



Figure 1: *Thistle II*, Artist Proof, 2011, Photopolymer etching, watercolour pencil, 9 x 10cm.

‘Landscapes are culture by nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and rock and water. [...] But it should be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents, of becoming, in fact, part of scenery.’

(Schama, 1996, p. 61)

In the prologue to anthropologist Paul Basu’s text *Highland Homecomings - Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora*, he retells a scene from the 1937 novel *Highland River* by Neil M. Gunn. Based on a true story, two men meet in the World War One trenches of Northern France. One is a native Highlander and the other a Canadian of Highland descent. The Canadian has the upper hand when it comes to his attained knowledge of Scottish history and lore and recognises the Caledonian landmarks the Scot drops in conversation. The Scot has knowledge of the country as ‘ground.’ They resolve to meet after the war is over when the Scot will take the Canadian up river, where they will poach a salmon and experience the sunrise from the Highlands. (Basu, 2007, p.xi)

In his retelling, Basu highlights two different ways to engage with landscape, one physical and one psychological. It is this sort of contemplation and expression, of both psychological landscape and physical ground, that has underpinned much of my printmaking and research in recent years. Initially, my Masters proposal sat within this discussion. I am quite well read in Scottish history and literature but my knowledge of Scotland as ‘ground’ is scant. I wrote that I would respond to Scotland as psychological ‘place’ and a hand-me-down homeland.

‘Many diasporic Scots have never visited Scotland but nevertheless been raised on stories and descriptions of the old Country and are avid readers of Scottish books, films and websites. Such

people have long imagined Scotland, its historical places, its landscapes, the character of its people [...]' (Basu, 2007, p.53)

'Diasporic cultures mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and the entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place' – James Clifford (cited by Basu, 2007, p.10)

My intent in regards to image making was to romance my childhood interpretations of the Auld Country. It wasn't that my family did not embrace Australian culture, far from it. Barbeques and days at the football or the beach were common fare. Yet these activities were supplemented with evenings of my father standing by the piano, singing songs of a Scottish home, and the attendance of events such as Highland Gatherings and Pipe Band Society dances.

'The first alternative risked idealisation, romanticism and trivialising; the second risked disappearance. [...] Hence 'Caledonianism' and 'assimilationism' were both strongly espoused and practised, sometimes by the same people.' (Prentis, 2008, p. 217)

This year marks the centenary of my grandparent's arrival in Australia. The story I heard growing up was that a coin was tossed. It was heads for Australia and tails for Canada, as there were members of the Cranston Family already having migrated to both destinations. Like many others, my grandparents left Scotland in what is now being described as an imperial diaspora, which was brought about by colonial expansion, not the better-known victim diaspora – the Highland Clearances. (Basu, 2007, p. 11) It was a time when Australia had great need of skilled tradesmen and my grandfather John McDowall was a master stonemason. His stonework still stands in the Scottish township of Haddington and throughout Sydney's North Shore. He worked on the northeast pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and he built a beautiful family home, Barrhill, which was listed by the Heritage Commission in 2008.



Figure 2: John McDowall and Agnes McDowall (nee Cranston) outside Barrhill, Pymble NSW, late 1920s.

Source: <<http://haddington-cranstons.wikispaces.com/AH+Cranston+-+images>>

From the outset I wished to make images that fully engaged with nostalgia. Nostalgia, in its modern meaning of a whimsical look at the past, as well as its archaic meaning – in Joseph Bank’s journal he wrote that, nearing Java, the *Endeavour’s* crew were ‘pretty far gone with the longing for home which the physicians have gone so far as to esteem a disease under the name of Nostalgia.’¹ The longing for home and the ideal of home is addressed further below.

Early on in my research project I communicated difficulty in the naming of my exegesis, as I found myself responding more and more to elements of portraiture alongside place-based content. The reading of *Highland Homecomings* and other works by Basu resulted in a realisation that my original propositions about the persistence of Scottish culture in my family were accurate and well-founded. But, in addition, I became informed that Scotland remains an imaginary homeland for very many others and my attachments to things Caledonian is in no way unusual. In fact, I was verbalising notions held by many in the Scottish diasporic community. It became obvious that Basu would be my primary theorist.

