SCRATCHING THE SURFACE: SELF-PORTRAITS AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exegesis research paper is to locate my art practice as a new form 'body art' within the field of self-portraiture in contemporary art in Australia. This practice-led research enquiry will ask the following question: how can the body be employed as a tool to create a portrait of self to create growth and transformation? Traditionally, self-portraits are constructed with a mirror in a frontal, vertical manner on an easel. However, in this study I am using vertical and horizontal orientation using the body to purely make marks not to create realistic self-portraits of my face and head. Through employing the body to make a representation, I am using various methods and engaging with various tools, techniques, and materials across a variety of different mediums to find new knowledge. I am using drawing, painting (oil and acrylic), printmaking (etching, lino block printing, monoprinting), and ceramics. Central to this enquiry, is the development of my method of artmaking, what I call Reflective Phenomenology. This is a combination of reflexivity (Pierce, 1868 as cited in Archer, 2013) and Merleau-Ponty's (1968) phenomenology. I am incorporating reflexive activities, where inner dialogues and reflections on the process is recorded and serve to document my way of working. I am using this method of gathering data for my findings. The inner dialogue, questioning, answering and self-talk leads not only to new actions but growth and transformation. I am engaging phenomenologically with my body, interacting with other bodies, surfaces and tools performed in the studio as a way of representing self. I am calling this body art because the presence of the artist body and the actions performed by the body is the focus of my work (Marsh, 1993). My approach is informed by an embodied, phenomenological model of

intersubjectivity (Jones, 1997) between my body as the subject and object in self-portraiture which I call body art. In body art, there is a blurring of live art and performance boundaries where I am simultaneously the subject and object (Sobchack, 2004). My body art performance that is recorded and made in the studio, where the body performs my practice and presented to an audience later in the form of artworks. The body not only leaves its trace, but I am communicating how the body feels in place and time, to contribute to the field of self-portraiture using the body-as-self. In concluding, this research locates my art practice as 'body art', as a subject field within the field of self-portraiture more broadly and identifies a gap in contemporary art in Australia.. This exegesis further develops research on 'body-as-self' which is argued as a new academic concern.

CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I Chris Abrahams declare that the PhD Thesis entitled, 'Scratching the Surface: Self-Portraits and Self-Representation' is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signed [redacted] Date:30/03/2022

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Defining the research scope

1.1.1. Why is this study unique?

This study is unique to the field of self-portraiture as the focus is not on creating realistic self-portraits in a conventional and traditional manner, but rather, is an interrogation of how I use the body-as-self to create self-portraits. This research and significant body of creative work seeks to present a portrait of self as embodied in the lived-in bodily experiences (Pearson, 2017) where the phenomenological approach echoing Merleau-Ponty's (1968), intertwines with chiasmus of the body and objects. Here, I explore as De Beauvoir (1988) says the "body as lived in by the subject" (Parshley, 1988, p. 69), the body in performance (Auslander, 2006), and body-as-self (Sartre, 1943, as cited in Synnott, 1992, p. 100) to make marks using art-making tools as an extension of the body. My work challenges the modernist idea of self, which was based on "a stable, knowable world" (Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 202) but also a postmodernist mode (Sartre, 1957; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Berzonsky, 1990, as cited in Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 206) who say that the self is a construct and "identity is a self-constructed theory and is continually in flux" (Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 206).

The creative works focus on the process of making, recorded on video and images. This arts-based research (ABR) employs "the camera as a method of capturing images that preserve a static moment, the dialogue around the images is pivotal as it presents access to one's biography, worldview, biases, intentions and interpretations" (Pearson, 2017, p. 49). The way I frame the images assists me to analyse how my body is employed to construct a portrait of self. The images and videos I make offer a rich analysis of the significance of "social-spatial dynamics between identities and space(s)" (p. 49). For me, how the body occupies the studio space and the subsequent dialogue that emerges around the images captured by the camera reveals my biography, worldview, intentions, and interpretations. I use phenomenological and reflexive methods to capture the body-as-self. My project, therefore, uses an open-ended approach where I am not concerned with definitive outcomes but rather, more importantly, with both process art and reflexivity. While self-portraiture has a long and traditional history in Australia, there is little in the

way of using the body-as-self to create self-portraiture and process art. Anne Marsh (1993) says she wrote *Body and Self: Performance art in Australia 1969-92*, to fill the gap in Australian art history and track a chart through art movements – "happenings of the 1960s, through body art in the 1970s, towards a more political body in the 1980s and 1990s" (p. 1). As Marsh says, "[P]erformance art is a visual practice which is located in a specific time and place and usually involves the presence of the artist before his or her audience" (p. 2) For me, my practice using the body-as-self, occurred in time, place, and with the presence of the artist documented in the studio. The audience are only involved in events such as art exhibitions, where I was mostly absent. Of particular interest to me is the work of body art, where "the physical and psychological *presence* of the artist is foregrounded …; the artist body and the actions performed on that body become the major focus of the work" (p. 96).

The presence of my body is the subject and object, where the inscription of emotional and physical pain was expressed in artmaking. For me, my body became like that of a shaman who can heal themselves from childhood trauma, grief, and mental problems (Marxen, 2011). Further to this, my body was as a surface, and the surfaces I encountered created physical pain, associated with artmaking because of the repetitive tasks of scraping and scratching surfaces. While there are similarities here to Mike Parr's performative work in the 1950s, which explored the physical pain inflicted on his body as the signature mark and defining experience of the artist (Marsh, 1993), my work also engages in aspects of Parr's *Self-portrait project* (1987-1990) which include etchings of his face and head, where the focus was on the physical carving of the plates he calls 'foul bite' or 'noise' of the 'other' of the self-portrait (Loane, 1990). To my knowledge, the combination of these interrogations has been previously engaged by Australian artists such as Mike Parr, but there are no current similarities within singular artists' works in Australia. My research, therefore, deliberately combines these explorations with the generation of creative works over a four-year period. Overall, my creative works locate my practice as body art within the field of self-portraiture which articulates a gap and furthers the research on the body-as-self in contemporary art in Australia.

1.1.2. COVID-19 response research

I started this study in 2018, before COVID-19 descended. By March 2020 the global pandemic had hit while I was in Yangon, Myanmar. This immediately and irrevocably changed how I applied my methodology and data collection. My study became COVID-related research because I was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with lockdowns, isolation, hotel quarantine, and eventually my body succumbing to the disease in late 2021. Before the pandemic, my mode of operation featured and focused on my internal conversations (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) that I had with my body while at the USQ painting studio. In Phase 4 (see Methodology chapter), however, I did not have a studio, and I started documenting how I was feeling, asking questions, and making written notes and sketches in my visual journal. These sketches were quick and urgent because I wanted to record how I was feeling quickly and realistically at the time.

This emerged as a very different sense of self than that I had experimented with in Phases 1, 2 or 3 and it became increasingly important for me to visually document and write reflections to engage not only my body-as-self, but also my anxiety and confronting feelings at this time. I continued to document how I was feeling when I completed quarantine and my journaling became more thorough because of COVID-19. The reflections encouraged me to document how I was feeling by questioning my artworks in written form.

1.2. Researcher position

I grew up in Liverpool, Sydney and began drawing when I was five years old. I was talented at art in school, and it was something that helped my childhood traumas of abandonment and physical, mental, and emotional abuse. I was always a loner growing up and spent weekends going through the art galleries and bookshops in Sydney. My art teacher sent me to a Wednesday night art class in Camden, NSW in 1979 where I began drawing live portraits in charcoal. I was only 14 years old, and this started my interest in portraits. I was selected to be part of a STAR (Students Talented in our Region) programme in Liverpool, NSW in 1980-1981 where I specialised in painting and graphics. During this time, I used colour mixing and glazes as part of the process of painting, which I also used in this project. I discovered the use

of mixing the opposite colour on the colour wheel to express my emotional use of colour, not necessarily for colour theory.

I am a visual artist with over 34 years as an art teacher, with my own practice extending over 40 years in the fields of drawing, painting, etching, and ceramics. My undergraduate major and practice was etching at City Art Institute, Sydney in 1983-86. I lived in inner-city Sydney at this time when I discovered Edward Hopper (1882-1967) as painter and etcher and was influenced by a lecturer at art college, Rose Vickers (1941-) and her work depicting old buildings in and around Sydney. Consequently, my etchings began to focus on night images of old building, railways and petrol stations in Newtown, Sydney influenced by Hopper's and Vickers' night images. I joined a printmaking group called Studio One in Canberra, in 1988-1995 where I was involved in group exhibitions. It was not until I was involved in Community Printmakers Murwillumbah (CPM, 2005) that I started exhibiting solo work. My major exhibition was a series of abstract paintings called Soulscapes (2005) followed by a solo show in Café Arts, Gold Coast Arts Centre in 2006. I have been involved with Impress Printmakers Brisbane and had a solo show in Brisbane, titled Harbours of Life, 2007. My most recent exhibitions, that have enhanced and challenged my previous work, have occurred during my DCA research, and are detailed in this exegesis.

For this research, I am therefore ensconced in the position as participant-researcher, which fits in with my chosen methodologies. My theoretical positioning uses phenomenology as a philosophy which has helped me understand how my body engages with the world with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas of lived experiences engaging with phenomena (1962, 1968). When I combined art and phenomenology it was to interrogate how my body engaged with art materials/ tools to construct a portrait of myself. This process of using my own body as research and outcomes generated changes over the course of this study, where I discovered new arts practices to set a regime for my body to follow. My emerging methodology Reflexive Phenomenology helped re-position my body's recovery from work and life trauma, and this changed again as I was recovering from COVID isolation, lockdowns, and hotel quarantine. I no longer needed to employ the body to make portraits of self,

instead concentrating on the process of engaging with art materials and allowing natural forces to so affect matter.

This study is divided into 70% practical creative work generation and 30% theoretical research. This study's weighting deliberately expands my art practice in order to research self-portraiture as a way of exploring self, identity and as a way of dealing with emotional pain, trauma, and life events. I sought to experience committing myself to a study schedule where my body was to go through a regime of one hour of each day per medium; drawing, painting, etching and ceramics. New knowledge emerged from my practice over time when I challenged the fixed stable self in self-portraiture. Using constructivist theory my self-portraits are constructed over time and place.

1.3. Theoretical and methodological scope

I began by investigating self-portraiture as a way of healing and overcoming traumas in my life (Alter Muri, 2007). Theories of self were investigated using Lacan's theories of self as a construct (Lacan, 1977, as cited in Fink, 1995, p. 35) and identity that is continually in flux (Cox & Lyddon, 1997). This is a constructionist, postmodernist approach to the artist as the subject and object (Jones, 1998) where my bodily actions were the focus of my work (Marsh, 1993). I rebelled against the Cartesian mind/ body split using the body-as-self to construct a self-portrait. I become more interested in the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and his concept of the lived body. Phenomenology as a philosophy helped in the understanding of how my body engaged with materials and processes with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1968) ideas of lived experiences engaging with phenomena. I examined visual phenomenology (Leavy, 2009) as the experience that I viewed and engaged within the studio environment. Visual art methods were therefore essentially participatory for me (Leavy, 2009), viewed by an audience that are not participating in the making experience (Wrathall, 2011, as cited in Parry, 2011) but for their attendance at exhibitions. My practice expanded further by exploring the process art (Wheeler, 1991) of embodiment, touch, and materiality, through my bodily connection with art materials. Material, unlike matter, refers to natural materials or artificial substances which will be further processed and transformed (Wagner, 2001, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015). This is to follow matter,

material, materiality (Lange-Berdt, 2015), in the state of becoming (Grosz, 2001 as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015) and have unknown possibilities (Derrida, 1985, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015). The phenomenon of materiality is known as a materiality-effect (Brown, 2010 as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015) because the result of the process of using materials is known through our bodily senses.

The artists that interested me most, as this practice unfolded are Frank Auerbach, Mike Parr, and Aida Tomescu who are outlined in Section 3.5, Practitioner review. Both Auerbach and Parr helped me to construct a portrait of self, using various mediums. Tomescu was specifically influential in my interrogation of process art, as something that began to help challenge and eventually erase my initial emphasis on self-portraiture. My methods of data collection used the visual arts as a tool for gaining data rather than written or verbal communication (Leavy, 2009; Pearson, 2017). This methodology employed the camera as a way of capture, such as photographs and video. I applied phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) and reflexive (Archer, 2013) practices consisting of video diaries, sketches, photographs, and filmed documentation as well as actual artworks. As stated earlier, my research is practice-led, utilising my own body as a site to conduct research, and represented in the genre of self-portraiture.

1.4. Chapter overview

This exegesis has been written to complement my art works, videos, and photographs as part of my DCA study. The title of this exegesis is *Scratching the Surface: Exploring the body-as-self* and this effectively sums up my DCA project as a whole, in that my research explored how the body-as-self can be employed to construct a portrait of self. The following is a brief outline of each chapter of this exegesis.

Chapter 1: Introduction, provides an overview of the exegesis that defines the field, establishes my research position, examines the purpose of study, and briefly outlines the theoretical and methodological scope of the project.

Chapter 2: Methodology, examines the various methodologies such as arts and practice-based research, visual phenomenology (Leavy, 2009), reflexivity (Archer, 2013) and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) that help to scaffold the data

collection methods undertaken in this study. I developed my own methodology, Reflexive Phenomenology to best explain my own art practice.

Chapter 3: Literature review, explores the philosophies and key concepts from literature associated with self, embodiment, and phenomenology. This was strategically used to anchor the study and assist in the analysis of the creative works. Key theorists include Maurice-Merleau-Ponty, Rosalind Krauss, Jacques Lacan, and Bruce Fink that form the basis for investigating the self-portraiture and to contextualise the practical component of my research. This chapter also focuses on how the literature addresses artists that use the genre of self-portraiture and process art and other key practitioners who were influential in my creative practice.

In **Chapter 4: Findings**, I consider the analysis of my creative works, and how my methodology, Reflexive Phenomenology, emerged and changed pre and post COVID-19. I analyse how Reflexive Phenomenology was applied over the phases of creative work, and how this affected my actual artist body in a way that became beyond the initial realm of self-portraiture.

This exegesis *Scratching the Surface: Exploring the body-as-self* has been written to complement the practical component of my DCA project. The archival curated collection can be viewed on chrisabrahams@artmoi me

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

The methodology for my DCA project uses various methods for incorporating the visual arts into my research, primarily as a source of gathering data. Multiple methods will be used and include arts-based methods or "A/r/tography", (Leavy 2009, p. 3), "Visual Anthropology" (Leavy 2009, p. 217), reflexivity (Archer, 2013) and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1993). I am creating new knowledge about practice based on my artistic actions and art-making methods as a form of research (Norris, 2020).

Visual images are unique in that they can evoke an emotional, even visceral response. They have a different response compared to text or sound. As Patricia Leavy said in *Method Meets Art* (2009), "visual imagery is created and the point of production is inextricably bound to the art, visual art opens up multiple meanings that are determined not only by the artist but by the viewer" (Leavy, 2009, p. 215). In the context of this project, I am the researcher and the subject of my research. I used visual researched-produced images (Leavy, 2008) to address the research question. In essence, I created artworks, not only as visual images for analysis but as a part of the representation of data. However, how the art is created and the environment in which it is created are important factors in my project. According to Leavy, "human experiences cannot be separated from the environments in which they occur" (p. 226); she called this "Visual Phenomenology" (Leavy, 2009, p. 226). The methods that I am using include the movements made by the artist in the studio environment and the visual images that are created that contribute to my research project.

As part of my research, I am using photography and video to record my way of working in the studio which will assist in gathering data as part of my findings. There are different models to assist in data analysis and interpretation known as "Visual Anthropology" (Leavy, 2008, p. 217). I am using the camera as a tool for recording on video and still images of artworks in progress and completed ones. The images produced (both still and moving) are necessary research data that capture the accumulative processes of work. The goal is not to use visual images to translate into verbal data but to build a bridge between visual and verbal. As my research explores

techniques that employ the body in constructing a self-portrait, it is essential to demonstrate how this is done. Both moving and still images are a form of documentation that provides evidence of the methods used to create artworks and these will be analysed later as findings of the project.

The artworks I make for this DCA project are a powerful medium through which self-identity may in some way be 'resolved'. The strategy of 'aesthetic intervention' is offered by bell hooks in "Art on My Mind: Visual Politics" (1995) and while her work deals with group identity struggles it can be applied to individual identity as well. Hooks uses art to "jar people into *seeing* something differently" (as cited in Leavy, 2009, p. 220). In my project, I will explore how my art may raise the consciousness of the audience who may also be dealing with issues such as self-identity. I will therefore discuss my overall methodology of "arts-based research" (Leavy, 2009, p. 3) or ABR, and how it relates to my DCA project.

2.2. Research questions

My practice-led research enquiry asks the following central question: – how can the body be employed as a tool to create a portrait of self? Or, in other words, how might the artist access the body/ self to create a portrait of itself? How can my body and artworks be a conduit for research and as a research data? How can phenomenological and reflexive methods be used to capture the body-as-self? How can the artist body be used to make marks on different surfaces that represents the face and head? My project, therefore, uses an open-ended approach where I may not be concerned with definitive outcomes but rather, more importantly, the process and reflexivity. My aim is not to make realistic self-portraits in a conventional and traditional manner but rather, I am using some conventions and art methods to capture the face and head of the artist. The process of using my body to make self-portraits will contribute to new knowledge of self-portraiture in the visual arts.

2.3. Arts-based research

The field of arts-based research uses practices in the visual arts, "to explore, understand, and represent human action and experience" (Pearson, 2017, p. 47). As a visual arts researcher, I am using "lived experiences through multiple dimensions:

textual, oral and visual" (p. 48). This arts-based visual methodology employs "the camera as a method of capturing images that preserve a static moment, the dialogue around the images is pivotal as it presents access to one's biography, worldview, biases, intentions and interpretations" (p. 49). This is an important aspect of my project as it seeks to present a portrait of self as embodied in the lived bodily experiences. The way I frame the images assists me to analyse how my body is employed to construct a portrait of self. The images and videos I will be making, offer a rich analysis of the significance of "social-spatial dynamics between identities and space(s)" (p. 49). For me, how the body occupies the studio space and dialogue around the images captured by the camera reveals such things as my biography, worldview, intentions and interpretations.

Another aspect of arts-based research (ABR) is that it uses art-based methods, such as painting and drawing which are part of the research methodology as a philosophical approach. "A/r/tography" is a term used by Leavy (2009) to describe: "A/r/t … a metaphor for artist/ researcher" (p. 3). By using the arts as a tool for gaining data as it has the "potential to bring forth data that would not emerge through written or verbal communication alone" (Pearson, 2017, p. 20). As she said, "arts-based practices are therefore useful for research projects that aim to describe, explore, or discover. Furthermore, these methods are generally attentive to processes" (Leavy, 2009, p. 12), with my express emphasis on process. How I engage with the art practices and explore new ways for the audience, and the artist, are potentially transformative and challenging for my practice.

I aim to use art methods to explore new ways of re-representing the self. I am not representing a traditional view of self-portraiture, rather, I am employing different artistic techniques and methods to use the body as a tool and other tools/ materials in the studio as the focus of my research. The actual way of working in the studio is of the utmost significance. While these art methods are not new or unique, the fact that I am the subject of the research using my own individual body makes it unique. Some of the art methods I will be using include oil paints, drawing (pencil, charcoal), etching (printmaking), and ceramics (the application of these will be detailed in my reflective journal – see below). Particularly, I will be applying these techniques by scratching, inscribing, burnishing, rubbing, erasing, constructing and de-constructing as the need

occurs in the practice. My aim, therefore, is to develop new methods of working to address the research question and finding new knowledge about my studio practice, and not necessarily the outcome.

In the process of making a self-portrait, the act of building up the surface with paint and scraping it back is one method that I aim to use which includes reflection; this will be explored more fully in Section 2.7 below. These reflections will be captured in sketches, video documentation and a visual journal, all of which are essential to my methods of data collection. This will be a continuous process that contributes to the whole understanding of the phenomena of making and reflecting. In this approach to phenomenology, the artist may need theories as a guide, but the ways of making are not reduced to a set of rigid methods or procedures, rather, it becomes a lived experience of addressing the research question. How my body as a surface is engaged with other surfaces is a phenomenological exchange between the body and external objects. In the following section, I will discuss phenomenology in general and then as a necessary part of my methodology.

2.4. Phenomenology

Phenomenology as a philosophy can be traced back to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Fredrich Hegel (1770-1831). After World War One (1914-1918) Europe was in physical and ideological ruin (Eagleton, 1983, as cited in Groenewald, 2004). In this context, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), sought to develop a new philosophical method as a way of providing certainty to an otherwise disintegrating western civilisation. He named his philosophical method phenomenology as it was the science of "pure phenomena" (Husserl as cited in Eagleton, 1983, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 43). Husserl believed that reality existed only through the immediate experience of pure phenomena and anything outside of this reality must be ignored. For Husserl, there is a rejection of "the belief that objects in the external world exist independently and that the information about objects is reliable. He argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 43). Put simply, the aim in phenomenology is to get back to the things themselves (Eagleton, 1983; Kruger, 1988; Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Groenewald, 2004). Husserl was a student of Franz Brentano (1838-1917), who constructed a basis for phenomenology that stressed an

"intentional notion of consciousness" or the "internal experience of being conscious of something" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 43).

