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the gap\_\_\_\_\_between art & life

an exegesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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Kirsten Price 2021

## abstract

*Every day I am an educator, a motivator, a collaborator, a co-author, a partner, a playmate and a director and an artist. The passage of time is marked by calendars and timetables. I make work whilst I teach; intuitively, playfully manipulating materials that are at hand using simple processes and technology. It's like an experiment, setup within a framework with the results often left to chance. Working on a "kitchen table," I engage in conversations within my locale. I provide a narrative of my experiences and daily interactions with the cohabitants of my space, combining intimacy and playfulness with social commentary. I want to create an ongoing dialogue between the handmade and the ready made, to make a translation for the viewer, not to reveal all possibilities, but to understand the lived experience of my space by comprehending and describing its genesis. Work is made and remade by playing with and manipulating materials immediately at hand. I translate and transform discarded material by categorising, grouping, arranging and layering? One project leads to another, things are reinvented and reused through a process of bricolage. There is always material left behind - a residue. It's debris, it depicts debris; it's a work, it depicts making a work. I want to work in the gap in between life and art.*

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## preface

*I am a teacher but not just a teacher.*

*I am an Art teacher and that makes me different.*

*My studio is my classroom, a negotiated space.*

*A home to many artists everyday.*

*I follow a prescribed pattern regulated by bells and the endless rhythm of bodies -  
arriving and leaving.*

*The ecology of the art room has a life force all its own.*

*I live my life in the imperative!*

*Communication is often rapid fire, short and fragmented.*

*It is not chaotic or random.*

*There are identifiable patterns and rhythms in these interactions.*

*How can I document and express the relationships within and with the “ecology” of the  
art room?*

*How will I turn the humble and discarded into something inherently beautiful?*

*How do I make the process available to the viewer whilst not teaching a lesson or  
providing a recipe?*

*What will I leave to chance?*

*Am I an artist or an editor?*

*Who is my audience?*

*Do they participate in the process?*

## table of contents

abstract	2
acknowledgements	3
preface	4
chapter	
1 <i>the kitchen table</i>	5
2 <i>minding the gap</i>	9
3 <i>translation</i>	25
4 <i>puttering about</i>	30
5 <i>a brush in my hand</i>	46
references	48
list of images	51

## 1. *the kitchen table*

My daily life is one of urgency and time dependencies and relies on my ability to make thousands of small decisions every minute reacting to cues, instructions and demands of others. The passage of time is marked by calendars and timetables. As the theatre of each day unfolds I take on many roles. I am, at different times, both an author and an artist as well as a collaborator, motivator, playmate as well as an educator.

I make art work whilst I teach; intuitively, playfully manipulating materials that are to hand using simple processes and technology. It's like an experiment, setup within a framework with the results often left to chance.

I engage in conversations with my 'habitat' by working on a "kitchen table" in the middle of my classroom, I am able to discuss, create, react and interact with my students. Traditionally, the kitchen table is the nexus of family gatherings and lives are discussed around it. It is a comfortable space to share stories and relate experiences. My "kitchen table" in the art room is just that - a space where conversations happen and ideas are shared - a domestic space where artworks are conceived and set on the table for consumption. The world of the art room begins on the "kitchen table".

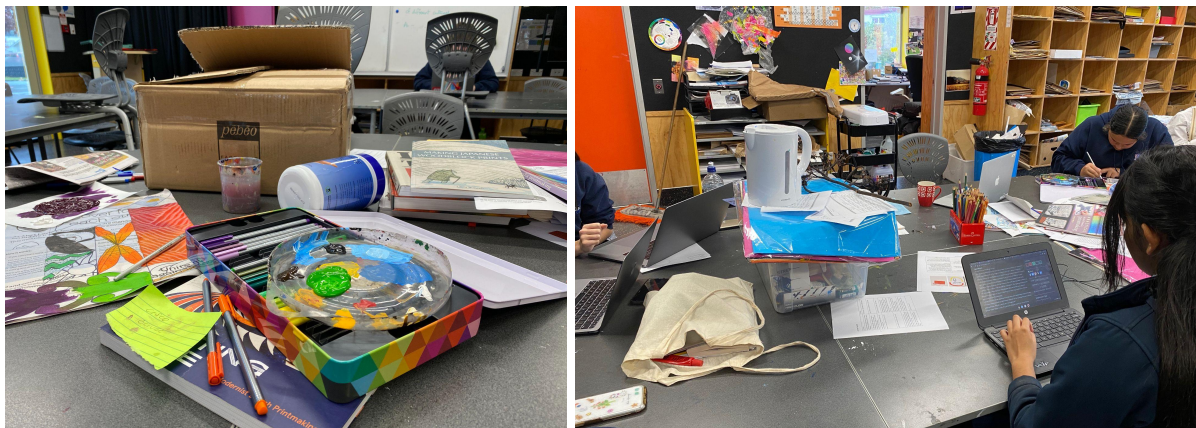


Figure.1 the kitchen table with the inhabitants of the ecosystem in situ, 2021 - image by author

I function within an “ecology” a part of a larger ecosystem - Somewhat separated from the rest of the school but still connected to and moved by the life force of the larger ecosystem. It is an expression of the relationships between one and other, and the temporal, spatial patterns that define the interactions with our physical surroundings. I am the dominant organism who defines, shapes and regulates interactions. There is competition within and between “species” that interact dynamically and a regular flux of energy that is fed by matter. This matter, discarded ephemeral material details and records the intimate relationships within and with the habitat.

Every image created in this space leaves behind discarded first attempts, unintended marks and offcuts of materials - the residue of art making. Fluorescent coloured, ephemeral printed material, stationery, packaging stamped with directions and instructions, discarded paper and printed materials left by the photocopier, paint unused in trays and used tape are authentic products of myspace. By playful manipulation, I make the low value and the discarded into high value and precious art for consideration.

Here the photocopier's fragmentations, striations, blurrings and intrusions of light are as important as the original texts and images. I like that people can recognise a Xerox image. It's a quick way to copy an image and record a document. It's ephemeral, a visible image on a piece of paper and not necessarily meant to be viewed as art but through a process, it can be repurposed into something more permanent. As a tool, this seemingly complex machine, is ready to hand and is both a port which imagery passes through and a repository for that which is no longer deemed important or necessary.

The pile of discarded material beside the copier forms an archive of images once thought worthy of replication and distribution but now abandoned, often because of perceived minor imperfections.

Writing is material and, then again, it's not. By manipulation, the original meaning is obfuscated and the materiality of text is uncovered. It is often illegible and acts as a source purely for the imposition of visual order and pattern. The focus is on the issues

of seeing versus reading, not so much in an effort to dispense with the original meaning but to heighten the overlapping ambiguities. The process is arbitrary and so is the method of presentation.

