

Chances we take - constructing portraiture and identity

Author:

Cleary, Jane

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Chances We Take -
Constructing Portraiture and Identity.

Jane Cleary

A thesis in fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of

Masters of Fine Arts

UNSW



College of Fine Arts

School of Art

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ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

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Signed Jane Cleary

Date 12/08/13

Chances We Take

Constructing Portraiture and Identity - Abstract

The construction of identity throughout the formative years of a person's existence provides the foundations of who they become. This research investigates the notion of identity in youth, the contributing factors and the tensions that may be experienced in the endeavor to create one's self. Serigraphically speaking the screen-print and an individual's identity proceed from the same process of layering. The indeterminate nature of both allows for the free explorations of concepts such as childhood and contemporaneity where the outcomes result from experimentation and discovery. The construction of the work reinforces a connection to the formation of identity which is embodied by the layering process common to it and printmaking. The partnership of nature and nurture creates us all and the core of this investigation is the notion that we are all elaborated out of our time, place and history.

My research engages with the 'new childhood' that so many in our society embark upon, or attempt to return to later in life. *Chances We Take* therefore is, at once, a youth lost and a youth regained and the exhibition is a celebration of play, an opportunity to enjoy, re-live and experience childhood once more. Analogous to the construction of a screen-print, each layer within a life contributes to the outcome. Every event we experience becomes part of the fabric of "us" contributing to the person we become. Just as each experience has consequences for the individual, if one layer in a screen-print is mis-registered - intentionally or otherwise - it impacts on the artwork's final aesthetic condition.

The human condition then, is, layered, and correctly *registered*, to create a whole. Each of us are aggregations, we *are* the print.

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Introduction

Orientation

‘During the last three decades of the twentieth century- the so-called ‘postmodern’ era - issues of personal identity and how that identity is constructed and understood came to the forefront of cultural commentary and aesthetic practice. Postmodern visual culture has explored the relationship between individuality, social role, and cultural, sexual, and gender stereotypes, but artists deal with these concepts as unstable, fluctuating and indeterminate’ (West, 2004, p. 205).

The construction of identity throughout the formative years of a person’s existence¹ provides the foundations of who they become. This paper investigates the notion of identity in youth, the contributing factors and the tensions that may be experienced in the endeavor to create one’s self.

‘Portraits are representations, but they are also material objects...Portraits therefore take a number of physical forms and serve a multiplicity of aesthetic, political, and social functions’ (West, 2004, p. 43).

Portraiture is employed to explore the defining fundamentals of an individual, revealing the nature of ‘truth’ in the image by examining the

¹ For the purpose of this paper the ‘formative years’ are those early years of a child’s life, age 4-through adolescence, age 16, with a primary focus on the younger years (ages 4-12).

relationship between the singular and the cultural and the pursuit for uniqueness in a contemporary setting.

Serigraphically speaking the screen-print and an individual's identity proceed from the same process of layering. The indeterminate nature of both allows for the free explorations of concepts such as childhood and contemporaneity where the outcomes result from experimentation and discovery. The construction of the work reinforces a connection to the formation of identity which is embodied by the layering process common to it and printmaking.

The idea of the 'master stock' referred to throughout the paper evolved as the body of work developed and is conceptually central to both my work and the formulation of identity that is this paper's focus. Each print, born of the same ink has contributed to the next work and each work formed is a product of the last. If children develop over time in conjunction with both huge and miniscule events, environment and their ancestry, perhaps the images that seek to depict them are similarly formed. The partnership of nature and nurture creates us all and the core of this investigation is the notion that we are all elaborated out of our time, place and history.

Society is an organic entity. I grew up in a culture vastly different to that of today. The evanescence of our own present results in the inability to 'go back' despite the yearning of some to do so. Whilst initially my research focused on male socialisation and the formation of identity, the research then extended to encompass the larger issue of how each individual reaches their destination and the importance of the path taken.

²The term "master stock" has been appropriated from the Chinese cooking tradition wherein a stock is repeatedly used to poach meats. 'The defining characteristic of a master stock from other stocks is that after initial use it is not discarded...instead the broth is stored and reused in the future as a stock for more poachings...in this way, over time, flavour accumulates in the stock, making it richer and more complex with each poaching' (Wikipedia, 2012a, para. 4).