Following Husserl was Martin Heidegger (1867), who further developed Husserl's ideas with the concept of *Dasein* which means being there in the lived-world, or *Lebenswelt* (Heidegger as cited in Schwandt, 1997, as cited in Groenewald, 2004). Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) then expanded these ideas. In the light of these philosophical ideas, I draw specific insight from Transcendental Phenomenology (Husserl, 1970, as cited in Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 92) and Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Interpretative Phenomenology (Heidegger, 1867, as cited in Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 93) as these specifically inform my research and the making phases of my overall studio practice.

Husserl (1970) asserted that phenomena is how it is perceived by the individual's consciousness – "inner evidence" (as cited in Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 92) or intuition and not an external reality. This means putting aside all my assumptions about how to go about my research and let my intuition or inner-self lead and guide the research. The challenge for the artist applying Husserl's (1970) transcendental approach is in the following:

> To describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. The process involves blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings; thus, a unity of the real and the ideal (as cited in Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 93).

A transcendental-phenomenological approach is where all thinking, beliefs and attitudes are suspended, and the focus is entirely on the body's experience of the phenomenon. The essence of the phenomenon is a state of "transcendental-I" (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 93). This is a state where there are no preconceived ideas about how to do something. Instead, is a position known as *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, where one gets in touch with the essence of the phenomenon. This is gained through what Husserl (1970) called a"bracketing" (as cited in Neubauer,

Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 93) where all previous understandings or knowledge are bracketed off. In my case, this could mean that I suspended all my knowledge, skills and ideas about art processes to get in touch with the phenomenon. The next step Husserl called transcendental-phenomenological reduction where the meanings and essences are constructed and may need a variation of imaginative, intuitive processes. Overall, bracketing is gained when the body can engage with the essence of a phenomenon. Husserl's ideas were further developed by Heidegger, discussed below.

Heidegger's (1867) focus is on the "being and temporality" (as cited in Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 94) of the human lived experience in this world of external reality. This relationship is known as the individual's "lifeworld" (p. 94) and its influence on the world around them. According to Heidegger, the individual's consciousness or experience of phenomenon is not separate from the world, instead, it has been formed through a human's experience of living in the world. This type of phenomenology aims to understand the deeper layers of human experience, background experience and narratives. It aims to not only understand but to interpret an individual's daily experience. Within this type of phenomenology, the experience of daily life or lifeworld must be interpreted through their background experience and narrative. However, phenomenology as a research methodology is quite different to phenomenology as a philosophical position, which I will discuss in Section 2.5 below.

2.5. Phenomenology as a research methodology

Phenomenology as a research methodology presents a practical application of the philosophical stance (Stones, 1988, as cited in Groenewald, 2004) and is a viable alternative to traditional scientific approaches to research. In phenomenological research, "the aim of the researcher is to describe accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). For the researcher wanting to apply phenomenology as a research methodology there is a focus on the lived experiences of people (Green, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1988; Maypole & Davis, 2001; Robinson & Reed, 1998, as cited in Groenewald, 2004). By looking at how these experiences are lived subjectively, new meanings and ideas emerge that informs how those experiences are understood. Within phenomenology there is a reluctance to prescribe specific steps on how to apply the methodology, because that would do an injustice to the integrity of

the phenomenon (Holloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999, as cited in Groenewald, 2004). It is agreed though, some sort of guideline is needed, especially for new researchers (Groenewald, 2004). Engaging with phenomena is the goal of phenomenology to describe the actual phenomenon by its experience, in terms of what and how it is experienced. While phenomenology as a research methodology is relevant to my research project, I will focus on how phenomenology is activated by artists and their art.

2.6. Art and phenomenology

In a general sense, Heidegger (1962) stated that art is an essential part of human life (as cited in Parry, 2011) and has long been associated with phenomenology. In *The Phenomenological Relevance of Art* (2011), Mark Wrathall states that, "[O]ne of the characteristic traits of the existential phenomenological tradition in philosophy is a serious engagement with the fine arts … influenced by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty with its deep roots in the work of Nietzsche" (Parry, 2011, p. 9). He added that these philosophers understand that art can demonstrate a deeper understanding of phenomenology as a form of inquiry. Heidegger summed it up in the following passage:

> The word "phenomenology" only gives insight into *how* one is to exhibit and deal with that which is supposed to be dealt with in this science. A science "of" phenomena means grasping objects in such a way that everything which is up for discussion must be dealt with in a direct exhibition and a direct demonstration. The expression "descriptive phenomenology," which at bottom tautological, has the same meaning. Here "description" does not mean a method of the sort of, say biological morphology. The title has rather a prohibitive sense: steering clear of all non-demonstrative determination … *Every exhibiting of an entity in such a way that it shows itself in itself may, with formal legitimacy, be called "phenomenology*." (Heidegger, 1962, as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 9)

For Heidegger and other philosophers in this tradition, the question is whether phenomena can be described with just verbal description or whether direct demonstration is needed. The concern is that verbal description of the phenomenon

might hamper the understanding of things. For example, the verbal description of "hammering with hammers or cutting with knives" (Parry, 2011, p. 10) does not really describe what is happening phenomenologically. I would argue that my art is a method of pictorial depiction that can demonstrate the phenomenon of grasping objects more fully.

Art can therefore be a method of demonstration of the phenomenon that verbal or written description is unable to do. Friedrich Nietzsche (1974) in "The *Gay Science"* argued that the power of art is in artists as phenomenologists:

> … only artists … have men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each himself is, himself experiences, himself wants; only they have taught us to value the hero that is hidden in each of these everyday characters and taught the art of regarding oneself as a hero, from a distance and as it were simplified and transfigured – the art of "putting oneself on stage" before oneself. Only thus can we get over certain lowly details in ourselves. Without this art we would be nothing but foreground, and would live entirely under the spell of that perspective which makes the nearest and most vulgar appear tremendously big and as reality itself (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 10).

Art and artists have the power to see and hear affectively like no other as they evaluate and experience the world. As Nietzsche (1968) stated, "[A]ll art exercises the power of suggestion over the muscles and senses … All artworks, tonically, increases strength, inflames desire (i.e., the feeling of strength)" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 10-11). Heidegger (2002) followed along these lines, when he stated in his 1935-36 essay, "Origin of the Work of Art", art is the "highest possibility of its essence … revealing that establishes and brings forth … possibilities of existence that could not be understood and established in any other way" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 11). Hence, the visual artist is not only able to show you things that which you could not otherwise see, but more importantly, the body is able to phenomenologically engage with the world to produce artworks.

In a similar vein, Merleau-Ponty (1964) demonstrated the nature of our embodiment with the world and art, when he said, art and only art can show us "in full innocence" the "sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body"

(as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 11). The reason Merleau-Ponty claims art and only art referring to pictorial art, is because of the way the artist sees and perceives the world. This has something to do with the way the artist practices his or her art and how it is depicted on the canvas. It also has to do with how the viewer perceives the art that is expressed and allows the viewer to become part of the artists' world. The author, Mark Wrathall made note of the two sides when Merleau-Ponty (1964), referred to the artist who "interrogates the world with his gaze" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 12). It is the artists' practice of starring at the mountain and then coming back to the studio and rendering it. In my case, starring at the mirror and using art as a method of recording what I see in the mirror onto canvas. To capture what is seen, according to Merleau-Ponty (1964), "to unveil the means, visible and not otherwise … [using] light, lighting, shadows, reflections, colour, all the objects of his quest are not altogether real objects; like ghosts, they only have visual existence" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 12). All these things are at the artist's disposal. The other side of the story, according to Wrathall (2011), is the way that the artist lets the viewer into the world of his or her gaze. The artist causes something to be visually seen by using objects of his gaze and sharing his engagement with the world. Underlining this, according to Merleau-Ponty, is that "art, and the pictorial arts is uniquely well qualified to help us understand our perceptual engagement with the world" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 12). The reason art and artists can help us understand our perceptual engagement with the world is because of the way artists see the world and construct compositions based on what they see. This means "…a work of art performs a kind of phenomenology insofar it shows us something in such a way that we understand it more perspicuously than did before…" (Parry, 2011, p. 12). Leon Battista Alberti (1996) noted the "surface of the eye as a living mirror" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 14). Da Vinci used this method in his painting creating a two-dimensional rendering of space and the two-dimensional reflection of space on the "living mirror" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 14) of the eye. This means for pictorial space that whatever is received by the eye in light rays is considered real and what is reflected in the painting as represented is also real. This could also be applied to the mirror itself, as whatever was reflected and mediated by the mirror was as real as the light waves from the "living mirror" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 14) of the eye. The mirror itself, as a method of reflection of the human face, is a useful tool but not in the sense of the mediation of realism, rather in traditional self-portraiture. Rather, it is purely a tool and a reference point in which to create my representations.

Heidegger (1962) argued that there are two ways of looking at the world. Firstly, through our bodily engagement with the world. Heidegger (1962) called this *Umsicht* or circumspection and secondly, mere observation or *Betrachten* which "is to direct us to our everyday, ordinary, unreflective, practical engagement with things around us" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 19). In circumspection, the world is geared to our bodies when involved in practical things. When things are grasped without thinking about them, the phenomenon is present in ordinary perception. This perceptual engagement with the world, gives as Merleau-Ponty (1964) said, "visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 20). As an artist, I can present on canvas, what Merleau-Ponty (1964) called, "secret ciphers" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 20) of sensory qualities that create certain experiences and in turn invites a response. For the artist and the viewer, that response is more practical than reflective.

Merleau-Ponty (1964) says the artist, "interrogates the world with his gaze" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 21) by looking at the world in such a way as to discern meanings and present "profane vision" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 21). As Merleau-Ponty (1964) states, "painting liberates the phantoms captive in it" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 21). Each artwork, therefore, can present a vision of the world that has not been seen before and the artist is invited to employ the body as the vehicle for creating artworks. As an artist/ researcher my aim is to use the body to construct a portrait of self, the object and subject of my gaze. I am using my body in motion to create artworks as part of my research. To look at how the body is moved to respond and act through motion, the artist Paul Klee (1919) stated that the making of artworks come into being via body motion or "eye muscles" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 22). His claim was that an artwork is made, (especially in the act of painting and drawing) when the body moves into position ready for action. There is a waiting period where the eye perceives the world and then expresses it through the body. He said the artist is attuned to see the world more perceptively than most, and therefore, creating a picture demands the artist represent the world, not just the art of holding up mirrors! Klee (1919) described the way the body moves to perform art making as, "a certain fire, yet to come, revives, works its way along the hand, streams onto the board and, from the board leaps as a spark, closing the circle from which it came; back to the eye and beyond" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 22). It is interesting to note from this description

that Klee does not distinguish between the inner and outer body, but that the source comes from the eye, the receptive and perceptive part of the body. The artist's responsibility is to place his or her body in position awaiting the fire of creative inspiration but as Mark Wrathall (2011) states, this cannot be forced, the artists can only wait for the fire to awaken. "When that happens," he said, "there is no longer an experience of the artist pressing something inner out into the world. Rather, the body is moved to respond, as it becomes the vehicle of depictive work" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 22). Klee (1919) reinforces this view: "swept up into such movement, we find it easy to develop a creative disposition. We are ourselves moved, hence find it easier to impact movement" (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 22).

In Klee's self-portrait in *Abwagender Kunstler,* 1919 (Figure 2.1) the hand, the eye and body of the artist are visible, poised ready to make a responsive motion. There is no brush or paper, or canvas depicted, rather it depicts the eye and oversized hand as the main feature of the body poised ready to paint. The artist needs to be sensitive to his/her body as the mediator in the making of artworks. My body is a means of research using physical movements to create artworks. In particular, the muscles and eye perception which translates into action. In this experience of creating artworks the eye is in a way being taught how to see objects in the world and to be made sensitive to things. The eye and the body have the job of making visible things that are not necessarily seen and therefore gives content to the experience of the world. To do this the hand is the extension of the body which uses tools and equipment as a means of creation.

As an artist/ researcher in the studio, I engaged with the world and with tools practically. "[T]hese things will move me to act, to see things, to think thoughts, but without my necessarily having any thoughts about them" (Parry, 2011, p. 20). Heidegger (1962), articulates this principle:

> Equipment can only genuinely show itself in dealings cut to its own measure, for example, hammering with a hammer. But in such dealings this entity is not grasped thematically as an occurring thing, nor is the structure of the equipment known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about the hammer's character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in way which could not possibly more suitable … the less we

> stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific "manipulability" of the hammer … No matter how sharply we just look at the "outward appearance" of things in whatever form it takes, we cannot discover anything available (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 17).

Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty agree that the world is full of things to be engaged with practically but more importantly, these things are objects in themselves and not individuated in anyway. For example, Heidegger (1976) said a pen, a lamp, a chair is:

> what is first of all "given" … is "for writing," the "for going in and out," the "for illuminating, "the "sitting." That is, writing, going-in-out, sitting, and the like are something within which we move ourselves from the beginning. These "in order tos" are what we know when we "know our way around" and what we learn (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 18).

As an artist in the studio, I am engaged with art tools and methods. First, the brush, palette knife or stick, is given for painting. The environment in which I work is the studio, wherever this is in the world. As I will be using my body to make actions and movements in the studio, "the field of forces and tensions will alter and shift in response to these actions and as a result new configuration of tensions, new solicitations to further action will arise" (Parry, 2011, p. 18). As Merleau-Ponty (1963) said, the phenomenal field is altered as actions and responses are taken and modifications are made after inner dialogue is taken place. This is like Autonomous reflectivity where "self-contained inner dialogues that lead to action without the need for validation by other individuals" (Caetano, 2015, p. 62). The methods of reflexivity are based on Archer's work (2013) and will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.7 Reflexivity below. As an artist in the studio, I am researching how the body is employed to construct a portrait of self, that brings a whole lot of tensions and forces as the body is engaged phenomenologically with tools and materials what Merleau-Ponty, (1963) calls the 'phenomenal field' (as cited in Parry, 2011, p. 18). As I am continually responding to actions through inner dialogues in the process of making artworks and recording, this process will contribute to my findings.

As an artist, I think phenomenology comes naturally because of the way the body uses tools and materials to make artworks. This view is underscored by Van den Berg (1997) in "A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated" (2004) who said a phenomenological approach is "common knowledge among … painters" (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). He said artists are born phenomenologists because of their understanding in the task of sharing our insights with others, by means of producing images. There is a phenomenological exchange that takes place when using the body as a vehicle and engaging with art tools and materials to bring about new images. As Christina Gschwandtner (2014) said, "[C]reating a work of art is a process of making visible, transferring a phenomenon from one reality to another" (p. 306-307). It is this process of using visual art methods is a means of making that which is invisible, visible. Through this exchange between the body and objects is a way in which it leads to new experiences (Dewey, 1997). Art methods can be used to uncover lived experience and a phenomenological method, aims to describe, understand and interpret meanings of my lived experience (Greene, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1988; Kvale, 1996; Maypole & Davies, 2001; Robinson & Reed, 1998, as cited in Groenewald, 2004). In *Art as Experience* (1980), Dewey discusses the concept of the experience in art as likened to a river that flows, as opposed to a pond which is a stagnant pool of water. Dewey called this "aesthetic experiencing" (Ambrose, 2019, p. 84) where depending on our habits and embodied histories of past bodily experience, experience may lead to further growth and transformation.

As Leavy (2009) said, 'all art, regardless of the medium is a product of the time and place in which it is created, as well as the individual artist who is the embodied actor situated within the social order' (p. 216). The individual artist and their bodily experiences are based on habit. These experiences will either lead to further growth or dead ends, depending on our habits and the habits of those that came beforehand (Ambrose, 2019, p. 84). For the phenomenologist/ artist/ researcher, these habits are a way of analysing the life world of the individual's experience.

In phenomenological methodology, art can provide insight into human thought by analysing human experience and taking steps to uncover the depth of this experience which need to be seen in the environments in which they occur (Leavy, 2009). Noe (2000) said art can be an effective tool for phenomenological research

because it places experience at the centre of knowledge-building. He noted, "To describe experience *is* to describe the experienced world" (as cited in Leavy, 2009, p. 125). For researchers working within a phenomenological framework and visual phenomenology, experience becomes central to the visual arts context. Experience not only occurs in the visual landscape but more importantly, it is viewed and engaged within the environment in which it occurs. According to Noe, phenomenologists can use this method of investigating visual experience by engaging with the environment (Leavy, 2009, p. 227). I use visual art methods to capture the environment where the experience of creating art is recorded for research purposes. The camera captures a live experience in the environment in which art is created. It also records the body using different methods of art making. This dual approach ensures that the lived experience of the artist and the art that is produced are both recorded for research purposes. I undertake this method to create self-portraiture, applying my own phenomenological, lived experiences as artist/ researcher.

The visual arts-based methods that I am employing are participatory (Leavy, 2009). This means that the methods I am using will be viewed by an audience that will experience it, either in exhibitions or live events. As I am the participant in research and creating art that serves as data, I am incorporating the visual arts in research. As Leavy (2009) said, "*Visual arts-based participatory methods* are a specific set of practices for incorporating visual art into the research process … these methods are frequently part of multimethod research designs" (p. 227). The model of phenomenology and reflexivity is one such example of combining different methodologies, where a more traditional design does not suffice. I have explained phenomenology, and art in detail, and in the following section I will discuss reflexivity in general terms as I combine it with the above notions of phenomenology, to articulate my own emerging methodological practice, which I am calling Reflexive Phenomenology.

2.7. Reflexive phenomenology

The notion of reflexivity as an inner dialogue was first developed by Pierce (1868), developed the concept of reflexivity as inner dialogue, or "musement" (as cited in Archer, 2013, p. 2). Archer (2013) stated this "transformed the passive 'looking in' to active speaking, listening *and responding*" (p. 2). Archer (2013) continues, "by

questioning and answering ourselves in self-talk, presumes *we alternate between subject and object"* (p. 2). This reflexive internal conversation where I am simultaneously the subject and the object, voices a question internally. My response comes from the subject and object and can be re-questioned by the subject. In "Principles of Psychology" (James, 1890, as cited in Archer, 2013) William James provided insight into the idea of dialogue between self /other and subject/ object. Through the reflexive conservation, the subject asks the question and the object answers and vice-versa until a new action is performed. This puts the "me-myself-I" into the present lived experience of the body in space and time, where the self, alters as it moves along the timeline which is also the "life- line" (Archer, 2013, p. 4) of a person. Similarly, Archer (2013) defines reflexivity as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice-versa" (Archer, 2013, p. 5). Archer identifies different modes of reflexivity, and for my work, I identify with what she called "autonomous reflexivity" (Archer, 2013, p. 5) where conversations are internal, self-contained and lead directly to action.

I assert that my creative work for this DCA engages phenomenology and reflexivity to create what I am calling Reflexive Phenomenology. In terms of phenomenology, the research approach seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who experience it (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). The goal in phenomenology is to describe "the meaning of this experience – both in terms of *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced" (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019, p. 91). Put simply, phenomenology is the individual's lived experience in the world, the relationship between the body and other phenomena. As for reflexivity, the inner dialogue between the body as subject and object leads to action. I am combining these two methodologies to take in the everyday life of the person where the lived-in experience of the body and reflecting on this experience to bring about not only action but as Archer (2013) states for change and transformation.

This approach has application in the phenomenological notion of the lived experience of the artist in the studio where the focus is on the body as the subject/ object when it is engaged with "internal conversations [that] are internal, self-

contained and lead directly to action" (Akram & Hogan, 2015, p. 607). In my case, as I am the sole participant in this research, my aim is to investigate my own lived experience in the studio. I aim to use methods of reflexivity by constructing an inner dialogue in the studio and in relation to making. This will be done by capturing my reflections using sketches, video diary and photographs, which becomes the research data that develops over a period of time. In this process, I am continually in the cycle of reflecting and making, maintaining a strong orientation towards the phenomenon under study. The final stages of this process of reflexivity will be to see how the data contributes toward the whole phenomena. New knowledge and meanings may evolve through this process about the research project "to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person [him] herself" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96), allowing the production of the new to emerge. For me, all the above can be manifested in the body engaging with the handling of art-making tools themselves. The data that will need to be gathered includes all the experiences of the researcher. This will mean not only physical data but also unseen data, what I hear, see, experience, and think in the process of collecting data.

2.8. Methods of data collection

My data collection methods applying phenomenological and reflexive practices consist of video diaries, sketches, photographs, and filmed documentation as well as actual artworks. As stated earlier, my research is practice-led, utilising own body as a site to conduct research, and represented in the genre of self-portraiture. The embodied material through which my "body is transformed" (Parker-Starbuck & Mock, 2013, p. 210), where ideas are discovered, presented and research is conducted in and through my body, challenging the Cartesian mind/ body duality. I am locating the body as site, not as a gendered, sexual, political, or cultural body but rather, the body/self of an artist using phenomenological, reflexive methods of research. I will therefore use 'first-person methods' which means using my own physical, corporeal body through everyday activities in the art studio. The body is the vehicle in which the lived experience is performed. The making process is like a rehearsal in the studio, where I habitually and intentionally go through the bodily process of making marks using various drawing, painting, etching and ceramic media.

