

Exhibition review:

Mind the Gap: Tending the interface of art and therapy

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An exhibition of artwork from clinical and teaching staff on the Master of Art Therapy program at Western Sydney University.

Exhibiting artists

Andrew Bromley; Catherine Camden Pratt; Jo Davies; Kate Deacock; Mandy Evans; Liz Fitzgerald; Joanna Jaaniste; Anita Lever; Sheridan Linnell; Nerine Martini; Joy Paton; Suzanne Perry; Martin Roberts; Sarah Versitano

Opening of *Mind the Gap*, 27 October 2018

In reviewing an exhibition honouring relationship and community, it seems appropriate to acknowledge the sadness felt following the recent loss of Adrian Lania and Nerine Martini. Joanna Jaaniste's decision not to perform her piece *Power, politicians and plotters: A drama essay courtesy of Shakespeare* at the opening spoke to her grief. I hope through these moments of sharing we are reminded of their professional and personal significance in the lives of many.

This response references Nerine Martini's opening remarks, praising curation, each artist's investment of time, their art-making and embodiment of layered meaning, exploration of materiality, ideas and concepts. Her comments about her own art practice and its impact in her life, her mindful focus on both process and beauty of the exhibition, its messages and depth evoked "an expanded notion of aesthetic beauty" (Hyland Moon, 2002, p.132). It is this reference to relational aesthetics that guides my curiosity and critique, bringing nuanced meaning to my experience of each work and solidifying my sense of art therapy's

valuable positioning within the broader context of Western art despite the lengthy debate about the distinction between "process and fine art" (Hyland Moon, 2002, p.133).

The title of the exhibition included the words "tending the interface", immediately transporting me to earlier sewing experiences where 'interfacing' was added to strengthen or reinforce fabric where needed. In art therapy "the interface between art and art therapy" is an art therapist's art practice, a form of strengthening and a way to bring understanding and replenish those who contain and hold the unknown, creating safe spaces for others. To further this conversation is exciting.

In becoming visible, the artists have bravely become "part of an ethics of challenging therapeutic privilege" (Linnell, Perry, Pretorius, & Westwood, 2019, p.259), risking personal exposure usually asked of their clients. As an audience we return the gaze, sitting alongside the art therapist working their craft.



Anita Lever and Joy Paton, *Mind the gap*, 2018, interfacing, embroidery threads, pins, 140 × 775mm. This collaborative object became a symbolic stitched threshold for the exhibition concept, design and intentions.

Agreeing that: “visual imagery is never innocent; it is always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledges” (Rose, 2012, p.17), I reflect critically on the visual images, artist statements and the clients and contexts upon which the meaning of these images depend. You can’t have this group of visual images without the other. This intertextuality (Rose, 2012, p.191) is vital to my response and understanding of the works that follow.

Martin Roberts’ playful artwork *Garbage patch* served to deepen my relationship to environmental issues, to question stakeholders, dominant discourse and my own response and responsibilities. A level of discomfort and anger was evoked as I delved ‘within and without’ in the face of this carefree image about global crisis that calls out to the larger community for action.

Catherine Camden Pratt’s artwork *Vulnerability*, with gifts from nature, mindfully found, shared, layered, tenuous or laid bare, used symbols broken, delicate and vital, reflecting self and new growth.

The healing and reflexive nature of her art process revealed a deep connection with her own and others’ vulnerability with an integrity that allowed for the unknown to be revealed in its own time, encouraging her audience to give space for their own reflective practice.

Touched by **Sheridan Linnell’s** *Moonlight bay*, I’m encouraged to follow her lead into the unknown. Expressions of playful tending ‘perforated’ the surface with layered meaning, perhaps elements of past and present leaving traces, often unseen and silent. Her poetry spoke of the “agape” that “brushes her thinning skin” that, through gentle tending, opens a portal to transformation.

This expressive portrayal of artist and context suggested an investment that welcomes diversity, playfulness, authenticity and integrity. Through both her work and creative process, we are held and invited to take up the tools of critical reflection and relational aesthetics.

Mandy Evans’ intuitive work *Floating* bridges a gap between the conscious and unconscious worlds. The rawness of this unstretched canvas with its simplicity of structure portrayed both co-operative mastery and congruence between process, materiality and words. This work evoked

a response of both joy and pride in being an art therapist, encapsulating the significance of this creative and therapeutic process.

