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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Meta Praxis

Craft Practice: A Way of Being

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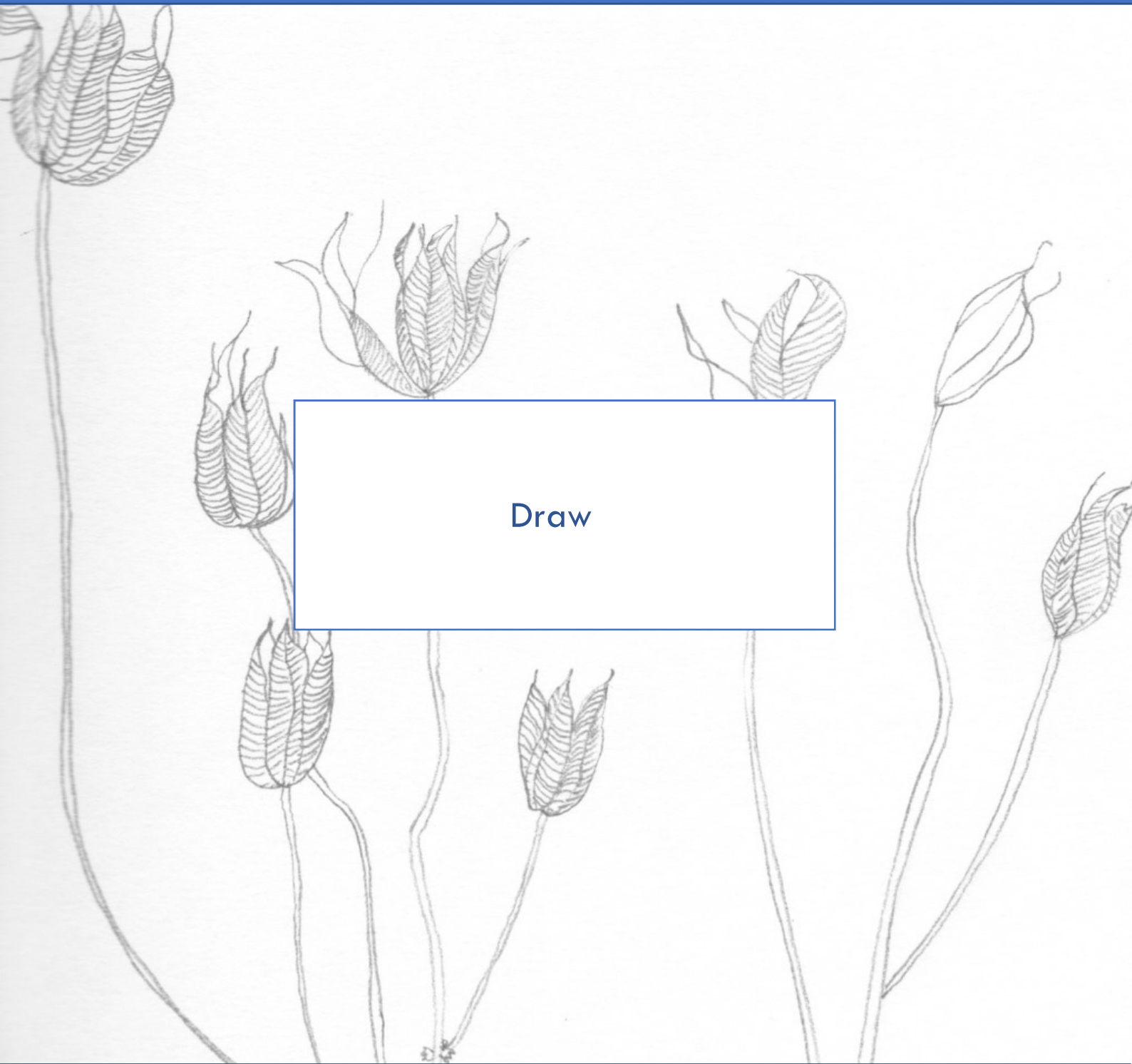
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Draw

Draw Breath

Observe the hush
Amid your deckle edged
Lines and contours.

Allow me to be still.
Bury deep among your folds and creases,
Littered by White Clover, Sea Campion
Eye bright and Knapweed,
Gather the
Bog cotton,
Watch the lichen grow,

Here I can breathe.