This will be reflected in the daily discipline/ habit/ routine through reflecting on daily movements, action and re-enactment using muscle memory in art practice. My way of recording this process is through relying upon audio-visual documentation, photographs, and sketches, visual journals, which allows the artist / researcher to see and hear the body being recorded. In video documentation there is a distancing perspective that provides close readings for analysis through self-reflection interviews which ask pertinent questions, such as how does the artist/ body feel today? This provides impetus for what colours and other techniques I might deploy in the studio.

Below is a list of frequently used methods I have been using and will continue to use in this research:

1. **Reflective journal/ writings:**

- Discursive and detailed personal application of the various arts techniques/methods at the site of making art in the studio: reflections on video and of the actual experience of making

2. **Videomaking of studio practice:**

- Recording "live" video footage capturing work being made in the studio. This will provide a detailed visual diary of my 'mark-making' experiences

3. **Artist journal:**

- Early stages of ideas for work, techniques, sensations etc- a detailed presentation journal may or may not appear in final exhibitions of my DCA creative work.

4. **Audience feedback:**

- Feedback from audience from exhibitions, which I will use to further inform my work.

I will attempt these methods in a loose chronology of phases for the realisation of creative outcomes for this DCA, as outlined in the projected outcomes table below.

Table 2.1

Methodological Table - Phases, data gathering methods, and timeline

Phase	Activity	Dates	Methods of Data Collection
1	Studio-Work at USQ, A and Q Block	Mar, 2018-Dec, 2019	1, 2, 3
2	**DCA Exhibition #1**: Scratching the Surface: Self Portraiture - Exploring the Body-as-Self, A Block Gallery, USQ)	1-23 October, 2019	4 I received feedback both formally and informally in the form of a local newspaper article. Informally by comments made by staff, students, and visitors to the exhibition. I left a guest book for people to sign.
3	Studio-Work: Yangon, Myanmar Studio-work and journaling, COVID19 Hotel quarantine, Sydney, Australia	Jan, 2020-Apr, 2020	1,2,3, 4
4	**DCA Exhibition #2:** Cam Robertson Gallery, Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery.	March, 2021	4
5	**Research trip: The Naked Face NGV** Studio-work- Brisbane	Jan, 2021	1, 2, 3,4
6	Reflective data coding, exegesis writing and binding	Jan, 2021	1,2, 3, 4

The table reveals the projected outcomes for my DCA research which is heavily reliant on studio practice. The phases mentioned above will assist me in creating instances of intense making, exhibition, data gathering, coding that are part of my methods for deploying and articulating my notion of a Reflective Phenomenology methodology.

Figure 2.1

Paul Klee, 1919, *Abwagender Kunstler*

CHAPTER 3: PHILOSOPHY AND KEY ISSUES IN THE LITERATURE

3.1. Introduction

In this literature review, I am investigating theories associated with self, embodiment, and phenomenology. Key theorists include the work of Maurice-Merleau-Ponty, Rosalind Krauss, Jacques Lacan, and Bruce Fink. These theories and constructionist theories of self and identity form the basis for investigating the self-portraiture and contextualise the practical component of my research. This Literature Review also focuses on what the literature says about these artists that use the genre of self-portraiture and offers a practitioner review section which focuses on key practitioners who have specifically influenced my creative practice and who explore the concept of self-portraiture. The artists as key practitioners anchor my creative work in the context of self-portraiture which is also explored through theoretical and methodological lenses used to extend and develop my work over the course of the Doctor of Creative Arts.

3.2. Portraits of the Self: The research/artist as a rebellious subject and object

Throughout history artists have used self-portraiture as a way of self-representation and self-understanding (Alter Muri, 2007). Self-portraiture, in the most fundamental sense, is a portrait an artist produces of themselves. An artist may use self-portraiture as a way of revealing something about themselves. A self-portrait is a way of expressing oneself, but is also a way of finding oneself, or, more accurately, constructing oneself. It can be an opportunity for an artist to step back from, or to reflect on, that experience. In this activity, the artist does not need to worry about pleasing others, but only him or herself. Nor does the artist need to be concerned about how they look in the mirror, but, rather, they can place more intent on capturing something about the face and head. It can be just a few marks, colours or strokes that can sum up the self-portrait. Traditionally, self-portraiture is the artist's intention to represent or re-present the face and head as the subject/ object of inquiry. In recent history, "selfies taken on smart phones demonstrate a similar purpose, as self-portraits have done for centuries" (Kozinets, Gretzel, Dinhopl, 2017, p. 2). My research project,

however, is not to produce selfies nor to make realistic self-portraits in the traditional sense. Rather, I am rebelling against the traditional, modernist notion of self-portraiture and the Cartesian mind/ body split and re-representing my face and head using the body to construct a self-portrait. Sartre (1943) affirmed "the body as the self" (as cited in Synnott, 1992, p. 100) and I am using the body-as-self. There are many theories around the notion of the body, but my research question is how the body can be used to construct a self-portrait? To address this question, I am drawing on the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and his concept of the lived body. Phenomenological theories will be explored as well as theories of the body and the self. Theories of the body have developed over the centuries from the Greeks to the present, as has the genre of self-portraiture.

The history of self-portraiture dates back to Egyptian, Greek, and Roman times but in the Renaissance period in the mid-15th to 16th centuries it becomes centre stage, coinciding with the invention of the flat mirror where artists depicted themselves in religious works as a "sort of signature or testament of the artist's skill" (Gorichanaz, 2019, p. 5). Artists such as Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72) *Self-Portrait* (ca.1436) and Agnolo Gaddi (1369-96) *Self-Portrait* (ca. 1380) promoted themselves to prospective employers in return for a commission or a place in the royal court. Shearer West (2004) notes that self-portraiture during this time was in order "to gain a rite of passage in the artworld, to promote their artistic abilities, to attract commissions and patronages, to experiment with different techniques, methods and media, to ultimately emerge as sovereign individuals" (as cited in Tamboukou, 2015, p. 77). During the Renaissance, artists frequently identified themselves as either the main subject, or as important characters in their work, often with different actions, dress, and backgrounds.

Self-portraiture was used to represent wealth and interest in the individual as a subject, to raise the profile of the artist and even to represent the artist as "the conduit of divine inspiration (an earthly god among mere mortals)" (Jones, 1998, p. 57) or "transcendence" (Tamboukou, 2015, p. 77), for example, Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) painted himself in "true colours" (Lackey, 2006, p. 439) in *Self-Portrait* (1500) and Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669) who created self-portraits in at least 40 paintings, 31 etchings and ten drawings which all produced a "visual autobiography" (Harris, 2013, p. 136). According to Simone Alter Muri (2007), "self-portraits can be a tool to

assist the artist to step back from an experience and reflect on that experience" (p. 331) as a form of art therapy. In my work, self-portraiture can be a way of healing, as a way of overcoming traumas in the artist's life (Alter Muri, 2007). Self-portraiture for me, is a focus on the self as a construct and not as a realistic depiction of my face and head. According to Amelia Jones (1998) the postmodernist approach to the artist as the subject and object is "fragmented, decentred, intersubjectively defined" (p. 57). Anne Marsh (1993) concludes that in the postmodern era, the "presence of the artist body and the actions performed on the body becomes the focus of the work" (p. 96). The body-as-self becomes the vehicle to construct my self-portrait as the action of performing the self-portrait rather than painting a realistic mirror image of my face and head. This is a different approach to self-portraiture but still retains some of the devices needed to capture the face, such as the mirror.

Before photography, only artists could construct a self-portrait, using such devices as still water, glasses, and reflective surfaces, eventually choosing the mirror as an invaluable instrument, a two-dimensional surface that displays a three-dimensional image. My approach is to retain some of the methods and devices of traditional self-portraiture in my creative works, with a few differences. Initially, in this research project, my work began with a series of selfies taken in the mirror, followed by a series of drawings and etchings based on those photographs. The series of self-portraits that followed was not so much about re-representing my face in the mirror, but more about how the body can be employed phenomenologically to construct a self-portrait. Based on the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) and his concept of the lived body, I am employing my body to make marks on different surfaces using tools and art mediums in the studio. These images retained the use of the mirror as a device but are intentionally compositionally off-centre in the picture plane and try to push my face and head to extreme positions. I have used complementary colours and the use of the palette knife rather than the realistic use of colour and conventional paintbrush as a tool. I intentionally painted or printed right up against the edge (or "bleed") and left the painting frames unvarnished. These methods are ways of communicating a feeling of uneasiness and are deconstructionist and informal in composition. My aim in constructing self-portraits, as stated earlier, is not realistic, finished, formal representations of my face and head.

However, what evolved from this process was more of a focus on the phenomenological exchange between the body and objects to construct a self-portrait.

My method of constructing a self-portrait developed into removing all conventional devices such as the mirror or even to represent my face and head, to a predominately phenomenological approach echoing Merleau-Ponty's (1962) intertwining chiasmus of the body and objects. The "body as lived in by the subject" (De Beauvoir, 1988, p. 69), the body in performance (Auslander, 2006) and body-as-self (Sartre, 1943, as cited in Synnott, 1992, p. 100) to make marks using art-making tools as an extension of the body. The focus in this series of my creative works made for this research emphasises how the artist/ body feels in time and place. The process consisted of purely making random, repetitive marks, working against representation of my face/ head as in conventional self-portraiture. This forms my original contribution to the field of self-portraiture in the visual arts.

This understanding of the process of making as self-portrait, using the body-as-self, where the body expresses its own lived embodiment and physicality, I found, was a way of getting to know myself. The self-portrait, for me, is a way of representing and experiencing the lived, physicality of my body, but equally, I am employing my body to construct a self-portrait. There are various interpretations of the body, such as the body is the tomb of the soul (Plato) (Synnott, 1992); your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (St. Paul) (Synnott, 1992); your body is a machine (Descartes) (Synnott, 1992), but Sartre (1943) said, the body is self (Sartre, 1943 as cited in Synnott, 1992, p. 100). For me, I want to use my body to construct a self-portrait and as an artist I represent, that is, re-present my body using mark-making processes. In reference to representation, Stuart Hall (1997) makes two points on this: Firstly, "representation is always re-representation" (Hall, 1997, as cited in Richardson, 2012, p. 3) and is a "construct in accordance with a specific set of politics and ideas" (Richardson, 2012, p. 3). Secondly, Hall (1997) states that "Representation as representative of something" (Hall, 1997, as cited in Richardson, 2012, p. 3). My aim is to rebel against the traditional idea of self-portraiture as my representation of something by using my body to represent my self-portrait. My self-portrait represents or rather re-represents my body as a non-normative body which only exists in representation. My self-portrait is framed as representation of my body and while it does not fit in with transgressive

art, which aims to outrage or shock, it does deviate from what is considered traditional self-portraiture.

In the following passage, I wish to outline the discourse surrounding the Cartesian split between the body and mind. The Cartesian dualism, which was developed by the sixteenth-century philosopher Rene Descartes (1971) in his *Discourse on Method*. This philosophy was based on the idiom, "the *mind*, by which I am what I am" (Descartes, 1971, as cited in Synnott, 1992, p. 100). A distinction is made between the head and the body, with the mind associated with "reason, philosophy, control and transcendence, the body denotes unruly passions, excess and immanence" (Richardson, 2012, p. 13). I rebel against the Cartesian split between body and mind in my representation of the self-portrait, and I argue that the body does not denote unruly passions, excess and immanence. Rather, my body embodies the lived experience, as the subject and object where my body encounters itself using art tools and materials to construct a self-portrait. The artworks become an embodiment of my body and leaves its trace as residue on the works. This phenomenological exchange between the body and objects is the main aim that I want to explore in more detail in the next section.

3.3. My self-body process art practice

In this study, my focus was on phenomenology, process art (Wheeler, 1991) and the body-as-self and how it influences my art practice. In my practice, my bodily connection to the artworks was in the natural or studio environment where the work was made. According to Daniel Wheeler (1991) in Art Since Mid-Century, process art allows "natural forces- time, gravity, atmosphere, temperature to so affect the materials that the works remain forever subject to the waning or waxing stresses of change" (p. 259). Where performance artists use their own bodies as the medium and personal actions their means, in my practice I employed the body to construct a portrait of self, using art materials. Petra Lange-Berdt states in How to Be complicit with Materials (2015): - "the term 'material' describes not prime matter but substances that always subject to change, be it through handling, interaction with their surroundings, or the dynamic life of their chemical reactions" (p. 12). The meanings are taken from matter and materiality (Lange-Berndt, 2015) and my bodily temporal engagement with it. I allowed the process of change to occur in my artworks such as chemical reactions,

bodily residue, colour changes, and decay to affect the works. After the work of the artist is done, my artworks works were subject to the elements, time, and gravity in the process of art making. In Formless: A Users Guide (1997) Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, "focussed on art that explores processes of embodiment, touch and materialization of thought" (Bois & Krauss, 1997, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015, p. 13). In my practice, I explored the process of embodiment, touch, and materiality where I followed materials through my bodily connection with art materials, such as wood, stone, paper, paint, clay, metal, ink, muslin, charcoal wax etc. Material unlike matter refers to natural materials or artificial substances which will be further processed and transformed (Wagner, 2001, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015). They are the base used for artistic creation. To follow materials means we come against a host of different terms that can vary from "matter, material, materiality, *Stoff*, substance or medium". (Lange-Berdt, 2015, p. 14). Materials are said to have a life of their own or *Eigenleben* and always in the state of becoming (Grosz, 2001, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015). Jane Bennett calls them "vibrant matter" (Bennett, 2010, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015) and said to have unknown possibilities (Derrida, 1985, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015). The phenomenon of materiality is known as materiality-effect (Brown, 2010, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015) because the result of the process of using materials is known through our bodily senses. In the following section, I explore phenomenology in more detail and how it relates to using the body-as-self.

Phenomenology is a philosophical movement started by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl in 1905, which was later developed by Maurice-Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1962). To Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is that as humans we engage through the world through embodiment. For him, the "body is seen as 'the soil' of human existence, namely the body as the primordial site of experience and expression" (Poulsen & Thogensen, 2011, p. 32). *In Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) he challenges the Cartesian mind/body split by arguing that our mind and body is not separate, but one with the world. The body, which includes our mind, is the site for our lived existence. Merleau-Ponty talks about the body as our own lived-in body which continually engages with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968) Merleau-Ponty combines the concept of the lived body and the ontological notion of "flesh (*la chair*)" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, as cited in Leder, 1990, p. 62). Flesh is neither of this world nor of the subject, but it is primal. Hence the mind

cannot be conceived of as separate to the body, but rather has a mutual relationship with the flesh. If we as humans want to understand the world, we experience it through our bodies. When our bodies engage with objects or things in this world, we get to know self (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). When I touch an object with my body, I am also being touched by it and the act of touching an object invokes an awareness of self (Beaulieu, 2000, p. 39). The modernist idea of self was based on "a stable, knowable world" (Gergen, 1991, as cited in Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 202) but a postmodernist mode (Sartre, 1957; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Berzonsky, 1990, as cited in Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 206) say, the self is a construct and "identity is a self-constructed theory and is continually in flux" (Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 206). The self is a result of choices or actions made in one's life. Based on this theory, there is no such thing as finding oneself or discovering a core identity, the self can be made up of multiple selves based on actions that have been taken in one's life. In my practice, I am using the body-as-self as a construct and as a result my identity and self is constantly changing and in flux. When the body meets itself, it invokes an awareness of self. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) said, subjectivity is not divorced from the body, rather, my existence as subjectivity is one with my existence as a body and with the existence with this world. In this context, my research project, is using the body-as-self to make a portrait of self and using tools and materials to construct a portrait of self. The central aspect of this project is the lived bodily experience of the artist (myself) to create a self-portrait. My aim here is to link Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory to anchor my creative art practice within a postmodern view of self-portraiture (this process is specifically discussed in Chapter 2, Methodology). Ideas associated with self as developed by Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink are outlined below as well as Rosalind Krauss's reading of Lacan's essay: "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1977) and what this means for self-portraiture using the body-as-self.

In his account, Lacan describes the time when the infant recognises their image in the mirror. Lacan suggests the mirror gives a false sense of self. The formation of the ego or the 'self-image', as well as linguistically structured images, are the ways in which the self is presented. According to Fink (1995), "the ego or self, is a construct, a mental object and is by its very nature a distortion, an error, a misunderstanding" (p. 37). The images produced using the mirror are *subject* to the symbolic codes of

culture, and the images produced are constructs of self. Rosalind Krauss (1997) has a different take on Lacan's concept of the Mirror Stage as "the child, Narcissus-like, bent over the reflective pool of water, finding the source of his *imago* on a horizontal field" (p. 90). Krauss emphasises the horizontal axis of the body or the lower part of the body stratum. This is important for me in constructing a portrait of self, employing the body as a tool from a horizontal orientation where the lower part of the body is emphasised. I use tools and materials with my body to create self-portraiture on the floor of the studio, using a stick attached to the paintbrush as an extension of my body. The use of the stick allows less control via the hand and allows the body to take more control over mark-making. Handling a paintbrush is about learned behaviour of the mind in knowing how to paint, whereas, if the brush is attached to a long stick to reach the floor it takes away the element of control. Hence, by changing the way I paint and the knowledge of how to paint, I am allowing the body to take control and therefore, change the representation. By creating the artwork on the floor as opposed to a vertical easel, the emphasis is on the lower part of the body on a horizontal orientation.

Horizontality, as opposed to verticality, is explored by Bois & Krauss (1997) as a "state of being, lowering from the vertical to the horizontal" or "horizontalization" (p.26). The horizontal 'stages an attack' against the vertical axis and on the body and culture itself. The floor is the production site as a specific intention, which is what I consciously use in my work

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The horizontal field emphasises the lower part of the body and is essentially an attack on the vertical, upright human body. According to Krauss, horizontal orientation represents something primal, animalistic, and ancient where the gaze is toward the ground. On the other hand, the vertical, where the human being is erect and frontal, is the opposite to the horizontal. In my practice, I use both the vertical and horizontal but whatever the orientation, the focus is on the use of the body to make the artworks. The idea of using the body signals the idea of corporeality and refers to the "physical practices and techniques of material bodies" (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2013, p. 212). In this sense, the notion of embodiment refers to the physical state of being in a body or having a body. As Erika Fisher-Lichte (2008) said, "[B]y emphasising the bodily being-in-the-world of humans, embodiment creates the possibility for the body to function as an object, subject, material and source of symbolic construction, as well as

a product of cultural inscription" (Fisher-Lichte, 2008, as cited in Kershaw & Nicholson, 2013, p. 212).

In this context, the idea of the body as subject/ object is something I explore in this research. For me, the body is not something I comment on in terms of gender, cultural or social constructs, rather, my focus is how employing the body, can create meaning for myself first, then my audience. The transformation from vertical to horizontal axis, where the body is lowered from a vertical to a horizontal position, is a deliberate act of embodiment of my performative artist's body in space and time. For me, this is symbolic of what I want to represent and create meaning with my body in the studio, without theatricality, but rather, exploring the notion of how the artist/ body intersects with the performativity of embodiment.

3.4. Embodiment and performative practices

The terms body or bodies represents specifically what is considered human and may include representations where the body is either present or absent. In Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation" (1997), Amelia Jones argued that body art or performance may be presented through "photographic, textual, oral, video, and/or film traces" (p. 11). The fact that the audience is not present when the artist performs the work does not take away from its intrinsic value or significance. She noted "while the live situation may enable phenomenological flesh-to-flesh engagement, the documentary exchange (viewer/ reader <–> document) is equally intersubjective" (p. 12). In her book, "Body Art/ Performing the Subject" (1998), Jones argued that body art has made a dramatic shift from modernism to postmodernism, informed by phenomenology, where artworks no longer need to be a "fixed, normative, centered modernist subject" (p. 12). As Jones states, the experience of viewing artworks via photograph or text is different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, but "neither has a privileged relationship to the historical "truth" of the performance" (p. 11). Either way, the audience can "grasp the historical, political, social and personal contexts for a particular performance" (p. 12). In my body art, I will be employing my body to construct a portrait of self in the studio which will be recorded on video and photographs as a form of "documentary traces" (p.12) depicting how my body as object and subject to create marks that represent a portrait of self. My portrait of self is rebelling against traditional self-portraiture, which is a

modernist, realistic, normative, frontal representation of the face and head. I am essentially using the body to construct a self-portrait as a body art performance. Jones argued that "body art instantiates the radical shift in subjectivity from a modernist to a post-modernist mode" (p. 12). She states "body art performances are enacting the dispersed, multiplies, specific subjectivities …" (p. 12). The difference between a modernist and postmodernist mode is identified by differentiating the terms such as body art and performance. The term body art is used here to differentiate it from performance art which was a term used to describe performances made in 1960s – 1970s. Performance as a broad term may also be used to describe a theatrical piece presented to an audience. This implies that by using the term performance, it must take place in front of an audience. However, as Jones (1997) stated, body art is informed by "an embodied, phenomenological model of intersubjectivity" (p. 18). Body art is where I am phenomenologically engaged with the performative body to construct a self-portrait as artwork recorded and made in the studio and not to be presented as a live act in front of an audience. Rather, I am recording the making of my self-portraits in the studio as a body art performance. It records and embodies the lived experience of the body of the artist. While there are performative aspects to my practice as an artist, it is not classed as performance per se. Rather, it is a body art performance that is essentially my body as the artist and the awareness of my body as it performs the role of re-representing in the process of art making. My body art or body works will be presented to an audience later in the form of documentary evidence.