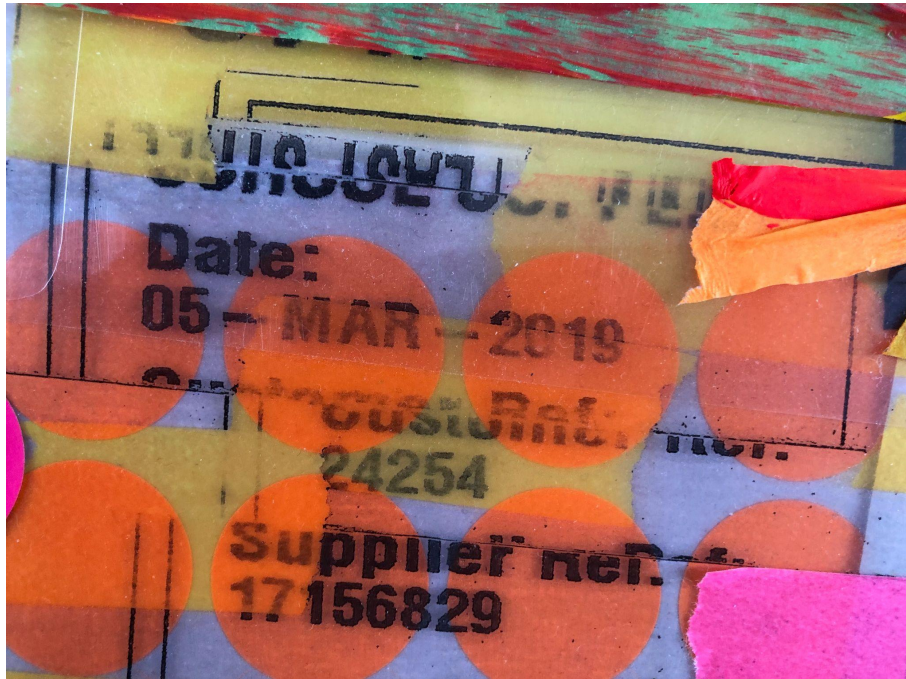


Figure 2. *drawing, mixed media collage*, 297 x 420 mm. 2019. Image by author

## *2. minding the gap*

I am captivated by the immersive qualities of highly detailed, rich, layered surfaces and their ability to draw the viewer in, revealing more and more on close examination. The work of Robert Rauschenberg, whose early works anticipated the Pop Art movement, holds a particular interest for me; he employed non- traditional materials and objects in various combinations. Initially materials were sourced by the impecunious young artist from abandoned objects and discarded materials in the neighbourhood surrounding his studio in New York city. The ability of Rauschenberg to make work out of almost any material that was to hand intrigues me as does the abundance of his work. His work appears to be a long narrative of experiences and events juxtaposed with a huge variety of found or discarded materials.

His belief that painting relates to both art and life and his desire to work in the gap inbetween (Rauschenberg, 1959), presented a direct challenge to the prevalent abstract expressionists of the 1950s. He rejected their heroic, machismo, painterly gestures and their attachment to the universal meaning expressed in a work of art and instead created multiple or fluid meanings through combinations of everyday objects and images. His focus was on the development of his own personal sense of looking.

His work represents an ongoing dialogue between the handmade and the readymade, and between the gestural brush strokes and the mechanically reproduced image. Rauschenberg had an expansive artistic philosophy and throughout his career, he collaborated with performers, printmakers, engineers, writers and artists, many of whom were friends or colleagues. He imbued new significance to ordinary objects and images by combining unrelated items and recontextualising them as art.

Work was made and remade from materials immediately to hand. Paintings incorporated not only found objects but found images and were transferred to the canvas by the silkscreen process which had previously only been used as a commercial

process. The silkscreen process allowed Rauschenberg to address the multiple reproducibility of images, which were, as a consequence, flattened and reduced to one or two tones. He saw the potential beauty in almost anything. "I really feel sorry for people who think things like soap dishes or mirrors or Coke bottles are ugly, because they're surrounded by things like that all day long, and it must make them miserable." (Rauschenberg, 1977 as cited in Lindeman)

My work engages in snatches of conversations, with the ever present cohabitants of my space by way of an archive of documents left behind on the photocopier; they provide a narrative of my experiences and daily interactions. Collaboration was always critical to Rauschenberg, and his inclusiveness did not stop at the point of making; it often involved the viewer. Usually uninvited, or at the very least unsolicited, opinions are often shared by my students as a work progresses. Curious about my intentions and why selections of materials have been made questions flow concerning not only the physical form of the work but also it's intent. I find myself responding to this dialogue which takes place over the time it takes to make the work and I am often diverted from the path of my original intent. On occasion, students have physically made changes to a work that they perceive makes it better. I am left to question whether in fact my students are collaborators or an ever present audience who bear witness to the art making process as it unfolds in front of them?

The photographer Wolfgang Tillmans has continued to expand his practice to include diaristic photography and uses what are considered to be snapshot documentation of his social milieu and physical surroundings: they combine intimacy and playfulness with social commentary.

Tillmans has developed installation methods that, without regard to any hierarchy, combine frameless images that are either directly pinned or taped onto the gallery walls. Coloured photographs sit next to inkjet prints that also include ephemera such as postcards and magazine clippings of earlier work, and the works often reach to the ceiling and show his concern for site specific exhibition making. He says, " I accept that

they speak about me, and yet at the same time, I want and expect them to function in terms of the viewer and their experience.” (Nickas, 2011).

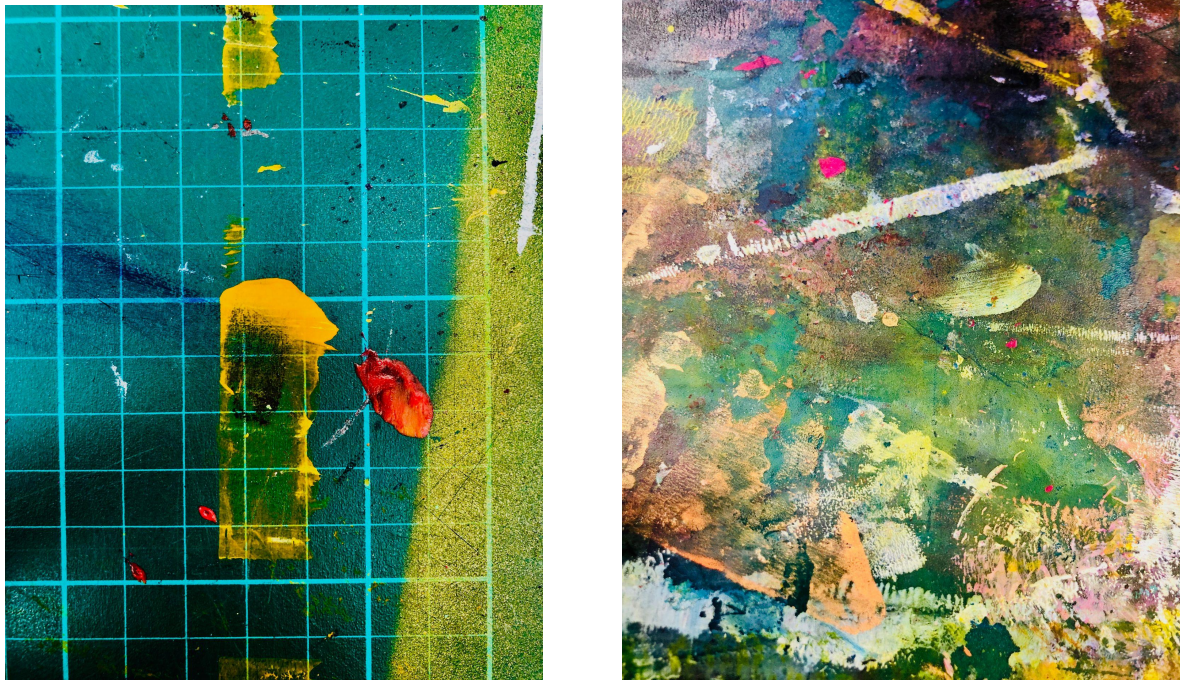


Figure 3. *cutting mat & table top, art room, 2019* - images by author

I too use photographs ‘to correct my own way of seeing’. The impersonal and spontaneous nature of a snapshot engages me and enables me to collect many images from unrelated sources and to collate, sort and categorise them. Tillmans rejection of the sometimes “precious” and formal nature of the photography and his ability to combine the many different forms of the medium in a single artwork sparks particular resonance for me.

My fascination with printed imagery and the re-use of found images from the ephemera that surrounds me, encourages the exploration of the factory aesthetic in printmaking (the ability to make many identical images that appear to have been manufactured, as in a commercial process) using the material that I encounter everyday and to discover how to re-contextualise these images.

