I have made these into an analogous unit for the purpose of viewing, although each stands alone as being a separate enquiry. With each pastel I tried to ignore completely the ‘picture’ contained in the reproductions that is, the image of the two figures and simply look at the colour differentiation and arrangement on the flat surface, thinking of the space around the figures as having the same quality of solidity as, say, Jacob’s head, experimenting with different colour combinations and transparencies to try and achieve that ‘sacramental light’ apparent in Rembrandt’s work. In some, rather than look at the reproduction as a whole, I restricted the area I was looking at, confining myself to working from certain sections of it, so as to change the context that the shapes and forms were seen in, which in turn changed their meanings. The forms were becoming more removed from the human forms. They appeared to be becoming landscape forms, existing independently as new things.

The angel’s head however, persisted in being perceived as a head, no matter how the context was altered. Regardless of the fact that it was featureless, the shape of the head on the neck was unmistakably referring to a head on a neck, and as such, was influential in the perception of it. The lack of detail seemed to have no bearing on the sentiment contained within it. What conveyed the expression was the general posture. Specifics, in this case, were obviously of no importance. Psychological studies have found that although specific emotions can be perceived from facial expressions, *intensity* of emotion “is better judged through body acts or positions, [Speer (ed)] 1972, p.61]. And according to Arnheim, “nothing we can learn about an
individual thing is of use unless we find generality in the particular”, [1967, p.13]. Gombrich believes this too: “Perception always stands in the need of universals. . .we could not perceive and recognise our fellow creatures if we could not pick out the essential and separate it from the accidental - in whatever language we may want to formulate this distinction”, [1982, p.104].

I wanted to research further the way the visual language of painting and drawing could create these perceptual models that refer to an expression or sentiment contained in a human form that is unspecific; in a way that did not deny the very process of discovery. To do this I turned, for want of a constantly available model, to myself and the convention of the self-portrait to pursue this line of enquiry.
The appearance of things in the world, is not necessarily the way they are. This is sometimes called ‘visual subjectivity’: “the principle of visual subjectivity, which recognises that things may vary in their objective appearances depending on conditions of light and atmosphere and situation and formation of one’s retina, characterises the human receptor as fundamentally singular, enclosed, and only peripherally associated with his fellows”, [Richardson 1971, p.77]. So many variables can affect the way an object appears, that to base assumptions on the way a thing looks is to limit the understanding of that thing, but it can be difficult as Arnheim says: “to distinguish an object from the afflictions of its appearance is an awe-inspiring cognitive achievement”, [1967, p.15].

The ‘snapshot’ has transformed the portrait by turning it into a split-second replica, however it has made us see the problems of ‘likeness’ more clearly than past centuries were able to see it, [Gombrich 1982, p.116]. The painted portrait has a history of conventions and assumptions about how it should look in terms of resemblance to the person depicted. The problem, as I saw it, was to find a way of painting and drawing ‘about’ heads and ‘headness’ in a way that went beyond portraiture, likeness and appearance - “finding the real through external appearances”, as Giacometti puts it, [Sylvester 1980, p.4] - in an effort to develop models that were convincing ways of seeing and understanding the head.

**Catalogue Section 2.**

**The Initial Self Portraits Drawings** (all pencil on paper, 50 x 72)

I made the decision to reject the use of colour, seeing drawing, simply with a pencil on paper, as a way of working that was further removed from the paradigmatic idea of absolute appearance. By this I mean the Western European view of
appearance widely held since the Renaissance. As Richardson says, “even a simple line drawing has already an extremely opaque relation to reality; obviously things are not dead white and covered in long thin marks,” [1971, p.37]. In the initial drawings I made of my head (ten in all), I wanted the features to emerge from marks that did not mimic the appearance of them but that referred to them in a non-illustrative way. Francis Bacon (1909-1991) puts it well when discussing a painting of a head that he had (then) just completed: “...what made the sockets of the eyes, the nose, the mouth were, you analysed them, just forms which had nothing to do with eyes, nose or mouth”, [Sylvester 1975, p.12]. I thought of the mark-making process as drawing in and out of the head, rather than just around it, in an effort to, as Rawson puts it, “create a conviction of reality in our minds in its own special terms,” [1976, p.35]. I also agree with him when he says, “a well developed language of marks can convey far more about what it represents than any mere copy of appearances. Good drawing always goes beyond appearance,” [Rawson 1976, p.17].

As well as attempting to create a head using non-mimetic marks to refer to specific features, keeping in mind the discoveries I had made with the transcriptions (particularly with the pastel drawings of Jacob Wrestling with the Angel that is, that the lack of detail of form seemed to have no bearing on the sentiment contained within it), I began to generalise and make ambiguous certain features so as to make a representation of a head that conveyed a quality of expressiveness that did not rely on specific facial features.
or a specific expression to achieve it. The idea of the gaze began to intrigue me. I discovered that the less illustrative the eye, the less specific and more ambiguously expressive was the sentiment contained in the head, and in the drawing as a whole, total structure. Capra quotes a well-known Zen phrase, which is relevant to this notion of saying more with less, [Rubin 1984] and with less specificity: “the instant you speak about a thing you miss the mark”, [Capra 1975, p.35] By rubbing out the eye (sometimes one, sometimes both) so that there was no conventionally drawn pupil for example I found that the ‘eye’ was made of what was left behind - a palimpsest or a mere trace of pencil marks, and by the same token was able to embody an expressiveness that had not been apparent before.

Queen Nefertiti, c 1360 BC, limestone, h. 500, State Museum, New York. (Janson 1986, p.68).
Paglia, in ‘Sexual Personae” discusses the Nefertiti bust, asking ‘whatever happened to the eye?’” She offers that it was perhaps unnecessary in a model and never inserted, however, she says that “the eye was often chiselled out of statues and paintings of the dead. It was a way of making a hated rival a non-person and extinguishing his or her survival in the afterlife.” [1991 p.67]. Whatever the reason for its absence or its exclusion, it is clear that the second eye is unnecessary. The sentiment contained in it is conveyed just as strongly (perhaps even more so) as if the other eye was there. As Deregowski says “perception of a representational element in a design stimulates search for related elements. Identification of an eye, say, suggests that another eye is to be found in the picture and also that it is (usually) either to the left or to the right of the one already found,” [1984, p.77]. It is not necessary to spell everything out entirely, in iconic terms, for the mind to comprehend the idea or the image. Gregory puts it another way, “if the brain were unable to fill in the gaps and bet on meagre evidence, activity as a whole would come to a halt in the absence of sensory inputs”, [1979, p.75].

**Critical Essay 2. Modigliani**

It was at this point (around November, 1991) that I visited the “Masterpieces from the Guggenheim” exhibition at the Gallery of New South Wales, and saw Modigliani’s Jeanne Hebuterne with Yellow Sweater. This painting reminded me of other work I had seen while overseas, belonging to Modigliani and prompted me to write the critical essay that follows in the appendices (Appendix B).

Modigliani’s work was very relevant for me at this time due to the fact that the eyes in his paintings were often a focal point. With them, Modigliani discovered a new model for conveying expression and sentiment that was unspecific and universal. The words of Giacometti (1901-1966) about the sculptures of the New Hebrides are pertinent to the heads in Modigliani’s paintings, “they have a gaze without having eyes … if I did really model an eye and put in a black pupil, or if I did try to imitate
their brilliance … it’s still an illusion in which you have no great belief,” [Sylvester 1980, p.5]. It was this that I was aiming for (heads that were non-illusionistic, but not perceived as missing something rather, offering a number of convincing ways of seeing and understanding them), in the works I have just described and the drawings that are to follow.

