

Practitioner's Statement

Cutis and Skinscape

Flexural 1

Rachel Ey

I began my art exploration with a mind-map; I traced every part of my life that has influenced and shaped who I am today. Much of it was quite generic, like music, travel and family. However, the topic of skin stood out as unique. I came to this through my own life experiences; throughout my childhood I can't remember a time that I wasn't self-conscious of my skin. I have many moles, freckles and beauty spots, and am only just now appreciating the uniqueness of these imperfections. Quite literally I have never been "comfortable in my own skin". As well as this, my parents ended up in intensive care as a result of concrete like burns to their knees. My mother had to get skin grafts, and this process truly fascinated me. I began to see the skin as a live organ rather than just our outer shells. It's adaptability to be transferred from my mother's hip to her knee was unimaginable for a child of my age.

In my first two works, I explored the magnification of skin, and skin cells. By first painting these patterns in with masking fluid, then painting over this with water colour, I had to peel back the dried masking fluid to reveal the white paper underneath. Through this process, I was reminded of the layers of skin that we have covering our body, which can be, in a way, "peeled back" to reveal what is underneath. The elasticity of the masking fluid made this seem even more realistic, taking on the texture and uniqueness of true skin. The first piece, *Cutis*, was particularly hard to finish as my dog managed to walk over it with muddy paws and ruined the white surface about the top of the skin. I was able to cover this with a deep pink maroon watercolour that fades out; which compliments and contrasts the colours and texture that are created underneath the surface of the skin. This step was a huge learning curve as that which initially seemed a disaster and negated many hours of work actually forced me to change it in a way which I feel improves my painting and makes it more interesting.

The second of these paintings, *Skinscape*, is based on a single skin cell. I interpreted each detail of a magnified cell to create a painting which could be interpreted as an aerial landscape. I like the ambiguous nature of these paintings as they can be both interpreted by the audience as objects other than skin and to a large degree is left up to the individual to draw upon their own experiences and interpret works their own way. This second painting took a long time to complete because some areas, like the blue cells, had to be covered with masking fluid and then painted, then layered once again with masking fluid to create the intricate patterning with the wash-over colour. The title was influenced by the ambiguity too as I did not want to completely give away what the work was about.

These first two paintings are heavily influenced by the work of Japanese contemporary artist Yayoi Kusama, in particular her dot paintings and repetitious, almost obsessive Infinity Networks. The boldness, structure, and spontaneity found in all her works guided me when I interpreted the images of skin. By using the repetition of specific details like the blue cells in *Skinscape*, and the line work in *Cutis*, I was able to make these painting cohesive throughout, which is what Kusama does in many of her works. My paintings are also reminiscent of some contemporary Australian Aboriginal art. Within many of their painting one will find hundreds of dots, interlaced with symbolic figures, which may tell secret sacred creation stories or may depict land and country. I found it fascinating the parallels which could be drawn between my work, Kusama's, and the work of many indigenous painters. This made me reflect upon the interconnected way in which everything in the world, micro or macro, can be one and the same.

For the next part of my body of work, I began by looking more at the surface of the skin. This eventually led me to investigate the skin's innate texture. When looking at my own hand, I was reminded how unique our skin and fingerprints are. I wanted to explore this idea; that the folds and creases of our skin created by a lifetime of movements make us unique and help form our identity as we age. In response to this, I created four sketched drawings of hands. Each hand is expressive and different to the next - this was achieved by overlaying contour lines which gave each hand form and depth. All four of these drawings are slightly different; some lines are more "curly" than others whilst others are more structured and rigid. I called the collection *Flexural (2)*, which is the medical term for skin flexures and folds.

The portrait work of artist Fleur Elise Noble was a major influence when I created these works; her freedom of line work and ability to express minute details with mere scribbled expert let built up on each other guided me as u tried to give my hands as much detail and expression as possible with loose brush strokes.