

Anne

Materiality of Loss



Artist statement

The Materiality of Loss is the culmination of a two-year creative collaboration with Art Therapist Elwin Harewood. The works of art were inspired by my husband's love of music, particularly Vaughan Williams's "The Lark Ascending" and Prudentius' ancient poem read at his graveside:

*Take him, earth, for cherishing,
to thy tender breast receive him.
Body of a man I bring thee,
noble even in its ruin.*

Throughout the collaboration, and working independently on the pieces, I became aware that there were moments when I understood that something had somehow 'moved' or 'changed'. I am a very cerebral person and words are important to me, so this process of crafting the physical images had accessed something different and deeper within myself. My husband Tim was extremely creative in many areas of his life; so this collaboration enabled me to reflect upon those experiences and to draw near to him through the artworks.

Collaborating Fine Artist/Art Therapist

From the Sublime towards an Aesthetic Reception

The Materiality of Loss was created as part of the Material Legacies exhibition for the Stephen Lawrence Gallery. It was the partial outcome of Stacey Pitsillides PhD project in Design. My collaboration on the bereavement project with Anne was to inspire her to create a work-of-art that would represent her loss, possibly through digital means for the gallery space.

From my own perspective, being a fine artist, the criteria throughout the project was an exploratory investigation into the visual and performing arts, for an understanding of representational art as catharsis, a purging of the emotions for poetic clarification. My point of departure was critical theory, philosophy and psychoanalysis to grasp and address a concept of the Sublime and Aesthetic. The notion of a *sublime apprehension* is signified as an existence lost to the overwhelming power of awe – whereby dread and wonder is without actual physical danger at hand; but it pertains to a ‘fugue state’ of being a total consciousness. However, *aesthetic appreciation* signifies a free-play of love for the beautiful – a harmonious and purposeless disinterested ‘*pleasure*’. The pleasure I speak of in the context of aesthetics is unlike the Freudian concept of the *pleasure principle*, which dwells in Eros – an instinctual drive for carnal self-gratification. Aesthetic pleasure moves beyond the sexual appetite, transcending to Agape – a spiritual and selfless incarnate love.

Collaborating with Anne was basically a meditation on bereavement; her husband was taken by cancer. Throughout the project her pictorial images traversed a spectrum of moods, fluctuating from apprehensive feelings towards a tranquil region of being. My role was to facilitate Anne through an imaginative and creative process, whereby her emotions becomes gestures embodied within the work-of-art. I am not speaking of the psychological purposefulness of making an artifact, utilitarian craft, or a decorative “art object” of the applied arts. When I speak of art here, I am speaking of fine art – the Beautiful Arts. Art in this sense is a mimetic process grounded in the sociocultural nature of simulacrum. It is an aesthetic communication – a means of authentically attuning and dialoguing to (an)other in harmony. The artist and the recipients co-exist within a transformational region of an inter-subjective relatedness: empathy (mutual moods and feelings) being the fundamental discourse of the constantly changing and maturing relationship.

The idea that representational art is a *simulation* of the human condition and can be healing is not a new one. This notion of art and aesthetics has been written and talked about since ancient times and can be traced back to the Greek word ‘mimesis’ – a relational term signifying an imitation, which has connotations to simulacra, resembling, a reproduction or an act of expressing similarity of traits. Therefore the word represents a mirroring of the/a truth of *presence*, or the *essence* of being human (becoming). It does not merely signify the ‘*object of art*’ per se, it carries important implications for a corporeal mirroring, placing aesthetic appreciation in an inter-corporeal context, bound by earthly experiences. The entire human being is an embodiment of perceptual consciousness, not merely a psychological construct. The art of this ‘imitation’ becomes an intimate dialogue uniting the spiritual within the corporeal. Mirroring in the context of my collaboration on the project is used in the sense of a

post-modern reading of mimesis, whereby the mimetic process is essential in the matrix of human relatedness – simulacra.

Ancient philosophers placed great emphasis on mimesis; both Plato and Aristotle recognized the qualities and properties of poetic imitation. However, it was the mimetic process that proved contentious between these two scholars. Plato regarded poetic imitation as a negative influence on mankind – infecting its moral judgments. Aristotle on the other hand radically redefined that notion, seeing the relational aspects of poetic representation as being cathartic, with the abilities to abreact and purify the emotions. Aristotle in his treatise on a poetic representation states that from an early age and into adulthood, human beings delight in imitation; and psychoanalytic thinkers such as D W Winnicott and Daniel Stern posits mirroring, in the maternal sense of relatedness as being crucial to an infant's harmonious emotional maturation.

The “Materiality of Loss” is Anne's concluding pictorial text from a sequence of images exhibited in 2017. Basically her ‘piece’ conforms to the Aristotelian concept of the ‘tragedian plot’ – an organized material narrative of self-discovery and clarification. It condenses the artist's lived experience and is perceived as a unified whole, rather than a sum of its parts. Anne's experiences are confined to the two-year period of the creative project in contemplation of her loss: reflecting upon her husband and their shared life together; seeking insight and solace for the demise of his body. His spirit is eternally with her as his earthly body is forever lost to an immateriality...