**Catalogue continued**

**Larger Self Portraits (all pencil and acrylic on paper. 72 x 101)**

I approached these drawings with a similar intent as the initial self portraits, which was to create a head, encoded by visual means, that was not mimetic of the appearance of what a head looks like, but one that (despite this and because of this) contained and conveyed sentiment. As Francis Bacon says when discussing the dilemma faced by painters dealing with the human figure, “they just want to make it more and more precise; but of a very ambiguous precision”, [Sylvester 1975, p. 13]. This time, however, instead of relying only on the pencil and the rubber and the surface of the paper to create the drawing, I also used white acrylic paint. This served to further remove the image of the head from the idea of simply copying nature, as I used the paint to work over the features that caused aspects of the head to be illustrative - again predominantly, but not solely, the eyes. The white acrylic paint was also a reminder of the surface of the paper - a reminder that what was being seen was not actually a head but a language of marks that configured to be a representation of a head. The paint I used to flatten out the forms, especially that of the garment covering the upper body, keeping in mind the ways of the Japanese print-makers when
representing garments clothing the human form. It also helped, along with pencil lines that suggested depth, to create a space - a loosely defined interior - for the figure to be situated in.

The different sized paper (doubled) allowed me to work with a larger portion of the body and still keep it at the same scale as the previous drawings, in which the size of the figure was nearly twice life size. This made it possible to work with the idea of the posture of the head on the neck playing an important role in the conveying of expression.

I attempted to work in a similar way with oil paint on specially (commercially) prepared paper (all oil on ‘oil sketch’ paper, 650 x 940). Conscious of the way coloured paint could become mimetic of the ‘look’ of a head, I restricted myself to a limited palette, endeavouring to use the same colours that made up the drawings: the warm white of the paper, the cool white of the acrylic paint, the dark grey of the pencil and the steel grey of the acrylic when painted over the pencil. In some I also introduced a dark purple to add richness to the dark grey. Rather than relying on diagonal lines (as in the drawings) to convey depth and location, the use of colour enabled me to create a space by contrasting colours in blocks in the area around the head.

**Self Portraits - Smaller Figures on Large Paper (all pencil and acrylic on paper. 72 x 101**

Again, the problem with these drawings was to find the ‘real’ in a way that went beyond the appearance of the head (that is, my head). As Giacometti says, ”I think we have such a preconceived idea of what a head is (in painting and sculpture) . . . that it is becoming divorced from the experience of seeing the real thing”, [Sylvester 1980, p.4]. Using the same sized paper as for the above drawings (except one - it was half the size), I reduced the scale of the figure and, using the acrylic paint, made the representation of it more generalised and consistent as an overall form, rather than the head and shoulders of the previous works by painting within the parameters set by the line
contraining the form. The forms, although still absolutely recognisable as figures, were becoming simpler and contained in a space that had an ambiguous depth due to the fact that it was not defined by anything else but the figure. The space and the figure have a sameness, the aesthetic in these drawings being not only the figure, but the totality of the adapted piece of paper. As Carmichael (1931- says, the information of a drawing is contained “dynamically in both the ‘equality’ of the characteristics of the lines and the spaces that they define between them and the existing parameters of the piece of paper”, [1987].

The figures in these drawings had to contain and communicate an expression, not necessarily a specific one, with their posture - at least that was what I wished for them to do. Facial features were still discernible in most of them - some more so than others, but that were made up of non-illustrative marks and ambiguous and expressionless. Gombrich says, “past experiences will colour the way we see a face”, [1982 p.108]. Our learned experiences, what we know about the sentiment expressed by a certain posture - the way the head is held, the stoop of a body - will affect the way the face is perceived. Arnheim says too, “visual knowledge acquired in the past helps not only in detecting the nature of an object or action appearing in the visual field; it also assigns the present object a place in the System of things constituting our total view of the world”, [1967, p.90]. (Although it was written around nine months later, the critical essay in the appendices (Appendix D) is relevant to refer to at this point. It is about an exhibition of Utamaro’s that I saw in Tokyo in November 1992, and discusses in more detail the concept of posture conveying the idea of a painting).
Subtlety I thought, was the answer, I didn’t want to overstate or exaggerate the posture of the depicted figure in order for the figure to embody expressiveness; I didn’t want the figure to be a caricature that conveyed an extreme and obvious expression. Keeping the posture simple, (I had experimented with different, less subtle postures with a drawing I made of twelve heads, taken from different female figures in Muybridge’s famous “Human Body in Motion” [pencil on paper, 50 x 72]), I made the drawings so that the figures represented, and the drawings as a whole would contain and communicate expressiveness and sentiment. The expressiveness contained in the finished drawings had not been entirely predicted at the outset - the figures were not illustrations of a sentiment.

I had the same intent with the paintings on paper that followed (of which I painted six [all oil on ‘oil sketch’ paper, 65 x 94]). The more successful of these were the ones that, like the drawings, contained the representations of the forms that were more generalised and self-contained (the features were barely discernible), relying more so on the iCoflic language of the paint for meaning - the way the paint made the whole image (and acted on the figure, the space and the surface) – rather than just the image itself. Again the
colour of the paint used had a tenuous link with the appearance of a head. The choice of colour was arbitrary, however I imposed the restriction of a limited palette on myself, in most of them using only white and two other colours, so that what I relied on to make the painting was the way the paint behaved - the structure of it, rather than the colour of it.

**Critical Essay 3. John Miller**

It was around this time that I viewed an exhibition by John Miller, the critical essay of which follows in the appendices (Appendix C). This essay is primarily a critical discussion of the paintings included in the exhibition at Girgis and Klym, and the relevance of them to my own work (because of this relevance, Miller became by external supervisor). As an introduction to the essay I briefly discuss the work of Robert Windsor and Caroline Williams, contrasting their approach to painting.

**Catalogue continued**

Even though the outcome had not been predicted, the intent was clear. When I refer to the paintings and drawings containing a figure that conveys an expressiveness that is ambiguous, I do not mean incomprehensible, nor do I mean that I am leaving ‘work’ to the spectator - ie, relying on their imagination to ‘finish off’ the drawing or painting. As Langer says, when discussing the intent of the artist, “it has to be entirely given - what is left to the imagination being implied, not missing, [1953, p.393]. Wollheim too, is another writer who has reasserted the notion that a work of art means exactly what its author intended it to mean and that the work cannot function in the correct way until the viewer is able to perceive that intention, [Bryson 1991, p.25]. Wollheim says that the viewer’s experience must be attuned to the intention of the artist where this includes “the desires, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, emotions, commitments that motivate the artist to paint as he does”, [Wollheim 1987, p.102].

My intention, in the next drawings and paintings that I discuss, was to *imply* features in the forms in a way that was non-specific. That is to say that features were not in any way
missing, but intimated. It has been proposed that the equipment needed for interpretation of something, that is, for us to perceive something, involves having practical experience and being familiar with objects depicted, as well as having a familiarity with specific themes and concepts that the work is exploring, [Panofsky 1962]. This relates to Wollheim’s notion of a spectator needing to understand the artist’s intent before the painting or drawing can be fully appreciated, as well as the idea of our thoughts influencing what we see (as well as vice-versa). As Watzlawick notes, “the meaning we get depends on the questions we ask”, [1991, p.201].

Studies by Deregowski show that people of most cultures recognise and accept (and in a lot of cases use) a drawing of a ‘stick figure’ as being a form of ‘abbreviation’ for a human figure. He says, “no stick figure has ever been seen, yet stick drawings are readily acceptable forms of representations, even to relatively unsophisticated perceivers who have never encountered a drawing before, and to young children”, [1984, p.25]. Representations of human forms are recognisable as being such because our visual knowledge (not simply of iconic imagery) is so entrenched with concepts of the human form. We tend to project, from our own experience, life and expression onto an image of the human form and supplement what is not actually there, [Gombrich 1982].