‘[The] diaspora is cemented through shared imagining of its homeland. (Basu, 2007, p.xi)

¹ Nostalgia is ‘an important trope’ in Romanticism and the word is derived from the Greek. It translates as ‘homecoming’ ‘pain’.

Until this point I had been narrowing the parameters of my research but the thoroughness and neutral delivery of Basu's research was revealing and convincing. *All* of my background study became relevant as I accepted that mine was a topic of identity. My terms of reference re-expanded and the 'umbrella' of identity, under which my research now sheltered, covered all my wants and needs in regards to both research and image development. It also became pertinent to include a response to my first and only trip to Scotland in 2004 and the influence this had on my image making.

'They never made the return trip, sadly, as it was Grandfather's wish' – Alison Mackey.²

The idea of homecoming is enmeshed in my subject matter as one after another my generation make their 'return to the source.' To each one the journey had much meaning. Through my study I now know the language I used when explaining why I was in Scotland to the local inhabitants, was the language of the diaspora. I would explain to them that I was in Scotland representing my father and grandfather who always wished to 'gae hame' one day. I would say I was on a pilgrimage. (Basu, 2007, p. 56) I *did* experience the liminality. I *did* experience a 'spookiness' in the township of Ballantrae, the 18th century seat of the McDowall family and haunt of the bard, *Rabbie Burns*. (Basu, 2007, p. 56) I *did* meet the distant relative, who *did* introduce me to the historical and physical landscape. (Basu, 2007, p. 58) My thoughts of a Scottish home *did* become refined due to travel. I now envisage a Scottish home not as Scotland itself, but as the town of Haddington, home of the Cranston family, and the small Ayrshire townships, Crossmichael, Colmonell and Barrhill, where my paternal grandfather was born and raised. (Basu, 2007, p. 93) This is all as Basu suggests. Basu could have written *Highland Homecomings* for me. My exegesis now had its title – *Familiar Ground: Expressing Post-Diasporic Scottish Identity through Collage and Print*.

²Alison Mackey, my sister, in scrapbook of family history, gifted to me in 2005.

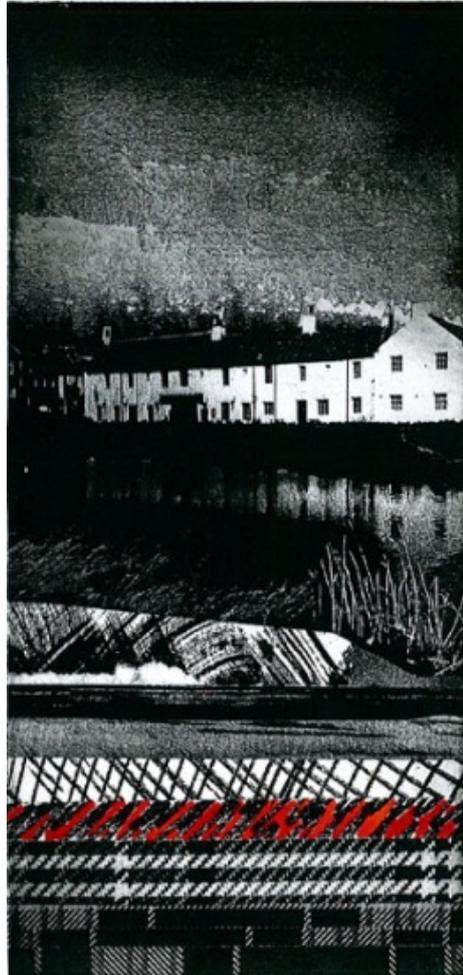


Figure 3: *Pilgrimage I*, 2011, Photopolymer etching, gouache, 10cm x 21cm.

Here in Australia, Scottish culture endures. Much of it hinges on music, arts/crafts and storytelling. My sister paints ceramics, often with Scottish motifs and landscapes, scrapbooks, Photoshop's and records family history. One brother makes bodhrans and tippers³ and enjoys any opportunity to sing a song or spin a yarn. The other brother imagines lineage through the Scottish kings, back to the original Ayrshire residents. Such is the power of *imagineering*. While some cousins play in pipe bands, others play fiddle tunes. One cousin is writing a novel based on the Cranston family story, a saga that sees only one of 'the big family' still resident in Scotland by the early 1920s. In the words of the East Lothian News, September 5th 2011:

'More than 90 years ago the Cranston family of Haddington sent seven boys to fight for Britain in the First World War.'