Part 2 of a process-led series *Embodied gestures of grief* by **Jo Davies** embodies a gestural exploration of somatic and emotional responses to grief. A quote by Paul Klee “Art makes the invisible visible” sits alongside in the artist’s accompanying text.

Despite the black, seeping, overwhelming nature of Davies’ portrayal of grief, her artwork evoked a strong sense of healing and containment, with darkness held in a surrounding white. The accident and happenstance, invited through the use and interaction of specific materials, rendered intention into formed expression creating a congruence of content and process. This work encourages exploration with creativity for deeper connection and growth.

Kate Deacock’s reworked canvases authentically displayed a visceral process of alchemy and commitment to process, culminating in a calm and powerful minimalism, despite or perhaps transforming its ‘unseen’ complexities. Connecting her audience to her personal and cultural context, her text revealed a courage and integrity that gently challenged its audience to pursue their own tending of imperfections, vulnerabilities and experiences.

Andrew Bromley’s *Traces (or 3 is the magic number)* sensitively and reflexively related early art-making experiences to later influences on his sense of self and identity. The viewer engaged with process and the finished piece, where both revealed and concealed layers and accompanying text added complexity and connection to the relational process of his chosen profession. Trust, respect and honouring of vulnerabilities flavoured my response, inviting self-reflection and a path for transformation.

Framed as a window of postcard-sized art responses, **Liz Fitzgerald’s** *Limbic resonance – yours, ours* invited her audience into her ongoing reflective art process that follows her client work. Gaining understanding and bringing unconscious inner states to consciousness, her use of symbol, materiality, mark-making and text (within and alongside the artwork) provided insight about a therapeutic tool that differs from more linear and verbal analytical tools, allowing for new

meaning, understanding and healing. There was a moving truth, beauty and authenticity to what was expressed.

Suzanne Perry's *Art and the unconscious*.

Ghost donkey (film still on canvas) informed by her work with complex trauma, breathes life into the symbolic dreamlike world of the unconscious. Specifically exploring Winnicott's (1971) theories of transitional phenomena and the intermediate space, her work evoked curiosity and wonder about both delicate and unsettling elements and the 'quiet holding' within this relational space.

This work reinforces the importance of an art therapist's role, its integrity stemming from the collaborative process of those involved, suggesting a trust, respect and encouragement of diverse ideas and sensibilities.

Sarah Versitano's *Between spaces* took us on her exploration of liminal space, working with elements both within and outside the frame exploring unknowns, transitions, uncertainties and transformation. She engaged the viewer to journey through, alongside and between the images, where a multitude of meanings, responses and paths can flow, providing hope and potential.

Supporting, sharing in and holding each other's art-making process meant viscerally responding and tending to materiality and vulnerability. In their eight-piece series (*In – Fuse*) *Salt for gold 2018A*, displayed as a textural collaboration with nature, colleagues and friends **Anita Lever** and **Joy Paton** explored elements within the relational space of art therapy, creating a solid grounding for freedom and exploration of feelings and experiences. Their predetermined choices and relational approach built trust and respect for difference, collaboration and contemplation.

Their authentic art process challenged its audience to welcome the new, explore ways to journey within, and engage imagination and collaboration.

Mind the Gap powerfully communicated the importance of arts therapists tending their own art practice, an often neglected part of professional development. It amplified the joys of creative absorption and the possibility for layers of further meaning about self and other. Its message engendered reflection in a way that strengthened "the potential for our profession to make a profound difference in the quality of people's lives and consequently, in the quality of the world in which we live" (Hyland Moon, 2002, p.143).

Take the virtual tour

[Click here](#)

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anzjat

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF ARTS THERAPY

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The editorial team wishes to thank all peer reviewers who have generously contributed their time and expertise to the peer review of this edition of *ANZJAT*.

ANZJAT is a peer-reviewed journal and as such all accepted submissions are reviewed by peer reviewers well-versed and respected in the subject of the submission.

Full-length articles 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14 were double anonymously peer-reviewed.



Published by the Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association

ACN 63 072 954 388

PO Box 2391, North Brighton, VIC 3186, Australia

www.anzacata.org

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ISSN: 1833-9948

Design and production Vic Šegedin