Over the course of my MFA, the core objective of this paper remained: to create a contextualising document for a body of artworks that explore childhood iconography and aspects of nostalgia, to provide access to a time and place thought lost. As a child anything is possible, being a superhero is a viable option but more than that the possibilities are liberatingly endless.

In the process of researching the 'hows' and 'whys' of *other* individuals, I have unintentionally discovered my own. *Chances We Take* is about individuals, parents and doing the best you can. It's also about grappling with the unease of getting older and the fear of the unknown. John Lennon (1980) was right, when he said 'Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans'³.

Chances We Take is the umbrella term used for five definite series of screen-printed artworks that are: Series 1: The Poppers; *Chances you took* and *Astro-nought*, Series 2: The Portraits (a series of 7 single sheet works), Series 3: The Booth (a series of 6 single sheet works), Series 4: The Puzzles; *Shoot!* and *G&P made me*; *It's a family tree, see*, and Series 5: The Room; *It's a maze in here*⁴.

³ Emphasis added.

⁴ For a comprehensive list of presented artworks please see Artwork Reference List- page 33

Chapter I

Cut from the same cloth; the fabric that creates us:

Environment and Identity

‘If you plant two identical tomato seeds in two different environments, you will have two plants of strikingly different size and overall shape, but they will still be discernibly tomato plants. There is no longer any questions that brain tissues create the potential for having certain types of experiences, but there is also no doubt that the experiences, especially early ones, can change the fine details of the brain forever’ (Panksepp, J., 1998, as quoted in Gerhardt, 2010, p. 49).

Someone is born in Australia every 1 minute and 24 seconds, and children under the age of 15 form 19.1% of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2010, para. 1, para. 13). When a child is born they begin to experience the world. One cannot separate the individual from the cultural and vice-versa. The complex interplay of genetics, parents, culture and environment combine within the child resulting in an outcome that is more than a sum of it’s parts. Every second, change occurs, an infinitesimal reflection of an action or event that may shape a life forever. Genetics, social pressures, parenting or the lack of any of these things influences this circumstance. These catalysts are not rare; they are a constant in our culture, our surroundings and our environments. We are each distinct but we also form a whole, we are the movable arm of a

connect-together Transformer⁵, singular components and yet necessarily combined for the completion of something larger.

Significant research has examined the effects of sibling order on temperament and personality⁶. Dr Frank Sulloway (1996 as cited in Klass, 2009, para.13) explains birth order as ‘simply a proxy for the actual mechanisms that go on in family dynamics that shape character and personality’. So ‘me’ as a character and personality already existed, and I was further shaped by the family mechanism in to which I was born. The motifs evident in *Chances We Take* are conceptualised by my experiences of youth. The children we were, and the person I have become, have also contributed in great measure to the construction of the works and their conceptual meaning.

As children, our parents provide everything. Perhaps too much, but as with all parents mine were doing their best. In those early years, I was their artist’s proof. Beginning as a concept, held within their hopes for me, I then became a physical being; a ‘clean slate’, the person I was yet to be shaped by the people who surrounded me. Over the years, my parents’ added layer upon layer, providing experiences intended to positively shape the person I was to become. Their intention was to get each colour to line up, striving to register positives and negatives⁷ accurately enough to create an image.

⁵ A Japanese toy line that originated in the 1980s. Developed by Microman and Diaclone partnered with Hasbro. The toys developed into a tv series and most recently a movie franchise. The story surrounds a group of otherworldly robotic figures who can transform from robot to everyday objects including vehicles. The original set of toys transformed individually but also clipped together to form larger Transformers.

⁶ Birth order research involves the study of one’s order in the family unit. Researchers suggest this order to influence on ones personality and lifestyle. Researchers include Jeffrey Kluger. (2006) *The new science of siblings*. Time Magazine Science. Frank Sulloway. (2001). *Sibling order effects*. Elsevier Science. Jeannie S. Kidwell. (1981). *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Vol. 43, No. 2 (May, 1981), pp. 315-332. National Council on Family Relations.