³ A bodhran is small hand held drum and is played with a small stick called a tipper.

Sadly four sons were killed and two more were horrifically wounded. Only one lad returned from war unscathed. According to the Imperial War Museum and the Scottish National War Memorial this may rank as one of the most significant sacrifices made by a Scottish family in the Great War.’ (East Lothian News, 2011)



Figure 4: The Cranston Family of Haddington (*The Big Family*), Scotland.

Source :<<http://haddington-cranstons.wikispaces.com/AH+Cranston+-+images>>

There is to be a memorial to honour the Cranston family in the new John Gray Centre nearing completion in Haddington, Scotland. Its unveiling will coincide with the centenary of the outbreak of WWI. My cousin Stuart, the novelist, has lobbied and worked hard, with support of family and friends, for this to come to pass. The town and the country authorities have agreed that it should ‘take the form of a three-dimensional bronze plaque’ and furthermore, the concept that pleases them most is that of a ‘female weeping at receiving a death notice’ and that this female should ‘represent every mother, wife, sister, daughter or lover whose life was altered by the news of her man’s death or wounding at the front.’⁴ It took some time for me to warm to this generic depiction that smacks of Scottish Romanticism. I worried about whether it would be judged overly sentimental, but this story, if any, deserves the sentiment. Hence, I find myself, as yet, unable to suggest an alternative. I too am thoroughly torn by the tragic historic narrative and I too find the Romanticism alluring. My heart tells me I would have preferred something more authentic, but

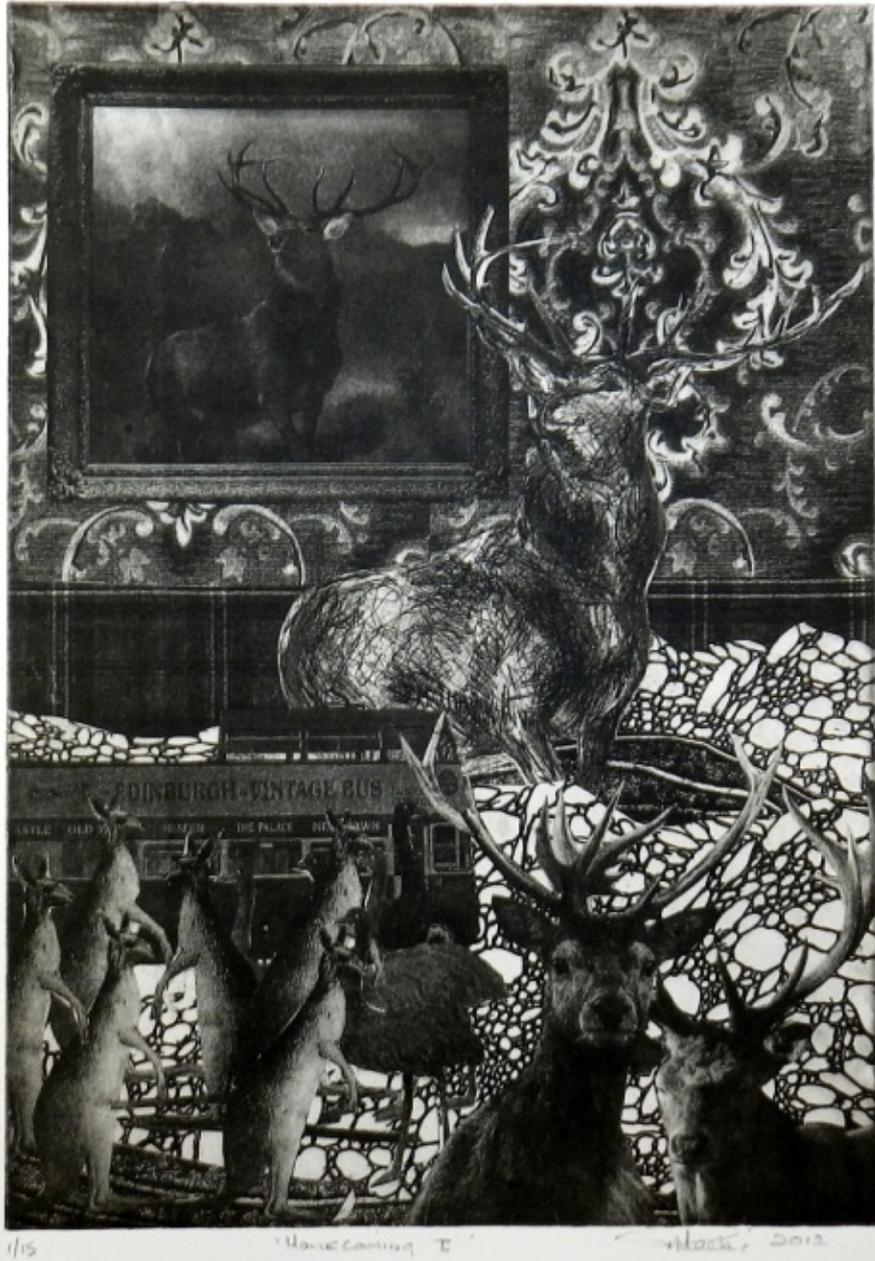
⁴ Official Request for Proposal for Cranston memorial plaque circulated by East Lothian Council, Scotland, June 2012