Self Portraits - Taller Forms on Large Paper (all pencil and acrylic on paper, 72 x 101)
In these works, in both the paintings (oil on ‘oil sketch’ paper, 65 x 94) and the drawings, the features are implied by the entire form, by the posture of the figure, the shape and position of the head, because of what we know; that is, our familiarity with
the human figure, and representations of it. However the significance of the drawings and paintings is not just contained in that which is represented. Inseparable from the form is the process involved in reaching the final image, the marks and the acrylic paint in the case of the drawings, and the way the white form defines the space and the surface of the paper and its parameters. Likewise in the paintings, the line and the colour that separates the form from the space around it, the ‘equality’ of the form and the space, the surface of the paper and the way the paint behaves on it and the scale of the form in relation to the dimensions; the relationship between all of these elements is the important and significant thing that carries the meaning. Not one element can be singled out at the expense of another, as being the signifier of significance.

At this point in my program I wanted to discover further ways in which the idea of perceptual space is created on a flat surface, other than having the figure define it. Because of my interest in the Japanese wood-block prints, I turned to the Japanese model of non-perspectival space and the way that this interacts with forms and the surface to create an iconic image that, although referential and alluding to space was not creating a counterfeit illusion of space - a space that was entirely perceptual and self-Contained, with its meaning embodied in the relationship between these elements.
Part 3 - The Japanese Model of Space. The Wall, not the Window

My line of enquiry had been, as discussed in Parts 1 and 2, the dynamic interaction between the pictorial conventions of perceptual space, the forms and the surface of a painting or drawing. Artworks are not made up of components. As McGilchrist points out “works of art affect us wholly, and with the whole of themselves, ‘at once”, [1982, p.35]

Because of my interest in the way that the human form was defined by the Japanese wood-block printers, I turned to the Japanese print again, this time because I found their way of depicting space in a non-perspectival way a convincing model, one that was not illusionistic in the same sense as the Renaissance model of creating a fixed space, but one that was convincing in that one instance - a space that was contained within the print and nowhere else. As Langer says, “being only visual, this space has no continuity with the space in which we live; it is limited by the frame (or incongruous other things that cut it off) the created virtual space is entirely self-contained and independent”, [1953, p.72].

Catalogue Section 3
Self Portrait in Fan Shape (pencil and acrylic on paper, 72 x 101)
Taking the fan shape that is sometimes used by the Japanese artists (and since by Western artists, for example Gauguin), I carried on with the idea of the generalised human figure, but this time within a space that belonged entirely to the drawing. As with the previous self portraits, the space is defined (in most cases) by the figure, but only, in this case, the space that is contained inside the fan shape. Because of the fan shape the space appears to bend but then the figure appears to belong to a space that is not warped, so a contradiction of perception occurs. This space is also not the only space in the drawing.
The fan shape is within a border or a frame that is, in turn, within the parameters of the paper. This border reasserts the surface of the papery and does not deny that the space is a constructed one and one that is not illusionistic (hence the title of Part 3 - . . . “the wall not the window”). It is, as Langer points out “an entirely visual affair . . . the harmonious organised space in a picture is not experiential space, known by sight and touch, by free motion and restraint, far and near sounds, or voices lost or re-echoed”, [1953, p.72].

Self Portrait in Fan Shape

I painted with the same intent for three works on masonite boards (all oil on masonite, 80 x 122). I worked with the fan shape, the generalised human form and the ‘border’, this time including small paintings of squares within the fan shape so as to add a further contradiction of space, by maintaining the surface of the masonite board. This ‘device’ was a pictorial convention that I ‘borrowed’ from the wood-block prints. The signature stamps of the Japanese printers are often contained within a shape (mostly a square, circle or rectangle) that as well as fulfilling its role as a distinguishing mark, serves as a reminder of the surface.

The Door Panel Paintings
I had been painting on a hard surface most of the time (starting with the self-portraits on paper) and found that it suited my way of working, that is with oil paint thinned right down so as to be just a wash that I could layer over other paint or rub back. This helped with the idea of the emphasis of the surface. I wanted to use a tall and thin format for my next paintings, mainly because of the elegance of the shape (and the fact these
Dimensions are popular with some Japanese artists - the shape is known as ‘hashira-e’

Because the texture of the flat surface was significant I prepared doors to work on, sealing them with shellac and priming them with gesso. This preparation was an important part of the process because of the thin consistency of the paint that would go over the top of it. In between each coat of gesso (about twelve) in which the brushstrokes only went across the width of the door, I sanded the surface back using an electric sander until almost smooth so that it had the texture of the horizontal brushstrokes as well as the natural vertical texture of the wood grain - similar to canvas but more delicate.

**Door Panels - 1 and 2**

With these panels (both oil and acrylic on door blanks, 82 x 204), as well as the ones that followed, I was able to continue to work with the idea of the interaction between the space, the forms and the surface of the painting. I wanted to make the painting work using different elements and images and different spaces - ones that nevertheless interacted with each other and made sense within the whole structure of the painting. The figures in both of these panels, I wanted to be clothed so that I could work with the idea of suggesting a form underneath a shape that was flat and unmodelled. To do this I worked from drawings that I had done of a model, dressed sometimes in a kimono (more for the shape of it than because of its link with Japan) as in **Panel 1**, and sometimes as in **Panel 2** in a long fitted dress.

**Panel 1** is made up, iconically, of a representation of a figure situated in an ambiguous space that is defined only by the figure and the diagonal line that cuts off the bottom of the figure. The bottom of the painting within the border, I wanted to reflect the image, so that it would appear to be on perhaps a screen or a wall, and not be an illusion of a figure in a space. It also includes three squares that each contain a transcription of a print by Jim Dine (1935 -), two smaller squares that contain
images of channel markers in Corio Bay and a painted rectangle (the channel markers of Corio Bay are very precious to me. My house has a view of the bay, and during the day they are little black shapes that dot the horizon line; at night they flash red and green and define the horizon. The form of them and the idea of them I find beautiful, and I wanted to include them). All of these iconic elements are contained within a gold border that is intended to emphasise the surface of the panel and the artifice of the whole image. My intent was that the squares would do this too, while at the same time being self-contained images that embraced their own space and forms.

The figure in this panel continues the exploration of the idea of the non-specific figure, developed in the work discussed in Parts 1 and 2. This time however the figure is more obviously clothed (it is loosely taken from a drawing of a clothed model in a ‘life-drawing’ situation). I wanted the form of the figure to come from shape and colour only, not from modelling or illustration of form.

As in many Japanese prints and paintings (see illustrated examples in the Utamaro essay in the appendices) the figure in this panel belongs to a space that it defines. The space is also helped to be defined by the diagonal line that ‘severs’ the figure. The squares above the figure - the images of skulls, the squares beside the figure - the channel markers - and the rectangle on the other side of the figure, contradict this space that is defined by the figure and line by reasserting the surface, (incidentally, these images are not intended to mean anything in relation to the figure or to each other. In other words the images of the skulls above the figure, for example, are not symbolic of death). These other elements - the squares etc. - could also be images that are painted on the ‘wall’ behind the figure. The space, or our perception of it, oscillates between being on one plane and another. As Richardson says of Manet’s Olympia (1863), the paint, colours, and surface became important - they “revealed the obvious”. In doing that, according to Richardson, he has done far more besides, he has insisted on the “autonomy of the picture as a
thing Independent of the external world”, [1971 p.9]. That was also my intention

The intent was much the same in Panel 2 that is to bring together separate elements, containing different and disparate images and spaces, in the one painting that ‘insisted on the autonomy of the picture’. The representation of the figure in this panel is directly taken from a drawing of a model wearing, as I mentioned earlier, a fitted dress - the shape of which is obviously revealing of the form underneath, The figure is contained within a shape itself (a rectangle) so as not to define the entire space of the whole panel, but to just be an element of the panel, having an equality with the two rectangles above it. But as the colour of the rectangle it is contained in is a similar colour, only more opaque and solid, as the area around it - the original surface of the panel - it could still belong to the space of the whole panel simultaneously.