⁷ In this instance, positives and negatives refer to the mechanical process of the creation of a screen-printed image. Where photographs (used to) require a ‘negative’ to be exposed and printed, screen-prints require ‘positives’ to be exposed and imprinted to a screen as part of

In modern society, we seem never to actually leave our childhood behind; the constant recording of life through videos and prolific digital photography allow our existence to be suspended in an arrested development often left 'cached' in time and space on perennial Internet archives. *My research* engages with the 'new childhood' that so many in our society embark upon, or attempt to return to later in life. *Chances We Take* therefore is, at once, a youth lost and a youth regained and the exhibition is a celebration of play, an opportunity to enjoy, re-live and experience childhood once more.



Plate 1: 'Out', I'm shouting
'out', 2012. 107cm x 76cm,
Screen-print on Arches 88.

the process. They are, in essence, the 'black and white' process that determines which areas are printed and those that are not.

Chapter II

Process as metaphor: Ideals and imperfections

Twenty-eight years ago I emerged from the palette my parents mixed with not quite enough of some colours and a little too much of others. Along the way some of the colours have faded, some of the lines have been painted over, areas were rushed and some unfinished. The point is they finished what they could with the time and resources they had, and provided an outline for me to complete. This realisation required me to reconsider myself. Suddenly, looking back from the mirror was not just my face but their *gravitas* unrealised.

Screen-printing as a technology provided an unswerving path for the images in *Chances We Take*. Like all conceptualised practices screen-printing is process driven. Beginning with a photograph, the image is schematised chromatically and then reconstituted. Physically, the resultant colours are minimal – flat, clean and untouched and extend the tradition of screen-printings central relationship to Post-Pop practices.

What if, for a medium that was for all intents and purposes created to replicate something perfectly, didn't? Like us, the prints have individual traits: an ever-so-slightly mis-registered layer, or a hardly visible line through the ink. The paradigm of this medium and the practical conclusion is that, as with children you *can't* know for certain the absolute outcome. *Chances We Take* explores the notion that when human hands touch a process, it becomes less mechanical and more human. Thus the conceptual properties of screen-printing are linked to the formation of an identity based on the incorporation of experiences allegorised as the layers of the finished work.

Analogous to the construction of a screen-print, each layer within a life contributes to the outcome. Every event we experience becomes part of the fabric of “us” contributing to the person we become. Just as each experience has consequences for the individual, if one layer in a screen-print is mis-registered - intentionally or otherwise - it impacts on the artwork’s final aesthetic condition. The human condition then, is layered, and correctly *registered*, to create a whole. Similarly, each of us are aggregations, we *are* the print.

The *London Boys*⁸ series examines the relative nature of children’s play and the potential for chastisement implicit in just *being* a child. The motif of the superhero outfit utilises the accessible iconography of childhood, whilst concurrently locating the works within the continuous present. The boys are depicted at once alone, and yet connected through their uniform to a lexicon of masculine archetypes. This strategy illustrates the possibilities available to individuals in their quest to find meaning and identity. It also expresses unmistakably the desire of the adult audience to regress to the safety of childhood. The central theme of play is integral to a child’s formulation of identity, both in these works and in an expanded sense central to the relationship *Chances We Take* has to the genre of portraiture.



Plate 2: *You've got it made with the rest of the toys*.
2010. 107cm x 76cm, Screen-print on Arches 88.

⁸ The *London Boys* is a series of four works titled ‘*You’ve got it made with the rest of the toys*’, ‘*You ain’t got nothin’, you’re on the run*’, ‘*Things seem good again*’, and ‘*You wish you’d never left your home*’. All works were printed in 2010 and are 76cm x 106cm, Arches 88 archival paper. This suite of works was commissioned for the *Young Guns* show 2011 at Gallery Maya London.



Plate 3: *Under the cover of night, you still saw me*, 2010. 107cm x 76cm, Screen-print on Arches 88.

Traditionally portraits were used to show the likeness of a single person. Within this series the genre is used to evoke the specificity of a temporal location within the framework of a social and cultural setting: thus 'Portraits can thus appear to be both records of specific events and evocations of something more lasting' (West, 2004, p. 44). The 'power of portraiture, rests largely in this tension between the temporal and the permanent' (ibid).



Plate 4: *The big reveal*, 2012. 107cm x 76cm, Screen-print on Arches 88.