In body art, the body itself is the mode of embodying, and as Judith Butler (1988) writes in "Performative Acts and Feminist Theory(1988), the "'what' that it embodies is possibilities" (p. 521). The "materializing of possibilities" (p. 521) is the very notion of being a body as not merely matter or materiality but as Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1953) said, "a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation" (p. 521). The performative body or bodies are integral to the communication of meaning to an audience. It is an art of bodily possibility, an event where the limits of the body are negotiated, fetishized, imagined somehow else" (p. 20). The physical body presents what Peta Tait (2000) calls a "cultural spectacle" (p. 1) which does not limit the body through performance alone, rather the body is performative: an adverb that describes the nature of the body as a surface that is fluid and flexible in all somatic meaning-making contexts.

For me, as a researcher, I am essentially employing my own body as a conduit for research. According to Jennifer Parker-Starbuck and Roberta Mock in "Researching the Body in/as Performance" (2011), what is produced and performed by bodies is used for research in/ as performance. There is a blurring of live art and performance boundaries as the artist oscillates between being the subject/ object. For me, I am implementing the performative artist/ body as it engages with tools and art materials in the studio. I am using the studio as a type of stage, for myself, where the body is used as a vehicle for marking artworks. My body, therefore, is central in expressing that which is within, without any restrictions or limitations on how and what is expressed. In my practice, I intersect the interdisciplinary nature of body art and performance, and I am examining not only the body but the space it occupies, to not only "analyse bodies *in* spaces of performance but to consider how bodies might *become* or *produce* performance spaces" (Parker-Starbuck & Mock, 2013, p. 210). Crucial to my theoretical and practical exploration, my body becomes the material which is analysed, critiqued, scrutinised, displayed and transformed. This research endeavours to understand how my body becomes the way in which artworks are made using the body as a tool.

In the notion of embodiment, the body is employed not only as Kershaw & Nicholson (2013), call the "art of bodies" (p. 212) that creates possibilities where the body is used to its limits. The actual body of the artist negotiates its way around the studio, where gestures, movements and orientation are deployed in a way to create meaning. Artist researchers may analyse artworks where the body is absent and not present and this widens the context of the body as not so much about the materiality of flesh, a biological entity, but more as a complex space for potential rather than a fixed entity. The various ways in which the body and my art practice can be interrogated is a result of asking questions such as:

- How do I encounter a/ the performing body?
- How does my/ a body participate in, or generate, performance?
- What challenges are posed by archival bodies?
- How are bodies understood, imagined and re-embodied through notating practices, stage directions, images or memorabilia? (Kershaw & Nicolson, 2013, p. 212-13).

These questions are applicable to me as I interrogate my art practice of body art performance, rebelling against the traditional practice of self-portraiture. In the archival sense, documentation can be used, such as "written, photographic and moving images" (Kershaw & Nicolson, 2013, p. 213). I use photographs and video to record my body art practice, especially the methods I am using. This could include my body using tools and art materials to construct a self-portrait. These methods include how my body is using tools and art materials. This video documentation records the day-to-day process of my art practice. How the body does the phenomenological exchange is more important than the outcome of the artworks. It could even include mistakes in the process of making artworks and include that as documentary evidence. This is an ongoing process of building up a body of work, which will include methods I am using and how my body is engaging with the art space as a performance space.

The visual artist's body as an individual is not regarded in the same way as others in the performative context. How the body encounters itself is a phenomenological exchange between the performing body in contact with tools and materials. This dynamic effect creates a relationship with the body and the spaces in which the body finds itself. In this context, in my practice, my body embodies that which is undertaken in the studio, as a performative act of the artist/ body in space and time. This can, therefore, manifest and capture how the artist/ body uses the studio space but also the methods that are used to reflect how the artist/ body is feeling at certain times of the day. My body is materialising, realising and embodying the possibilities which I believe adds meaning to what is done in the studio. How the body is feeling is essential in expressing that which is within mark-making to create a portrait of self in the studio. Creating an atmosphere and finding ways for this to happen is something I wish to explore further in my methods of making my art in the studio.

As my body is the avenue for research, I am finding ways in which to allow the body to not only experience but to express how the body is feeling at one time and place. Jane Bacon (2009) delivered a paper entitled "Sitting Practice: Expansion Earth" (2009) at TaPRA Conference, University of Plymouth, September 8, 2009, where her aim was to eradicate the mind/ body binary. The emphasis is not so much on the spectatorial or spectated body, but more to do with the lived-in experience of the body. As Bacon sits, she allows a movement, a word or an image to emerge that

embraces bodily and felt experience. In this exchange, there is a sharing of research through the body and addressing binaries such as bodies in theory/ practice, observing/ spectating bodies and performing/ participating bodies. By addressing these binaries in my own studio practice, I am afforded an avenue of investigation that drives new creative art research. Parker-Starbuck & Mock (2013) identify two main questions that drive the research project that focuses on bodies and performance:

- What and whose body/ bodies am I researching?
- How am I locating this/ these particular body/ bodies in or as a site of performance research? (p. 214).

In my research project, the starting point is my body as the centre of practice-led research and as the subject of study. Part of the researcher's creative practice is writing about the lived 'experience' of the body, but I am interested in using Susan Kozel's (2008) model that incorporates 'physical performance and digital technology suggesting ways in which one might 'do' phenomenology' (Kozel, 2008, as cited in Kershaw & Nicolson, 2013, p. 227-8). Kozel (2008) outlines specific first-person methods and steps taken from her own practice. These are:

- Take your attention into this very moment.
- Suspend your main flow of thought.
- Call your attention to your body and what it is experiencing …
- Witness what you see, hear and touch …
- Take a break …
- Describe what you experienced … (as cited in Kershaw & Nicolson, 2013, p. 228).

I am locating my specific body as the site of this research with particular attention to the rebelliousness of the traditional self-portrait by using the artist/ body-as-self. The focus is on the body in the art studio as well as my proximity to other objects that are used as tools and materials that the body employs. This practice is useful in interrogating my art practice because it not so much about writing about research findings but in the *doing* of the phenomenological research, based on the writings of Merleau-Ponty.

My approach is to interrogate my work as a rebellious body by using body awareness, observation, and critical analysis of my lived-in bodily experiences in the studio. I am using first-person methods of physical performance and digital technology. Documentary evidence covers how I do embodied phenomenology in the studio as I record through video and photographs my body art or performances. The practitioner review below is a discussion of artists who have influenced my practice and my research in the studio. As for the art-making methods and techniques a more detailed discussion will be included in the Methodology chapter.

3.5. Practitioner review

As part of the Literature Review, this Section 3.5 Practitioner Review aims to provide a working knowledge of the creative works and practices relevant to the concept of self-portraiture as part of my creative practice, and the examples of practice will assist in helping to construct research questions that will link my theoretical knowledge and methodological practice. As part of this practitioner review, examples of artists that rebel against traditional self-portraiture and how they employ the body-as-self are examined. This does not include all artists that use self-portraiture as a practice, but only those who are actively involved in the creative practice that explores the rebellious body, and have, in some way, impacted my own creative practice. They come from diverse backgrounds and represent a variety of ways in which this concept has been interpreted, explored, and expressed in their body of work. Below, I have studied examples of their work which have direct relevance and considered how their work has influenced and formed my own practice, citing similarities and differences. The artists include Bruce Nauman, Mike Parr, Frank Auerbach, Trevor Lyons, Arnulf Rainer,and Cindy Sherman. .

I have included a process artist because as time went on my practice was about the process of how the body-as-self engaged in the process of making not self-portraiture. This is defined as Process art and as Daniel Wheeler (1991) says in,Art Since Mid-Century, “artists associated with “process” chose external but organic substances- oil, rubber, wood, grass, ice, sawdust, even cornflakes- as their materials …allowed natural forces- time in collusion with gravity, temperature, atmosphere to so affect the materials that the works remain subject to the waning or waxing stresses of change” (Wheeler, 1991, p. 259). Based on this statement I think it is specific about

what process art is and the artists mentioned previously, were chosen because of their approach to self-portraiture, which I was influenced in the early stages of my project. A contemporary Australian artist that identifies as a process artist, is Aida Tomescu, which I will analyse in section 3.5.7. Each of these artists have made a substantial contribution to the visual arts, especially in their respective fields, which is of great significance to this research project.

3.5.1. Bruce Nauman

Bruce Nauman investigates spatial relationships with a focus on his own body. He said, 'if you can manipulate clay and end up with art, you can manipulate yourself

Figure 3.1
Bruce Nauman, 1996-97, *Self-Portrait as a fountain*

in it as well. It has to do with using the body as a tool, an object to manipulate' (Nauman, 1971). He works in traditional and non-traditional materials to create self-portraits. For example, *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, 1966-67 (Figure 3.1). As a fountain he disengaged with himself and the world but meanwhile, as the subject – be it Nauman himself or the intended viewer – always remained untouched (Graw & Moltke, 1995). This portrait exemplifies Nauman's work as having elements of body, video, and performance.

In another quite different work, *Face Mask* (1981), (Figure 3.2) combines an expressionistic serif text of the word 'Face' written backwards, in the same way as in a mirror or glass and the word 'Mask' written forwards. As Carrie Butt (2016) says, the work "is self-referential and alludes to the body" (p. 695). The reference is made to the face and to the idea of the mask. By reversing the text 'Face' and writing the text 'Mask' in a straightforward manner, the work can be read as verbs facing something or masking something. Either way, the re-presentation of the body is rebellious and disruptive. For example, the reversal of the text 'Face' is, as Butt (2016) says, deceptively simple but his work is uncomfortable and irritating to experience by the viewer (Butt, 2016). The emphasis on the word 'Face' which has been written backwards means you would need a mirror to read the right way. The mirror is an object that is usually reserved for an image of the face. The way the work has been constructed also alludes to the body in the human act of scribbling or rubbing out, where some of the text is visible and in the other parts erased as if something is being masked. The two words put together one on top of the other, reinforce the whole idea of the mask on a human face, in hiding his or her identity. This idea can be played out in the current climate of COVID19, especially when the wearing of a face mask becomes mandatory and politicised. The refusal to wear a face mask is also an act rebelliousness as a body, rebelling against health warnings and government.

Figure 3.2

,Bruce Nauman *Face mask,* pastel, charcoal and pencil on paper, 132.8x 180 cm.

Another performative work by Nauman is *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square* (1976-78, 2010), which is a short film where the artist uses his own body to walk step by step forwards and backwards, slowly around a square marked out on the floor of the studio. There is music playing continuously, adding to the repetitive nature of the work. Viewers becomes very aware of their own bodies and the performance incites rebelliousness and discomfort in the body of the viewers. This is reinforced by the awkward movements of the artist's body being employed to make such simple movements. The work, highlights how the effort expended in our own bodies to do even simple tasks. The idea of using the body in the studio is of interest to me because it records how the body may be used as a construct of self. By recording this work, it becomes a documentary that traces the body's movement as a performance. The body leaves its trace on the ground and in the art space itself. The task of recording how the body engages with itself, and the

surroundings reinforces the long-lasting value and significance for me as I use the body-as-self to construct a self-portrait that rebels against the traditional idea of self-portraiture.

In another work, *Ten Heads, Up and Down,* (1990), (Figure 3.3) consists of ten heads which represent the artist's head, mounted on top of each other and upside down, made of wax and suspended from the ceiling with wire. A sense of unease and instability is created in the re-representation of the artist's body. The conventional sculptural form of a human head is subverted by disrupting the formal elements of sculpture and in the way they are exhibited in a gallery space. The use of fencing wire

Figure 3.3 Bruce Nauman, 1990, *Ten Heads Circle/ Up and Down,* .wax, wire, 243.84 cm.

to install the work instead of the usual hanging wire also suggests a rebelliousness against the traditional idea of hanging in a gallery space. The idea of using a three-dimensional form, replicates the head of the artist and it can also be seen in the round. The nature of the material ensures that every line and shape of the face is cast in wax. The heads are a vessel, even though they appear solid. The use of a three-dimensional form is complementary to the two-dimensional work that may be on the wall. In re-representing a self-portrait in the form of ten heads, on top of each other, the copy of the artist head/ body rebels against the traditional idea of self-portraiture. The artist has employed the body to create a mould for the heads which reinforces the idea of the artist body-as-self. It suggests there is a body below the heads, the artist's body. Presenting the heads as upside down and on top of each other "incites discomfort in the viewer and increases the viewer's awareness of their own bodies" (Butt, 2016, p. 695). This suggests a lynching and the viewer as well as the artist's body become hyper aware of the neck that separates the body from the head. As a sculptural form, which is normally white or the colour of the sculptural material, the artist has instead used a variety of colours. This is a reaction against traditional, modernist sculpture and a postmodern take on sculpture. It profoundly dislocates the idea that the human figure, as in the modernist sense is a "fixed, normative, centred subject" (Jones, 1997, p. 12). Another artist, who has used the body as a tool to construct a portrait of self is the Australian artist Mike Parr, who I will discuss in the next section.

3.5.2. Mike Parr

Australian artist Mike Parr was predominately a performance artist in the 1970s but between 1987 and 2004 he produced over 1000 etching prints in his *Self-Portrait Project* (Figure 3.4). In this body of work, the performative body of the artist engaged with the plates in the re-presentation of his self-portraits. Etching is a printmaking medium where lines are bitten below the surface of the metal and then ink is forced into the lines and printed on dampened paper under heavy pressure, such as an etching press. Usually, acid is used to bite into the plate but with drypoint it is a direct method of etching, where tools are used to 'scratch' directly into the plate. The lines create burrs or farrows where the ink is caught when inking up the plate.

Figure 3.4Mike Parr, 1989, *12 Untitled Self-Portraits (Set 1),* Drypoint, 107.4 x 79 cm.

Parr used this technique to create images of his face and head which he said was about the body engaging with the plates to create an image of self, even to the point of self-erasure (Grishin, 1990). The idea of Parr working and re-working the etching plate, offers a phenomenological exchange between the hands as an extension of the body of the artist and the plates themselves, as he continually worked over the plate until the image disappears behind blackened lines. These lines or burrs are like scars representing the face of the artist. The performative aspect of the artist is seen in how Parr has employed his body to carve outlines to destroy or erase the image of the face, albeit not in front of an audience like he did in earlier performances. He was interested in the actual process of working on the plates themselves. In *An Invitation to Collaborate* (1990),

Parr states:

> I think of drypoint in terms of braille and excavation. It is as though the self-portrait is already in the copper ground. The physicality of the process is also extraordinarily complete since it is hard to distinguish in one's response between an impulse to extract a contour and one that is attacking it (Loane, 1990, p. 4).

For Parr, the self-portrait is not so much the re-presentation itself, but "… the process that signifies it is" (1998, p. 319). How the performative body engages directly with the plate is central and in the surface of the plate, like flesh that was cut into – as he did in an earlier performance. For example, *Cathartic Action: Social Gesture No. 5* (1977), a fake arm was hacked off in front of a group of onlookers. In the *Self Portrait Project*, however, the artist has used tools to attack the etching plate, with "the inadvertent scourings and imperfections of the surface" (Loane, 1990, p. 4), labelled "foul bite" or "noise" (p. 4). Parr saw the process of the work as "a kind of container" (Parr, 1999), a record of every mark, "a kind of archaeological site" (Parr & Sloggett, 1999, p. 321). In the article, *Diversionary Tactics: Mike Parr at the NGA* (2016) Bree Richards considers Parr's exhibition *Mike Parr: Foreign Looking.* According to Richards:

> The artist's face subjected to fracture and distortion-smeared, sketched, scrawled, erased … topographical in their attention to fine striations and rivulets, the tangled web of lines and murky areas of tone and shade accumulating as rivers and valleys on an aging face and body (2016, p. 46).

He has re-represented his face as a "…veritable resume of techniques, marks (scars, scribbles, punctures)" (Clemens, 2015, p. 52). Parr rebels against the traditional idea of self-portraiture where the face is fractured, distorted and was more concerned with the process of how the body was employed to make a self-portrait rather than a realistic portrait of himself. As Anne Marsh states, "the position of the body was often fractured, torn and maimed" (Marsh, 1993, p. 50). Marsh is referring here to Parr's earlier performances in the 1970s but can also be akin to how he "performs" his etchings. In all of Parr's work the performative body of the artist is the key. The body is able to perform the whole process of etching and reinforces the physicality of the

body. The body leaves its trace in the prints that are made which reinforces a phenomenological exchange between the plates and the body itself. The plate needs to be scratched out using the hand as an extension of the body and there is also a doubling of the body by re-representing the body in the prints. It is a medium that can bite below the surface of the plate using acid or drypoint. Another artist who has employed the body to re-represent himself is Frank Auerbach, who will be discussed in the next section.

3.5.3. Frank Auerbach

British artist Frank Auerbach has spent the last forty-two years working with models who have posed for him, but my focus here is his *Self-Portrait* (1958) (Figure 3.5). In his work, the performative body as the lived experience of the artist is central to his practice. In the film, *Frank Auerbach: To the Studio* (Rothschild & Auerbach, 2001), he routinely works in his studio for 365 days a year, from sun-up to sun-down with hardly a minute to spare. This demonstrates the discipline of the artist body where he rarely leaves the studio and experiences a race against time in his painting practice. He is phenomenologically engaged in the surface of the work where there is a continual working and re-working of the canvas or paper, to the extent that the abrasive action of the charcoal and rubbing of the rag destroys the work. This is shown in *Self-Portrait* (1958), where a piece of paper has been adhered to the work.

,Figure 3.5

Frank Auerbach, 1958 *Self-Portrait*

When asked why Auerbach did not use a new sheet of paper, he said, "… the ghost of erased images "in" the sheet contribute some pressure to the final version, which he is loath to lose" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 3). Derek Pigrum argues this erasure is not obliteration but restitution and a renewed act of making. These "… grey traces of obliteration" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 3) demonstrate a rebelliousness in the re-representation of his face as he works against a traditional idea of self-portraiture. A "… process of making, erasing, and re-emergence becomes, in Auerbach's painting, marks, streaks, scratches, trails and traces that are subject to a process of attrition, accretion, upheaval and restitution" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 3). Pigrum invokes Kenneth Burke's notion of the rhetoric which involves "… a process of change, constant transformation and the final persuasion that effects closure" (p. 1). Pigrum suggests this is, in fact, internal rhetoric or "self-address" (Pigrum 2014, p. 2). As Auerbach rejects the notion of art as re-presentation of self but instead simply sees the process of abstracting marks taken from what is "…observed and [the] observer" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 2). His practice is to scrape the paint off after each sitting and "… it's only possible progress … even if the thing looks plausible and presentable and nobody else might notice that it's no good, one's got to destroy it" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 3).

The sculptor, Louise Bourgeois (2005), relates to this in her practice, when trying to move forward to her goal, and the "… torment that things are not right and the anxiety of not knowing what to do. There can be destruction in the attempt to find an

answer … the re-do means a solution is found to the problem. It may not be the final answer, but there is an attempt to go forward" (as cited in Pigrum, 2004, p. 4). The mark, as Charles Sanders Pierce observed, is "… essentially a sign" and the outcome of "… pure play" (Liske, 1996, as cited in Pigrum, 2014, p. 4) producing a kind of "… musement" or what Burke would call "… motivation" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 4). Pigrum stated "… the mark sets in motion a lively give and take of possibility" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 4). Auerbach commented on the primacy of the mark, as "… something that happens to me rather than what I mean to do" (Peppiatt, 2012 as cited in Pigrum, 2012, p. 9), signalling a time when he 'forgets' about himself and how to paint; at that moment, he says, the mark appears.

In his work, the rebelliousness is not against the realism of the subject, but instead against the idea of the body performing mark-making until resolution. In the film, *Frank Auerbach: To the Studio* (Rothschild & Auerbach, 2001) Auerbach says he is not interested in performing for the public in his films, rather, he is only interested in the work. For Auerbach, the bodily performative aspect is important but not something that is displayed to a public audience, only to his many models and the artist himself. There is a structure in the performative body of the artist, where his body is situated in the studio.

In this performative act of painting, as Judith Weiss (2012) states, there is an endless "… erasure and restitution" (as cited in Pigrum, 2012, p. 1), where the artist continually removes the paint or charcoal from the previous day in the quest for resolution. According to Robert Hughes (1992), this pattern of continual erasure and re-appearance was due to the artist trying to "… stabilize and define the terms of his relations to the real, resistant and experienced world" (as cited in Pigrum, 2014, p. 3). Hughes states that Auerbach used to scrub back each day's drawing to a "grey blur" (p. 3) resulting in up to thirty stages of erasure. The mark, whether it be a stroke of the brush or palette knife, or an inscription made by a metal scriber in etching, is something that happens in the performative act of the artist. The mark is simply a sign of the "…observed and observer" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 2) in self-portraiture. What is seen or not seen in the mirror is not important nor is self-expression but purely mark-making.