The images of heads in the two rectangles are transcriptions of Van Eyck’s The Man with the Red Turban (1433). I chose this image to study because it is one that has always impressed me, (I have only seen it in reproduction) with the richness of colour, simplicity of composition, and the calmness of the man depicted. I also wanted to work further with the idea of the shape of a cloth or garment revealing the form underneath, that is underneath the turban, in a way that was not
illustrative of the form but suggestive of it (as I had done with the clothed figure in the same panel). These shapes also served simply as coloured rectangles that change the space that the figure in the shape below them had defined.


**Field Studies**  
**Three weeks in Japan**  
At this stage in my program, I felt I needed to research the Japanese Ukiyo-e wood-block prints (pictures of a floating world) in more depth, and have a first hand look at the work and the ideas contained in them so I spent three weeks in Japan in November 1992, visiting museums, temples and galleries in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka.
When the Japanese ports were opened to Europe in the nineteenth century, the Ukiyo-e prints gave the western world, according to Shore, a “glimpse of Japanese life” and became, with their “simplicity of line and large flat areas of colour, a major influence on the more innovative European painters”, [Shore 1980, p.6]. The influence of Japanese art on western painters is known as ‘Japonisme’. This is not to be confused with ‘Japonaiserie’ which is the western interest in the exotic, decorative, or fantastic qualities of Japanese art for their novelty value [Chisaburo (Ed) 1980, p.144]. Japonisme is not a style. According to Wichmann, “it does not lend itself to being used as a concept in place of a style; and it cannot be pinned down to a specific period” [1981, p.7]. It is rather, the influence of the (then) new ways of seeing the world that the Ukiyo-e prints, and then the Japanese paintings provided. It caused a “decisive re-evaluation” in the ways western painters had been looking at the world, [Wichmann 1981, p.23].

The influence of Japanese art was not restricted to just ‘simplicity of line and large flat areas of colour’ but was also manifest in the other artistic ‘devices’ that provided unfamiliar solutions to ways of seeing and representing space and forms and how they relate to the apparent world. (As Chisaburo cautions: “it is often very difficult to determine in what respect and how far Japanese influence extended”, [1980, p.9] and...“it is sometimes difficult to be persuaded of a Japanese source when an equally good and more accessible European one is at hand”, [1980, p.195]. However, as Henry Moore (1898-1986) says, “I suppose everything which one appreciates must have some influence even though one isn’t (always) aware of it”, [Chisaburo (Ed) 1976, p.10]).

Below is a list of these artistic devices, that provided new solutions for visual representations in the nineteenth century, and are still able to be ‘extracted’ or deconstructed and used as conventions of depiction, combined with Western pictorial
conventions, and by doing so, creating alternate perceptual models.

- **diagonal composition** - where the diagonal slants not only lead the eye into the distance but set up a continual interplay of forces between space and surface;
- **composite formats** - that is the development of the grouping together of different formats which were referred to as ‘the contest of framed pictures’, - a way of making a composition in which the most disparate pictorial forms such as the circle, oval, fan-shape, double circle, gourd shape and the more usual rectangle and square are used in conjunction - one format within another;
- **trellis and grille** - which was the structure of sliding walls and fences that was used as “veil-like spatial blocking devices” to create different pictorial planes, [Wichman 1981, p.233];
- **truncated objects and oblique angles** - this was the use of the inclusion of a part of an object, the rest of which was supposedly outside the pictorial space. This part of an object made a simple shape that although referred to, say, a boat, could have been seen as just a shape of colour on its own resulting in, according to Wichmann, the “exaggerated leaping viewpoint - the eye jumping from one thing to another, from one plane to another”, [1981, p.243]; and
- **the silhouette** - In his book “Kunst and Handwerk in Japan” Justus Brinkmann says, “windows like ours do not exist in the Japanese house. Their place is taken by translucent white paper which is stuck onto a wooden lattice on the outside of the outer sliding partitions. When, in the evening, the people moving around inside the house by lamplight throw their shadows onto the partitions, passers-by are provided with all sorts of shadow-play. The painters used such shadow pictures”, [Wichman 1981, p.259].

The importance of the Japanese model of reality was not only manifest in the prints and paintings housed in museums and galleries, but in the whole Japanese ‘experience’. In Kyoto
especially, (the old capital) which was spared from the bombs in World War II, the Japanese convention is evident in the architecture, the gardens and in the more than 1000 temples that house many of the countries greatest artworks. (Some, as in the Imperial Palace can only be gained access to after creeping across ‘nightingale’ floors, which were supposed to warn the royalties of intruders). Because of the whole experience I was able to see more clearly the importance of these conventions, and the importance of the Japanese model of visually representing reality. The contribution of this model with its conventions was not exhausted. The ideas in much of the work still looked fresh and innovative, and the ‘devices’ still valid solutions, two to three hundred years later; as in works such as Tagasode (Whose Sleeves?) (Anonymous, 17th century), from the Idemitsu Museum in Tokyo, which is a pair of six-fold screens, colour on gold paper. This work was also part of an exhibition that travelled to Australia in 1982-3 called “Japan - Masterpieces from the Idemitsu Collection”. According to the catalogue that accompanied this exhibition, this type of screen that is depicted was a specific category of early Edo (17th century Tokyo) painting that was very popular throughout Japan.
“They invariably contain references to the woman who wore the kimono in the form of motifs such as the amulet, purse (seen hanging from the stand in the top screen), or an incense set that would suggest a fragrance enjoyed by the woman”, [Capon 1982, p.50].

This is a good example because it shows just how important the surface is. The gold paper constantly reminds the viewer of the flatness of the work, by asserting the surface, as well as, at the same time, being seen as depicting space around the screens and the small table. (The gold also gives the work a certain preciousness and beauty). The space is shallow but ambiguous, defined only by the diagonal lines of the red table that hold instruments for an incense smelling game, the coop and, in the top screen, in the receding lines of the clothes stand as it disappears off the edge of the panel.

The diagonal lines of the table (especially) do not recede towards a vanishing point in the same way as it would in a traditionally western depiction of a table in space, but rather they describe a trapezium, which, if the table was a ‘real’ object would be misshapen. Also, we see this table as if from slightly above, whereas the kimonos, which are represented simply as flat shapes of unmodelled, patterned colour, and the stand in the bottom screen are shown from the front. This makes for two spaces and viewing angles within the one structure. However it is a convincing depiction of self-contained space nevertheless. It is, as Langer would say, a total visual field. She talks about the space contained in paintings generally, but it is relevant to quote her here – in this work is created “a single, self-contained, perceptual space, that seems to confront us as naturally as the scene before our eyes when we open them on the actual world”, [Langer 1953, p.86].
Catalogue continued

The paintings and drawings that I made on my return from Japan were much more informed about the Japanese model, and they reflect and are influenced by the artworks that I saw there.

Door panels – 3, 4, 5 and 6 (all oil and acrylic on door blanks. 82 x 204)

To create pictorial space in each of these panels (except Panel 6) I used geometric shapes to ‘illustrate’ space; shapes that relied on diagonal lines to create an illusion of space but not illusionistic shapes on their own. Away from the created situation these shapes would be only shapes. Because the diagonal lines of the screen-like shapes do not recede in the Renaissance way of depicting space - the fixed perspective, they remain faithful to the Japanese model of illusion and the perception of space. They do not rely on a fixed point of viewing. In these panels I was aiming for, as Roger Fry puts it, “an autonomous, formed space”, [Langer 1953, p.15]. He goes on to say, “the normal use of vision . . . is suspended by the circumstances that we know this space to be virtual, and neither believe nor disbelieve in the existence of objects in it. So we see it as a pure perceptual form, created and articulated by all the visible elements in it”, [p.15].