I want my installations to have a frameless and spontaneous quality much as if they have been pinned on the wall for future reference or carelessly left on the floor. I want to manipulate images and replicate them countless times using the photocopier as both a camera and commercial printing device. I enjoy the feeling that they are creeping or edging down the wall organically using smaller and larger component parts to create a sense of perspective.

My discovery of the work of USA painter and sculptor Franklin Evans provided an example of another artist whose work was autobiographical in nature but not rooted in deep seated memories of life events but rather in the immersive quality of the materials that surround many of us everyday. Evans uses the material that is to hand in his studio and fills gallery spaces with vast amounts of essentially discarded or used material such as: printed material in the form of gallery invites, tape that has been used to mask areas in his painted works, amassed art supplies and materials. These works are obliquely autobiographical and their installation in a gallery space is both time consuming and performative in their intense making process. The result is an immersive narrative that lets go of the precious and is founded in exploration and discovery.

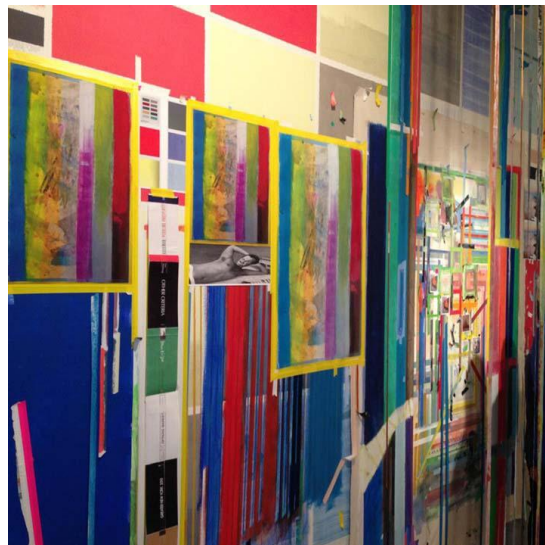


Figure 4. Evans, Franklin. *Paint thinks, de Cordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA, 2013*

Evans' installations fill every surface of the gallery space, with floor and ceiling both covered and connected with tape as a linear element. The viewer is immersed in the space and is able to walk over the work taped on the ground and covering every surface. When he is installing these works, Evans says that he doesn't know in advance how the work will end but says that the story of the work comes afterwards. (Evans, 2013). He views each new work as an exploration and a discovery, a kind of restating of the world of the commodity to make his own reality. New work is almost always created in connection with older work and the artist's oeuvre becomes a continuous narrative in which the reality is shaped by the images we consume.

The process of art making explored by Evans resonates with me. My work like his, occurs simultaneously in the same space using materials, processes and technology that are readily to hand. The results are not pre-planned or pre-determined by anything other than the limits of the materials and the technology. I manipulate and play with materials whilst often working on another task or engaging in conversations. Often, one work will form the basis of another and materials will be recycled and reinvented in a process of exploration and invention.



Figure 5. & 6. *Installation, tape, vinyl, textile, digital prints*, 2018, installed size approx 180 x 60 x 50 cm - images by author

I am intrigued by the process of the work of Walead Beshty, best known for his photography. Like Evans and Rauschenberg, Beshty uses materials that are immediately to hand including the discarded and used-up. He, however, differs in that he does not edit or select but rather includes “everything” in an attempt to avoid editing or selecting. He presents everything to the viewer with the intention that they will make the final decisions about what to take from the work.

I am often reluctant to discard work or images and will place them aside for further consideration in a future work. Like Beshty, I dislike having to say that this is outside the artwork or the project. I think that the arbitrary exclusion of items will affect how the work is understood. My work is often multi layered and dense with imagery with the intention that the viewer will bring their own experience to the work. It is not for me to say how they will view it or what they will take from the work but unlike Beshty, I do make aesthetic decisions about what to include through a translation process.

In 2013 Beshty began a year-long project entitled “A Partial Disassembling of an Invention without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in which the Pulleys and Cogwheels Are Lying Around at Random All over the Workbench”. This work documents every used, spent or discarded object in his studio with cyanotype photogram prints on cardboard, wood or any other cellulose based material culled from his workspace. The materials included private correspondence, interactions with the museum - every detail both professional and personal is included in the work itself - it's a work that describes making a work. The final result was exhibited on the 90 metre wall of the Barbican Centre's Curve gallery from ceiling to floor. In the last month of the project Beshty, in residence, produced cyanotypes with discarded items from the venue.

He tells of making a 'dumb rule' to set parameters for the project. It's a piece that tells the story of its own making by describing the entire productive life of the studio. Beshty

explains that a large part of what makes an artwork is also the social relations between individuals, the people that come together and make something happen. (Beshty, 2014)

Over 12,000 cyanotype prints were produced and presented in chronological order. No aesthetic decisions were made about which works to include from the vast number created throughout the year of the project. Every image was considered and included either on the wall as part of the major work or in a series of large books that were an adjunct to the main event but available for the perusal of the viewing public.

Beshty tells us that, by making aesthetic decisions as part of an editing process, he would be imposing a narrative about what can be seen. He wanted there to be possibilities that he couldn't see, to produce a work that depicted rather than concealed where it has come from. He says, "My work is an ecology and an ecology has no outside, you can't hide the waste, or the residue that's in it. Every choice produces a side effect. How do you consider that in aesthetic terms?" ( Beshty, 2014)

Beshty describes the outcome of art objects as an aesthetic experience. He says he tries not to conceal the process, to make it available but not reveal it. Viewers can engage with the work on multiple levels but he doesn't want to, "teach a lesson or provide a recipe" (Beshty, 2014). He asserts that objects have no meaning in themselves but rather, provide prompts for many possible meanings that are dependent on the context in which they are viewed and by whom the meaning of an object is ever evolving (Tylevich, 2013, p. 126).



Figure 7. Beshty, Walead. *A Partial Disassembling of an Invention without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in which the Pulleys and Cogwheels Are Lying Around at Random All over the Workbench*. Curve Gallery, Barbican Centre, London, October 9 2014–February 8 2015

The 'kitchen table' space where I work is a socially negotiated space - the centre of an 'ecology' and it is most definitely where people come together to make things happen. The daily social interactions and connections forged between myself and my students help me to determine what will be included in a work and what will be left out however, as with Beshty, anything left over is not discarded but rather sidelined to be potentially included another time.

Like Beshty, my art making process is made available to an audience who can engage with the work on multiple levels. I try to do things in an obvious but simple way and I'm careful not to interfere with the autonomy of the viewer and to take away their role in the production of meaning. One project leads to another, things are reinvented and re-used and there is always material left behind - a residue. It's debris, it depicts debris; it's a work, it depicts making a work.

Molly Springfield's use of texts that reveal visionary moments of how people experience, organize and reproduce information draws me in. She begins her process by making delicate, careful, meticulous graphite-on-paper drawings of photocopied books - making, in her words, translations. "I am interested in the idea about what happens to something that gets translated," (Springfield, 2006) she explains and then adds, "I like the conceit that I'm playing the translator." She admits, however, that she is not really translating but rather cobbling together a version from all the work that others have

done. Some time ago, she became interested in the annotations that books provoke from readers. She started inviting people to submit photocopied or scanned book pages that they had inscribed or otherwise marked. Her 'Marginalia Archive' is an interactive installation that explores the relationship readers have with text. Contemporary examples of marginalia submitted by friends and viewers were the source material for the installation which expanded as the exhibition progressed.

I have no desire to laboriously translate a photocopied image as Springfield does but I do admit to liking the conceit of playing the translator in other ways. By a process of translation and transformation a new meaning for discarded and abandoned material is created. I am interested in what happens to the physical form of a document that has been translated by a process of ordering and grouping text.