Observe the mountains,
Giant dormant reptilian
Mottled skin of heather
And grass.
Bare your story, tell tales with
Thoughts planted in the machair.
Listen while
Myths and dreams fuse.

Here I can taste the clouds,

Watch out the red smelted soil
Smell the burnt and the bleached
How deep do we trek to seek calm,
Leave scars
Tell of legends where we cannot

Remember or even imagine what has been lost.

Draw

A primary expression, the simplicity of its nature, a pencil faint, dark, light, deep, tentative, secure, reversible. Learning how to look, to stare, to begin to relate form, spaces, distance, movement, allows us to be completely in the moment, no time for minds to race ahead, the quality of line perceived and produced directly relates to the focus and desire to enter into a dance between tools and subject. No matter the extent of how wild and carefree or how detailed and tight, only through practice can my mind be trained to enable magic to emerge.

Sometimes, there is no idea of what will emerge but knowing that just starting can calm one's mind, settle your hand and an excitement will convey that a discovery is about to be made.

Every discovery - next time, right pencil, right time of day, right frame of mind - informs, liberating a sense of adventure, knowing even if all falls apart a new awareness will have been created.

My drawings are my 'now'. By being in the present moment-by-moment, only by letting go of preconceptions and tensions, and allowing the mind and hand to be at harmony with each other, can the movement and rhythm beat the same tune: lightness of touch, speed, tensions accorded time and space, pressure or evanescent marks as brief as a fireflies' light, let the marks dance and play.

The deftness of touch can be as tuneful as a virtuoso violinist, the movement works between the space of intuition, observation, and playful intent. By allowing those elements to intermingle, collide and co-exist, the practice takes its own course and breath into line and awareness brings unity, creativity, a deep core of primary expression. Whilst drawing is to be with the air, the tool, mind and object breathing lines onto paper, meditation uses breath, awareness of the mind's narrative to see and feel perspective, patterns and bring the practice to the direct experience of knowing. Drawing for me is a contemplative inner practice of observation.

One can learn through practice, drawing skills, the preliminary study medium, to satisfy the representation of a subject; but, to allow for deeper, emotional marks to appear, the practice of drawing requires more staring, more understanding, more observation touched with skill to add a quality of transformative feeling. By letting go of fear, by allowing the unconscious to take over while staying absolutely connected to that moment, I find something as yet undiscovered will become known.

It is a private occupation; only mind and tool as one, at its purest level, it is an insight and record of intent and vulnerability. How often do I take pleasure looking at sketchbooks and the

workings of the mind as much as the finished work? There we find the fragility, the humanity, the questions and the guidance to lead us out into the work itself.

There is no permanence, nothing to judge, just a tumbling of ideas falling, emerging, and reacting between tool and hand. Mistakes, scribbles, finely drawn concepts all contribute to an understanding.

'Goethe' Goethe on Art:

*"I have been recently fortunate, said Goethe, in buying excellent drawing by famous masters very cheaply. Such drawings are invaluable, not only because they give us the artist's mental idea in all its purity, but also because they put us into his mood at the moment of creation."*¹

I draw to exercise seeing, to dissolve air and breath into silence, to concentrate on a performance with hand and tool, alone awakening a space to connect me to my subject. I look, and look intently, my mind wants representation, my body wants life, my tool needs encouragement. Practice makes memory of perception, memory of action, we enter the act with diverse intention, one of playfulness, or of depiction, or of desire, we aim to be visual orator, conservator, a voice of linear beliefs weaving a captivating quality of light into shadow revealing what is there: with softness, pressure, a textural ballet of tone, the mind of the creator is laid bare. Drawing can reach out and touch the liminal; with the grace or power of lines, we explore what is between, what is beyond, an evocation of what we perceive as represented through our eyes. It can touch us like breathing life onto paper, a performance of the non-verbal, a connection of mind, hand, dreams, reality. I record and depict, dissect in spontaneity, an immediacy to 'Educate': educe "to draw out".