Plate 5: *Heartbroken*, 2012. 107cm x 76cm, Screen-print on Arches 88.

As Panofsky writes:

A portrait aims by definition at two essentials...On the one hand it seeks to bring out whatever it is in which the sitter differs from the rest of humanity and would even differ from himself were he portrayed at a different moment or in a different situation; and this is what distinguishes a portrait from an "ideal" figure or "type". On the other hand it seeks to bring out whatever the sitter has in common with the rest of humanity and what remains in him regardless of place and time' (Panofsky 1971, as cited in West, 2004, p. 25).

Between the ideal and the rest of humanity lie the traits that make us unique and as Panofsky establishes, it is within this distinction the individual exists. Portraits have a range of functions and can be considered 'aesthetic objects, but equally can be seen to act as a substitute for the individual they represent' (West, 2004, p. 43). *Chances We Take* 'calls attention to the process of its production - to the appearance of an individual in the fugitive moment in which it was produced' (ibid), allowing the audience to view and participate in the instant, providing the audience with a reverse route to their youth.

As the work informed the research, *ipso facto* as the investigation continued, the construction of the works evolved. In the creation of each work - the performance of being made - a new consideration of practice emerged. Initially the images were inspired by the mechanical workings of the developing brain, however they were reflective of much more. Similarly the images are not only about boys, but notions that concern us all. The conceptual ideas *of* the paper and the physical work *on* the paper, layered with the master stock of paint, became apparent.



Plate 6: *Are you and I so unlike?*, 2012.
107cm x 76cm, Screen-print on Arches 88.

Chapter III

Everywhere I go, damn there I am: Content and me

In a family of four children, I am the youngest with only 6 years between the oldest child (my brother) and me. My sole sister is the quintessential “girl” and as a child is quoted as demanding ‘pink pink, everywhere, pink!’ Whether it is genetic, biological or environmental, in my youth I had more in common with my brothers. As a result, the iconography I ascribe to this time has an almost exclusively male slant. Accordingly I associate such stereotypically masculine images with a satisfying and enjoyable childhood.

Nagal (2006, p.49) states that due to chemical balances it is possible for a boy to have a brain that is ‘more female in design’. I theorise then, that the converse is also plausible; that it is possible for a female brain to be more male in design. These occurrences do not reside in a vacuum, environmental and biological factors coexist, ‘nature and nurture interact from the start’ (Andreasen, 2005, as cited in Nagel, 2006, p. 74). Consequently perhaps *my* brain and further my persona, shaped by the environment in which it developed has a pronounced propensity, interest and connection to masculine motifs and iconography.

Further, I’m not yet a parent. My perspective originates from a loving and close-knit family. We take care of each other, and that includes my two nephews (currently 5 and 4) and my baby niece (18 months). It is my belief that the familial occurrences and their implications are likely to echo and overlap with the experiences of the larger community of viewers.

⁹ (Folds, 2011).

By referencing a lived time and place, a framework of common cultural context is inevitable.

The origins of the imagery are eclectic. The photographs and resulting prints of children don't lend themselves to girls; a little girl in a revealing Wonder Woman outfit gave the works a different trajectory¹⁰. Aspects of the imagery stemmed from growing up with male siblings, memories involving games of Castle Grayskull and He-Man, Transformers, Scalextric Slot Cars, Superheroes and the constant theme of fighting against something bigger and stronger than the individual.



Plate 7 & 8: Castle Grayskull. The fictional Castle from He-man and the Masters of the Universe (Fimation Associates, Mattel). As a child I would play with this for hours and hours. As a teenager, my parents sold it at a garage sale. We have not moved on.



Plate 9: He-man (right) battles Skeletor (left) in the 1980's series; The Masters of the Universe.

¹⁰ This seemed to overtly sexualise children, a theme and a concern not central to my research. There is no doubt that children in contemporary society are sexualized, but this wasn't the focus of the images or central to the research. The unfortunate burden of sexualisation inherent in the social position of young females is well beyond the scope of this paper.