The major figures in these panels are all taken from drawings done from a clothed model, as were the figures in Panels 1 and 2. In the panels, as in the drawings, the idea of these figures was to not only add a human presence to the paintings, and embody the work with the same sense of expressiveness contained in the figure, but for them to be a shape on the surface. I wanted the garments to be simple flat shapes of unmodelled colour that somehow suggested form contained
underneath, painted thinly so that the texture of the panel would not be denied, and therefore the surface would be emphasised.

The use of the gold paint emphasised the surface also. In Panels 3 and 5, I used the gold colour to paint rectangular shapes over the diagonal shapes of the ‘screens’. This distorted somewhat the perceived space, by being a reminder that the shapes were just shapes and not illusionary objects. The images contained in the gold shapes in Panels 3, 4 and 5 are transcriptions of my own drawings made in life-drawing situation (Panel 5) and drawings made from images contained in Muybridge’s “the Human Body in Motion” [1955].

Not only are they reminders of the surface, but reminders of a human presence in the paintings; also adding to the paintings a notion of time, through the sequential nature of the images.

**Door Panels - 7 and 8**

Both panels, like the preceding six, contain the human figure. This time however, the figure used is my own. Instead of working from a drawing of a model, I made the paintings using drawings of myself as subject matter (both drawings are pencil on paper, 72 x 202,). Because of the nature of the self-portrait, that is, looking at oneself in the mirror to make (in this case) the drawing, it usually appears that the figure is looking out at the viewer. This was something I had explored in the work discussed in
Part 2, that is, dealing with unspecific facial features, especially the eyes and the ‘gaze’ that comes from them. Like the later self-portraits the features of the face are implied by what we know and how we know to ‘read’ the entire form - the posture of the figure and the shape and the position of the head. And like the previous panels, the form of the body is suggested by the simple flat shape of the garment that clothes the figure.

Again, the figures define the space. Because the size of the figures has been enlarged (so as to make the garment shape more prominent) the space created by the presence of the figure appears to be the predominant one. The flatness of the figures however, especially in Panel 8, make them seem that they could in fact be painted on the screen-like shape behind them rather than in their own space. This contradiction of the space in turn causes a perceptual conflict with the screen shape. It then becomes simply a painted diagonal shape rather than a depiction of a kind of screen that creates another space. The content of the two panels then, like the preceding panels, becomes just as much about our perception of illusion - the way the space and the form oscillate between the picture plane and the figure field, as it is about the resulting imagery.
**Summation**

My penultimate research was the paintings and drawings made prior to the field trip to Japan. It was in this research that I formulated my methodology, and formed the ‘reconstructivist’ approach which was involved in understanding the visual language structures it embodies, and reconstructing new ways of seeing things in the world (particularly the human form and the perception of space). These paintings and drawings successfully demonstrate my understanding of the visual language as being an expressive dynamic interaction between the surface of an artwork, the perceptual space alluded to, and the forms contained in it. The expressiveness and the significance of these paintings and drawings come from not only the human figure depicted in them (although these figures, and I have discussed, are expressive and that was intended) but also from the visual language structures.

Studying the prints and paintings in Japan confirmed that what I was looking at were not styles but different language structures. The artworks I made on my return are not then in a Japanese style, nor are they a form of Japonisme, but rather an exploration of this structure, and with it, a deconstruction and then a reconstruction of Japanese conventions of pictorialism, combined with elements of my own Western tradition.

I wanted these culminating artworks to have the same kind of expressiveness that was embodied in so much of the work I saw in Japan, especially those that contained the human figure, as for example, in the wood-block prints discussed in the essay on Utamaro: so much expressiveness achieved in a minimalist way.

These final six panels, along with the drawings made at the same time, demonstrate this expressiveness achieved in a minimal way, with their refined forms that suggest sentiment through posture and slight gesture rather than expression, colours (in the panels) rubbed back into the texture of the wood,
until the surface is as expressive as that depicted upon it, and the relationship between these elements.

The colours in these panels are important. The rubbed-back reds, golds, and ochres were intended to refer to the slightly faded appearance of the century old ukiyo-e prints. However, being an Australian painter it is impossible for Aboriginal culture not to be absorbed into my perception. I find that as well, the colours allude to traditional Aboriginal hues. I have not had the opportunity to deal with this newly discovered level of meaning within my work. It has however, opened up the possibility for extended research. Neither have I had the opportunity to deal with further levels of meaning that I am aware that other viewers will perceive in my drawings and paintings.

I ask that my thesis be viewed not as a definitive solution to a thesis topic but as a series of solutions that demonstrate an understanding of visual language, its themes, allusions and non-verbal language structures, which are essential tools in the painting of Australian art works in the future.
Appendix A

Critical Essay - Gareth Sansom
Gareth Sansom (1939- ) represented Australia in the 1991 Indian Triennale. A selection of the work shown in India makes up part of the work currently on show at the Ian Potter Gallery, Melbourne University, (August 1991).

Mostly painted in New Delhi about New Delhi, where the artist lived for several months prior to the Triennale, it is an intensely personal show - one that can be considered within two categories: a show that stands alone as being Sansom’s latest work, as well as an exhibition that has travelled from its originally intended viewing place to the country which it represented in an international triennale.

Within the first category, this show is yet another voyage into Sansom’s inner-self, his history, dreams, sexuality and fantasies. I say ‘yet another’ because since Sansom was a young painter his work has been diaristic and self referential. He has been ‘revealing’ himself since 1965 when, in Sansom’s first review, Bernard Smith called his paintings depicting paederasts and homosexuals and their social and sexual lives, “acts of courage”, [Smith 1965]. And again in 1975 Graeme Sturgeon calls Sansom’s paintings his “private world” into which we are admitted by the artist, “but in which we rapidly become voyeurs, gripped by the ghastly fascination of it all, titillated by the overt hints of aberrant sexuality”, [Sturgeon 1975]. In a review of his work in 1982, Robert Rooney agrees that the imagery contained in Sansom’s work is primarily about himself and “his kinks, obsessions and mock sadistic tendencies”, [Rooney 1982].

So with this exhibition containing thirty watercolours and fourteen paintings using predominantly oil and enamel on canvas, we are once again confronted with Sansom and his soul-baring and like Sturgeon in 1975, I was “titillated” and intrigued by the
diaristic content of the works. It is hard not to be. As Terence Maloon says in the catalogue, “with extraordinary honesty, Sansom’s art expresses a grown man’s anxiety about maintaining an identity and keeping up appearances”, [Maloon 1991, p.13]. In *Ageing* for example – one of the larger paintings in the show, Sansom has placed a photo of himself with a naked girl (Sansom is clothed) on a painted yellow ground, surrounded by a volume of written words in green paint that record the painter’s dilemma of having to face reaching fifty, [Maloon p.13]. He writes such phrases as “the older you get the more conscious you begin to get of personal defects”, and so on, going on to describe these defects. He explains his reasoning on the canvas-

“So here I am attempting to put something together with words and paint and photographs which might in some way conjure up some of the emotions I feel when I look back at my life to date
All Sansom manages to conjure up is a sense of boredom of the self-indulgent subject matter. He proves that titillation, self-expression and an intrigue of the subject matter ultimately does not make for good painting. Once the impact of the subject matter has ebbed, these paintings on canvas and the watercolours of Sansom’s have not a great deal to offer. In the words of Matisse, “a work of art must carry within itself its complete significance and impose that upon a beholder even before he recognises the subject matter”, [Flann (ed) 1973, p.36]. Even Sansom himself said, in interview with Geoff Lowe in the accompanying catalogue, “I have always wanted to prove to myself and possibly to the public that the first thing, the most important thing to me, is that I am a painter who enjoys paint”, [Lowe 1991, p.23].

