NOW WE KNOW WHAT PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH IS, LET’S TALK ABOUT HOW TO DO IT WELL.

DR SUSANNA CASTLEDEN AND DR NICOLE SLATTER. SCHOOL OF DESIGN AND ART
• Activity
• Practice-led research.
• Reflective practice, some examples
• What to do and what not to do
• Visual Examples
Consider your last significant studio activity. Write a paragraph about the discovery/discoveries you made through undertaking that activity.
Activity part 2.

Link this studio-based discovery to your theoretical research.
‘What did the studio process reveal that could not have been revealed by any other mode of enquiry?’ (Barrett and Bolt 2007)
‘...practice is not a means to bring forth a known end but is the principle driver of thought.’ (Clare Humphries’ PhD, 2014 RMIT)
Ways to Reflect on, and Respond to your Creative Research Project

Reflective practice privileges the process of inquiry, leading to an understanding of experiences that may have been overlooked in practice.
Why reflect on the development of your creative project?

• Take stock of what you have done so far
• To be able to identify and define problems
• Evaluate what and how elements are working
• To be efficient and effective in your use of time
• To be able to find alternative ways of doing things
• To analyse evidence and arrive at a personal opinion and solution
• To interpret, compare, contrast and evaluate visual material
Reflection in, on and for action.

  
  “To meet the challenges of their work, they rely less on formulas learned in graduate school than on the kind of improvisation learned in practice.”

• Reflection-in-action = Thinking on your feet, as you make.

• Reflection-on-action = this is done later on

• Reflection-for-action = what next, what are your needs and hopes?

Ways to consider your work as it progresses

• Compositionally / formally
• Technically
• Theoretically
• Aesthetically
• Within its historical / contemporary context
• In relation to other works you’ve made
• Reassess the background information you’ve gathered. Look at your proposal.
Reflective Journals

• Record comments and feedback from peers and staff.
• Use reflective writing to make comment on artworks you’ve seen in galleries/books.
• Collect and comment on relevant artworks / writing.
• Document your work in progress and reflect on what you see in the photograph.
• Be constructively self-critical
• Take notes at talks / lectures and then record your thoughts and responses.
How to write about the process of creative practice without being descriptive.

Artist Statement. Critical review
Lyndal Jones (in 2012 Sydney Biennale)

Lyndal Jones

*Rehearsing Catastrophe: The Ark in Sydney, 2012*

installation and performance at the 18th Biennale of Sydney at Cockatoo Island

dimensions variable

Performance for the 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012) at Cockatoo Island

Courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Sydney

Project Team: Jeph Neale and Hilary Jackman, Chris Knowles, Stephen Jones, Mike Leggett, and volunteer performers

Photograph: Prudence Upton/Destination NSW
REHEARSING CATASTROPHE: THE ARK IN SYDNEY

In order to be ready for the flood they say will happen as a result of melting Arctic ice, I’ve followed Noah’s example and I am preparing an ark. In the spirit of adaptation, an old Sydney ferry has been appropriated and docked at Cockatoo Island, the former centre for shipbuilding in Sydney. It is customised for the hundreds of animals due to arrive. The word ‘catastrophe’ may seem melodramatic, but, as Slavoj Zizek argues: ‘we can rely neither on the scientific mind nor on our common sense – they both mutually reinforce each other’s blindness … The situation is like that of the blind spot in our visual field: we do not see the gap; the picture appears continuous’. How then might we see gaps and discontinuity, and thus be able to prepare for predictable catastrophes? This project suggests that through play we might rehearse preparedness. It then goes further and asks what might it involve to do anything necessary to escape? I focus on context, place and empowerment through very long-term projects involving performance, video and installation – sometimes together – that rely on sound as strongly as on the moving image. They have all centrally included a woman’s voice. Since 2004, my focus has largely been on the poetics of climate change at the international level from the perspective of a small Australian country town. The Avoca Project at Watford House, Avoca in central Victoria involves collaboration with artists, scientists, activists and local people.
The aims for the exegesis and the aims for the creative practice are the same.
Kit White #4
“Art is the Product of Process

Whether conceptual, experimental, emotional or formal, the process you develop yields the image you produce. The materials you choose, the methods of production, and the sources of the images should all reflect the interests that command your attention. The process does not stop with each work completed. It is ongoing. The cumulative result of that process is a body of work.”

Kit White #8
“Art is a continuing dialogue that stretches back thousands of years.

What you make is your contribution to that dialogue. Therefore, be conscious of what has come before you and the conversation that surrounds you. Try not to repeat what has already been said. Study art history and stay alert to the dialogue of your moment.”

Kit White # 28

“An idea is only as good as its execution

It is important that you master your medium. Poorly made work will either ruin a good idea or make the lamentable execution of itself the subject. Overly finessed technique can mask a lack of content or can smother an image. At the same time, roughness and imprecision has its place in rendering. One can only gauge the need to throw technique away if one has first achieved the mastery of it”

“Art is a process of discovery through making, and our ability to discover is generally greater than our ability to invent. Think of your work process as a form of travel. Look for things you don’t know, the things that are revealed or inadvertently uncovered. It is easier to find a world than to make one”

More from Kit White

• For every hour spent making, spend an hour of looking and thinking #30
• What happens on the studio should be a conversation not a monologue # 31
• Making art is an act of discovery #40

A few what not to do’s

Creative practice does not illustrate theory
A few what not to do’s

In the exegesis, be careful not to set the creative work up to be something it isn’t, or can’t be.
A few what not to do’s

In the exegesis, don’t explain what practice-led research is.
A few what not to do’s

In the exegesis, don’t describe your research into the content for the creative practice. If your creative practice uses paint, don’t describe the material components of paint, where it comes from or how you got it, instead describe what you did with paint (you wouldn’t describe the form of the book or the journey to the library when referring to a theoretical text).

Similarly, unless absolutely essential, avoid technical descriptions.
A few what not to do’s

In the exegesis, avoid overly descriptive reflections on the research process; instead of

I wondered which method would be more appropriate, watercolour or oil.

Consider

Watercolour, with its translucent, fugitive, watery qualities, was used to investigate....
A few what not to do’s

When describing the research process, consider if the description is relevant to the methodology or to the outcome of studio practice.
A few what not to do’s

Avoid being overly self-referential ‘....as I asked myself....’
A few what not to do’s

Avoid telling the reader what method you employed in your creative practice, (‘....adopting reflectivity as a method’), instead tell the reader what you found out.
A few what not to do’s

When referencing artists or other creative practitioners as part of your contextual review, choose well, reflect critically, look and read deeply - just as you would with theorists.
Practice-led research takes time...
‘In those moments when you feel discouraged or lost in the studio, or when you experience rejection, rest completely assured that what you don’t know about something is also a form of knowledge, though much harder to understand. In many ways, making art is like blindly trying to see the shape of what you don’t yet know. Whenever you catch a little a glimpse of that blind spot, of your ignorance, of your vulnerability, of that unknown, don’t be afraid or embarrassed to stare at it. Instead, try to relish in its profound mystery. Art is about taking the risk of engaging in something somewhat ridiculous and irrational simply because you need to get a closer look at it, you simply need to break it open to see what’s inside’.

Teresita Fernández
Practice-Led research. Further reading


Brady T. 2000 A Question of Genre: de-mystifying the exegesis. *Text (4)* Vol 1 April