that role will be served by artefacts in the Cranston collection. Strongly in its favour, the chosen form of memorial will be readily understood by museum patrons, the present generation of Cranston offspring and future generations of relatives 'on pilgrimage.'

As my image making forms a body of work it becomes obvious that my own response is certainly keenly nostalgic and romantic; it too often acts as memorial, in the same way perhaps as my cousin's novel, as my sister's collations, or the bronze to be installed in the John Gray Centre.

My attachment with Scottish Romanticism may be consistent with the visual tastes of the diaspora but it is not everyone's cup of tea. In a review of Sir Edwin Landseer's 2005 Edinburgh retrospective, *Monarch of the Glen: Landseer in the Highlands*, Richard Dorment, art critic for the Daily Telegraph, tried to quantify the political incorrectness of Landseer in the 21st century. Landseer's work is condemned as being overly sentimental. The brutal hunt based works of Landseer are shunned by animal lovers and activists alike. Present day historians accuse him for not engaging with the Highland Clearances, which occurred concurrently with Landseer's Caledonian body of work. Dorment asks that we compare Landseer to Delacroix and judge him on his large scale Highland works and not his 'silly pictures in which comical dogs wear bonnets and smoke pipes.' Dorment does however engage with animal sentimentality enough to comment that when he looks at *The Old Shepherds Chief Mourner* he finds 'the emotion expressed in it true and without false note.'

Landseer is also admonished by the Scottish Nationalists for his 'collusion' in the *Tartanisation* of Scotland. Vacationing at Balmoral Castle with Queen Victoria each summer, Englishman Landseer, according to Dorment, created 'the image of the country that never existed, one with phoney 'traditions' of pipers and kilts, and an ersatz history featuring chivalrous nobles and a poor but happy peasantry.' (Dorment, 2005)



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Homecoming I

Block, 2012

Figure 5: *Homecoming I* (Appropriating Sir Edwin Landseer's 1851 painting *The Monarch of the Glen*), 2012, Photopolymer etching, 28 x 20cm.



Figure 6: *Homecoming III* (Appropriating part of Sir Edwin Landseer's 1837 work *The Old Shepherds Chief Mourner*), 2012, Photopolymer etching, 29 x 20.5cm.

The arguments of the Scottish Nationalists are cogent as Scotland looks toward independence. There are those who feel that unless Scotland moves past dependence on Romantic imagery then it will not grow up as a country to find a place in the modern world, but remain forever committed to a sort of *Brigadoon-ness*.⁵ Basu quotes Magnus Linkletter saying, 'I suggest that Scotland will only be a modern nation again when the last visitor centre is smothered by the last tea towel design of the *Declaration of Arbroath*.' (Basu, 2007, p.19, 77, 78)⁶ Yet Basu goes to some length in explaining the profiling of the diaspora and the dependence on tourist dollars that sees the continuance in the use of this imagery to attract diasporic pilgrims.