Drawing: Making: Walking

*Klee- The line that develops freely, and in its own time goes out for a walk. (1961:105)*²

Perhaps as I make marks on my paper, metal, choice of material, I am using these as:

*"...conduits of inscribed activity" as in "Lines", A walk by the Foi of Papua New Guinea a walk is never just a walk, it is to look out for fruiting trees, or a quality rattan or edible insect larvae."*³

As I make marks, inscribe my thoughts into the materials, I have chosen to embed a moment and a memory. It is an evocation of

¹ Eckermann, 1998

² Ingold, 2007, p. 76

³ Ibid., p. 78

all the processes that lead to that time, which transfer to the piece which by turn becomes dynamic in its own way: by shape, proportion, design, and colour. Craftsmanship is the expression of all processes of the artist leading to that moment. Michael Lloyd Master silversmith and Interviewee for my film, "Contemplating Making", wrote for his exquisite exhibition, "Twelve Vessels":

*"Drawing is a fundamental necessity for a designer; it is a first-hand experience of the beauty of line and form, the poetry of proportion, an imbibing of a sense of wonder and a sense of bearing witness; it is a discipline which requires a level of concentration that brings the draftsman into a closer relationship with that being drawn, than the casual observer, however appreciative, can experience."*⁴

Therefore, as a result of that integration of this process I am transformed by the making of it, the viewing of the piece, the wearer or recipient, the users of are transformed just by being with it. I am altered by this interaction, my intention as an artist to nurture, add beauty, warmth, to amuse, to intrigue, to stimulate. If the work is done with right intention, this transformation will happen.

My own media is jewellery, and I have always used drawing as a practice, my foundational primary media for preliminary study. I have known through experience within a career and life of making and designing, the emotional affects jewellery can have. The preliminaries that led to its creation, drawing, acute observation can transmute expression and different aspects of human experience into a piece and, consequentially have a profound affect and inspiration for the maker, the giver and the wearer.

My interests have always been in the psychological effect the creative process and the visual image can have on people. I attended several experiential workshops led by an experienced Art Therapist. We were asked to talk briefly about ourselves and say something meaningful and personal. As we went around the room, stories emerged which were astonishing, sad, adventurous, surprising, even ordinary.

I did not expect what happened next. An unknown, elegant woman began to talk of her life, which began in Scotland, how she had just returned to Scotland after a life lived with her husband as emigrants to Canada. The story unfolded and, as she related their lives together, she was undoing a necklace from around her neck and continued to hold it in her hands without making reference to it. Their adventures included many excursions and on one such outing her husband had given her, as a gift, this necklace, bought originally in Scotland, as a gesture

⁴ Lloyd, 2010, Introduction

of love and homeland. He had carried the necklace everywhere with him until a suitable time to present his wife with it. This occurred at a particular waterfall and renowned beauty spot. The necklace became a symbol of their life, the stream of love they had for each other and the life they had chosen of adventure. Now that her husband had passed away it had taken on a new significance and become her most treasured possession.

I had designed and made that very necklace, as a fairly new, young graduate, and although I had no recollection of the specific exchange, there was no doubt it was mine. It was very emotional, to know I had created something that took on its own story, not one I had envisaged; it was a moment of extreme joy and emotion. Later, in private, I exposed myself as the originator of her piece, and of course it was quite a moment for both of us. We were simply changed as a result of that coincidence in a beautiful way.

As stated in “Lines”:

“Drawing freehand, I take my line for a walk. Likewise, the wayfarer, in his perambulations, lays a trail on the ground in the form of footprints, paths and tracks. ‘Aboriginal people of the Australian Central Desert (observed by Roy Wager) notes that the “life of a person is the sum of his tracks the total inscription of his movements, something that can be traced out along the ground.”⁵

Perhaps the life of the craftsman can be noted as the sum of their tracks, marks, objects embedded with memory, skill, details, mistakes, a trace of a life embraced through and within effort, a journey of discovery, a life of learning and giving. Those moments are captured, and a narrative begins. We create a connection to the work, send it forth and relationships continue.

Stories have always been our way of being, before the written word, narrative carried facts, geographical information on landscapes, traditional ways of living, symbols and captured imaginations determining culture and practical resources. Stories change as we change, meandering, turning, adapting, but always defining habitat, culture, politics, leisure, capturing history in that very moment.