The young French artists of the short lived Support/Surface movement of 1966-70 shared a desire to escape the conventions of the closed space of painting and to express the reduction of painting to a material structure supporting the plane. Work was open to the wall moving beyond or escaping the closed space of the picture as an object and the sculptural spatial qualities of painting were explored

The use of printing and folding, or the process of saturating canvas with colour, emphasises the materiality of the support and along with the repetition of a motif liberated the work from composition. The supports/surfaces version of deconstruction drew on the contemporary trends of analytic abstraction (self referentiality), process art (methods and processes) arte povera (humble materials), minimalism (exhibition methods) with an emphasis of the haptic over the conceptual.

The works, once free of the frame, were easily folded, rolled and cheaply transported. Exhibitions frequently showed work that could be unrolled and stretched seemingly without limit. Some were designed to occupy as much space as possible while other experiments produced works that were designed to be rolled up in canisters.

Important for the support/surface was the world of the everyday - paintings were made of humble materials readily to hand ; shop awnings, curtain tassels, commercially printed fabrics, cigarette packets and most surprisingly, handkerchiefs and dish towels hung from drying racks commonly found in a french home. Colourful pattern filled paintings were created using the imprint of a house painters sponge.

The idea was that large formats, the dissolution of the object, and the primacy of colour over drawing transformed how the viewer saw, experienced and related to the work bringing about a kind of movement between the conscious and unconscious mind.

Why do these works engage me? After all, they were created in the 1960s as a response to a different question for a different time? I believe I have a similar impulse to deconstruct painting, to turn to my everyday world for my materials, to favour the process of creating an image, to reject the use of a brush but not the idea of painting itself and to push materiality to the forefront.

I strive to bring about a movement between the conscious and unconscious. I want the audience to both see and feel the work shifting between both the discernible and the suggested. I value the ability to create a "fabric" that is easily transportable, flexible, foldable, rollable and pliable, made from cheap materials that are readily to hand and that bear the marks of the human hand.

Since the 1980s, Polly Apfelbaum has been filling galleries and public spaces with works of riotous colour that can be simultaneously considered paintings, sculptures and installations. Her work occupies an ambiguous space between the disciplines and like the artists of the support/surface movement, she has rejected the use of the traditional canvas which she describes as a "big macho structure" (Artsy).

Apfelbaum is best known for her vibrant floor pieces in the 1990s composed of brilliantly coloured hand-dyed strips of velvet which she referred to as "Fallen Paintings." These kaleidoscopic works celebrate a command of lively colour, geometric forms, and non-representational subjects, but reject the aggressive masculinity of the Abstract

Expressionist movement. Referencing, feminism, everyday life and the expressive qualities of colour, the works are engaging, witty and playful, challenging the notion of women's work.

The work is both painting and sculpture pushing past traditional disciplines into Pop Art and perhaps photography, fashion and material process, whilst all the time, charming the viewer to revel in the pure aesthetic joy of the finished work.



Figure 8. Apfelbaum, Polly. *L'Avventura Revisioning the Familiar*, Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. 1994

Works provide both a formal clarity but also underlying layers of a personal, domestic, narrative. She explains that, "It's the story which gives objects a history, another meaning but I think formal clarity is probably the easiest thing for people to see." (Apfelbaum, 1989). Whilst the formality is evident, there are also layers of meaning from culture and an everyday lived experience coming together in the moment. Specifically,

it's about treating everyday objects from different parts of her life with reverence using a process of ritualization to make them important and more precious in a superficial way.

Apfelbaum suggests that the selection of objects is serendipitous and culture is often reflected by superstitious ritual. Connections are made, not with logical formality but a layered narrative that does not focus on a perfect solution. A manufactured, mechanical process is rejected, despite many works relying on the repetition of a single motif. Smooth perfection is not the desired result. The hand made is never perfect because man isn't perfect. Apfelbaum further explains that there are three terms that are important to her;

*"Suppleness*: a non-rigid formal language, the softness of crushed velvet, the liquidity of fabric. Things piled up, draped, lying on the floor, leaning against the wall. Serial and variable arrangements (as opposed to orthogonal, erect, vertical, and fixed).

*The domestic (the everyday)*: ...the realm of repetition, reiteration, and routine. That which does not declare itself to be a work of art first of all.

*Wonder (beauty)*: to begin to wonder at the subversive and critical possibilities of the beautiful, the excessive, the fantastic" Polly Apfelbaum, 1992 (Locks Gallery)

I have long been seduced by the sensuous qualities of textiles. Like Apfelbaum, I respond to the formality of their structure but also the ability to create and recreate by endlessly piling, folding, stacking, pinning and pegging. I luxuriate in the feel of fibre and the flexible, pliable, drapable qualities of cloth. I will fold and pleat endlessly enjoying the suppleness and plasticity of the material, transfixed by its ability to take on many forms.

Textiles speak to me of the domestic realm and the repetitive rituals involved in cleaning, washing, ironing and folding - a kind of rinse and repeat. They hold the story of domestic life and the, often feminine, need to decorate and embellish prosaic household items.

El Anatsui, a Ghanaian born sculptor, transforms simple everyday materials in striking, large scale installations. Thousands of aluminum bottle tops are sourced from recycling sites and sewn together with copper wire and then transformed into metallic fabric-like wall sculptures. Every piece of these seemingly stiff and rigid materials resemble a knitted or woven stitch which, when combined, create sculptures based on the traditional Ghanaian beliefs and woven cloths such as kente cloth.

Whilst giving the appearance of a textile with material softness and pliable flexibility, the works are intended as sculptures with the intention of drawing connections between consumption, waste and the environment. His extensive use of recycled low value African materials emphasises that, whilst he is working with discarded materials to create something beautiful, there are places in the world where this is a necessity rather than a choice. He hasn't just turned something discarded into something beautiful.

He poses questions about the combination of both an ethnic African identity and the traditions of abstraction which is firmly rooted in Western art. Like Apfelbaum, he is both a painter and a sculptor who essentially 'paints' using bottle tops to build up colour and pattern. His works have been likened to both traditional kente cloth, tapestries and paintings by Gustav Klimt because of the metallic gleam of the work which appears like Klimt to be made of small metallic brushstrokes.

"[I am interested in textile because it is] Always in motion. Anytime you touch something, there is bound to be a change. The idea of a sheet that you can shape and reshape. It can be on the floor, it can be up on the ceiling, it can be up on the wall, all that fluidity is behind the concept."

*The Nomadic Aesthetic*" (Tate gallery)



Figure 9. El Anatsui, *Old Man's Cloth*, 2003, aluminum and copper wire, 487.7 x 520.7 cm, Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, FL)

I am fascinated by the ability of hard and rigid materials to become perceptibly pliable, drapable and flexible on a very large scale. Each discarded bottle top is a small act or stitch part of a much larger fabric like the small brushstrokes in a painting where the decision to combine nuances of colour and texture are made as part of the art making process. Handmade, they comprise thousands of small acts which, seen in a large scale, replicate the brushstrokes of a large canvas but unlike most painted canvases, they spill down the wall; billowing and folding, oftentimes spreading onto the floor. I want my work to billow, fold and spill organically down the wall and onto the floor as both painting and fabric frameless and plastic in form.

Using a craft-based practice that employs identifiably Pacific materials, Ani O'Neill's work is, like El Anatsui, often produced collaboratively or from a community initiative. Positioned firmly in New Zealand but identifying as a Cook Islander and now resident there, O'Neill was taught traditional crafts such as tivaevae by a grandmother. She believes in the value of the needle and its ability to join materials that will create textiles and other traditional crafts of weaving and plaiting making a connection to the traditional art forms of lei and mat making. Work made of brightly coloured crocheted disks of wool

question the division of craft and fine art. She notes that her position as a Rarotongan allows her to both question and embrace Cook Island art forms much in the way that El Anatsui combines the appearance of traditional Ghanaian textiles with that of painterly abstraction.