The colour palette in my work is deliberate and is based on the fundamental notion that primary colours make us comfortable (Tansey and Kleiner, 1996, p. 14). Colour has a 'psychological dimension: red and yellow connote warmth; blue and green, coolness' (ibid). Twentieth century artist Mark Rothko sought to 'overwhelm and arouse emotional responses in the spectator' (Williams, 2010, p. 314) with abstract blocks of colour, and devoted attention to studies of the interactions between viewer and artwork.



Plate 10: Mark Rothko. *No. 16 (Red, white and brown)*, 1957, 252.5cm x 207.3cm. Oil on canvas.

Comic book superheroes and their costumes elicit a similar emotional response, often evoking nostalgia in mature viewers. Superheroes 'were created by us, and always have been at root, an adolescent power fantasy' (Waid, 2005 as cited in Morris, 2005, p. 5). As a commonality, we aspire

to them, to be like them and to uphold their moral values. The base concept of a hero is 'normative...It doesn't just characterise what is, it offers us a glimpse of what ought to be. It presents us with something to aspire to in our own lives' (Loeb & Morris, 2005, p. 16). Superhero outfits are commonly based in primary colours; reds, blues and yellows are evident in the costumes of Superman, Spiderman, and The Flash (among others). The colours employed in *Chances We Take* are known and trusted. Our eyes see primary colours and our mind feels calm (Tansey and Kleiner, 1996, p. 14). Primary colours can be mixed to create secondary and complimentary colours; they are malleable and transformative. The environment in which they exist, and the light they are viewed in, impacts the way in which colours are received, just as the light in which *we* are viewed impacts the perception of our character and subsequent treatment by others.



Plate 11, 12, 13: Clockwise from left: Superman (published by DC Comics), The Amazing Spiderman (published by Marvel Comics) and The Flash (published by DC Comics).

The colour field is particularly momentous within *It's a maze in here*. The hues used in this work are master stock colours, mixed as required. Each

screen contributing subtle variations as colours are replenished and added to over the course of the 117 screens required in production. The 36m² work - in the tradition of Rothko - engulfs the viewer, creating an environment within which the audience might experience, in the scale and imagery, the sensation of being a child. The room depicts a childhood playground with simple timber and metal equipment reminiscent of the 1970s and 80s, employing bold primary colours to stand out against the cool secondary background. The scale invites the viewer to become part of the work, but also the purpose of the work is to elicit an emotive response, a feeling that forms a crucial aspect of the piece. The muslin substrate of the room is linked to traditional notions of printmaking while the unconventional physical qualities of the material allow for the opening up of printmaking as a form to uncharted possibilities. The open weave of muslin enables the image to be discerned but also seen through. To experience the artwork is to be at once within and outside of the image. The translucent nature of the fabric allows for a secondary audience; from without, the viewers inside the work appear as if part of the imagery.



Plate 14 : *It's a maze in here*, 2012/13 (detail). 360cm x 360cm x 240cm. Screen-print on muslin.

Chapter IV

You can't win, 'cause time can't lose": Chance

I regard it as self evident that had I been born in another place to another family, the person I am would not exist. The images are impacted by the chance of their culture and context, while the printing process is similarly affected by myriad variants. Like any creative form, there are days when the process is problematic. Colours may emerge incorrectly or bleed¹¹ past their designated area. The thick, hand-made paper can stretch or tear. An area to be printed may be so large as to challenge what is possible. On these occasions the interaction between parent and child is mirrored in the experience of artist and print and the final result evidences events within the process.

The family trees we create are so much more than lines on a page; they are a path from us and a path to us. Since 1951 when my mother was born, my maternal grandparents have set in motion a family: four children, twelve grandchildren, and three great grandchildren. My paternal grandparents: two children, six grandchildren, and three great grandchildren. Twenty-three individuals created as a direct result of four. In formative years, children learn to love and trust (or to not), they learn social skills and emotive relationships and they learn this from the influential people in their lives. Like many, in my case it was my family.

