

Kathryn Skelsey – Artist’s Statement

“Winter Collaborative” Exhibition, Fairview ArtSpace, 2008

- Life Drawing and the Human Form

Human anatomy & biology - and the care of them - have long been a source of fascination to me, ever since my exposure to the sciences during my high school studies. The body’s physical complexity, and its intimate interactions with the mind and emotions, became further apparent and intriguing during my physiotherapy training and subsequent employment.

During my college days I closely studied human cadaver specimens, and I performed an anatomical dissection for my final research. I enjoyed drawing the structures and patterns apparent in bones, muscles, nerves, organs, cells and body systems as a memory aid for my exams. Since I fostered an interest in art, it was an obvious progression for me to subsequently wish to explore the body’s outer artistic representation by attendance at life drawing classes.

Those familiar with life drawing classes would know of the usual sequence of poses from quick 1 minute “warm-ups”, through to 5, 10, 15 and 30-minute-long poses, presented by the unclothed “model”, and guided by the tutor. The increasingly longer poses enable the artist to exercise and hone their observational and mark-making skills; initially rapidly, to capture the sheer essence of the model’s position and mood, and later more intricately, with more detail, discipline and interpretation. During these classes I was allowed to indulge my interest in the ways that simple, static, two-dimensional lines can evoke curves, contours, underlying structure and even movement. The tracks of my under-drawing show the path of my explorations. The unusual proportions and extra layers of flesh on some of the models provided extra challenges to my artistic skill, and developed my acceptance of the human form in all its permutations. And, since inherent immediacy of life drawing classes did not allow for perfect composition or flawless technique, I learnt to welcome the happy accidents that resulted.

Therefore I relished these opportunities to expand my methods of interpreting of the body, as shown by the variety of styles in the drawings in this “Winter Collaborative” exhibition. These apparently straight-forward sketches are actually quite special in that they represent the impact that life drawing has had in creating an important foundation for my subsequent university art studies, medical illustration practice and conceptual art creativity. I utilised several of these works in my first portfolio, which was instrumental in my acceptance at a number of Sydney art institutions, and my completion of a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a distinctly health-related emphasis.

In this exhibition I have chosen to name the artworks by referring to an expansive cross-section of words derived from medical and anatomical terminology, psychological and emotional states, therapeutic techniques, and health system jargon. These titles demonstrate my visual response to the drawings after the event of their creation, in relationship to the model’s appearance, presence and physical position. Word play can be a delightful game when so many overlapping meanings can be developed from such a variety of sources. Hopefully the resultant titles will enhance each viewer’s appreciation of the broad range of inspirations and expressions inherent to these works.