I too am captivated by craft based processes that use readily available, humble, low value materials and by using the traditional but simple repetitive processes of sewing, weaving, plaiting, knotting and twisting, create objects of beauty and value.

For over twenty years, Tom Friedman, a contemporary American sculptor has been investigating the viewer/object relationship, and "the space in between". He moves between the comical and conceptual using meticulously rendered drawings and sculptures to recreate a fresh look at everyday objects from his life and surroundings. Unexpected objects, that are autobiographical in nature, are created using prosaic materials including hair, plastic, styrofoam and paper.

Celebrated for his playful and exacting approach to art making, he embraces everyday life by looking at intimately familiar objects and their intended function. His works, which at first glance appear to be simple in structure, reveal on closer inspection, an exquisite attention to detail complete with a handmade intricacy that is masked by a seemingly mass produced or prefabricated appearance. Friedman's playful works challenge everyday processes of perception and notions of artistic value.

"Art, for me, is a context to slow the viewer's experience from their everyday life in order to think about things they haven't thought about. Or to think in a new way," Friedman said. (Stephen Friedman Gallery)

I enjoy the seduction of a work that appears to be slick and smooth and appears to be mechanically created free from apparent imperfections but on closer viewing reveals small flaws and moments of hesitation and imprecision by the maker. By using low value discarded materials of no apparent worth or import I want to create intricate works that, like Friedman's, are playful but challenge our perceptions about the worth and

value of common place materials now discarded but still containing the story or history of a community or an ecology.

### 3. *translation*

Daily, I clear discarded images that gather beside the photocopier. False starts, abandoned attempts or discarded ideas pile up, they are documents that provide a narrative of the workings of our 'ecology'. This ecology is comprised of several different "species" who inhabit this space and through their interactions with each other, create an energy which is manifested as a detectable pulse.

This detritus always captivates me as it is a record of the unspoken life of my space and or habitat. These images tell me what has captured my students attention and what they think is important. Included are timetables, notices, instructions (all vitally important at the time to the maker) now discarded providing the text that forms a narrative of the social connections and interactions of the space.

The photocopier is a democratic tool available to all. The machine in my space is freely available and in constant daily use by all the inhabitants despite the fact that many have an intense and intimate relationship with their phones. It operates as both a camera and a printing press working within definite parameters to correct my own way of seeing. It is only possible to enlarge to 400% colour and tone can only be modified using a simple scale for any given copy. Whilst the result is, for the most part, semi predictable there is also the element of surprise and serendipity. Small marks and imperfections can be exaggerated and emphasised whilst being copied and recopied. The image loses a little information with every copy but gains noise and grain having a somewhat scrappy DIY appearance. By feeding an image through multiple times a serendipitous layering occurs and I am able to build up colour, tone and texture with each passage of the paper.

I have no desire to laboriously translate a photocopied image but I do admit to liking the conceit of playing the translator in other ways. I am interested in the analogue mechanical nature of the photocopier and what happens when it becomes a tool to make art. I begin with an image that is not of my creation but has an aesthetic appeal for me and by a repetitive process using the simple mechanical functions of the

photocopier, I make several translations and, gradually, take ownership of an image meant for another purpose and discarded by its original generator.

It is almost as if I am a larger organism feeding on the detritus, left behind by the less evolved species further down the food chain. I have no control over what will be excreted, having been seen as waste and of no further use or value. Energised by the anticipation of what I might find, and how I will interpret it, I begin the process of translation by making a series of small decisions as each page is expelled from the copier.

Previous work has seen the photocopier used as a tool to copy and recopy onto transparent acetate images of surfaces left behind after an artwork is made; cutting boards, paint spills and bar codes, text and symbols from abandoned or used up written material. There is no hierarchy or pre determined schema used for these works. Instead there is an element of chance and serendipity and, by selecting images and repeatedly copying, I am making the process available but not revealing it.

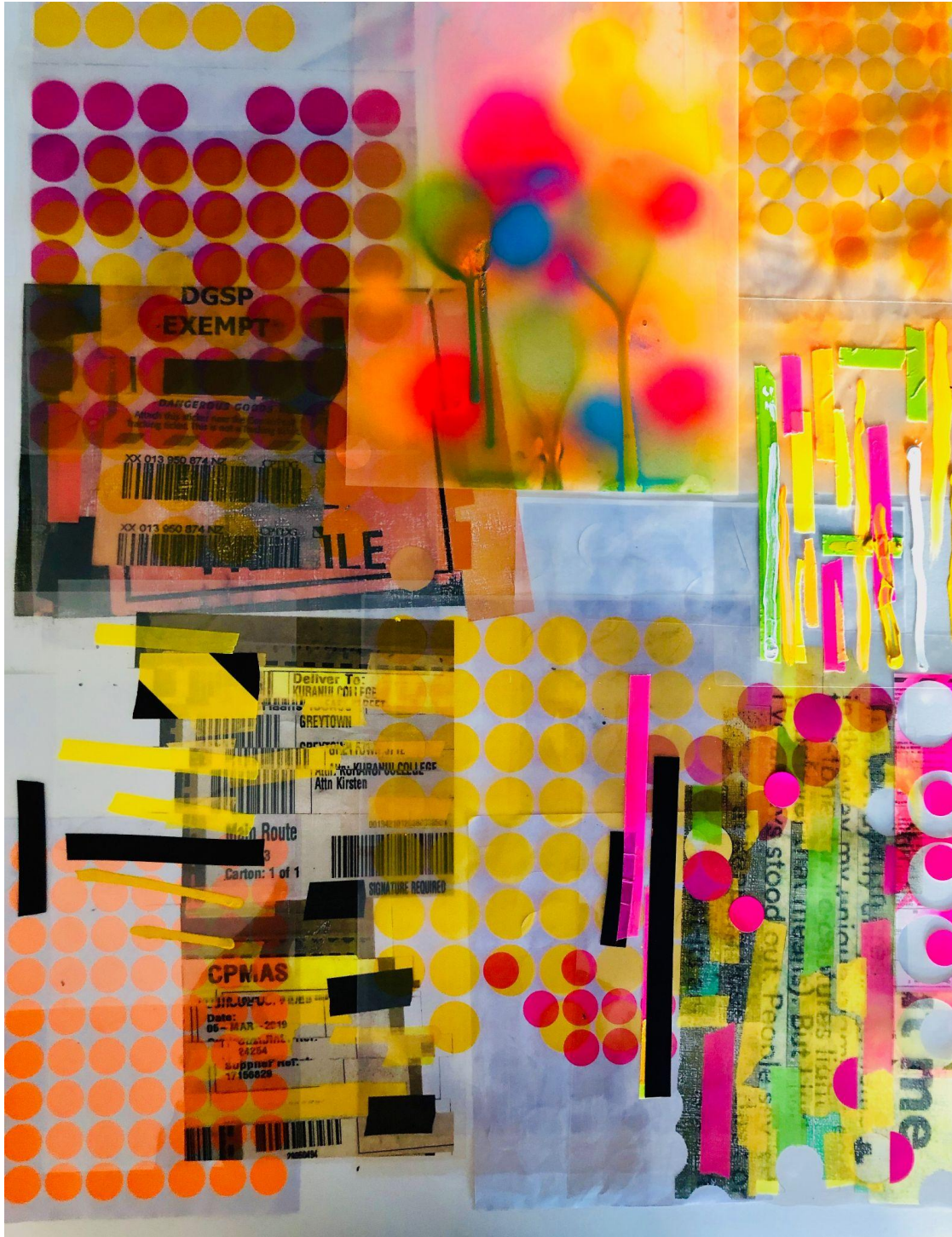


Figure 10. *Untitled, Collage, acrylic paint, photocopy on acetate, tape, 100 x 750cm - image by author*

By using material left behind directly in my work and by a process of arranging, layering and grouping I wanted to make the viewer aware of the complexity of the interactions that take place, all day everyday. Ephemeral written material contains and details, the unspoken conversations. It expresses a translation of what is the life blood, the rhythmic pulse which is everyday life.