Apart from perhaps a couple of exceptions such as *Flesh to Flesh to Flesh* there is no evidence of a painter proving that he loves his chosen medium and deals with the language of it above all
else. *Flesh to Flesh to Flesh* (oil and enamel on canvas) does validate Sansom’s ideas on painting, as told to Graeme Sturgeon,

“*its formal, structural resolution is the way the picture ends for me, irrespective of whether its turned out to be more figurative or less figurative, or whether its got religious, or humorous, or ironic overtones. What’s most important is whether I can rest aesthetically with how the thing has evolved and I’ll keep repainting it, if I’m not happy with how it looks*”, [Maloon 1991, p.13].

The meaning of *Flesh to Flesh to Flesh* although containing ten generalised human figures linked together by the penises with a black dotted line, is in the whole structure, and not just the imagery. It is contained in the shapes and the placement of the figures and the tension between them, the strong yellow forms on the red-brown ground and the flatness of the paint. No other paintings in this exhibition carry within themselves that “complete significance” that Matisse speaks of.

Another point I would like to raise is the appropriateness of this group of works representing Australia in the Indian Triennale. By doing this I am not questioning Sansom’s suitability - only this selection of work.

One only had to see Sansom’s exhibition at the same gallery in 1986 (entitled “Paintings 1956 - 1986”) to know that Sansom is an important figure, both in Australian art and internationally. The bulk of this 1986 show was strong. All subject matter aside, however, it was an exhibition that showed an artist in command of his medium, dealing with the visual language of painting.

This present selection of works does not do justice to Sansom nor to the country being represented. Granted the work was mainly about Delhi and would have therefore had superficial appeal in that city, but perhaps we would have been better represented by another selection from Sansom or from a different artist altogether.
At the time of viewing these works, I was concerned with the process of painting and drawing, rather than the results. I had chosen the transcription as a way to be freed from choosing subject matter. Once released from the (self-imposed) restraints of picture-making I could concentrate on working out where the aesthetic lay within the works I was transcribing. I was endeavouring to concentrate on what I was actually painting about - not figures in some kind of space (all of the paintings I transcribed were figurative) but making a painting of the picture plane - the shapes, forms and colours on a flat surface that configured to be something our minds recognised within the figure field. Seeing Sansom’s work was timely as I felt he had failed to show the importance of the process rather than the resulting imagery.
Appendix B

Critical Essay - Modigliani

“In the greatest art, one is always aware of things that cannot be said, of the contradiction between expression and the presence of the inexpressible”, [Sontag 1961, p.36].

These words of Susan Sontag are very pertinent when looking at the works of Modigliani (1884-1920), specifically his heads and portraits and the ‘look’ they have, that is, the lack of illustrated eyes with pupils and directional and specific glances. The eyes are, as Carol Mann says in her detailed biography of Modigliani’s short life, “a focal point, sometimes simultaneously open and shut, at times blank, yet hypnotic, frequently both”, [Mann 1980, p.100]. It is this ‘blankness’ (although I tend to think that the word ‘blank’ is inappropriate here - it suggests a ‘dullness’ which these portraits and heads never are) this non-specific way of painting eyes, that gives the heads their power.

In this essay I would like to refer directly to three works I have had the opportunity of seeing - Jeanne Hebuterne with Yellow Sweater (1918), at the ‘Masterpieces from the Guggenheim’ Exhibition at the Gallery of N.S.W. in November 1991; Lunia Czechowska with a Fan (1919), at the George Pompidou Centre in Paris in January 1989; and Head a sculpture made in 1911-12 that I saw on numerous visits to the Tate Gallery in London during 1988 and 1989.

Modigliani’s portraits are, as the word suggests, depictions of specific people, made even more specific and unchallengeable by the fact that the titles of the paintings are the names of the persons depicted. For example, Jeanne Hebuterne with Yellow Sweater. The title could not be more directive and unambiguous. However, for all that, I do not get the impression that I am seeing Jeanne Hebuterne, as she was on a day in 1918. This

painting is about her, not an equivalent to a snapshot capturing a split-second likeness.

The simplified shapes, the thin, scratchy surface seemingly painted over with a dry brush, the vivid colours and flat forms that give such volume, the elegant shape of the neck and head all contribute to this painting’s aesthetic, that is, that this painting is like Jeanne Hebuterne. The aesthetic, or meaning of the painting lies in the relationship between all these elements.

Modigliani manages to capture a gaze without giving the face in the painting conventional eyes. The non-specificity of the eyes gives the face, the head, the body a changeable expression - one
that can’t be pinned down because really, when one tries to name it - its gone, and been replaced by something else. “The real peculiarity of his figurative style is that it manages to be both precise and ungraspable”, [Hughes 1990, p.318]. These are words that Robert Hughes has written of Francis Bacon, but they also aptly describe the way Modigliani works. About his own ‘style’ Modigliani says, “the efficacity and necessity of a style is in that it separates the idea from its creator leaving room for all that cannot and should not be expressed and style is the only vocabulary that can bring out this idea”, [Mann, p.21].


In Lunia Czechowska with a Fan, again, the strong shapes of vivid colour that make up the yellow dress, the red walls, the arms,
the poised shoulders and neck, the elongated face with its pointed chin, make for a very powerful painting. The forms are so simple but so dynamic. Compositionally, this is a very strong painting. But what makes it great is the expression, the sentiment that is contained in the face with those unspecific eyes. One gets the feeling that this painting could not have had a directional gaze or it would have lost its strength. This painting has, as Susan Sontag puts it, “a sense of inevitability”, [Sontag p.33].

Because of these eyes the sentiment expressed is again ungraspable. One can look for clues in the mouth, the tilt of the head, the slope of shoulders, but it really doesn’t help. That stare isn’t blank - somehow it is a lot of things at once, but contained, and not easily categorised. And as I said with the portrait of Jeanne Hebuterne, the minute one tries to categorise it, it has disappeared. Anyway, as Susan Sontag says, in good art, “there is always a directness that entirely frees us from the itch to interpret… to interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the work”, [Sontag p.11].

When one sees Head Modigliani’s sculpture in the Tate Gallery, it becomes clear where the ungraspable and unspecific quality of expression in his paintings is derived. This head with the elongated head on the thin column for a neck is
beautiful in its simplicity and timelessness. Because it is unlocated in time or event or sentiment it takes on a quality of universality. Carol Mann says of his sculptures, “these heads are not portraits, perhaps neither men nor women, (perhaps both)...
The basic repertoire is voluntarily limited to the extreme but the range of expression is infinite”, (my. emphasis), [Mann, p.60].

At present I am examining through my work with the head, this concept of dynamism precluding interpretation. Therefore Modigliani’s works are pertinent to me at this time. I am striving to achieve this same sense of universality, unlocated in time, sentiment or event, by working with heads with non-specific features - essentially the eyes. I am in the process of discovering whether absolving the face of eyes altogether, by getting rid of them rather than not drawing them at all, can give a drawn or a painted face a gaze without having eyes. Like Modigliani, I am striving for the “contradiction between expression and the presence of the inexpressible.”
Appendix C

Critical Essay – John Miller

in the “The Age” today, Christopher Heathcote spoke of the worth, or lack of, of contemporary painting. “What you see all too often these days is many artists choosing simply to illustrate trends in recent theory...”, [Heathcote May, 1992]. From what has been on show in the galleries recently, Heathcote’s description is apt. Two exhibitions that exemplify his concerns are Robert Windsor’s (1955- ) recent paintings currently on show at Deakin University Gallery, and Caroline Williams’ (1945- ) “Men”, that was on show at the Ian Potter Gallery, Melbourne University in March 1992.