During the making process, I am telling a story, using my hands and materials to join others and myself to the story, which leads to that time. This story may give prominence to hand skills, or technology, traditional materials or smart materials, ritual, celebration, or just to evoke or awaken the senses. All stories tell of our human behaviours, of birth and death, of humour, of greed, of pleasure, of family, of ethics and relations; they

⁵ Ingold, 2007, p. 79

expose feelings and contain tributaries to be travelled, or enjoyed, or used for the purpose intended by its maker, originator.

“The things of which the story tells, let us say, do not so much exist or occur; each is a moment of ongoing activity. These things, in a word, are not objects but topics. Lying at the confluence of actions and responses, every topic is identified by its relations to the things that paved the way for it, that presently concur with it and that follow it into the world. Here the meaning of the ‘relation’ has to be understood quite literally, not as a connection between pre-located entities but as a path traced through the terrain of lived experience.”⁶

I am not advocating just the ‘ingredients’ of a narrative of aesthetics and beauty, although that is of course a valid and recognised genre of craftsmanship. Indeed, many artists use their work for political activist statements, reasons to shock, even abhor the viewer, as occasionally happens within ‘The Jewellery Activists’, an influential group of political statement jewellery artists, but these genres also carry the anecdote of that journey and activates a process of thought which engages the audience, user, wearer in that particular social engagement.

Manufacturing techniques have, if born of an artist’s intention, the ability to carry a narrative; although, within mass industrial scale, that story switches to a primacy of function, technique, material costs and worth, status and practicality. We switch from primacy of sensual touch to one of measured functionality. We are touched by emotional responses and awed by technological progress.

Each technological breakthrough carries the advancement of our abilities and conveys a story of development, adaptability, intellect and an aesthetic determined by the collective consciousness of that moment.

If I consider that making has similar evocations to walking, a moving, lived experience, an immersive activity, foraging to enliven senses, imbuing them into materials, it is a basic act. We are clearing a space into which thought and story can move.

Ingold continues, arguing the difference of imbuing and measuring:

“In a thesis on walking, movement and perception Wendy Gunn poses the question, ‘How do the traces of a footprint in the sand differ from records of walking measured by the instruments of gait analysis? The scientific study of gait treats walking as a mechanical process of locomotion, and records the bodily kinesis of experimental subjects by plotting the

⁶ Ingold, 2007, p. 90

*position of joints at regular intervals and joining the points of the plot to form a graph. Although the resulting lines are continuous, these lines are connectors and therefore devoid of movement. They are lines of locomotion and not of movement, and go across, from point to point, rather than along the trail of the walker's own way of life. There is more movement Gunn observes in a single footprint than in all of those lines put together. Likewise, there is more movement in a trace of handwriting than in a whole page of printed text.*⁷

By hand-making or creating a narrative alive with conscious deliberation, design and, while embracing technology, adding accuracy and intimacy, we are also determining movement: a footprint in the sand, or a finger mark.

Mass manufacture can create a separation from the original creative force, a distance away from the initial vitality, narrative and footprint, but it can also become like a record of intent, a printed text of the object and take its own motivation out into the world. As a labour or cost saving process has its own validity, it changes embedded emotion into quantity and therefore dilutes its essence.

Sketchbooks for the artist maker is the equivalent to 'walking' the journey, of recording a journey, to stop and select, observe, give weight and light to details. It is the mind's trails and traces according to the originator. If a line is like taking a walk, then we can look at its importance.

Walking is part of a meditation technique and it is also examined as an inherent practice for the creative process for some artists. Julia Cameron, in 'The Artists Way', eloquently portrays walking as part of practice:

*"Nothing brings home the beauty and power of the world that we live in like walking. Moving into our bodies, we embody the truth that as artists we are out to make a "body of work", which means we must encompass more than each day's march."*⁸

The sketch book as part of practice may take many forms, paper and pencil, card, dimensional models, clay, fabric, experimental pieces with an acknowledgement of the movement required to embrace the story intended. Frank Gehry, architect, would find using paper, card, duct tape, Sellotape, all materials with opposite qualities to the titanium and building blocks his final design would use. He could explore unintended curves, and shadows, angles without the constraints and precision imposed with metal, steel and concrete, and allow a free flow of thought and movement to the work. The technical material function was

⁷ Ingold 2007, p. 93

⁸ Cameron, 2002, p. 2

changed to allow the trajectory of a fast, surging, free flow of thought and movement, to allow unexpected spaces to evolve. His model of 'Maggie's Centre' Dundee lives now in the V&A Dundee, the fusion of childlike play, manipulation of folds, coherence of space coupled with intelligent knowledge of materials and knowledge, through personal experience, of the requirement for intimacy, hope, comfort for the intended users of his work – those experiencing cancer.