Phenomenology is a term that is often used to describe the sensory qualities of seeing, hearing and feeling; what it is to live and to have sensations of differing kinds. However, our lived experience is much richer in content than mere sensation. Traditionally, phenomenology is given a much wider scope, by addressing the meaning that objects have in our experience: most notably the significance of effects, events, tools, the passage of time, self and others as these things are experienced in our world.

As envisioned by Husserl, phenomenology is a method of philosophical inquiry that rejects rationalism in favour of reflective observation which reveals the individual's lived experience

The lifeworld is the "world" each one of us lives in. You could call it the "background" or "horizon" of all experience, and it is against this backdrop that each object stands out with a meaning that it can only hold for us. It provides a careful description and analysis of our lived experiences and seeks, by way of systematic reflection, to determine the essential properties and structures of our embodied lives.

Similarly, minimalist art can be seen as an extension of the abstract idea that art should have its own reality and not merely be a representation of something else. No attempt is made to represent an outside reality, instead the viewer is asked only to respond to what's in front of them. Aesthetically it offers a pure form of beauty which embodies the qualities of order, simplicity and harmony and challenges the importance given to the art object believing that it leads to a rigid art works which only the elite and privileged few

can enjoy. It can also be seen to be representing both truth and honesty in a work that is not pretending to be anything other than what it is.

Phenomenological discourse tells us that our 'lifeworld' is both personal and intersubjective and could be described as a 'homeworld', and as such, it does not confine each one of us in a solus ipse.

The daily social interactions and connections forged between myself and my students, as part of our everyday lived experience, helps me to determine what is to be included in the work and what will be left out.

Whilst passages of these early works pleased me and my initial intention was to document our everyday lives by providing a careful description, they didn't satisfy me as coherent works. Instead, they appear to be offering an archaeological sampling of the materials rather than providing, in phenomenological terms, a bridge between a subjective and objective analysis. There is no doubt that there was observable evidence of our everyday lives but it hadn't been sufficiently processed to take on another form and was still readily identifiable in its original state. There had been a process of selection but not of transformation or translation and an elevated result with an increase in artistic value had not been achieved.

Free to comment and reflect on my process, the students were delighted to be able to recognise tiny pieces of themselves and our everyday life in the art work. Suggestions were offered and when my back was turned, small changes and adjustments were made to works in progress. Opinions were strongly held and debate was had as to the final form of the work and the relationships between the materials selected for inclusion.

On reflection, this process of negotiation in some way prevented the work from achieving a unifying and cohesive aesthetic quality. During critiques, both within MFA circles, and in the art room, viewers sought out small passages of the work for closer inspection and comment but didn't refer to the work as a cohesive whole. My immediate

need was to then find a process and or tools that would enable me to use the detritus of the space to make aesthetically and conceptually coherent works.

The next consideration was how to provide a theoretical context and structure for my work that would support revealing the process of their making but wouldn't dictate to the viewer how to see them.



Figure 11. *Untitled*, post it notes, invoices, labels, tape, paint, felt pen, photocopy on acetate, 100 x 750cm. 2018. image by author

#### 4. *puttering about*

French social anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss describes the artist as "shaping the beautiful and useful out of the dump heap of human life." (Levi-Strauss as cited in Selz, 1975, p. 161). He compared this artistic process to the work of a handyman who solves physical problems with whatever materials are to hand. He refers to this process of making do as *bricolage*, a term derived from the French verb *bricoler* (meaning "to putter about") and related to *bricoleur*, the French name for a jack-of-all-trades. (Levi-Strauss, 1966 as cited in Mambrol) *Bricolage* describes both the creative use of leftovers, and cobbling together disparate parts. It differs from assemblage where the original identities of the component parts are still visible.

Both the terms jack-of-all-trades and "to putter about" hold particular appeal for me. My process is very much about playing with and manipulating materials - 'puttering about' until the aesthetic qualities of the results satisfy me. Whilst I have no desire to be the jack-of-all-trades, I do select from a variety of media and processes and will use materials and tools at hand to shape and cobble together 'disparate parts.'

For the most part, earlier work has been just that, assemblages, where the origin of the selected material was still clearly identifiable. Whilst it is engaging to look for clues in a work, it wasn't my intention to reveal the origins of materials. By using bricolage as a theoretical context I would be able to create a new work with new meaning and new roles to play for all the elements.

Drawing on practices from both semiotics and rhetorical analysis, visual rhetoric seeks to examine the structure of an image and its persuasive effects on an audience. Visual tropes and tropic thinking are a part of visual rhetoric which includes an understanding of the creative and rhetorical decisions made within a work with regard to colour, shape and space. The primary concern is with the sensory expression of a cultural meaning as

opposed to purely aesthetic considerations. The process of semiosis ensures that I can make a continuous translation of text and images via the fluctuating and fluid relationships formed by the human mind, everyday artefacts and real life events. Semiotic systems represent a language that includes images, text, non verbal signs, and other art forms that function as cultural texts.

I am captured by text that instructs, warns and informs - FRAGILE, THIS WAY UP, CAUTION, DANGEROUS GOODS, PAY NOW fall off the photocopier everyday. Almost always, these pieces of text are expressed in high, fully saturated colours and bold type demanding the viewers attention. I am inextricably drawn to highly coloured text. There is something ineffable about visual work, something about the visual properties that create a sense of poetry that is beyond a definition. It is like reading text and viewing it as a drawing.



Figure 12. *Label*, 2018, image by author

I have always used the photocopier to continuously and repeatedly process imagery with little regard for its original meaning or context but instead as a process of translation. Whilst I enjoy the conceit of that role, I don't want to form an interpretation

for the viewer and present the work as a cultural text . Visual rhetoric involves the way in which writers arrange passages of text on a page as well as a myriad of decisions that involve the selection of different fonts and colours amongst other elements to shape the text.

The sheer volume of material piling up by the photocopier daily necessitated a process of selection. What should I choose to translate and transform? Should I apply the eye of the editor and choose documents and or images because of their aesthetic appeal or should I apply a method of random selection rather like Beshty had suggested ? Did I too need a 'dumb rule' as a parameter for my work?

Whilst the scope of Beshty's year long project entitled "A Partial Disassembling of an Invention without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in which the Pulleys and Cogwheels Are Lying around at Random All over the Workbench" was impressive in its breadth, size and scope, it didn't provide the consideration for the aesthetics that I needed. It lacked intimacy and the ability to function as a cultural text and an expression of everyday interactions of the 'ecology' I am part of.

As part of an earlier work in 2019 I used small samples of circular cutouts joined together to suggest small fabric samples discovering how rigid and seemingly inflexible materials could be joined to create large, pliable installations that occupied the space between painting and sculpture I began making small tests using circular cut outs. A cutter was used to select small parts of larger text documents. I was able to see how I could link one small regular unit to another and to create a larger piece that could be experienced as one work. The process was almost as if I had identified separate pixels from the one image but instead of zooming out and allowing them to recombine and maintain the sense of a single image, I was zooming in separating an image into individual pixels and piece by piece, creating a new unseen image.