3.5.4. Trevor Lyons

Artist Trevor Lyons (1945-1990) used the medium of etching to represent the scouring and blasting actions that transformed and disfigured his face during the Vietnam War in 1968. An exploding Claymore anti-personnel mine ended his career as a soldier and left him with severe facial and eye injuries for which he had to undergo major reconstructive surgery. *Journeys in My Head* (1987) (Figure 3.6) is a series of developmental prints based on his horrific experience. From just one plate, he created twenty-two etching states depicting his initial injuries and the various stages of surgical reconstruction he endured. Roger Butler (2003) in *Artists in Action*: *From the collection of the Australian War Memorial*, describes Lyons' process in the following:

> While etching his memories on the zinc plates, Lyons annotated his struggles and progress. The image was etched, aquatinted, scraped back and reconstructed to create the portrait, and his descriptions read like a record of a medical procedure (Butler, 2003, p. 140).

Figure 3.6 Trevor Lyons, 1987, *Journeys in my head,* 22 nd state, etching/aquatint on paper, 34 x 30 cm

The first stage in this series of prints begins with a lightly etched profile of Lyons' face before the explosion and ends with his final image which portrays his face as a decaying skull-like head. The sunken eyes show little emotion. As Butler (2003) noted, "[I]t is death staring you in the eye" (p. 140). This suggests the way that the artist performs or executes his own portrait as a re-presentation of death. The performative body of the artist is engaged with etching tools and materials to construct

and de-construct the self-portrait, rebelling against a traditional view of self-portraiture. The re-representation of the face and head in this series of etchings goes from realism to semi-abstraction depicting the actual lived experience of the artist. The unique aspect of etching is that it is a medium that lends itself to disintegration as the acid eats away at the plate, symbolic of the physical disintegration of the body. For Lyons, these images are disturbing because of the psychological connections that are made between the violent qualities of the etching process and the lived experience of the performative body of the artist.

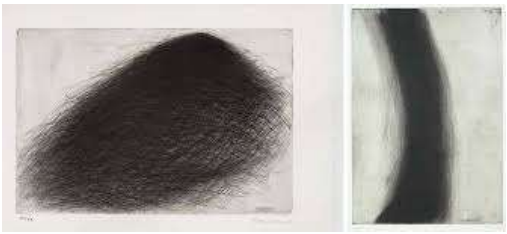
For me, this process of constructing and de-constructing the etching plate and the physical, bodily approach is a way of re-representing that rebel against traditional self-portraiture. I want to use the etching plate and the process of etching to re-represent my face. I am interested in the developmental approach in etching where each stage is recorded and printed. The plate can also be let deteriorate by using acid and human uric acid and even leaving the plates out in the weather. This reinforces the idea of horizontality and the use of body art and performance. Another artist that employed the body to construct and deconstruct his self-portrait is Arnulf Rainer.

3.5.5. Arnulf Rainer

Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer's (1929 –) work consists of self-portraits in paintings and photographs. His self-portraits are, as Lynne Cooke, (1997) concludes, "principally in the guise of what he terms Face Farce and Body language/ Motor Poses" (p. 55). The works are based on the performative body of the artist, whereby he aims to "bypass, shred, subsume, undermine or otherwise unmask those familiar and conventionalised means which strangle more fundamental, even primal impulses" (p. 55). The photographs of himself show a rebelliousness against traditional self-portraiture in the re-presentation of the body as "…excessive, contorted and strained postures which he has elaborated by vehement painterly and graphic gestures that

Figure 3.7

Arnulf Rainer, *Hill, 1963 and Knee 1956,* etchings



alternately accentuate, deface and defile in order to cull an image of raw untrammelled emotionalism" (p. 55). Rainer believed that to understand the innate human condition, he had to access it himself, and his body must be the vehicle. He not only photographed his body and face but his two etchings, *Hill* (1963) and *Knee* (1956) (Figure 3.7) also rebel against traditional self-portraiture to re-represent the body, just as marks without any photographic reference to the body of the artist. He has performed these marks using his whole body to create "random, unintentional or accidental elements are powerfully combined with seriality and/ or repetition" (Schonlieb & Schubert, 2013, p. 29). These works are 'blackenings' or 'overpaintings' depicting an 'informal, heavily expressive and very dense net of strokes' (p. 29). The artist sweeps his arms, hands, fingers, and the entire body across the plate to create these etchings.

Another work, *The Birth of an artist* (1972) is a full body photograph of himself that also shows the rebelliousness of the re-representation of the body where an oil crayon is scribbled over a photograph of himself. The process of "disfiguring and recuperating enacted by the ferocious graphic scrawls embroidering these photographs" (Cooke, 1997, p. 55). He painted without preconceived thought, forcing his hand to move faster than his mind. He was inspired by the action painting of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923-2002) and Wols (1913-1956), his Overpaintings (1953-64), as well as his more violent experimentations with the face (1960- 70) where he investigated 'the role of language in the social order and issues concerning self- identity' (p. 55). I am not so much interested in using photography to re-represent my face and head but the idea of 'blackening' and erasing the body is something of interest. The use of the body to create etchings to re-present the body as a self-portrait is something I want to explore. Another artist who employs the body-as-self to construct a self-portrait is Cindy Sherman.

3.5.6. Cindy Sherman

American artist, Cindy Sherman's (1954-) work mainly consists of photographs of herself in various guises and disguises which have provoked "questions of alienation, female identity and transformation in a postmodern age" (Knafo, 1996). Some art historians have labelled her too narcissistic due to her over-emphasis on self-portraiture (Larson, 1987; Danto, 1991, as cited in Knafo, 1996). However, other art historians and critics consider her work from a perspective of "play" (Knafo, 1996) and not necessarily self-portraits (Sehgal, 1991, as cited in Knafo, 1996). .

In , "(1996) Danielle Knafo wrote that Sherman's work has, 'a sense of theatre in which she manipulates her favourite toy – her own body – to play out an infinite number of roles' (1996, p. 1). This idea of play has long been a subject of inquiry in western society, inspired by the theory of play (Vygotsky 1978; Lindqvist 1995, 2001, 2003, as cited in Nilsson & Ferholt, 2014) where playworlds can be of any age, including visual artists (Nilsson & Ferholt, 2014, p. 921).

Figure 3.8

, Cindy Sherman, 1978*, Untitled Film Still #21 ("City Girl")*

Her early work *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–1980) stills, each constructed differently, "recreating the 'self'… transforming and disguising herself through make-up, dress and hairstyling as a comment on dress and masquerade" (Church Gibson, 2018, p. 486). Her work explores questions such as, "Who am I? What should I look like? What is my role? What am I made of? What is my relation to the past? and How do I relate to others?" (Knafo, 1996 p. 1). Michelle Meagher (2002) said that Sherman has made a career of herself both in and behind the camera and "uses herself as a model – and not in the picture – the figure we see is not Sherman but rather Sherman in disguise" (Meagher, 2002, p. 18). According to Meagher (2002), "the photographs are not autobiographical; they are not self-portraits" (p. 18). Rather, the photographs are

"the intersection on art, fashion and feminism" (Church Gibson, 2018, p. 484). These film stills are representations and not supposed to be anyone. They are, re-representations of the artist body as 'hardened outside – all image … to the idea of the feminine interior as limp, moist, formless' (Krauss, 1996, p. 93). In these early 1980s film stills and fairy tale illustrations, Sherman is seen by Laura Mulvey (1991) as "playing on this inside/ outside topography on the woman's being in which nothing can be imagined behind the cosmetic façade but a monstrous otherness, the wounded interior" (as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 93). However, the late 1980s saw the performative body of the artist body ultimately disappear, replaced by the images of decaying food and vomit. For example, *Untitled #175* (1987) (Figure 3.9). According to Laura Mulvey (1991), "abjection" (as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 93) and no more than "image" (as cited in Knafo, 1996, p. 1) is the word used to describe this series of work. The images are not supposed to be self-portraits in the stereotypical sense but rather use the body as a site of the "wound" (p. 93).

Figure 3.9

*7*Cindy Sherman, 1987, *Untitled #175*

The term abject is employed by Georges Bataille in the 1930s and later developed by Julia Kristeva in *The Powers of Horror* (1982). Mulvey sees beyond the re-presentation of Sherman's self-portrait in the film stills of early the 1980s as, "cosmetic facades that fit over the heroines … as a monument to Lack, as a cover up for the fact that the woman's body is "the site of the 'wound'" (Krauss, 1996, p. 93). From the hardened exterior of the film stills to the idea of the feminine interior as limp, moist, formless, to the work of the late 1980s to the "images of the decaying food

and vomit raise the spectre of the anorexic girl" (Mulvey, 1991, as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 93). The body of the artist disappears in the 'spread of waste detritus' (Krauss, 1996, p. 93) from a vertical body to the horizontal ground of the "abject" (p. 90). A view reinforced by Mulvey (1991), who noted, "the disgust of sexual detritus, decaying food, vomit, slime, menstrual blood, hair … Cindy Sherman traces the abyss or morass that overwhelms the defetishized body …" (as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 93). Mulvey, (1991), states the body of the artist is re-represented as "deprived of the fetish's semiotic, reduced to being 'unspeakable' and devoid of significance" (as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 93). Krauss says Sherman's work has not only gone from high to low but "lower than low" (p. 95). It is the rebelliousness of the artist body that strips away the system of the fetish, showing you what is beneath the veil. As Jacques Derrida (1987) says in *The Postcard* (1987): "it is, woman, a place unveiled as that of a lack of the penis, as the truth of the phallus, i.e.., of castration" (as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 98).

This re-representation of the body is where the body is no longer in view but rather re-represented as abject on a horizontal orientation. In the 2008 series Sherman re-represents herself with an emphasis on the ageing process and ugliness (Church Gibson 2018; Meagher 2014). For example, *Untitled* (2008) which depicts the artist in her sixties. Sherman re-presents her body as rebellious against the body beautiful of the fashion industry by emphasising her ageing face. Each photograph constructs the self differently and according to Church Gibson (2018) the 2016 series she uses for her own performative body with "tools of self-adornment" (p. 494). For example, *Untitled #570* (2016). Here, the artist has constructed images of herself to both challenge and oppose fashion and the body beautiful. She uses her own performative body as the central focus with dress, make-up, and a variety of backgrounds. She has phenomenologically manipulated the camera and the colour printing process to ensure the artist body is a central theme in her work. Sherman's recent work (2017-18) is a series of selfies on Instagram, images of ordinary people that have been manipulated, some contorted and cartoon-like where the artist has engaged with the handheld phone camera in the modern digital age of the selfie. They demonstrate a re-presentation of the body as an exploration of everyday lived experiences and are not meant to be self-portraits. The artist has photoshopped elements of the photographs to re-represent the

face with unrelated and random elements that once again re-represent the body with a sense of play.

I was interested in Sherman's waste pictures in the idea of using the lower part of the body to construct artworks that rebel against the traditional self-portrait. Her use of the ageing process in the face and use of the body to rebel against the body beautiful is something I would like to explore. I am interested in Sherman's sense of play in all her work as the body freely engages with surfaces, tools, and materials to construct a self-portrait. I am not interested in a traditional realistic portrait of self, rather, how the body is employed to construct a self-portrait is the most important factor.

3.5.7. Aida Tomescu

Aida Tomescu is an Australian contemporary process artist and is known for her abstract drawings, paintings, and prints. Although these are distinct mediums, Tomescu says they are related (Maloon, 2012) but for my discussion here I will examine each medium separately.

The artist begins a new series with drawing on paper, building up layers of charcoal, ink, or pastels. It's a way of opening a new series allowing her thinking to develop and connections to be made. Her drawings first appear to be quick impressions but, they have evolved over time. The works are built up through layers- lines overlapping, rubbing, and erasure. The works on paper seem much looser than the works on canvas, which have a wide variety of calligraphic marks and fragments of text (McDonald, 2015), for example, *Ardoise II* 2006 (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10
Aida Tomescu, 2006, *Ardoise II*, mixed media on paper, 120 x 80 cm.

Her paintings have developed from 1999-2000 where canvases were made of heavy, grey oils, to the new work in 2007 in the *Campi Flegrei* series of vibrant colourations of red orange in the paintings, for example, *Thor*, 2007, *Ore*, 2007 and

works showing incised lines such as in *Sgraffito*, 2007 and *Quadriga*, 2007. In *Aida Tomescu: States of Becoming* (2009), Deborah Hart says, "In Tomescu's mature paintings the sheer physicality of paint, its density and the archaeology of the layers, its application and movement across the surface…is reminiscent of earth or old walls encrusted with layers of paint and matter over time" (Hart, 2009, p. 15). As Tomescu says:

> Oil paint [has the capacity to] transform itself. I understand painting as a found structure. A painting evolves from continuous building up and erasure. The paint becomes a presence, dictating the structure, bringing in a surprising other intention to the work. (Maloon, 2012, p. 6).

The artist describes her process of making as an experience of layering colour in the following:

> I travel through their stages and eventually they form their own colour. I think very much about formed colour. All the previous layers participate in creating that particular blue or yellow. As I scrape back into the work, the previous layers also participate in the making of that colour (Hart, 2009, p. 18).

For Tomescu, it is about the experience of making rather than the process. Her work is not characterised by masterpieces but rather sequences of paintings where she takes time to continually reflect on the works until resolution. She says:

> Perhaps what my training gave me were the seeds of understanding to slow down with an image. It was about allowing an image to work on you, finding answers from the act of looking repeatedly. It sowed the idea of questioning on canvas (Hart, 2009, p. 10).

Tomescu's etchings developed from her early collages and are different to her paintings or drawings, in that she felt the resistance in the metal plates (Stranger, 2017). The scale of the etching plate allowed Tomescu to see the whole image in mark-making, as opposed to in her large-scale paintings. Mark-making became part of the process in painting by incising lines in the paint, which was influenced by the etching process. Since 1994, she relied heavily on scrapers as a tool of erasure and excavation

which she repeatedly used to edit an image as part of the layering process like the painting process. She describes working on plate:

> The resistance the hard ground offers my drawing, the way it interrupts the facility of my line. The tension in the palm of your hand when you mark deep in the plate it makes you want to take drawing to the edge of ability, away from flourish towards something more essential, more felt. The process generates associative thinking, reduces the distance between "thinking" and the "doing". And I am working to fix or locate an image…and then unfix it, let it breathe (Stranger, 2017, p. 2).

Ultimately, nothing is fixed in any of the mediums I have described, the aim, however, for Tomescu is to let the image and the surface breathe between layering. It is this reflective questioning that allows the surface to live, have a pulse and open to be endless possibilities.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

Initially, my DCA project was about self-portraiture as a visual representation of my face and head, but over the course of the four years (2018 – 2021) my focus became about the actual techniques and processes of scratching the surface with different materials. I employed my phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) body-as-self connection in the process (Wheeler, 1991) of making artworks in the natural or studio environment. This engaged a process of using materials and materiality (Wagner, 2001; Brown, 2010, as cited in Lange-Berndt, 2015,) through embodiment, touch, and materialisation of thought (Bois & Krauss 1997) for artistic purposes. I encouraged the process of change (Lange-Berndt, 2015; Wheeler, 1991) to occur in my artworks and my body-as-self using my own emergent methodology which I have termed Reflexive Phenomenology. This methodology induced insights into my practice, regarding my body-as-self trope and my body-connection so that my artworks were constructed over time through my own inner conversations (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) to not only transform my artworks, but also myself as my body adjusted to different circumstances that I was confronted with throughout the making phases of the research. I allowed the elements of time, temperature, gravity, and whatever was on the floor of the studio or the ground to affect and become part of the works (Wheeler, 1991) through my temporal bodily engagement with them, lowering them from the vertical to a horizontal (Krauss, 1997) ground. Overall, what I have discovered through my practice is that my self-portraiture was not so much a depiction or a representation of my body or face, but overall, a self-document. All my artworks have been captured through photographs, videos, and art journaling as a form of reflective documentation, and the findings offered in this chapter have come about through coding these documents to construct revelations about my studio and art practice.

My body became an agent through which I (the self) engaged with other phenomena that were imposed through my vast travels prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. I was intending to go to the UK in April 2020 for an artist residency entitled *Draw to Perform,* but this was cancelled. My exhibition was also cancelled in April 2020 and therefore, the phases outlined in the Methodology chapter

are out of chronological order but nonetheless interpenetrated each other. While the emphasis of the DCA was on my own artistic expansion and exploration through practice, in this chapter I explain how I developed and used my own emerging methodology (Reflexive Phenomenology), which is a combination of reflexivity as an inner dialogue (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968). This is therefore my major finding from my creative practice research. Below I analyse how it emerged, how it was applied in all the phases, and how it affected my body-as-self in this project. I examine my practice in considering these findings, my works and the works of other artists that have influenced me during the research journey.

I have included my archive/ portfolio which curates and visually captures the phases of creative generation and insights, and can be viewed on https://studio.artmoi me/login (user name: chrisabrahams@hotmail.com password: Zali_1983!). This archive/portfolio is a curated collection of these works and I have included further details and images of the artworks to complement what is discussed in this chapter. I have also uploaded my own recordings (videos) to YouTube to show the process I took in each of the phases. Some of these overlap each other in the way I went about making artworks because I was emphasising the process rather than the product. I encourage the readers to view this archive prior to completing the reading of this Findings chapter, as the archive shows the works that I am discussing in all the phases of the work, each informing and building on each other. As outlined in the Methodology chapter, there are five different collections of creative works from Phases 1 to 5, both in the archive and explored further below.

4.2. Finding 1: Emerging Reflexive Phenomenology as a practical methodology

The major finding of my research is my emerging methodology, Reflexive Phenomenology, which was particularly developed during the early Phases 1, 2 and 3 through my exploration of the live video recordings and discursive application of my phenomenological body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968), working through the process of making. In Phases 4, and 5, however, my focus around Reflexive Phenomenology transformed, in more concrete terms, to where I began a deeper focus on my visual journals and asked myself how I was feeling because my mental and physical self was

affected by the sudden lockdowns brought on by the global pandemic in March 2020. I was in Myanmar at this time, and this provided a major mental and material shift in the way I went about reflecting on my experience and how I communicated with self. By applying Reflexive Phenomenology, my body-as-self was affected as I deliberately engaged with and confronted these circumstances. I specifically developed reflexive activities where I questioned how my body was feeling in the seemingly ever-changing space and time.

This continued and was heightened throughout hotel quarantine where I deliberately interrogated my conscious internal dialogue on how my body was feeling at different times of the day over the 14-day hiatus. This inner dialogue (Archer, 2013, p. 2) was not just passive 'looking in' but I was actively speaking, listening, and responding. I was questioning/ answering how my body was feeling at different times of the day over a 14-day period and making sketches alongside the responses. This self-talk was between my body as the subject and object where I was simultaneously both the subject and the object, voicing a question internally, until a new action was performed by the phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968) body. This put the body-as-self into the present lived experience of the body in space and time. The timeline was in fact a "life-line" (Archer, 2013, p. 4) where my inner conversation with self was not only a voice of what I was feeling in the body but was a way of creating change within my person. I divided my A3 sketch book up into six squares to represent the different times of day; 9 am, 12 pm, 3 pm and 5 pm when I was questioned and then answered how I (my artist/ body) was feeling. I made written entries and then sketches that correlated with what was in written form in the other squares. Some of the sketches I made into paintings with canvas paper, oils, and easel I set up in the hotel room. This inner dialogue continued throughout Phase 5 and expanded to include visual journals where I was able to detail my working within each medium. I used this set of behaviours and techniques every day, and asked myself questions about my drawing, such as: *"How should I erase without 'destroying the work'? What if by erasing the paper, it peels off or even gets a hole in it?"* (Abrahams, June 9, 2021). Similarly, in painting, I asked myself questions such as: *"How should I scrape back the surface of the canvas without destroying it? What happens if the canvas is ripped in the process of scraping the surface? Should I attach another piece of canvas in its place as part of restitution of the piece?"* (Abrahams, June 9, 2021). These questions

helped me to create a body of evidence as to how I might shape and deploy my emerging notion of Reflexive Phenomenology so that it became a process of making which directly engaged my body-as-self in creating and transforming my creative works in response to my questioning and answering. In doing so, my visual journal chronicled how each medium also affected and changed my body-as-self as an agent in the creation of the work.

In the context of the studio, regardless of where I was situated, I was in constant dialogic exchange between myself and the emerging work. All the creative work developed through using this emergent methodology, whether final pieces, drafts or practice-anomalies are part of this reflexive work process. In this way, I employed my body to engage phenomenologically (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) with tools and art materials because of consciously applying reflexivity (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) through an inner dialogue. This is the focus of Finding 2, which delves more richly into the methods and techniques I applied and developed to realise and manifest my emerging Reflexive Phenomenological methodology. The next assertion specifically provides an analysis of my creative outputs throughout this DCA research. I have used the Phases established in the Methodology chapter to anchor the chronology of events and undertakings that have, over time, transformed my practice from the self-contemplation of portraiture to the holistic engagement of my entire physical body in my studio practice.