Both of my mother's parents are still alive. Grandma and Pop were born in 1928 and 1927 respectively. My paternal grandfather died in 1981 and my Nanna in 1997. Obvious traits are evident within my family; a certain type

¹¹ (Nielsen, R., Zander, R., Brant, J., & Radice, M. [Cheap Trick], 1985)

¹² 'bleeding' of an image occurs when too much paint is pushed through the screen or with uneven force. This creates steaks or pools of ink outside the designated image.

of fingernail, the inability to say something funny and not cackle afterwards, leaning back with your hands on your head to think. The qualities of my grandparents and indeed generations past have been inherited, each of my relatives garnishing a little more of one and less of the other. I am the culmination of many events, not just in my life but also in theirs; they are my master stock; for surely had their paths not met, neither would my parents', and so on. The works of *Chances We Take* required influence to exist. Similarly, my grandparents are my 'positives', the marks of their lives integral to the construction of mine. We are each a product of our time, our families and our nature, so too are the prints a product and a reflection of theirs.



Plate 15: *I was wrong*, 2012,
107cm x 76cm. Screen-print

Chapter V

Layers of meaning: Construction

The brain is a complex muscle designed to perceive, process and reply. The 'preferred option is to describe the structural attributes of the brain as having three regions, or layers' (Nagal, 2006, p.19). These layers cooperate to control human function and are the forebrain, the midbrain and the hindbrain. Similar to the regions of a brain, the layers of a screen-print contribute to one another informing the completed image.

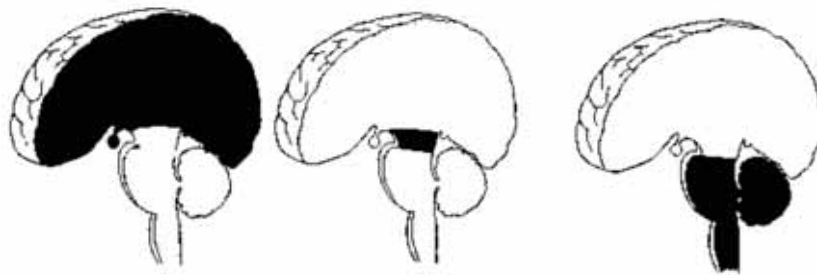


Plate 16: The Forebrain The Midbrain The Hindbrain

The original photographs are processed through a series of manipulations using digital technology, creating an image comprised of multiple layers. My practice centres on this deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of the image, allowing an opportunity for error and fault as well as success. Despite being a process of replication screen-printing is flawed, it holds an inherent trickery, a broken promise. Within my practice there are governable factors, however, as with life, there are also areas that are uncontrollable. Despite efforts at regulation, the outcomes are, at times, unforeseeable.

¹³ Image: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (2012).

Coating the silk-screen with photo-emulsion and exposing the paper positive can be compared to the burgeoning development of an identity through foundation-laying decisions and experiences. Ultra Violet light hardens the image into the semi-permanence required for printing. Moments and exposures impact us, leaving voids for material to pass through and be absorbed as experience. Each colour of the printed artwork requires a separate screen and thus a different exposure, creating another layer in the process and serving as a singular experience in the construction of an image. On average, a print in *Chances We Take* required 12-15 screens, however *Shoot!* comprises over 200 separate hues; individual opportunities for unforeseen outcomes.



Plate 17: *Shoot!*, 2012, 108cm x 82cm. Screen-print on plywood, glue, screws.

The process of screen-printing requires the act of registering¹⁴ which to me reflects the experiences we have in youth. This act, along with the master stock of paint, informs the conceptual notions of the research. Just as parents guide children, each decision made in the printing process contributes to the outcome. Just as I am connected to my siblings by our parents, so too are the prints within an edition and indeed the series, connected through their common ancestry of the master stock. This formation is expressed in *G&P made me; it's a family tree, see* presenting a traditional colour wheel, linking individual colours to each other and ultimately forming a larger image. The interactive properties of this puzzle allow the participant to 'mix' the image embodied by the process of shuffling and reordering of the tiles necessary to complete the work.



Plate 18: *G&P made me, it's a family tree, see*, 2012, 108cm x 82cm. Screen-print on plywood, glue, screws.

¹⁴ Registering refers to the act of lining up individual layers of colour to form a whole image. Each colour is individually printed and carefully placed on the image so as to, ideally, line up perfectly with the previous colour, thus a seamless image is constructed.