Figure 13. *Detail of mixed media work, 2019.* Image by author

The ability to create a new work piece by piece, deciding on the relationship between each tiny unit signalled a return to my passion for handmade textiles and how they are constructed - painstakingly, repeatedly and often collaboratively, one small act at a time be it a stitch or a knot. Since childhood, I have been seduced by the texture, colour and pattern of textiles of all kinds. Earliest memories are of the colour and pattern and I only need to close my eyes to recall the feeling of the fabric that I wore on my first day of school and the brightly coloured patterned curtains in the spare bedroom where I slept at my grandparents' house. The new 1960s bathroom fascinated me and I marvelled at the pattern of the vinyl floor trying hard to see where the pattern repeat began and ended.

Creating repeating patterns from single simple geometric shapes suggests a world of endless possibility to me, however, I don't want to make 'textiles' by mechanical means but rather by hand, piece by piece making every decision as the need occurs. What

shape will I use next ? What colours please me? How will the pattern of the text and image I use be disrupted by each intuitive act.

Just like the textiles created out of necessity by my female relatives and decorated to enhance the beauty of these prosaic, utilitarian objects, mine would be created at 'the kitchen table' whilst being caught up in the repetitive rituals of everyday life.

Each of these fabric samples provided me with the opportunity to play, testing the pliability of each piece. Could I fold, bend and drape small geometric shapes of printed paper? Would they fall softly? How supple would they be? Could I pleat and fold them? Could they take on a variety of forms allowing me to make works that are easily transportable, flexible, foldable, rollable and pliable, made from cheap and humble materials.

Initially, I used tape as a joining medium but quickly found that it lacked the necessary strength. Sitting on the 'kitchen table' next to me was the humble everyday stapler and after some quick testing of it's possibilities, I found it to be the ideal tool. I was able to staple each small round cut out piece together using geometric patterns that formed naturally creating 'brush strokes' by juxtaposing similarly coloured or marked shapes.

By playing with these pieces of 'painting' I discovered that they were self supporting and pliable and could be draped folded and moulded into loose shapes revealing both the back and the front simultaneously without losing their structural integrity. Initially, I held the pieces together prior to stapling with small pieces of brightly coloured tape. This allowed me to test combinations and create small irregularly shaped passages that could then be combined into a larger single piece, however, it also provided a 'wrong side' to the fabric of the work and revealed to the viewer the process of making one small act at a time.

Structural integrity was the next concern. Did it matter what kind of paper I used? How was the plasticity of the final fabric affected by the weight of the paper and the size of

the cut out? More staples in small circles produced rigid less pliable results but they were able to support the large areas of larger cut outs which were more pliable with increased drapability. The weight of the paper has a less dramatic effect on the end result. The issue, when using lighter paper, was the fragility of the end result and its ability to be easily transported and rolled and folded repeatedly like a tribal blanket.

I wanted the work to be frameless, informally pinned to the wall, allowed to drape and hang with folds created by the change in scale of the circular motif and the relative weight of the paper. Lit from the side to create intricate shadows cast onto a large blank wall it would crease and billow with apparent weightlessness.





Figure 15. Detail of Tribal blanket, photocopy, staples, paint, 275 x 170cm, 2020 - image by author

Having decided that I would set a simple rule as a parameter, I chose a pile from the photocopier from one day, the 9th February 2020. Selected at random, there was nothing about that day, no special significance, nothing much happened, there was nothing extraordinary and the pile of abandoned material looked much like any other. I resolved to only use material from that pile that I had processed using the photocopier. By enlarging and reducing and passing images through the machine repeatedly I was able to paint, building up tone and colour and breaking down solid areas into pieces of grainy smudges and soft tonal changes. Previous work has had a strong focus of extremely high key colour and although the pile contained images with high key colour text that instructed, warned and informed me, I decided that I would predominantly use the photocopier to manipulate colour and make only minor additions of splashes of fluorescent colour.

The piece was built using elements that had been made by intuitively, playing with the materials until the result pleased me. The rule determined that I would make playful, highly crafted, hand made intricacies that would change the perception of discarded materials for the viewer but which were masked by a seemingly mechanically produced appearance. Using a repetitive and ritualised process, text was repeatedly broken down to its barest essential marks. The original meaning was lost but the intention was that the viewer would make new connections and interpretations. The work would bear evidence of the stories of an ecology whilst retaining evidence of the small acts of imprecision and indecision created by the human hand. The result was not pre-planned or pre-determined by anything other than the limits of the materials, the tools and the technology. I manipulated and tested the possibilities often whilst working on another task or engaging in conversations.

Critique of the work recognised the scale and physical flexibility of the material which was positioned against a large blank wall and lit directly. The 'tribal blanket' was able to be folded and pleated to create shadow and the desired billowing effect casting delicate shadow that repeated the geometric patterns. The reference to a blanket or quilt was identified during critiques and the decision to use a rectangular format was questioned.

Viewers were engaged by the use of pieces of text and attempts were made to derive personal meanings from it by interpreting apparent and unintended signs and symbols.

This work had followed the simple rule I set. It was indeed made from only material found by the photocopier on the 9th February and I had tested the potential of both the materials and its ability to be folded, rolled and easily transported. The intention to casually pin the work to a large blank wall had been realised however, whilst installing the work I recognised the endless possibilities for exhibiting work in this form. It could be infinitely pleated and pinned to any surface or draped and folded so that it cascaded onto the floor effectively occupying the space between a wall hanging and carpet.

Whilst the work was indeed handmade, using discarded materials that detailed the history of an ecology, it did not meet the high level of crafted intricacies to which I aspired. I wanted to make a work whose intricacy and detail drew the viewer in and where there would be a richer more decorative use of colour and pattern.

KEEPING BUSY

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DON'T FORGET

- label maker ✓
- shelves ✓
- chair tattie ✓
- cyber ✓
- UV light ✓
- not lights ✓
- back drop
- not box

folders

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- mercury vapor light
- press bed protection
- replacement felt.
- gloves latex vinyl 100
- NAS CLEANING DIC litre

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interest

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Figure 16. Document side 1 photocopy, 2020. Image by author

ILLUSIONS (82 A) class list for KP, Ms Kirsten Price in A4 2020TT

[redacted]	Grace	✓	F	10	JMBR
[redacted]	Ngakau	X	M	10	JMST
[redacted]	Xanthe	✓	F	10	JCIR
[redacted]	Angela-Marie	✓	F	9	JHSA
[redacted]	Ruben	X	M	10	JSTT
[redacted]	Jayde	✓	M	9	JWDR
[redacted]	Courtney	✓	F	10	JHKA
[redacted]	Seth	✓	M	10	JJHR
[redacted]	Logan	✓	M	9	JCIR
[redacted]	Sapphire	X	F	10	JHSA
[redacted]	Khalid	✓	M	10	JMBR
[redacted]	Jasmyn	✓	F	10	JHSA
[redacted]	Isla	✓	F	9	JPMW
[redacted]	Lilly	✓	F	9	JWDR
[redacted]	Joshua	✓	M	10	JMBR
[redacted]	Abigail	✓	F	10	JSHA
[redacted]	Jourdan	✓	M	9	JELT
[redacted]	Madison	✓	F	10	JHKA
[redacted]	Sinead	X	F	10	JCIR
[redacted]	Ruby	✓	F	9	JSTT
[redacted]	Tegan	✓	F	9	JSHA
[redacted]	Harry	✓	M	9	JMBR
[redacted]	Ruby	✓	F	9	JHSA
[redacted]	Tannah	✓	F	10	JSTT
[redacted]	Ryan	✓	M	9	JELT
[redacted]	Harrison	✓	M	10	JCCW
[redacted]	Shayden	✓	M	9	JCIR
[redacted]	Marshall	✓	M	9	JSHA
[redacted]	Cameron	✓	M	10	JSHA
[redacted]	Constance	✓	F	9	JSMA
[redacted]	Eden	✓	F	10	JGAR
[redacted]	Madoc	✓	M	9	JMOW

Students 32 Males 15 Females 17

Took 3D initials lesson on disordered.  
 - About 50-60% got the hang of it.  
 - didn't some ok month  
 - 1 or 2 didn't really engage

Figure 17. Document side 2 photocopy, 2020. Image by author

I needed to set a new simple rule and draw in the parameters of possibilities. By employing tighter limits on the range of material I had available to work with, I felt sure I could make a work that would be not only more painterly but could achieve a lace-like delicacy. I chose to select only one double sided document at random from the pile left on the photocopier on the 9th of February 2020 and using only this document I created a further series of work using the same process of joining small cut out pieces of paper using the humble stapler as my only tool.