⁵ *Brigadoon* was a stage show (1947) and a movie (1954). The scene is set in Brigadoon, a magical Scottish Highland town, trapped in time.

⁶ The Declaration of Arbroath is commemorated *outside* Scotland, principally as National Tartan Day in the United States of America.



Figure 7: Interior of *Barrhill* home Pymble NSW 2008

Image taken by the author with the kind permission of the current owners, Mr & Mrs Adrian Grundy.

Since I conceived the idea of the *Familiar Ground* theme, my thoughts are often taken back to childhood, to the tobacco stained engravings of Scottish landscape, hung by wire from the plate rails in the hallway of the Barrhill home. It is here I have a starting place both in imagining the Scottish homeland and in the art of printmaking. The idea of this wall has proven to be an appropriate place from which to start collage construction a number of times. The re-dressing of this wall with Victorian or Edwardian wallpaper provides a background to the work and creates a stage for a visual conversation on Scottish Romanticism via appropriation, remediation and détournement. I assume this ‘turnabout’ in meaning happens during selection of the visual components, because my drive from the outset is to create a new narrative based on past narratives. I am highly selective in collage components and critical in placement, aware of developing conversation and narrative, and yet, I often feel that the collages ‘make themselves.’

My search for collage components is sometimes purposeful, sometimes random, and almost always sentimental. The box that I work from is filled with photocopied papers, some magnified. In it there are replications of hand drawn/hand painted gestures such as wet-in-wet watercolour, pencil work and old sketches (such as the drawing of the stag in *Homecoming I* (Figure 5) – a re-worked sketch from 2004.) The box also contains photographic images pertaining to family history and Scottish artefacts from my own collection and the family collection. There are many images sourced from the library and Internet image searches. These comprise a mixture of diverse traditional imagery, which spans a century of history, as well as samples of textures and

contrasts. As this process relies on its photographic nature the pursuit of high contrast is always part of the selection process.