During construction I began to conceptualise that past generations represent the real life personification of a master stock, making it clear that just as the paint on my current prints' 'ancestry' could be traced back to original inks from first year university, so too can I and indeed *we all* be traced back by generations across time and place. The master stock is both a practical component as well as a metaphor of the foundational ideas of the work. Added to over time, the master stock is ultimately formed by both the nature of the environment and the nurture of the artist. Much like a multi-hued colour wheel, among genetics, experiences and family concepts, were the very circumstances that built the 'registration' of my identity.

The process of screen-printing is at the fore of the research, however the human limitations within it are also of interest. As with a parent and the experiences they provide for their child, the first few layers are carefully weighted and regulated, however there comes a point where the importance of the outcome shifts from parent to child; from artist to print. The final product of this Masters research is a series of works reflective of my own experiences, while relating to generations past and future. The research links a series of technical experiments resolved to create a single body of work.

Chapter VI

Completion: Audience participation and play

‘A stronger adult emerges from a childhood in which the physical body is immersed in the challenge of nature...Modern life narrows our senses until our focus is mostly visual, appropriate to about the dimension of a computer monitor or TV screen. By contrast, nature accentuates all the senses, and the senses are a child’s primal first line of self-defence...children with generous exposure to nature, those who learn to see the world directly, may be more likely to develop the psychological survival skills that will help them detect real danger, and they are therefore less likely to seek out phony danger later in life’ (Louv, R., 2005, p.180-182)

When I was a kid we’d disappear for hours on our bikes, frivolously telling mum we’d be home for dinner. Her advice? Wear a helmet. Levitt and Dubner hypothesise that ‘fear is in fact a major component of the act of parenting. A parent, after all, is the steward of another creature’s life, a creature who in the beginning is more helpless than the newborn of nearly any other species’ (2005, p.135). The trajectory of contemporary society is being altered by an overly sensitive approach to parenting (Gerhardt. 2010, p. 27) and will undoubtedly affect the cultural climate and the ‘adults of tomorrow’ (ibid).

Play, as a concept, informs the notions of *Chances We Take*; boys¹⁵ at once pretending and yet, in that moment, *fully believing* they are superheroes fighting individual formations of evil, detecting danger and surviving. By arresting the subjects of the prints in a juvenile state, it is hoped that the audience will be reminded of their own childishness. Works such as *Astro-nought* and *Chances You Took* further this by allowing the viewers to integrate themselves into this embrace, encouraged to experience the frivolity of youth, and the moment of 'letting go'.



Plate 19: *Chances you took* (left) & *Astro-nought* (right), 2012. 112cm x 240cm, Screen-print on plywood.

¹⁵ This is not an attempt to say that this is a uniquely male experience or to deny the likelihood of girls experiencing as such, but as the works and research involve only boys this pronoun has been used.

Just as they required my interaction to be constructed, the works ask for the viewers' collaboration in order to become more complete. Ultimately insisting that the audience respond to them instinctually, as would a child. Series 1; *The Poppers*, derived from 1920s circus boards¹⁶, require participant and viewer¹⁷ to be compliant. *Astro-nought* and *Chances You Took* offer the viewer a chance to become the iconic 'career' characters of an Astronaut and Cowboy respectively. Viewers are permitted - for a brief moment - to be someone else, the 'someone' that perhaps they always wanted to be or maybe just a fleeting image of possibility. Elements of a 'reverse mask' are evident, the disguise of the façade allowing the viewer a chance to partake in a construction of an image skirting reality. The act of play positions the viewer as more than an audience and allows access to the transience of the moment.

G&P made me, it's a family tree, see and *Shoot!* require similar interactions and are based on sliding puzzles¹⁸ of the 1880s. The audience here is directly involved with the interplay of the image; each time a piece is moved, decisions and actions define the works and the challenge is to complete the image.



Plate 20: *G&P made me, it's a family tree, see*, 2012, 108cm x 82cm. Screen-print on plywood, glue, screws.

¹⁶ Individuals may position their face through the void of the board, completing the image and essentially transforming the participant into the character on the other side of the board.

¹⁷ Necessary to see the amusing result.