Decisions needed to be made about my reliance on the circular shape I had used thus far. By broadening the range of shapes I used I could create different systems of connection and vary the almost exclusively geometric outcome. I would use only four cutters; the familiar two sizes of circles, a hexagon and a small flower. Patches and fortuitous random marks could be allowed to seep into each other blending organically with less reliance on an overtly geometric structure.



Figure 18. *Sampler, photocopies, staples, 2020.* image by author

Whilst still making reference to the fluidity, drapability and blanket like structure of textiles, works could be made as small fragments or 'off cuts' for later combination into a singular whole or left as separate entities and allowed to form relationships with each other when casually pinned on a wall or allowed to fall onto the floor. The gap in between these 'off cuts' could then assume new importance emphasizing the fine, open, delicate qualities of lace where solid shapes are thinly connected to provide a structural pattern inherent in the fabric.



Figure 19. The gap inbetween, photocopies, staples. 2020 image by author

I found that the exclusive use of one document provided the boundaries that I needed and I embarked on a lengthy process of photocopying only one document over and over by using only the simple functions available to me on the photocopier. Experimenting with an endless series of enlargements, I continuously copied and recopied the results of each pass of the machine. Using this process I was able to break down solid areas of colour and tone to a fine grain with unanticipated visual 'noise'. By passing the same copy through the machine again and again I could layer colours and build up texture and tone much the same as I would have by using a brush on a canvas.

I had previously already determined the weight of the paper used had a direct effect on the pliability and flexibility of the end result. Whilst I wanted a more delicate and intricate result than I had achieved in the previous work I also needed to retain the structural integrity of each piece. They had to be able to be stapled together without tearing but also retain the ability to billow and fold. The relative texture and weight of the paper has a significant effect on the development of colour and tone in the images. Heavy textured papers increase the grain of the resulting image separating the colours into small splashes and dashes of unsaturated colour.

The next consideration was the longevity of the materials particularly the paper. The humble photocopy is not intended to be an archival document preserved for generations. How could I ensure that the works would last without extensive preservation? I have been able to go somewhat towards extending the life span of the work by choosing to use acid free fine art papers which would be accepted by the machine.

Sitting at the 'kitchen table' I began using batches of photocopies 'painted' as I have described. Using one sized cutter and working from only one photocopy at a time I cut many, many shapes from the selected image and using the stapler I began to join them, Using only one size cutter for each photocopy and working intuitively I made decisions about composition and connections one small act or 'stitch' at a time, deeming the work complete when I had exhausted the possible combinations or had simply used up all of the selected material.

The use of the small flower cutter enabled me to delicately join the small pieces producing a lighter, less dense result than I had previously achieved. The 'off cuts' looked like just that - fragments of discarded fabrics complete with floral patterns, for me reminiscent of the domestic crafts and fabrics of my childhood. I intentionally left in errors of precision and small mistakes, whilst I had achieved the more intricate and highly crafted outcome that I wanted, I was anxious not to smooth away the mark of the human hand described by Apfelbaum as a soul line. She says, "if the design is really good, a soul line is woven into the rugs the design can escape" (Westfall, 1989)

Exhibition of the work has required the consideration of many possibilities. The work was no longer a 'wall hanging' or indeed a 'rug' but instead by placing pieces in the often forgotten corner of a large open space, they could be allowed to creep, edge or fall organically down the walls and onto the floor making conversation with other fragments placed on the floor but with no physical connection. Alternatively, they could be draped across a kitchen table alluding to the brightly coloured floral and tablecloths of the 1970's. It would seem that they are destined to occupy the space in between.....

## 5. *a brush in my hand*

What does this mean for my work? I have provided myself with strict parameters in order to limit the range of material available to me. Using these simple rules I have been able to deepen and intensify my analysis of a visual text or a document in order to understand its evolution. I am able to creatively engage with the document at hand and play, test and experiment with combinations.

I want the work to be a work that describes making a work and through a process of bricolage, I have used materials immediately to hand to shape something more beautiful, to elevate the result and to enhance the qualities of the 'leftovers' in my space.

I want to invite the viewer to feel that they could play with the work and to bring to it their own lived experience, but I also want to challenge perceptions about the worth and value of common place materials, discarded but containing the story or history of a specific community or an ecology.

I don't want to maintain the identity of the elements within a work of work, but rather by a process of printing and reprinting, breaking apart and layering, to create a single document that expresses the lived experience of my ecology. Using visual rhetoric as a context and framework I want to reveal the underlying structure of the relationships between the elements of the story rather than the content of the story itself and to analyse the content of images as expressions of culture rather than of pure aesthetics.

I do wish however, to continue to play the role of the translator and to use the photocopier as both a camera and a printing press to produce images whose outcome I cannot directly control. Through a repetitive process of copying and recopying I am able to 'paint' almost as if I have a brush in my hand. By breaking down a document left on the photocopier I am able to understand its evolution. Using a simple tool I am able to intuitively join each tiny piece as a brushstroke painstakingly laid down to express a larger whole.

By creating an ongoing dialogue between the handmade and the ready made, I have been able to make a translation for the viewer that doesn't reveal all possibilities yet helps them to gain insight into the lived experience of my ecology. I have invited the viewer to identify and comprehend its genesis and the process of its emergence from an origin or event. I want to bring about a kind of movement between the conscious and unconscious mind.

Like Rauschenberg, I want to work in the gap in between life and art.



Figure 20. Soul Line, photocopies, staples. 2020 image by author

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## image list

Figure 1 the kitchen table with the inhabitants of the ecosystem in situ, 2021 - image by author

Figure 2. *drawing, mixed media collage*, 297 x 420 mm. 2019. Image by author

Figure 3. *cutting mat & table top, art room*, 2019 - images by author

Figure 5. & 6. *Installation, tape, vinyl, textile, digital prints*, 2018, installed size approx 180 x 60 x 50 cm - images by author

Figure 10. *Untitled, Collage, acrylic paint, photocopy on acetate, tape*, 100 x 750cm - image by author

Figure 11. *Untitled, post it notes, invoices, labels, tape, paint, felt pen, photocopy on acetate*, 100 x 750cm. 2018. image by author

Figure 12. *Label, 2018*, image by author

Figure 13. *Detail of mixed media work*, 2019. Image by author

Figure 14 . *Tribal blanket, photocopy, staples, paint*, 275 x 170cm, 2020 - image by author

Figure 15. *Detail of Tribal blanket, photocopy, staples, paint*, 275 x 170cm, 2020 - image by author

Figure 16. *Document side 1 photocopy*, 2020. Image by author

Figure 17. *Document side 2 photocopy*, 2020. Image by author

Figure 18. *Sampler, photocopies, staples*, 2020. image by author

Figure 19. *The gap inbetween, photocopies, staples*. 2020 image by author

Figure 20. *Soul Line, photocopies, staples*. 2020 image by author