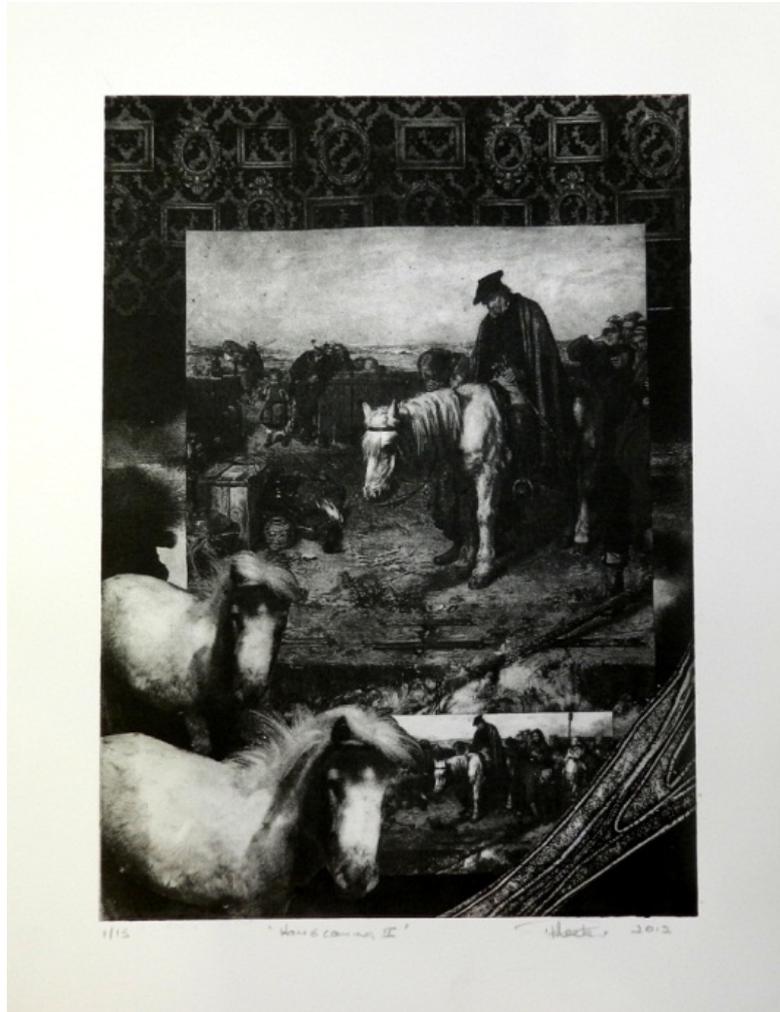


Figure 8: *Homecoming II* (Appropriating parts of Sir Thomas Faed's 1865 painting, *The Last Clansman.*), 2012, Photopolymer Etching, 28 x 20cm.

In studio critique sessions, some see a comic quality to some of my prints, but as mentioned in my abstract, one of my purposes is to question and to celebrate my cultural heritage and if some works are more light-hearted or grim than others I feel no concern.

It was recommended to me to read Andre Breton's *Anthology of Dark Humour*. Breton suggests that black humour, 'partly macabre and partly ironic', is the 'mortal enemy of sentimentality' and involves 'a superior revolt of the mind.' (Breton, 1997, p. vi) As much as I would like to accept the theory of the 'superior revolt,' I find others' ideas more plausible in regards to humour, such as this notion by Don Watson from his book *Caledonis Australis*:

‘A century after these ancestors of mine ventured into the forest with saws and axes and cut down their first hundred-metre-high mountain ash the shape of my cultural inheritance became clearer to me. The gist of this inheritance seemed to comprise a work ethic and a sense of irony, yoked together like two draught horses – or two brothers, or husband and wife, or father and son – one grunting and cursing as he labours, the other making grim jokes through clenched teeth.’ (Watson, 1997, p. xv)

The most likely explanation, to my mind, harks back to the cultural inheritance of storytelling, even though my response is a visual one. The ‘humour’, I contend, being just part of the substance to the story told. Historically, Scottish culture was passed down in oral form, through language and music. In the case of my close family, it was passed down through my grandfather, who quoted Burns, to my father who sang by the piano.

‘Such skills were generally learnt at the Ceilidh, the peculiar Celtic gathering. Ceilidhs expressed and maintained Celtic culture through music, song, poetry, saga and folk tales. They fostered arts and the most valuable social skills – retentive memories, fluency of composition, sureness and correctness of speech.’ (Watson, 1997, p. 7)

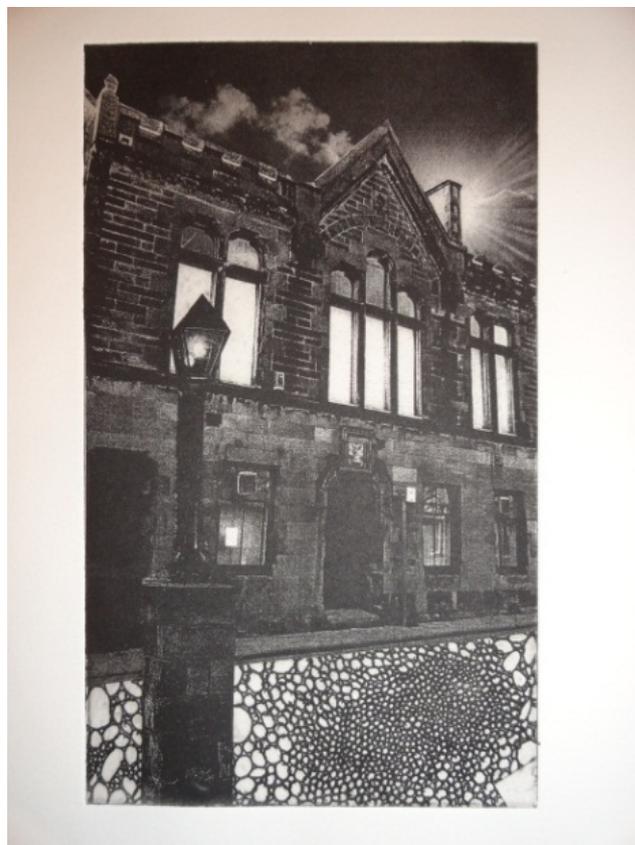


Figure 9: *Ceilidh*, 2012, Photopolymer Etching, 20.5 x 12cm.