Windsor, Serious Painting. 1991, oil on canvas, 182 x 152, coll. of artist. (Robert Windsor, Cat. 1992, p.10)
According to the essay in the catalogue by Peter Timms, Windsor’s work is probably about Post-Modernism. “Each of the works in this exhibition is, either directly or indirectly, an accumulation of responses to other works of art, and these responses are characterised by a kind of blankness. In this respect they might loosely be characterised as Post-Modern”, [Timms 1992].

Velasquez, Las Meninas, 1656, oil on canvas, 318 x 276, Musee del Prado, Madrid. (Velasquez, Cat. 1989, p.20).

Not even the theorists are able to agree on the characteristics encompassed by Post-Modernism. “Leading producers of the discourse such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Charles Jencks offer definitions which are mutually inconsistent, internally contradictory and/or hopelessly vague”, [Callinicos 1989, p.2]. Charles Jencks defines Post-Modernism as “fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any traditions with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence”, [Jencks 1986, p.7]. Lyotard believes the main thrust of this theoretical model to be “a tendency within modernism characterised by its refusal to mourn and indeed its
willingness to celebrate our inability to experience reality as an ordered and integral totality”, [Callinicos, p.18].

Peter Timms’ “blankness” is a new definition, but nevertheless manages to describe Windsor’s paintings. Devoid of meaning is another way. Meaning is attributed to the works only by the supporting texts in the catalogue. For example, we are told that Serious Painting, one of the geometrical abstracts, is based on a mathematical analysis of part of Velasquez’ Las Meninas. In actual fact, it is a geometric painting, with no more meaning than what can be ascertained by looking at the work. A large red square is contained on a white ground. Over these two figure fields are laid four small squares thereby changing the space again. What you see, as Peter Timms himself puts it, is what you get. This painting does not justify the importance placed on it by the meaning that is concealed from the viewer in the painting but described in the catalogue.

The paintings that make up Caroline Williams’ “Men”, we are told by Helen McDonald in the Catalogue, are the “the incongruity and embarrassment of men” in the wild and uncultivated landscapes of Australia, [McDonald 1992, p.2]. Apparently the works “resonate with satirical allusions to art history, religion, the class system and patriarchy”, [McDonald p.2]. Even though McDonald can’t quite decide whether the works are Post-Modern or not - “this is a matter for debate”, [McDonald p.8], she definitely feels that through these works “Williams finds her voice as a feminist”, [McDonald p.6]. By presenting males in traditionally female roles and making them the objects of the male spectator’s gaze, she is supposed to have exposed the tradition for what it is - an art for the white, male, European beholder. Like Windsor’s work, these paintings do not have their own value when separated from the text. What Martin Gayford calls “the moral and aesthetic sphere” has disappeared, [Gayford 1992].

Surely, as Robert Hughes says, the value of a painting “rises from deep in the work itself - from its vitality, its intrinsic
qualities, its addresses to the senses, intellect and imagination (and) from the very uses it makes of the concrete body of tradition”, [Hughes 1990, P.376]. Painting must go beyond relativism and taste. A work’s quality must be “aesthetically, intellectually, spiritually bigger than one’s puny tastes and opinions”, [Gayford].

In John Miller’s exhibition at Girgis and Klym (in April, 1992), the aesthetic sphere was still intact, and the relevance and meaning of the paintings was actually in the work itself, not simply in accompanying texts, theories or titles. As Christopher Heathcote says in his critique on Miller, he has “chosen a creative independence by detaching (himself) from the normal ebb and flow of artistic style or theory”, [Heathcote April, 1992]. Miller (1951-) is not ignorant of these theories, he simply finds some of the ideas transient and perhaps better written about. He has said that his language is the visual language, [Miller, May 5, 1992]. This is obvious in his work.

The exhibition contained twenty-four paintings in small sets of series - eight standing female figures, three standing male figures, four abstracted head series, but what made the most impact were the seven paintings of heads - six in a series and one separated on a wall of its own. Looking at these works I felt that Miller was confronting similar problems as myself, in working with the figure, especially the head which is so loaded pictorially with historical information. These problems include going beyond verisimilitude, portraiture, and specificity within the painted head.

Six glowing heads emerging out of rich dark paint, (and one of a pale blue/green ground) the form being made up of paint taken away, rather than added. Painted on boards that are gessoed a number of times then sanded back so that the surface is like glass, Miller builds up sometimes five layers of colours, to make his black ground. The colours in the head are a result of the colours in this ground as it is taken back to the original board (the lighter areas are the thinner areas) using what Heathcote
Miller calls "'good marks'. . . his brushstrokes are lovingly painted, precisely rendered, and fastidiously textured", [Heathcote April, 1992]. It was through this "newly discovered technique", [Miller, May 15, 1992] that Miller rediscovered the head - previously he had painted only the whole figure in this way.

Because of this way of painting, the viewer is made aware of the surface which is very important to Miller. He believes it should be attractive from all angles, as an entity in itself, besides just forming the image. It should not simply be a front-on thing. The way the head is painted does not differ from the treatment of the ground, in fact it comes out of the dark ground. In this respect space and form seem to merge.

Miller said, “if at all possible I try and avoid saying something too specific”, [Miller, May 15, 1992]. As a result these painted
heads are somewhat featureless in the conventional sense. The painting is left open (he wants to give the spectator something to do) to give the spectator options. The paintings rely on the viewer to supply the necessary information, seeing a nose for example, due to a chance mark. (Miller leaves a lot of his marks to chance or “serendipity”). He believes that every mark reacts to another and has the ability to totally redefine the work.

Changes in tone also provide a key to the features, relying as they do on chiaroscuro for form and placement in the totality of the head. Because of this lack of specificity in the features and the total form, these paintings do not appear to be portraits of anyone. Certainly the titles do not provide a clue - Diamond Head No.1, and so on. According to Miller a model was not used, he merely relied on memory (as he did with the standing figure series). He wanted to define the face but didn’t want “to get a character out of it”, [Miller, May 15, 1992]. Therefore the paintings go beyond mere verisimilitude or representation. They have an anonymous air about them, they are even a bit lifeless (Miller admits the underlying undercurrent is death) but this does not in any way detract from the power contained in the work. To remind the viewer that what we are seeing is a painted object, Miller has added a strip of gold leaf to the bottom of these paintings. Not only do they add a certain preciousness to the works, and lighten the overall darkness of them, they change the space, bringing the viewer back to the surface. Contained within this strip is a diamond shape made of twenty-two carat gold leaf. The choice of shape is arbitrary according to Miller, but it works very well and serves as a kind of pointer or marker to the head.

Due to this obsession with the paint and the surface the subject matter ceases to be the main concern. Regardless of the content, Miller says “good painting should have a life of its own.” In this way, Miller is part of the great tradition of painting - where the meaning lies within the painted work.
Appendix D

Critical Essay – Utamaro

In “Nonverbal Communication”, Shapiro Jeffrey writes of the results of a study by Ekman and Friesan, [1967] in which the findings indicate that specific emotions “can frequently be perceived from both facial expressions and body acts, although facial expressions are generally the more useful in such judgments”, [Speer (ed) 1972, p.61]. The authors believe, however that the intensity of emotion “is better judged through body acts or positions”, [Speer, p.61]. That posture has the ability to contain this intensity of emotion and express a sentiment regardless of facial expression, is something that I have been researching in my own work. Seeing an exhibition of Utamaro’s Ukiyo-e prints at the Ota Memorial Museum, in Tokyo, November 1992, confirmed my contention. Because Utamaro’s work (in this exhibition of around forty prints) contains mainly the depiction of an idealised female form, the meaning of the work, the sentiment conveyed, is contained in the posture and gesture of the figure rather than the face.