4.3. Finding 2: Applied Reflexive Phenomenological technique over the phases of the project

In this DCA project, each phase was deliberately outlined to capture the induced practices around manifesting Reflexive Phenomenology as a methodology for creating a comprehensive creative dataset of my findings. Finding 2 is the result of work I developed throughout Phases 1 to 6 where Reflexive Phenomenology was deployed. In Phases 1 to 3, I made videos that demonstrated the process, then live and in-situ, alongside the mirror which was a tool and key reference point in which to create my representations; the mirror can be likened to the surface of the eye or a fountain (Alberti, 1966, as cited in Heffernan, 2008) and used as a reflective device. Alberti calls it “the movement of the soul” (Alberti, 1966, as cited in Heffernan, 2008, p. 528), and was a key device for self-signification as I portrayed myself in ways that looked

nothing like the mirror reflected. In Phases 4 to 5, Reflexive Phenomenology was applied throughout visual and written journals, which changed the way I applied this methodology; these provided a more discursive "mirror" to hold up to my body-as-self which was in flux and uncertain when COVID-19 hit in March 2020. I was overseas at the time and my body was affected by lockdowns, hotel quarantine, and home quarantine. During Phase 5, however, Reflexive Phenomenology was applied in more discursive internal conversations/ reflections that changed from using the mirror as a device to re-represent my self-portrait to its removal altogether. My concentration was entirely on my body-as-self, rather than just my portrait, which became the focus of the making. The process of scratching the surface on paper, canvas, and plates was to interrogate materials and matter through my bodily connection to the artworks in the place where the works were made. I subjected my artworks to natural forces such as time, gravity, atmosphere, and temperature to so affect the materials that the works remain forever subject to change and transformation (Wheeler, 1991; Wagner, 2010, as cited in Lange-Berndt, 2015). This phenomenon of materiality is the result of the process of using materials through my bodily senses (Brown, 2010, as cited in Lange-Berndt, 2015), and I consciously and deliberately sought to apply and interrogate the practices of process art outlined in Chapter 3. I introduced the process of repetitively lowering my works from a vertical easel to the horizontal ground, where dirt, leaves, cigarette ash and chicken poo became part of the works. In some cases, the dirt and other matter was left in the work or incorporated into it by painting layers of paint over the pieces. Some works, such as the etching plates, were permanently left of the ground in my backyard where I allowed natural forces to scribe themselves onto the surface to capture the physical nature of being connected to Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) notion of "grotesque realism" (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 688). I allowed the artworks to change, through bodily fluids, studio and natural surroundings, and chemical reactions (Lange-Berdt, 2015). My bodily fluids became part of the etching plates, using the lower part of the body. Bakhtin referred to this as "degradation which means coming down to earth, where the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time to something new or better" (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 688). To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth known as "grotesque realism" (p. 688).

During my DCA, there were other physical and emotional events that affected my art making, such as my father dying in May 2019, and me feeling the grief of this very deeply. The further connection of the emotional and physical realities to my art making were focused during all the COVID-related travel and quarantine throughout 2020, all of which affected how I applied Reflexive Phenomenology. The following sections analyse how I applied Reflexive Phenomenology in the different phases outlined in the Methodological Table in Section 2.8.

4.3.1. Phase 1: Studio-work at USQ, March 2018 – October 2019

Phase 1 was pre-COVID where I studied on-campus at University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland. I had a studio space at USQ Q Block Painting Studio from March 2018 until October 2019. During this time, I set in motion a studio-practice regimen and daily routine where I began to engage my inner dialogue (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) to guide my actions. During Phases 1, 2 and 3, I applied Reflexive Phenomenology by using my body phenomenologically (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) through video journals. I recorded myself creating the self-portraits in different mediums. The videos themselves and the self-portraits serve to archive the making process https://studio.artmoi me/login (user name: chrisabrahams@hotmail.com password: Zali_1983!). I did not use a written visual journal at this stage (these appear later in Phases 4 and 5), my dialogues manifested themselves internally, and were subject to repetitious questions, such as: *What sort of marks should I use? What surfaces or grounds can I use in the different mediums? What orientation, either vertical or horizontal? How can I use the body to make a portrait of self? What mediums, and techniques to use? How can I create a 3-dimensional object?* (Abrahams, 2019).

In response to these internal questions, I made grounds or surfaces with my hands and body, on which to make marks. The term "ground" is short for 'background'. In drawing, I prepared a grey ground on which make marks in drawing medium. In painting, it is the first layer of paint (or another wet medium) applied to an artwork. In etching, the ground can be the raw plate, or a hard/ soft ground that was applied to the surface of the plate. Each of these grounds or surfaces were made so I could make marks that re-represented my face and head. Traditionally, self-portraiture

is the artist's intention to realistically represent or re-present the face and head as the subject/ object of inquiry but, for me, I was rebelling against the traditional, modernist notion of self as stable, fixed self, but rather considering the self is a construct, constantly changing according to the circumstances (Cox & Lyddon, 1997). A postmodernist, constructionist approach situates the artist as the subject and object; as "fragmented, decentred, intersubjectively defined" (Jones, 1998, p. 57). The "presence of the artist body and the actions performed on the body becomes the focus of the work" (Marsh, 1993, p. 96). My self-portrait subverts the Cartesian mind/ body split where the distinction is made between the head and the body and focuses on my lived experience as the subject and object where my phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) body intertwined with art objects though the senses. Therefore, my body becomes "lived in by the subject" (De Beauvoir, 1988, p. 69), the body aware of its/my performance (Auslander, 2006) and body-as-self (Sartre, 1943, as cited in Synnott, 1992, p. 100) to make marks as a re-representation (Richardson, 2012) of self to capture the "movement of the soul" (Alberti, 1966, as cited in Heffernan, 2008, p. 528). I used art-making tools as an extension of the body using the process of using art materials to construct a self-portrait. This is a deliberately disruptive approach to self-portraiture, but I still retained some of the devices needed to capture my face, such as the mirror, which is like a window frame (Alberti, 1966, as cited in Heffernan, 2008, p. 528) and the "ground level of self-representation" (Heffernan, 2008, p. 519). My self-portraiture is framed as a re-representation of my body and while it does not fit in with transgressive art, (Richardson, 2012) which uses a "freak body" (p. 2), that aims to outrage or shock, it does deviate from what might be considered a "traditional" genre of self-portraiture.

The grounds I made here were surfaces for painting, drawing, and etching. For painting, I prepared surfaces such as canvas boards, canvas stretchers, canvas paper with an undercoat and then made a ground so that the paint would adhere to it. The ground was made from a mixture of oil paint and turpentine and applied with a flat brush. It could either be covered entirely by subsequent media or left visible in the final work. In drawing, I made a grey background on paper by drawing a series of lines in different directions with pencil or charcoal and rubbing over the surface of paper with my hands or a paper stump. Marks were then made with any drawing medium. In etching, the ground was the raw plate where I drew on the plate with a metal scriber

or some other tool. I experimented with different grounds such as hard ground, and sugar-lift. Sugar-lift is a solution made from gouache, sugar, and gum arabic which I applied with a brush onto the plate, which then creates aquatint tones. I used the substance hard ground to create lines into the plate. It comes in a wax ball, and I dabbed it over a clean and heated plate. I then used a sharp tool, called an etching needle, to open lines in the hard ground on which to make marks. The physical making of a mark sets in motion a lively give and take of possibilities. The ground here was later translated in the actual ground (the dirt) to disrupt the notion of grounding. The mark, however, is something that happens to me rather than what I do (Pigrum, 2014). This means that through this bodily, physical exploration I discovered that there is a time when I forgot about myself and how to draw; at that moment, the mark appears. My body-as-self essentially disappeared into the marks I made. I was constructing a portrait of self, using the body-as-self to make marks that re-represented self, engaging with art materials and tools. This was where I introduced process into my temporal bodily engagement with material matter as a representation of body-as-self idiom, but it was not fully realised until Phase 5. I captured these actions through in-situ photographs and videos to document the changes.

In Phase 1, I experimented with not only two-dimensional but also three-dimensional work as well through different materials such as clay, wire, and Hebel block. Hebel is a type of aerated concrete used in housing construction and I have used this material in schools and in my home studio. I used Hebel block as an exercise in carving a letter "I" in stone, based on Robert Morris's *I-Box* (1962). This exercise of construction and deconstruction was not only using the body as the object, but the subject in the letter 'I', which represents self. I did not continue with Hebel block sculpture because of the health and safety concerns. Instead, I experimented using wire mesh and plaster bandages tore-represent my head and neck, which I stretched in the mirror and then rendered in three-dimensions. The weight of the sculpture was only being held by one nail and could easily become horizontal. I could feel my own neck and head being stretched in this activity, to repeat the emerging trope of these early phases where my physical body becomes the activation for my portrait of the entire self, not just my face.

When I applied the plaster bandages, I left areas that showed the wire underneath, which gave the piece a look of not being finished. The unfinished, roughness of the wire and smoothness of the plaster gave it an anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983) view. I mounted it on a plaster block that gave it a base and a sense of being finished or suitable for the plinth on the gallery floor. During this phase was my first contact with clay through simply making a sample slab out of air-dry clay so that it could dry fast. Laying the clay flat and horizontally on the table, while it is moist, I sunk my fingers into it, inscribed it with a metal clay tool and then when it was dry, I burnished it with a spoon. Again, I deliberately positioned myself above the clay slab where gravity and my body weight could roll out the clay with a rolling pin. As I touched the clay, I was also being touched by it. My skin and sweat was imbedded into the clay. Clay more than any other material allows my body to be 'the soil' and "primordial site of experience and expression" (Poulsen & Thogensen, 2011, p. 32), to phenomenologically (Maurice-Merleau-Ponty 1945, 1962) engage with the world. Merleau-Ponty (1968) combines the concept of the lived body and the ontological notion of "flesh" (Leder, 1990, p. 62). Clay can be likened to human flesh in that it originates from the earth and therefore has a primal link and consistency. Clay is a material from the horizontal ground and dirt, and I further engaged in this interrogation again in Phases 2 and 5 when I asserted that I felt myself more thoroughly "grounded" in Phase 5.

4.3.2. Phase 2: DCA Exhibition #1: *Scratching the Surface*: Self Portraiture – Exploring the Body-as-Self, A Block Gallery, USQ, Toowoomba Campus, 1-23 October 2019

Phase 1 directly influenced Phase 2 in that I was not only scratching the surface of etching plates but also applying this in painting, printmaking, and sculpture. This body of work culminated in my solo exhibition titled *: Scratching the Surface: Self Portraiture - Exploring the Body-as-Self*, A Block Gallery, USQ, Toowoomba Campus October 1-23, 2019**.** I chose the title of the exhibition because my body-as-self (Sartre, 1943, as cited in Synnott, 1992, p. 100)) was phenomenologically (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) engaged with scratching different surfaces. During this time, I specifically began to consciously use Reflexive Phenomenology as an inner conversation (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) strategy where I made video recordings of my body engaging with different surfaces, materials, and

tools. I was thinking and experimenting with different surfaces which included grounds in oil paintings, etchings, sculpture, and ceramic pieces. I used different tools to scratch back into the surface, such as palette knives, metal scribers and clay tools. In this phase, I included new etchings using the same techniques as the etchings above, but instead of creating only one-off pieces, I included the developmental stages to demonstrate the process of making, because etching and printmaking, in general, is about making multiples of the one matrix (which could be a block of wood, stone, metal, cardboard, or screen); I wanted to show the stages of development of my self-portrait. Although I used this process across Phases 1 to 3, my aim was to bring together resolved works that specifically rendered and materialised this process of scratching the surface. This exhibition brought together specifically resolved works from Phase 2. The processes and techniques of scratching the surface that emerged became more prevalent and important than the product, and this became integral part

Figure 4.1 Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Am I blue?* oil on canvas, 60 x 49 cm.

of my practice. I retained the use of the mirror as an applied reflective device allowing me to work in front of the easel in a vertical, upright, erect bodily position.

During this phase, my painting used mark-making on different painting and material surfaces. As I built up the surface of the painting, I reflected on how my body felt at the time and how I could represent this feeling using colour. The reflexive inner

dialogue (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) using questioning and answering continued for the whole process of artmaking with the body, assisting the scratches or scars to surface and re-represent the body to making connections across different mediums. The colours used were mostly black or monochromatic that pointed to how my body was feeling in space and time. In the painting, (Figure 4.1) *Am I blue?* is an image of my head as I saw it in the mirror. It is made from oil paint and as Auerbach says, "paint is at its most eloquent when it is a by-product of some corporeal, spatial, developing imaginative concept, a creative identification with the subject" (Pigrum, 2014, p. 5). I used oil paints because they entail a slow-drying process and can take up to three days to touch dry. This allowed me time for my reflexive response to the work, my inner dialogue while it was drying. Although infrequently deployed in this phase, I also began to experiment with my written journal and wrote: "Oil painting is the process of painting with pigments and drying oil as a binder. I used a medium that was low odour and slow drying so I could think about each step I am taking with this canvas my daughter gave me" (Abrahams, 15/ 5/ 19). My daughter gave me this canvas in May 2019 when my father had died, and I experienced specific bodily reactions such as grief, anger, and depression because of his death. The canvas my daughter gave me was already primed and had hessian textures glued onto the surface. My inner questions again returned to specific preparation ideas: "What will I do with this canvas? What sort of ground will I apply? What colours to use? How will I slow down the drying time so I can sit and reflect on the work?" (Abrahams, May 15, 2019). In response to these questions, I decided to cut the canvas off the frame and glue it on wood, so it was strong enough for scratching. I used darker colours that I mixed from Ultramarine Blue and Burnt Umber, not black. I formed a composition with my head off-centre and I used the mirror as a device for reflection. I used glazes of thin paint mixed with turpentine to gain depth in the painting, which gave the illusion of looking in – as in the window on the top right-hand side. After using a brush to create major lines on my face, I used a palette knife to score the painting with indiscriminate scratches. The colours I used in this painting are monochromatic and point to my emotional use of colour, rather than the use of colour theory.

The emerging work specifically referred to how my body was feeling at the time of making. Although I did not intend to scratch the surface of the painting, I induced it as an act that carried over from Phase 1. When I scratched back the surface of the

painting it felt like skin, in that oil paint forms a seal over it and it felt like my own body was being scratched back to reveal what was underneath. I therefore deliberately re-employed my phenomenological body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) to scratch back the surface of the paint, charcoal drawings and etching plates. Reflexive Phenomenology as an inner conversation (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) that includes my own lived experience or phenomenology through video recordings of my body, were completed on the floor of my studio in Q Block Painting studios, USQ. This video, which appears in the curated archive link above, demonstrates this process of painting with a stick on the floor of my studio (Abrahams, 2019 https://youtu.be/2LNZhYsPgJo 0:48- 1:20).

, *Out of the blue,* oil on canvas paper, 4 x 42 x 18cm

In a set of four artworks, *Out of the blue*, (Figure 4.2) are small pieces of canvas paper (A5) size that I created on the floor of the studio. I used a brush on a stick with my body above the work which incorporated risk, gravity (Lippard, 1971, as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015; Wheeler, 1991) and using the horizontal (Krauss, 1997) floor of the studio as the site of inscription. While on the floor, dust, dirt, and footprints become part of the work as base materialism (Bataille, 1929 as cited in Krauss, 1997). By repeating these ideas from previous phases, I began to further distil what the methods of my Reflexive Phenomenology entailed. Practising these encouraged me to not only deliberately disrupt the traditions of self-portraiture, but further indulge my entire body

in the making of the work, even though the self-portrait of my face was presented on the canvases. By placing four pieces together I could make a larger area to paint on and then I further experimented by rotating one square upside down as an anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983) model. Foster's notion is a divergent process, and I applied it so that one painting was out of symmetry with the other three which transformed the representation of my face on the surface; by rotating one square I created a distorted, subversive view of my body. This represented the unease in my body brought on by grief as I continued to use mark-making processes. By scratching the surface of the paint to reveal an orange, and opposite colour to blue, underneath. The orange is seen through the blue because I have left the brushstrokes unfinished and rough. I experimented with other materials such as paper, etching plate and scratching the surface of the plate as seen in this video: (Abrahams, 2019 https://youtu.be/Jf4DmbzH5bg 00: 00- 20: 08).

Subject vs object, (Figure 4.3) was created on the wall of my studio with my body facing the work with the mirror behind me. After painting my face, I rearranged the canvas pieces to create a new image. I created a further distorted image which communicated an expanded sense of unease or distortion that I was seeing in my own reflection and felt in my body. I depicted my head as overly large, and my face became distorted because that is what I was experiencing in my body at the time. As Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) says, "phenomenology of the body stresses the unproportionate, unoptical possibilities that follow on a more somatic, less visual awareness of the body" (as cited in Mc Dermott, 1996, p. 255). I was aiming for an anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983) model, which was working with unframed, unstretched canvas and arranged in a set of four instead of a single painting. This introduced the element of risk and chance (Lippard, 1971 as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015; Wheeler, 1991) in the process of constructing this image. The process was employing the body to control and transform matter (Wheeler, 1991) where the subject changed because of a conversation I had with the object. By engaging with art materials, my re-presentation of my face was subject to change as well as my relationship with it. This was a divergent strategy from a traditional self-portrait image and continued in the presentation of the artworks for the exhibition, but instead of framing the works, I left them unframed and used magnets to attach them to the gallery wall. In this way, I continued to explore the idea

of the anti-aesthetic (Forster, 1983) in terms of creating a sense of unease, unfinished and unframed portraits of self.

Figure 4.1

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Subject vs object*, oil on canvas, 4 x 29 x 29 cm

In a series of seven prints titled *Disintegration etchings* (2019), see Figure 4.4 below, was a particularly acute reflection upon my body-as-self in direct response to me watching my father die, which affected me emotionally and physically at the time. This video recording shows me physically scratching the plate with an etching tool as I looked at my face in the mirror (Abrahams, 2019 https://youtu.be/Jf4DmbzH5bg 17:42- 24: 33). In printmaking, work is done in reverse and then it is printed the reversed way up. Using this process and the mirror changed the self-portrait and the body-as-self. Throughout this work, I continued to inscribe the plates and took a proof or a print of each stage of its development until it was a black mass. Bataille (1929), stated that the black mass is formless or referred to as *informe* (as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 89) which Bataille (1930) also calls *base materialism* (as cited in Krauss 1996, p. 105) because it contradicts human erectness. This series privileged the performative act of my body 'destroying' my self-portrait and the body itself, over time, until there was a black mass on a horizontal field. My face disappeared in the final print but can re-appear if I scrape back the plate. The print records the state of the plate and my body as the self-portrait in time and place. The representation of my body changed at every point and the plate is a record of every mark I put into the surface as the self-portrait, and in the process of disintegration the face disappears behind a black mass. Bakhtin refers to this as "degradation which means coming down to earth, where the contact

with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time to something new or better" (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 688). To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth known as "grotesque realism" (p. 688). In this light, the black mass where the representation of my self-portrait in these etchings disintegrates over time, could also be reversed in that the plates can be given new life by scraping them back and starting again.

The body-as-self is constantly changing, in a process of becoming and just as my own body is changing, ageing, and disintegrating, this series of etchings demonstrated that my self-portrait changed over time. I was physically engaging with the plates, cutting the plate to an irregular shape, and cutting the paper to fit the shape, which points to an anti-aesthetic model (Foster, 1983). This is similar to the etchings of Mike Parr in the *Self- Portrait Project* (1997-2000) and more specifically his drypoints, where he sees the plate as the signification of the self-portrait, the "braille and excavation" (Loane, 1990, p. 4) as the physicality of the process of attacking the plate. This process of engaging with the plates was performative (Butler, 1988) as I sought to embody (Jones, 1997) the self. My body was situated on top of the plates, and I used my bodyweight, gravity, and horizontality to place pressure on scratching the surface. I printed these etchings using bleed techniques because the emphasis was on mark-making rather than the formal elements of etching. A bleed print is one that has no margin; the print image extends to the paper edge, thus there was no edge upon which to place the title of the work signed by the artist. Instead, I signed the back of the print, with my name, date, title, and year to disrupt the traditional expectation.

Figure 4.4 demonstrates how I displayed each step I arrived at by showing the changes experienced through the various "proofs". Proofs are normally produced outside of the numbered edition, but I did not make an edition, I included each impression I made from the plate. The proof is evidence that the printing was done at a given time and place, and that each proof is different due to change. The result demonstrated the process of change over time, allowing the materials and my engagement with them to determine the outcome.