Paul Basu describes the imagined Caledonian landscapes conceived by the children and grandchildren of the Scottish migrant population as 'imagineering.' I find this term, when applied to my collage processes, most apt. He predicts that as I become more informed I will discard the trappings of Tartanry⁷ and select a more mature, refined set of pictorial symbols. I wonder how this can be so. The texture, the 'feel' of tartan cloth and coarse tweeds, the image of the resilient prickly thistle, the memory of the drone of the pipes and the allure of artefacts is inherent and motivational. This is the language of Tartanry. But this is what my childhood was steeped in and this I had figured would be central to my image making. My stance at present is to say that although now aware of whether a visual element is an example of Tartanry (kitsch) or Scottishry (the authentic), I follow the same logic as in my discussion surrounding the Cranston Family Memorial, seeing no reason to discard Tartanry if this is the visual language understood by my demographic.

My previous supervisor, Dr Karen Lunn, in her thesis *Multiculturalism and Identity*, wrote of key criteria of identity, memory and fetishism. Her writings are relevant as I too resort to family artefact/souvenir as treasured resource. She declares, 'With an incomplete representation of the homeland, I have no choice but to fill in the gaps my father's souvenirs leave, creating an imagined totality rather than a factual construction of the past.' (Lunn, 2004, p.45) Paul Basu would perhaps see this as *imagineering*. He also discusses at length the domestic display of material culture representing homeland, describing it as 'performing Scottishness in the Diaspora.' (Basu, 2007, p.42)

⁷ Tartanry is a modern derogative term that applies to 'the excessive use of tartan and other Scottish imagery to produce a distorted sentimental view of Scotland and its history', according to the Collins English Dictionary. Wikipedia purports that the term Tartanry is used to describe 'the kitsch elements of Scottish culture'.



Figure 10: *Home I*, 2012, Photopolymer Etching, 10cm x 18cm.

Familiar Ground, the body of visual responses, is developing into a number of series of like work at like scale that relate to family history, homeland, homecoming and Romanticism. The works also show response to the similarities between the Tasmanian physical landscape and that of the Scottish, responding to my settlement and homemaking in Tasmania, a state that I, and others before me, have fashioned to Caledonian ideals. *Home I* is a simple example of this. A fine glowing specimen of a thistle in the foreground, a glowing romantic sunset in background, and the view of the darkened Tasmanian forest framed by a few leaves of the Rowan tree that grows in my garden. In my first few weeks of residence in Tasmania I wrote to my mother in Sydney, telling her of the thistles and bracken and the misty mountain location that made me immediately feel 'at home', and it is this engagement that seeps into my collages here and there as the work evolves. My personal search for the Romantic Sublime in Tasmania comprises, in part, hundreds of photographs taken of light and weather on the highland ridge that can be seen from my living room. Fragments of these skiescapes/landscapes are also being used in the making of collages.

In July this year I had a solo exhibition, *Imagineering*, at the Brunswick St Gallery, Fitzroy. It was the first showing of this work and my first chance to curate it and view it as a growing body of

work. The deep red walls of the gallery, the plate rails and skirting boards, were reminiscent of a Victorian drawing room and the salon style hanging of the work accentuated this, contributing to an 'other' timely ambience. Some prints received a small, subtle amount of hand colouring and this was commented on favourably.



Figure 11: Salon hanging, *Imagineering*, 2012, Brunswick St Gallery.

I find myself seduced by the qualities of the photopolymer media, the push and play for high contrasts and the search for fine detail. It is my belief that the exploratory body of prints is evocative and shows much promise in becoming a highly resolved body of print. I anticipate that my graduation portfolio will comprise a folio of etchings, on the most part miniatures, and a small number of larger scale works.

My research into my *Familiar Ground* and imagery of the diaspora has so far been engrossing and at many times revelatory. It is by no means complete. The strong relationship between Tartanry, embraced by the diaspora, and what was the popular idealised imagery from the time of my grandparents is evident; locked in time. My legacy, which may be construed as just another Post-Colonial dilemma, appears to be the passed down urging to *imagineer* romantic landscapes – the 'ungrounded' landscape of mists and thistles.

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