Utamaro (1754-1806), began his life as an artist, as many other Japanese artists did, as a book illustrator as well as making portraits of Kabuki actors, before becoming known in the world of the Ukiyo-e print. He soon became famous for his series’ depicting women - the “Beautiful Women” and “Popular Beauties” were among them. He made many prints of courtesans and prostitutes in the licensed pleasure quarters of Edo becoming famous as the “brothel artist”, [Kikuchi 1992, p.13].

He was the first Ukiyo-e artist to introduce the ‘close-up’ portrait (in the “Beautiful Women” series) which were “startlingly different from anything that had gone before”, [Newland (ed) 1990, p.94], probably influenced by the close-up portraits of the Kabuki actors, [Kikuchi p.20]. They were representations of women shown from the waist up, and no
Japanese artist had ever depicted a woman in this form before. However, unlike the depictions of specific Kabuki actors with their exaggerated and contorted expressions, the facial expressions and features of his faces, although often portraits of existing women, have been idealised and stylised so any expression of sentiment, or any distinction between the figures comes almost entirely from their posture and gesture.

I have chosen five prints to discuss because of the way in which they especially confirmed the notion I had been researching in my own work: of the intensity of expressiveness being embodied in posture and gesture rather than facial expression. Three of them are examples of Utamaro’s “half-length and ‘large-head’” portraits, [Newland p.94] and the other two are full length figures of exaggerated height.

Dance Called Dojo-ji from the series “Collection of Dancers”, may perhaps be a portrait of a specific woman, but the title doesn’t give any clue and her facial features certainly don’t. Unlike traditional Western portraits in which a likeness is usually discernible, Utamaro’s portraits are stylised faces - essentially two lines for the eyebrows, almond shaped eyes, a hook for the nose and a small mouth with slightly parted lips, all contained in a three-quarter profile. Dance Called Dojo-ji is no exception.

The size and placement of the figure in relation to the dimensions of the structure, the flat shapes of colour creating a sense of form, the signature and title of the work to the right of the figure - that changes the perceived space and reasserts the surface, are all central to the aesthetic of this print, however the whole idea of the work is contained and focussed on the woman’s posture - the way she leans back into what I suppose is a movement that is part of the Dojo-ji dance. Further, the perceived movement, the elegance of the figure comes not only from the way the head is held and from the placement of the fan, but also from the garment. As Wichmann says, “the pose does not create the image on its own - the garment plays a large part”

[Wichman 1981, p.16]. The sweeping shapes of the kimono, even though simple non-illusory flat areas of colour, are suggestive of form underneath and do much to create a sense of grace.

Like *Dance Called Dojo-ji*, *Reverie of Love* (one of “Poems of Love”) is another ‘close-up’ portrait of an unspecified woman. Her features are very similar to those of “Dance” but in this case the face has no eyebrows which somewhat changes the expression contained in the face to that of concentration and contemplation (the high eyebrows tend to express a sort of openness and once removed, the narrow almond-shaped eyes are seen in a different context) but I think this reading of the figure lends itself more to the posture – the turn of head and the hand
to the face suggest someone deep in thought - staring somewhere else because her attention is directed toward things absent.

As Newland says, “Utamaro’s interest in the bijin (beautiful women) went far beyond her surface beauty; he was, above all, concerned with capturing the essence of her personality, character and mood”, [Newland p.94]. This is true of a print from the series “Five North Country Hues”. As with Reverie of Love attention is directed elsewhere with the figure in Girl with a Letter from Kiri. Rather than concentration, though, the sentiment contained in this image is one of delight and excitement. This is definitely not coming from any expression on the face as, without the posture of the body, there is none. Instead, the idea of the expression comes from a posture that we recognise through our experience to be happiness - her head is
slightly back and her hands, that are close to her face, clutch at the letter. The garment also helps to show this feeling by the shape conveying a drawn breath, suggesting tension.

The standing figure in *Hour of the Rat* (Midnight), a print from the series, “Twelve hours in the Gay Quarters”, is an example of the way Utamaro would emphasise the posture of the figure by exaggerating her height. He achieved this, according to Newland by portraying the woman with a backward curve of the body, formed at one end by the layers of clothing, in this case, trailing along the ground and, at the other, by “excessively ornate” hair-styles [Newland, p.96]. The standing women looks over her shoulder at her companion folding a kimono while she tightens
her belt. The twist in her body which begins as a graceful bend from the waist, suggested by the shape of the garment, conveys an inquisitive and watchful expression as she leans to inspect her companion’s actions. The whole idea of the pose comes from the arch the figure makes, rather than from any sentiment contained in the structure of the face.

Utter weariness is conveyed by the posture of the woman in *Hour of the Ox* (2 a.m.), another print from “Twelve Hours in the Gay Quarters”. This is the depiction of a prostitute leaving her bed “blear-eyed to go to the toilet at 2 a.m... she is carrying paper and an incense stick, either to ward off mosquitoes or to disguise unpleasant odours”, [Kikuchi, p.65]. Although her face is almost a replica of the figure in *Hour of the Rat*, none of the alertness is evident here. Only exhaustion is conveyed in the
bowed head and stooped shoulders. This print is another example of Utamaro exaggerating the height of his female figures. In *Hour of the Ox*, this device serves to emphasise the weariness.

I stated in the introduction to this piece, that posture having the ability to contain a certain level of intensity of emotion and express a sentiment regardless of facial expression, is an argument I have been pursuing in my own practical research. Rather than stylise the faces of figures, however, I have opted (so far) to depict the heads somewhat void of facial features, (especially in my most recent work) so as to keep the faces as non-expressive as possible. I wanted to discover if the posture of a figure (the tilt of the head, a slight stoop of the sholders) could do all of the ‘work’ and convey a sentiment.
In each of the five prints discussed in this critique, the faces of the women are stylised and, with the exception of Reverie of Love with the missing eyebrows, would be impossible to distinguish if it were not for the shape and posture of the figures. However, because the sentiment contained in the posture is so convincing, our perception of the faces change, and we don’t see them as stylised until the comparison between them is made. As Arnheim says, “our thoughts influence what we see and vice-versa” [Arnheim 1967, p.15]. ‘The viewer believes he or she is seeing an expression contained in the face of the woman, when actually, it is the posture forcing that reading. It is because of the posture that we perceive exhaustion on the face of the figure in Hour of the Ox, and it is because of the posture that excitement is contained in the face of the woman in Girl with a Letter from Kiri. These prints of Utamaro show it is possible that a posture has the ability to change our perception of a face and contain all the information necessary for the viewer to make a decision regarding the sentiment contained in the work."
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[Texts referred to in the exegesis appear below as asterisked entries (*)]


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Catalogue of Works

1. Transcription of ‘Embracing Couple’.
2. Transcription of ‘Madonna and Child’.
3. Transcription of ‘Italian Family’.
4. Transcription of ‘Ezekiel’ (p. 11).
5. Transcription of ‘Jacob Wrestling with the Angel’ (p. 13).
8. Head Drawing (p. 25).
9. 2 Smaller Head Paintings (p. 25).
10. 4 Taller Forms (p. 28).
11. Self Portrait in Fan Shape (p. 29).
12. Masonite Panel (p. 30).
13. Panel 1 (p. 31).
15. Drawing from Panel 2 (p. 33).
16. Drawing from Model [1].
17. Panel 3 (p. 39).
22. Drawing from Panel 5, (p. 39).
23. Drawing from Model [2].
25. Drawing from Panel 6, (p. 40).
27. Drawing from Panel 7.
28. Full Length Self Portrait [1], (p. 41).
29. Panel 8, (p.41).
30. Drawing from Panel 8 [1].
31. Drawing from Panel 8 [2].
32. Full Length Self Portrait [2].
33. Group of 4 Drawings from the Figure.