Figure 4.2

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Disintegration etchings, Scratching the Surface art exhibition,* USQ Arts Gallery

During this phase I was inspired by Mike Parr's *12 Untitled Self Portraits* (1989), (see Figure 4.5). I viewed the original artwork daily from the the USQ Art Collection that was on disply in the hallway near the PhD student rooms (between 2018 and 2019). I chose it because Parr is an influential artist in my research and my intention was to reconstruct the image using a woodblock method of carving, but then print it like a monoprint, or singular original print. In woodblock printing, whatever is carved in the block is printed as white of the paper and the areas left on the block are printed black. A monoprint, on the other hand, means 'one-print' so every mark that is made into the block is printed. I used a large woodblock (76 x59 cm) and worked on this in my studio at USQ in 2019. I mounted the block on a vertical easel where my body was situated erect in front of the block. I re-used an image that was a photocopy of a drawing I did in 2019 and by re-using an image signalled more emphasis on the process rather than on the image making. The image on the block was carved out in reverse which changes the re-representation of the self-portrait and my body-as-self. The highly visceral nature of physically carving out the block with my body was a different bodily experience and the physical nature of wood meant that the representation of myself changed as my body became familiar with the material. Wood has a grain, so I had to work with the grain, not against it. My body was situated above the work where gravity and my body weight were able to give the necessary pressure

to carve. If I carved toward my body, I would potentially sustain injury as the carving tool can slip and cut my hands. This changed the representation of the emerging image because my body had to negotiate around the block to avoid injury. The changes in the material and the process of carving this image, I was getting to know myself through my inner conversation while working this block, and this, in turn, changed the self in representation and internally. This was a one-off print, so if the print was destroyed in the printing, I would have to repeat the whole process. The print, (Figure 4.6) reveals not only the lines which feel like scars on my skin and the representation of my body. In the *Scratching the Surface Exhibition*, 2019 of this Phase 2, I exhibited the print but also the block used to make the print as this artwork records my physical effort in manifesting the lived experience of making the entire work.

Figure 4.3

Mike Parr, 1989, *12 Untitled Self Portraits*, woodblock monoprint | 2002.393 University of Southern Queensland Art Collection

Figure 4.4

Chris Abrahams, 2018, *Untitled,* monoprint on Kozo paper, 75 x 53 cm.

I made three-dimensional clay heads to complement two-dimensional artworks, using white porcelain and hand-building techniques. In Phase 1, I was experimenting with clay as a material which was rolled out on a flat surface, whereas in Phase 2, I

constructed three-dimensional heads using a basic cylindrical shape with rounded head and a base. The details such as ears, eyes, nose, and mouth were generic forms, not realistic renditions of my face. I inscribed lines of my face/ head using clay tools and when the clay was bone dry, I burnished it with a spoon. I put these heads through the firing process at USQ Ceramics studio, however, when transporting them from my home studio and during the firing process several of the heads disintegrated or broke into pieces. Instead of discarding them, I incorporated these fragments into the process, and I experimented further with destruction by dropping the fired objects on the floor of the studio from a distance. They scattered into pieces becoming formless (Bataille, 1944) and introduced the element of risk and chance; I was now constructing a portrait of self, using form, weight, volume, and depth. By dropping the heads on the concrete studio floor, I re-purposed the site of destruction towards reconstruction and thus re-representing the body as an entity that is prone to destruction and reconstruction. On the floor, dirt, dust, and the the residual traces of my body is left in the clay. This video shows me dropping the clay pieces on the floor of the studio. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LNZhYsPgJo at 2 min:10 sec, 2 min:11 sec (Abrahams, 2019). In the reconstruction, I glued the pieces together leaving spaces where the dark void may be seen, and I was guided by my bodily impulses through my hands to make the forms. I suspended the objects from the ceiling with wire in the exhibition, but instead of the usual hanging wire, I have employed the use of old, rusty fencing wire, which I found on a random trip to a farm. The fencing wire adds to an anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983) model, and challenges the gallery aesthetic to hang objects from the ceiling. When exhibiting *Fragmented Self* (2019) in Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8, *Self-Portrait,* (2018) the use of direct lighting also creates sinuous shadows on the gallery wall, reinforcing the idea of mark-making.

Figure 4.5

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Fragmented Self*, clay, 25 x 15 cm

Figure 4.6

Chris Abrahams, 2018, *Self-Portrait*, clay, 25 x 15 cm

The use of deconstructive and destructive techniques communicated a fragmented body (Lacan cited in Fink, Fink & Grigg, 2002, p. 6), sense of self and the act of dropping the heads reinforces a subversive, performative (Butler, 1988) embodiment of the act of the artist's body in the studio. The contact with the floor and the earth reinforces the idea of horizontality (Krauss, 1997), which cuts across the axis of the body and becomes formless (Bataille, 1929, as cited in Krauss, 1996, p. 89). In Phase 2 there was a furthering/ transforming of my use of Reflective Phenomenology where the body-as-self ideas were changing and expanding to incorporate the elements of change, risk, and materials (Iverson 2010; Lippard, 1971 as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015; and Wheeler, 1991). The meanings changed because of my bodily engagement with clay as a material and the process of clay making. There were chemical reactions with the clay in the drying process and the fact that clay is fired at over 1000 degrees, changed the composition of the clay objects and how my body engaged with that process. Phase 2 ended in January 2020 when I took a job in Myanmar teaching in an international school.

4.3.3. Phase 3: Exhibition #2 *Cracking the Mirror Stage*, Cam Robertson Gallery, Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, (March 27 – April 25, 2021)

Phase 3 addresses my second and final DCA exhibition, but it is out of chronological order. I was intending to exhibit these paintings in March-April 2020, but it was cancelled due to the global pandemic. I rescheduled it for March 27-April 25, 2021, in Toowoomba, Queensland. I had to limit the number of works to only twelve because of COVID-19 rules of social distancing of 1.5 metres. This was extremely difficult to limit the number of works because I completed twenty-five works in this series, yet I selected twelve works that I liked and would most communicate the idea of cracking of the mirror stage. Please look at my collection for this phase in my archive/ portfolio which can be viewed on: https://studio.artmoi me/login (user name: chrisabrahams@hotmail.com password: Zali_1983!).

I completed this series in my studio at USQ Q Block, where I worked on this series seven days a week from October 2019 until January 2020.This meant that I could access the studio at any time of the day until 6 pm so I completed this series of paintings before I left to go to Myanmar in January 2020. My aim during this time was to address the question of how can the body be employed to create a portrait of self to create change and transformation? The self is by nature changing and not a singular entity. The self , "… is a construct, a mental object and is by its very nature a distortion, an error, a misunderstanding" (as cited in Fink, 1995, p. 37). The title of the exhibition was in reference to Lacan's Mirror Stage (1977), where he claims the mirror gives a false sense of self e, as if I was attempting to 'solve' or 'crack' the 'code' of the self as a construct. I was challenging the notion of the self as "a singular, stable self, a person has the capacity to be a multitude of possible selves" (Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 204). Just like my body-as-self was changing through Phases 1 and 2, this series of paintings demonstrated how my self-portrait changed, as a re-representation of my face through different constructs over time. I used the mirror not only as a reflective device but also a compositional frame, as a window of the soul. My image in the mirror, although an actual or genuine reflection of my face, was mediated through how my body was feeling at the time. I performed the role of subject in-situ in the studio and the document of self was rendered in the paintings. I employed my

body to form different constructions on each painting. I could have used a camera, but I chose to use the mirror to reference the history of self-portraiture and Lacan's Mirror Stage (1977). Before the camera was invented, artists painted self-portraits using a mirror (Lindell, 2017). The mirror changed the re-presentation of the face and hence the self-portrait. The mirror by its nature, reverses the image so if I adopted a left-cheek pose, the mirror's reversal of left and right results in the self-portrait showing the right-cheek (although it depicted my mirror-reversed left cheek). The left cheek bias results in emotional expressivity (Lindell, 2013) and in this series I communicated how I was feeling through colour, composition, and oil painting techniques. Reflexive Phenomenology was applied through further, deeper inner conversation (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) until I manifested change and transformation in the studio.

I used different coloured grounds which depended on how my body was feeling and the self-portrait was guided by bodily impulses. The ground on the paintings was a mixture of oil paint and turpentine. On the canvas boards, panels, and canvas paper I used a yellow ochre colour which is similar to the colour of paper. I used different poses in front of the mirror to move away from a frontal pose to angular poses where my head and neck moved towards the edge of the mirror/ picture plane. I used opposite colours, such as purple and yellow; green and red; blue and orange because they vibrate next to each other and created the sense of unease that I was feeling in my body. I used the opposite colour on the colour wheel to make a darker shade, instead of using black. I was not attempting to comment on or disrupt colour theory but rather use colour to represent my emotional state. In this series, I used flat brushes, small round brushes, and palette knives to apply the paint. I scratched the surface using the end of the paint brush, deploying further scratching of the surface and mark-making processes which were used to complete the works. In oil painting, the rule of thumb is to use darker shades first and then slowly move to lighter shades. This was problematic in trying to move from dark to light because the colours get murky with constant mixing on the canvas and on the palette. I overcame this by making final brushstrokes or marks with oil paint and a palette knife.

In my visual journal, I wrote, " In this series, I am stretching my head and neck

as far as it can go in the picture plane. I am trying to get away from purely frontal works. I use the mirror as reflective and compositional device" (Abrahams, 23/10/19). I was pulling faces in the mirror, to seriously engage my contemplation of my internal sense of self. The shapes and sizes of the works were mostly A3 size canvas paper, which was easier to use on an easel. I mounted these works on MDF and framed them with raw Radiata pine so I could hang them on a gallery wall. It was not important for

Figure 4.7

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Late-Night strum I*, oil on paper,
42.5 x 30 x 5.5 cm

the frames to be perfect because I was communicating raw emotions. The sizes were a similar shape to the mirror (45 x 45 cm). I did not use large canvases such as in Phases 1, 2 and 3 because I wanted to represent an intimate size of a human head that would just display my face and neck. The smaller works were on pre- purchased wood where I only applied a ground for the paint to adhere to. I experimented with the orientation of the works such as using 'landscape' format instead of traditional portrait, as shown in (Figure 4.10) below. This allowed more space to move my face off-centre and to the side, which communicated a sense of unease, unbalanced and an anti-aesthetic (Foster, 1983) model.

Figure 4.8

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Late-Night strum II*, oil on paper, 42.5 x 30 x 4.5 cm

Unlike Phases 1 and 2, where I alternated between verticality and horizontal orientations, in this series, I only concentrated on the face. This changed the way I represented my self-portrait where I positioned my body in the composition, and I used complementary colours instead of the monochromatic colours used in Phase 2. I applied Reflexive Phenomenology that expanded and changed from Phase 2 because I relied more heavily on my inner conversation (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) with the body-as-self, regarding head angles, facial expressions, forms, colours, and brushstrokes. There was an element of chance in the process of using art materials that were subject to change by my temporal bodily engagement (Iverson, 2010; Lippard, 1971 as cited in Lange-Berdt, 2015; Wheeler, 1991).

The images I produced were constructs of self, in that I pushed and pulled my face and neck up and down and on an angle. I placed the figure towards the edge of the frame of the mirror and the resulting image until my body felt the stretch. The head and face are also off-centre compositionally and the axis is on a diagonal. I used the mirror as a frame to see how far I could change the composition, colours, brushstrokes, and texture of the paint. I applied thick and thin areas of paint with a brush or a palette knife, using a wet-on-wet technique, sometimes called an *alla prima* method where the colours are added without blending. Oil paint is thick like flesh and forms a seal that easily breaks. I either used oil paint straight from the tube or mixed it with a

medium. I applied final and pivotal strokes that expressed what my body was feeling at the time. As Sandy Pottinger stated in the exhibition review Artistic vision provokes thought (The Toowoomba Chronicle, Friday April 9, 2021), "[T]he surfaces are impasto: the thick accretions of oil paint seem to sculpt murky angles, hollow eyes, the bridge of a nose" (Pottinger, 2021, p. 14). I used this technique because my intention was to create a quick rendition of my face and head because I could not hold these positions too long. The positions I was putting my body through to create these paintings were strenuous and caused pain in my neck as I stretched my muscles in the mirror. I re-represented my body, off-centred, off-balance, distorted and the brushstrokes are heavy and laboured. My body was feeling heavily laden at the time and when I was confronted with difficult circumstances. I broke up the picture plane like a cracked mirror and the brushstrokes allowed the viewer to see the ground underneath, which gives a sense of looking within or in the mirror. This all represented my own pain of my father dying which had caused all sorts of reactions in my body.

Metaphorically, the pressure and strain were so much that the mirror would crack so I wanted to break up the picture plane to re-represent what was happening in my body. These oil paintings show how I used compositional and colour mixing methods to paint my self-portrait. I mounted all the paintings on wood and the left the frames raw, like my emotions were at the time. The smaller pictures are already primed ready to paint on the surface, which means I could quickly get down what I was feeling. They were made of wood, so the paint almost slid on top of the surface, as in Figures 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13. These paintings I left unfinished because after a few gestural brushstrokes I was satisfied with the colours, composition, brushstrokes, and the lines on my face. As Pottinger said, "[T]he details are not easy to see, they blur and blend becoming distortions that do not define the recognisable, but instead peer into some inner turmoil, a writhing self in search of its identity" (Pottinger, 2021, p. 14). For me, it was more a result of the performative (Butler, 1988), bodily experience and phenomenological quality and the images were because of bodily impulses. This is something I discuss in the next phase where I am more concerned with the process than the product.

Figure 4.10

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Darkened Muse*, oil on board

Figure 4.9

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Lust Alienated*, oil on board

Figure 4.11

Chris Abrahams, 2019, *Green Intensity*, oil on board

4.3.4. Phase 4: COVID considerations and quarantine: Myanmar (Jan 2020 – April 2020); Lockdown in Myanmar (March 2020); hotel quarantine, Sydney (April 2020)

In Phase 4, the way in which I applied Reflexive Phenomenology changed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020. I was in Myanmar from 20 January 2020 and soon after in Yangon, where I was invited to give an artist talk at

Artissmile Art House, a gallery space where local artists exhibit their work, undertake workshops, and deploy field trips. I became friends with the CEO, Zar Li Aung who invited me on a field trip to Mandalay in February 2020. It was a painting trip where local artists painted the scenes, villages, river, and temples. Ipainted in oil on this trip and painting outdoors was a different experience as most of my painting up to this stage had been indoors. When the pandemic hit, I was forced into lockdown where my anxiety increased because I was confined to a small apartment with no studio space for an indefinite amount of time. My solution, as a form of relief from my growing anxiety, initially was to return to the Artissmile Art House in Yangon every day, but that soon stopped as no movement was allowed in the country. I stayed at the arthouse, sleeping on the floor in the office which I made into a studio, it had a mirror, and I had a portable easel, paints, charcoal, pencils, and ink. I started recording in my sketch book using drawing as the medium to record how my body and mental state was feeling. In previous phases, Reflexive Phenomenology was deliberately and consciously deployed as an internal conversation (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) I had with my body, backed up by my recording live-in-situ video recordings. In Phase 4, however, I did not have the luxury of this previous context, and it became increasingly important for me to visually document and expand my use of written reflections to engage not only my body-as-self, but also my anxious and confronting feelings at this time. My visual journal stated, "*Artist/ body feeling nervous re coronavirus"* (Abrahams, 2020, March 28, 2020). I did attempt a daily practice of inner conversation which resulted in a series of sketches (one A3 sketchbook page a day) from March 21, 2020 to April 6, 2020.

During this time at the arthouse, I contacted the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) in Myanmar and my doctor back in Australia. I was having panic attacks and started documenting this in my written/ visual journal by dividing up the page into six squares on my A3 sketch book with a title on the top reflecting on how I was feeling and the date. There were little written responses at this stage with a concentration on the sketches within the squares. I used compositional techniques in the squares to represent how I was feeling. For example, Fig 4.14 in the Myanmar journals has the figure pushed right up against the edge of the square and has lines over the face to represent that I was feeling trapped.

Figure 4.12

Chris Abrahams, *Journal entry*, April 7, 2020

This was where I started merging the written work and the visual work. Below, is an example of my journal entry:

> Artist/ body feeling panic- shaking during COVID19 crisis stuck in Myanmar- Fight/ flight response" and "Artist/ body feeling trapped here in Myanmar. At night my body was ok but, in the morning, it went into shock/ panic as the medication for anxiety wears off. Also worry/ fear COVID19. (Abrahams, April 7, 2020)

During my final days in Myanmar, April 5 to 7, 2020, I stayed at a hotel near the airport while I waited for a DFAT relief flight back to Australia. The artworks I made while in the Yangon arthouse, at the school where I was teaching, and at my residence had to be left behind, as I was I unable to retrieve them. I only brought my sketch book and art materials with me back to Australia.

Figure 4.13

Chris Abrahams, *Day 5 14*

I flew into Sydney on April 10, 2020 and had to quarantine 14 days in a hotel. Being in a hotel room with no fresh air (the windows did not open) and no way to exercise (I was not allowed past the front door) was mentally debilitating. I physically created a temporary 'studio' area near the window with a portable easel and the art materials I had brought with me from Myanmar. I also used the bathroom to set up my easel to use the mirror and wash basin. The way in which I used Reflexive Phenomenology and my inner conversation was to encourage both drawing and written journaling, in my sketch book because of the lack of a physical studio. I made a habit daily to do one painting and one-page of journaling each day of quarantine. The six squares that I had implemented in Myanmar, now represented the times of the day in intervals of 9 am, 12 pm, 3 pm and 5 pm when I would check in on how my body was coping. One square was allotted for writing and the other, sketching. I was now writing and sketching for the same amount of time. It then became eight squares which was a square for writing and a square for sketching. Figure 4.15 exemplifies this technique.

This was a little more of in-depth writing and accompanied sketches. This demonstrated my expanding view of my body-as-self and mark-making to describe what the body was experiencing in time and place. This emerged as a very different sense of self than that I had experimented with in Phases 1, 2 or 3; I consider this a major junction and transformation in how the re-representation my body-as-self was manifested through my narrative and associated sketches/ painting at this time. These sketches/ annotations and paintings were in direct correlation to how my body was feeling. It was pertinent to use my art to reveal and record how my body was coping during this phase. My inner conversations were deliberately demonstrated by recording them as words in the journal. This assisted me in taking advantage of whatever mobile surfaces I could to further record my bodily disruption.

Figure 4.14

Chris Abrahams, 2020, *COVID19 Hotel quarantine montage*, oil on paper

One of the works I completed in hotel quarantine was a series of small paintings I produced on food boxes that were left at the door of the hotel room. Figure 4.16 *Hotel quarantine* (2020) shows a montage of these paintings. There are only ten paintings

because that is the number of days I stayed at the hotel. I was granted an exemption from NSW Health and Qld Health to return to Queensland because of my mental state. I went to the hospital twice during this time because of suicidal ideations and the hotel doctor signed me off to complete the final few days in home quarantine in Queensland. These images, constructed in form and colour represent my emotions that I was feeling in my body.

During Phase 4 I was literally forced to involuntarily look within myself for change and transformation, whereas during the previous phases, it was voluntary. This dialogue of questioning and answering about my work is something that activated a through-line between the phases of my artmaking and helped to disrupt my use of self-portraiture from Phases 1 to 3. In April 2020, I returned home to Queensland from hotel quarantine in Sydney. When I returned 'home' to Toowoomba, the landlord wanted me to leave his house because I had just returned home from overseas and may have COVID-19. This was extremely upsetting and disorienting for me; it furthered my anxiety around my fight and flight responses. During this time, I tried to get back into my studio schedule at USQ's Toowoomba campus, but I experienced suicidal ideations at the time and was admitted to Toowoomba Base Hospital.

Phase 5 is therefore key to how my practice further transformed due to the stresses I experienced in Phase 4.

4.3.5. Phase 5: Studio-work Brisbane, May 2020 – Dec 2021

I moved to Inala, Brisbane in May 2020 but I was still experiencing fight and flight bodily responses. I was commuting to USQ Toowoomba campus daily to work in the studio. My body was still experiencing high levels of anxiety, but I felt a certain safety and familiarity at this new residence. My work for this Phase 5 in the collections file is in my archive/ portfolio which can be viewed on https://studio.artmoi me/login (user name: chrisabrahams@hotmail.com password: Zali_1983!). From May 2020, and continuing, I built a studio at this residence from scratch, including my etching press and easel. I went through the same studio schedule I started in Phase 1, although I did not continue with ceramics because I thought I had already exhausted that process. While I continued to practice the rigours of internal conversation in my self-portraiture, which I had been deploying through my Reflexive Phenomenology, this

phase began by continuing to interrogate my self-portrait as a construction of my body-as-self, but, as I became more settled in this new studio, I began to abandon the self-portrait, and my work become more focused on the process (Wheeler, 1991) of working with materials and tools. I abandoned the use of the mirror altogether in Phase 5 as I developed new habits regarding the process of working with materials and tools in my new residential studio. In Phases 1 to 4 I challenged the notion of the self as "a singular, stable self" (Cox & Lyddon, 1997, p. 204), to instead one that changes over time. I continued to make self-portraits early in Phase 5, but I changed the focus into employing the body-as-self in working and re-working surfaces using scrapers, palette knifes and erasers. In drawing, I made grounds of charcoal and then began rubbing back the surface with a kneadable eraser. While the self-portrait is still present in Figure 4.16, it disappears in Figure 4.17 which extends on how I had previously initiated this idea in early phases. In painting, I began making grounds of paint mixed with turpentine and then waiting for it to dry. I would then scrape back the paint in a daily habit. I repeated this process until the paper or canvas would rip. In etching, I made marks with hard ground and drypoint and then I would scrape and burnish the surface. The drawings, paintings, and etching plates were lowered to the floor of the studio or the backyard ground and I allowed further specific proliferation of process art techniques, such as natural forces to affect the works on the floor and on the easel of my studio, such as time, gravity, temperature, rain, wind, dirt, leaves, cigarette ash, chicken feathers and poo, as this new residence had a yard and chicken coop that provided a much more diverse spatial dynamic to previous interior studios. I placed my efforts in the different media to discover the processes of erasure, and restitution (Pigrum, 2014). I wanted to scrape back the self-portrait using tools and materials to begin again. It was a way of breaking out of previous habits and focusing on something that was evolving, fluid and layered. I started with drawing because the immediacy of charcoal generated a new cycle of working with a medium that leaves residue on all the surfaces it touches, including my own skin. Charcoal is very direct and experimental in that it can be erased quite easily, whereas with paint and etching it is more permanent or ingrained. I had used the process of scratching the surface in previous phases, in this phase my focus was entirely on that process of technique application, eradicating my physical presence in the subject on the medium, but nonetheless I am present in the making of the work. It generated a new cycle of working where I transitioned from self-portraiture to an entirely new series of works.