¹⁸ 'A sliding puzzle, sliding block puzzle, or sliding tile puzzle is a puzzle that challenges a player to slide usually flat pieces along certain routes (usually on a board) to establish a certain end-configuration. The fifteen puzzle is the oldest type of sliding block puzzle. It was invented by Noyes Chapman and created a puzzle craze in 1880' (Wikipedia, 2012b, para. 2)

Chances We Take as an exhibition acts as an access point to emotions and memories for the viewer; reminders of something once had and perhaps something still desired, each work providing an individual catalyst for a retained experience, a ‘choose your own adventure’¹⁹ of sorts, for it is the decisions and interactions of the audience which complete each work.

¹⁹ A series of books in which the reader (targeted at 10-14 age bracket) creates the path and outcome of a story by selecting from a range of possibilities.

Conclusion

If you want to make God laugh, make a plan

Chances We Take is intended to speak to its audience. Conversations will vary between individuals; some viewers may look to see themselves reflected, others their children or their family. The work may represent remembrance of the past or hope for the future. In critically approaching and researching the concepts of the work, I have found some clarity, personal maturity and made sense of my own struggle to grow up.

The research and accompanying works are a declaration of sorts. When I left high school at the age of 18 more-or-less “grown-up” in the eyes of society, I had no idea who I was, who I wanted to be or where I wanted to go. I didn’t realise that by putting one foot in front of the other, in purely *doing something*, I too would *become* something.

Grandma advises that I am not finished becoming ‘me’ however, the works mirror my own efforts to develop layer upon layer of myself, projecting memories of my childhood experiences that are specific to me but also find common purchase with most of their likely audience. In producing this MFA Research project I have added positive strata to myself: that of artist, printer, and student but also persistence, creativity, knowledge and growth. As a product of this experience I am learning to be comfortable with unforeseen circumstances and with the fluid trajectory of my own life. This experience like the prints produced is individual as is my understanding of it, formed only once with each positive layer and every mis-registration becoming part of my greater whole.

Chances We Take - Artwork Reference list

Series 1 The Poppers:

Chances you took

Astro-nought

Series 2 The Portraits:

Is it too late

Everything is enough

It hurts in here

Dear mum

'Out' I'm shouting 'Out'

*I was right (behind the door when you
knocked)*

Up again(st it)

Series 3 The Booth:

This is all I am

Heartbroken

I was wrong

Are you and I so unlike?

The big reveal

You can't win, 'cause time can't lose

Series 4 The Puzzles:

Shoot!

G & P made me, it's a family tree, see

Series 5 The Room:

It's a maze in here

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Image reference list

Plate 1: Fontane²⁰, J. (2012). *'Out', I'm shouting 'out'* [Screen-print on archival paper].

Plate 2: Fontane, J. (2010). *You've got it made with the rest of the toys* [Screen-print on archival paper].

Plate 3: Fontane, J. (2010). *Under the cover of night, you still saw me* [Screen-print on archival paper].

Plate 4: Fontane, J. (2012). *The big reveal* [Screen-print on archival paper].

Plate 5: Fontane, J. (2012). *Heartbroken* [Screen-print on archival paper].

Plate 6: Fontane, J. (2012). *Are you and I so unlike?* [Screen-print on archival paper].

Plate 7 & 8: Castle Grayskull (Filimation Associates, Mattel),

<http://www.cotygonzales.com/tag/he-man/>

http://www.retroactionfigures.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=42_12&products_id=2268

Plate 9: He-man battles Skeletor,

http://www.comicvine.com/skeletor/29-16424/all-images/108-214944/blog_the_same_sword/105-2463891/

²⁰ Note that the artist submits this paper and works using her legal name Jane Cleary. The artists exhibits and is also known as Jane Fontane, and this series of Masters works will be exhibited under this pseudonym.

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Plate 11: Shuster, J. (1941). *Superman: The Dailies* [comic book cover].

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Plate 15: Fontane, J. (2012). *I was wrong* [Screen-print on archival paper].

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Plate 17: Fontane, J. (2012). *Shoot!* [Screen-print on plywood].

Plate 18: Fontane, J. (2012). *G&P made me, it's a family tree, see* [Screen-print on plywood].

Plate 19: Fontane, J. (2012). *Chances you took* (left) & *Astro-nought* (right) [Screen-print on plywood].

Plate 20: Fontane, J. (2012). *G&P made me, it's a family tree, see* [Screen-print on plywood].

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