Although my body-as-self was still being used to construct the work, my body itself was being renewed by this 'new' way of working which took on a life of its own, a sense of becoming. It was like I was peeling off the old layers of the self-portrait that was encrusted with layers of old paint, paper, and metal plate over time, to start again. In the following section, I will look at how this was done through the different mediums and provide some examples of new work completed in this phase.

In drawing, for this phase, I used charcoal as a medium because of its adaptability and because it lends itself to erasure, if desired or required. I continued to re-represent my self-portrait at the start of this phase, but later I became more concerned about the process of working and re-working the surface itself. My practice was the process of adding charcoal and rubbing back the surface, which is a result of my own inner dialogue that encouraged further application. The process of leaving the paper on the ground affects the material, allowing natural forces-time, gravity, temperature, and atmosphere, "forever subject to the waxing and waning stresses of change" (Wheeler, 1991, p. 259). The abrasive action created by scratching the surface may also destroy the ground on which it is laid. In my journal I wrote:

> In drawing, while erasing the ground the paper peels off, which is an effect I want to achieve but I am having a conversation around how much should I erase without 'destroying' the work? What if by erasing, the paper peels off or even gets a hole in it? I then attached another similar paper patch where it is damaged. I am erasing with a kneadable eraser, knowing when to stop can be a problem and it is through a process of reflexivity or the inner dialogue that is taking place about the work (Abrahams, June 9, 2021).

Figure 4.15
Chris Abrahams, 2021, *Dream morphism,*
charcoal on paper, 56 x 76 cm

Figure 4.17 is a charcoal drawing on Fabriano Accademia paper. After I made a ground with compressed charcoal, I rubbed it in with a paper stump, hands, and fingers to create an even background. I made a few marks to represent my face in the mirror. I was still using the mirror at this stage as a way of reflection and as a compositional device. The figure is placed towards the edge of the picture plane hinting at the removal of the face altogether. I used a kneadable eraser, which is an eraser that is not only good for erasing and creating highlights but also to give a uniform surface. I continually rubbed the surface of the paper until it peeled off layers, which I allowed to happen. It is this process of rubbing with my hands to the point that the natural forces of abrasion caused change to the paper and matter over time. I asked myself: "When does the body stop working? When to stop peeling the paper or paint or scraping the etching plate? Reflexing on the result from a distance (6ft from the easel) sitting and reflecting on the result. Do I continue or do I stop?" (Abrahams, May 30, 2021). This similar process occurs in the work *Self Portrait* (1958), by British artist Frank Auerbach where the paper was destroyed in the act of erasure and restitution. The remedy was to glue another piece of paper on the damaged piece of paper. I then worked and re-worked the added layer of paper with charcoal with my hands or a paper stump. In all my work there is a process of making, erasing, and re-emergence and this is symbolic of the self. As I am involved in the process of change, transformation, and resolution in the work my body is also undergoing the same process. Figure 4.16 was the final self-portrait in this series.

In January 2021, I was able to travel to Melbourne to visit an exhibitiontitled The Naked Face at the National Gallery of Victoria, which was dedicated to showing the self-portraits of several twentieth century artists. The introduction to the exhibition discusses the idea of the naked face as something that reveals to us "the naked truth" (Gaston, 2010-11, p. 9). Often the face is a construct and hides the real character of the person. I was drawn to the mark-making by Rembrandt and Parr. I observed the marks up close and personal, especially in the work of Parr, *Untitled self-portrait #1*1989 and *Untitled self-portrait # 9* 1989, which are both drypoint etchings where the marks leave a characteristic burr. This issimilar to my own work in the previous phases, where my visceral and physical mark-making used the body to carve out lines and shapes of the naked face. While this exhibition did not necessarily suggest new pathways or insights into self-portraiture, what the experience did was to confirm that

the body-as-self as a constructed surface, was both the subject and the agent of the making. I used this insight, ultimately, to begin my abandonment on the self-portrait, and instead embrace the physicality of scratching the surface and mark-making. This process is both performed and executed by my physical body.

Figure 4.16

Chris Abrahams, 2021, *Charcoal ground*, charcoal on paper, 56 x 76

Although I was no longer-representing the face as the subject/ object, in the following works my body-as-self was employed in making the artworks. I abandoned the representation of self in search of the material other, because I felt like I exhausted

the self-portraiture series and by scratching the surface of the paper I was transitioning to a new process. In peeling back, the layers of paper, I was peeling back old habits and revealing something new, moving from one series to another. What looked like 'destroying' the work was in fact a way of renewal. Each layer that is peeled off is an archaeological layer of the body-as-self in time and place. It is reminiscent of the earth which destroys itself by fire, water, and wind, that generates new growth. Similarly, the body sheds old skin for new skin. During this time, I discovered an Australian contemporary process artist, Aida Tomescu known for her abstract drawings, paintings, and prints. Her process in starting a new series is with charcoal drawing on paper, like my regime of drawing, painting, and etching. She begins with charcoal because it opens new possibilities and building up layers of charcoal, ink, or pastels. This opens a new series in painting as an experience of layering colour as she travels through the stages and trying to find form in the work. All the previous layers participate in forming colour and form as she scrapes back into the work (Goanna, 2006). This process of layering, scraping back with palette knives is like the reflexive

questioning and answering I used in my work. Like Tomescu, I tried to slow down the process of painting by allowing the image to work on me and finding answers by questioning on the canvas (Goanna, 2007). By slowing down the process the image and reflecting, allowed the surface and the image to breathe between layering. Like Tomescu, I used scrapers as a tool of erasure, steel scribers in the etching process as a way of excavating the plates. Tomescu, felt the resistance in the metal plates (Stranger, 2017) as I did when I inscribed or broke the hard ground. I also felt the tension in the palm of my hand when I made deep marks in the plate. Mark-making in etching is by nature a slow and technical process that allows time for thinking or reflecting and the doing. It allowed Tomescu to work to fix or locate an image and then unfix it, let it breathe (Stranger, 2017) between prints. For me, I always take a proof of the plate by printing and image and placing it on a wall, sitting back at least 6 feet to reflect on the image and ask questions such as "what to do on the next plate?" Tomescu could see the whole image in mark-making because of the scale of the etching plate as opposed to her large-scale paintings.

In this work (Figure 4.18) I made a ground with charcoal and then repetitively rubbed back the paper with an eraser until the paper peeled off and made holes in the work. As a remedy, I adhered another piece of paper where the work was 'damaged' and then re-worked the foreign piece of paper with charcoal and my hands. This work was different than previous pieces because there is no re-representation of my face, and it was initially done on the vertical easel. I then lowered it to the horizontal floor of the studio. On the floor of my studio, dirt, dust, chicken poo, leaves and footprints got on the work and became part of the piece. Additionally, while on the ground, natural forces such as time, gravity, and temperature affected the material. My body-as-self was employed to make the work after my bodily residue was left in the paper on the ground. Bakhtin referred to this as "degradation which means coming down to earth, where the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time to something new or better" (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 688). This is reminiscent of the painter, Jackson Pollock who in 1947 first lowered a vertical painting to the horizontal floor of his studio. The floor or the ground hence became the site of production with his newly invented idiom of the drip pictures. In works like *Full Fathom Five* (1947), the dripped, encrusted surface consisting of nails, buttons, matches, cigarette butts and trash becomes part of the work.

In etching, for this phase, I continued making marks on copper plate with sharp tools and other processes, such as acid to eat into the plate. My early interpretation of self-portraiture was the re-representation of the face and head. I used a mirror, but as time went on it was more about employing the body itself to create marks on surfaces as a way self-representation. Like Arnulf Rainer's two etchings, *Hill (*1963) and *Knee* (1956) I used to concentrate on various body parts, other than the face, and made markings on etching plates and canvases as re-representation of the body. For me, these artworks are considered self-portraits because they use my full body to construct them. These etchings were made by looking at body parts and then using my body to make marks on the plate repetitively. For example, this video demonstrates me as the subject/ object using the body to make marks on copper plate (Abrahams, 2020 https://youtu.be/dKOVEYKTW_4).

Figure 4.17

Chris Abrahams, 2021, *Piss Plates*, copper plates 3 x 90 x 50.5 cm

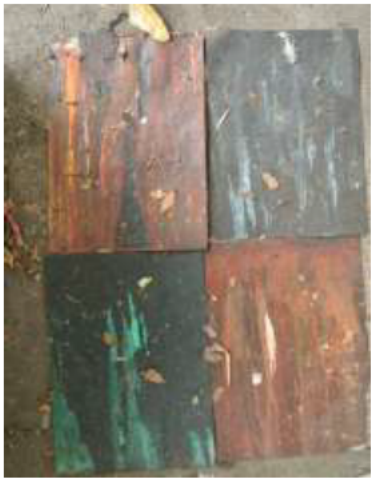
In the safety of the backyard studio, I created a series of three large copper plates (90 x 50.5 cm) (Figure 4.19) where I left these plates on the ground and the lower part of my body urinated on them daily. This act could not have been done in within the university protocols, but it is not just the act of my lower part of my body-as-self

performing this work, but it signals a move away traditional self-portraiture as in the representation of the face into the realm of the physical body. By placing the plates in a series of three also reacts against traditional Renaissance painting where altarpieces were created using three panels, symbolising the Holy Trinity. The title references the work, *Piss Christ* (1987) by the American artist and photographer Andres Serrano, which depicts a small plastic crucifix submerged in a small glass tank of the artist's urine. My physical body is utilised as the artist's self-portrait in the gesture of standing

spilling liquid on a horizontal ground where uric acid caused oxidation on the copper plates. This is reminiscent of Andy Warhol's series *Oxidation Painting* (1978) called which were huge canvases covered in metallic paint and he invited friends to urinate onto their surface of the canvas. For Warhol this was a group effort, but for me it was my own seepage, urine, and action where the lower part of my body created this work. The uric acid created pools of green oxidation and discolouration in the metal. In traditional etching, acid is used to etch into the plate, where the acid used here is my bodily fluid. This subversive act is again reminiscent of Bakhtin's subversion and disruption he associates with the carnivalesque, he refers to this degradation as "grotesque realism" (Bakhtin in Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 688) where the lower stratum of the body is connected to the world through fucking, urinating, shitting, and giving birth (Robinson, 2011). It is the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth (Bakhtin in Rivkin & Ryan, 2004). Using the horizontal ground as the production site is not only the opposite of the vertical erect human body but stages an attack on the erect human being, and represents something primal, animalistic, and ancient where the gaze is toward the ground. The process of urinating and leaving the plates on the ground affects the material, allowing natural forces – such as the elements, wind, rain, and heat and on the ground dirt, leaves, and bird droppings to become part of the work.

Figure 4.18

Chris Abrahams, 2021, *Green vs red ground,* oil on canvas paper



In painting, during this phase, (see Figure 4.20) I used canvas paper which is made to look like canvas, but it is paper, and I chose this material because it has layers. Over the course of six months, I continually added glazes of oil paint using the opposite colour to gain a darker colour. For example, I added red to green to gain a darker hue and redder colour to green. Each day I would go through this process, scraping back the canvas using a palette knife and lowering it to the ground of my studio. I scraped back the surface of the canvas paper until it peeled back in layers. I wrote in my journal:

> I am scraping the surface and adding layers of paint. I am asking questions such as how should I scrape back the surface without destroying the canvas? What happens if the canvas is ripped in the process of scraping the surface? Should I attach another piece of canvas in its place as part of restitution of the piece? (Abrahams, June 9, 2021)

The canvas paper began to peel back in layers, and I glued torn pieces of canvas on areas that were 'destroyed'. I lowered the works from a vertical easel to the horizontal ground where dirt, leaves, chicken poo, cigarette butts and ash became part of the works. The process of leaving these works on the ground affects the material, allowing natural forces to consume and guide the transformation. Eventually, I had to lift these works off the ground, otherwise they would be destroyed by the rain that filled the studio and by bugs eating the paper.

4.4. Summary of findings

My learning journey for this DCA project started in one place and finished in another. I started with the research question: how can the body be employed to create a portrait of self to create change and transformation? I was not so concerned with creating self-portrait's in the traditional sense or creating realistic portraits of myself, rather I was employing the body-as-self to construct portraits of self. During thistime I was affected by global events. . I have always loved working in isolation in the studio, and during COVID-19 I was forced into isolation. and the notion of the body-as-self was expanded to include the physical, embodied version of self which manifests itself in the process of using art materials, surfaces, and the environment in which I am working. My art practice, continued with scratching the surface of the

canvas, metal plate, and paper, to reveal what was underneath. This included making layers of paint on canvas, paper and etching plate and using scrapers to scratch back into the artworks. These works evolve over time and are not just a single finished work but a process of layering and erasure. I am using oil paint, which slows down the process of working and allows time to breathe between layers. I am having an inner dialogue with the

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

I will now examine how Reflexive Phenomenology affects the body. Reflexive Phenomenology as a methodology developed over the phases where I used my phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) body to engage in inner dialogues (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) between my body-as-self and my artworks. The application of Reflexive Phenomenology changed across the Phases of my DCA project from video journaling to written/ visual journaling because of the way my body was reacting to external circumstances and inevitable life events that affected my body. It became necessary to document in written/ visual journaling because of how my body was reacting due to COVID-19 lockdowns, quarantine, fight/ flight responses in Myanmar and back in Australia. The consistent use of the Reflexive Phenomenology became part of my practice to engage with myself and my artworks which allowed me to abandon self-portraiture altogether to focus on the process of scratching the surface of different art materials. My body as a surface became part of the surface of the works through my phenomenological, bodily, temporal engagement with materials and tools.

5.1. Reflexive Phenomenology affects the body

While the work is in no way completed, the creative works created for the exploration of my key research questions are now archived and have been analysed in this chapter. My key reason for undertaking this study was to use self-portraiture as a way of reflecting on self because of a personal and professional crisis. In 2022, I will submit my exegesis and my online creative works archive. What I have discovered is that by using the phenomenological body-as-self as a tool to create a portrait of self I created change and transformation in my body and in my artworks. I have used the body-as-self through all the phases of my DCA course, from Phase 1: Studio-Work at USQ, March 2018-October 2019, Phase 2: DCA Exhibition #2: Scratching the Surface: Self Portraiture – Exploring the Body-as-Self, A Block Gallery, USQ, Toowoomba Campus October 1-23, 2019, Phase 3: Exhibition #2 *Cracking the Mirror Stage*, Cam Robertson Gallery, Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, (March 27-April 25, 2021), Phase 4: COVID Considerations and Quarantine: Myanmar (Jan 2020-April 2020); Lockdown in Myanmar (March 2020); Hotel Quarantine, Sydney (April 2020) and Phase 5: Studio-work Brisbane, May 2020-Dec 2021.

I developed a methodology called Reflexive Phenomenology where I used my phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) body to respond to my reflexive inner conversations (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) with self to create change and transformation in all my artworks and in the circumstances, I was confronted. As a result of an inner dialogue, I made changes in all the different mediums and art processes across all the phases of the DCA program. By applying Reflexive Phenomenology my phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) body and artworks were affected. This inner dialogue (Archer, 2013, p. 2) developed as a deliberate internal dialogue where questions were asked, until a new action was performed by the phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968) body. In Phases 1 to 3, the internal dialogue was documented in live-in situ videos but in Phases 3 to 4 it became necessary to document how my body was feeling due to COVID-19 lockdowns and quarantine. As result of this experience, Reflexive Phenomenology as a methodology provided a new way of questioning, answering about the artworks I was in the process of making and the phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) bodily responses to them, rather than how my body was feeling. In Phase 5, Reflexive Phenomenology was about my phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) body's interaction with the process of working with materials, matter, and tools. As I touched surfaces, tools, materials I was also being touched by them and evoked an awareness of body-as-self. Both Heidegger (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1964) agree that the world is a world of things to be engaged with practically (Wrathall in Parry, 2011). What this meant in my artworks is that my body engaged with brushes, palette knives, metal scribers, and clay tools, all fit for purpose to express that which was in my body. While working, I employed my body to make and engage in different bodily orientation, movement, gestures, head angles, and facial expressions in all my artworks.

There were also the inevitable life events that affected my body such as the grief of the passing of my father in May 2019, travel to Myanmar and leaving my creative works behind, isolation, lockdowns, and quarantine. My creative outputs as arts-based research (Leavy, 2009) chronicles how as an artist, working in chosen and forced (quarantine) isolation, has managed to push to expand and challenge the traditional ideas around self-portraiture to now embrace the body as a working agent for the art, not just a subject.

In Phases 1 to 3, Reflexive Phenomenology affected the body-as-self, where I made video recordings of the live-in situ experience of me working in the studio engaging with different art materials, tools, and processes. I established a schedule of daily habits; (Bourdieu, 1992 in Archer, 2013) where I disciplined my body to spend an hour for each medium as a guideline, seven days a week and I reflected on this in my personal diary. This time limit was not fixed, but it provided a structure in which to work, and my bodily experiences were contextualised in the environments in which they occurred (Leavy, 2009). Although I worked largely in isolation, I was aware of other people in the adjoining studios, and this gave me a feeling of comfort and connection with other artists.

In Phases 4 and 5, Reflexive Phenomenology, changed where it became essential to document how my body was feeling because of lockdowns, quarantine, and fight/ flight responses. The consistent use of the reflexive inner conversation (Archer, 2013; Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2015) encouraged me to alternate between self and my artworks through visual/ written journals to engage in change. Reflexive Phenomenology became part of my practice to engage with myself and my artworks and this ultimately allowed me to abandon self-portraiture for the earthier material pursuits exploring techniques and natural degradation of surfaces. I used techniques of layering, mark-making, and scraping back surfaces in my self-portraits. The process included building layers from the ground up to construct self-portraits which were a form of questioning and answering on surfaces. My body as a surface became part of the surface of the works through my phenomenological, bodily, temporal engagement with materials and tools. Each layer was a document of self, where the dialogue was in every brushstroke, inscription, mark, layer, and construction as an expression of what I was feeling in the body. The works had a life of their own: alive, open, and in some cases unfinished, instead of labouring over the surface, which allowed possibilities in the process of making artworks. As my body and the artworks conversed, I slowed down the process by reflecting at each stage of the works and by using material that caused an element of delay. For example, using slow-drying oil paint allowed a reflective conversation with the artist and the viewer. When I took time to think, reflect and allow the canvas to talk, so to speak, I entered a space where anything was possible. Life slowed down as well as I became settled and recovered from nervous conditions as I was back in a familiar residence. I no longer needed to

be the subject of my creative enterprise and the adoption of process techniques was brought about by using Reflexive Phenomenology. Ultimately, it was the material and matter that was more important than image making. My abandonment of re-representation of self in self-portraiture gave way to primarily allowing the materials in my artworks to be subject to natural forces – time, gravity, dirt, ground, bodily seepage, and natural elements to affect the works (Wheeler, 1991). My works were imbued with my bodily residue and embodied the body-as-self. Applied reflexivity created a life-long inner conversation (Archer, 2013) that does not end here but continues as I reflect, respond to questioning, answering to cause change in the works and my body.

My notion of applied Reflexive Phenomenology as a methodology contributes to new knowledge in the field, which was forged in practice, over the course of my DCA program. I challenged traditional self-portraiture where the body-as-self was employed to construct a portrait of self. I also challenged the notion that the self is not a stable, single entity but takes on multiple selves, a construct over time and place. The theoretical work and my creative outputs chronicle how as a visual artist, working in chosen and forced (quarantine) was undertaken during an unprecedented global health crisis.

This exegesis based on creative work as a practice identifies a process, of a specific idea located in contemporary art, and named here as Reflexive Phenomenology. This paper developed from grounded research on the subject of reflexivity is not significant just for this project but in my own understanding will remain a life-long inner conversation (Archer, 2013) I and others are having. That is, with the self, effective for change and transformation. Importantly I began coursework at university to cause change within my art practice and, in body. This exegesis confirms the practice of Reflexive Phenomenology is worthwhile applying personally within discreet practice, but also the art classroom and broader community. What this paper illustrates beyond academic matters is that for productive growth and change of participants has been exemplary in prior contributions to what is known about the contemporary arts. As for this individual art practice, I will personally continue to engage with the process of using materials, tools, and subject artworks in relation towards natural forces as a relevant and highly applicable methodology. In that way I

further aim to leave a legacy of not only what has done during this period (2018-2022 archived online) but a contributing discourse on the subject field of Reflexive Phenomenology for others to engage.

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