By letting go of how materials should behave, and preconceptions to allow, walking into and with the process, we create movement not monitoring. The writer Janette Winterson digs deep with words to explain the responses we can get through being with art, also using the analogy of drawing:

“Art is cellular. The emotions it draws upon are fundamental and not always available to the ducts around the eyes. By re-moulding the reality, we assume to be objective, art releases to us, realities otherwise hidden. The soul Remembering how she felt, but what she felt Remembering not, retains an obscure sense of possible sublimity Against daily insignificance art recalls to us possible sublimity. It cannot do this if it is merely a reflection of actual life. Our real lives are somewhere else. Art finds them.”⁹

Drawing reaches out, treads pathways within encounter, a discovery of self, of grace, a search or connection to lived understanding, the in-between, the edges, the liminal. It is the visual evocation of movement, exhalation on paper; we can return to the breath constantly as a reminder of where we are. I talk of getting lost in the process, fusing with my work so completely, becoming a 'flow' state, where the awareness becomes so focused and our attention is acute, the enmeshed coherence of mind, tool/hand and environment form a movement of oneness. To do so, I let go of pretention, allow guidance from my collective experience, tune to our emotional state and let the drawing reveal itself. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Psychologist, on his theory of flow:

“I developed a theory of optimal experience based on the concept of -flow- the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.”¹⁰

Letting, go, getting lost, being alert, meditating - let us examine these traits as influential mind states.

⁹ Winterson, 1995, p. 58

¹⁰ Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 4

“The question then is how to get lost. Never to get lost is not to live, not to know how to get lost brings you to destruction, and somewhere in the terra incognita in between lies a life of discovery. Quoting Thoreau, for whom navigating life and wilderness and meaning are the same art, and who slips subtly from one to the other in the course of a sentence. ‘It is surprising and memorable, as well as valuable, experience to get lost in the woods anytime’ he wrote in Walden. ‘Not until we are completely lost or turned around - for a man only needs to be turned around once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost - do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of nature. Not until we are lost, in other words until we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realise where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.’”¹¹

In getting lost, I unearth my true nature. In getting lost, I have need to find my connectors, I need to learn to see, feel, examine, measure and find by re-igniting our discovering paths to a sense of freedom and space. It is there, laid bare to my emotions, that I find a way.

I am often lost in thought; I have been lost in wilderness. Both force a new way of looking, a re-orientation of the familiar, re-navigating, de-cluttering, bringing into focus. As I draw, I hope to enter a continuum of reconnaissance to awareness, a flux of mind and pencil, translating with the use of my tool signals and form. To do that, for me, requires cognizance to be released into movement, a translation of perception, desiring to capture a transient moment beyond representation to a place of harmony. Can drawing be my meditation?

In meditation, we are looking into the nature of mind. It is a different criterion, watching the reel of thoughts come and go, becoming aware of the nature of reality and its complexity. Meditation in a Buddhist tradition is the teaching method of impermanence and non-attachment towards enlightenment. Its teachings show us that the nature of reality is in constant motion and much of our trials and tribulations are believing we can grasp onto things. It is the pragmatic practice of doing; and, within the doing, within the experience, it reveals itself. It teaches us to be comfortable in uncertainty. Pema Chödrön writes:

“The foundation of prajnaparamita (practice) is mindfulness, an open-ended inquiry into our experience. We question without the intention of finding permanent solutions. We cultivate a mind that is ready and inquisitive, not satisfied with limited or biased views.”¹²

Drawing, for me, is an immersive action; I can get lost in the ‘praxis’ but remain alert to my actions. I can enter a state of

¹¹ Solnit, 2005, p. 15

¹² Chödrön, 2001, p. 94

'flow' where I am in total absorption, and I am letting go of pre-existing tension, creating a space of inquiry. I am absolutely in the moment of just being. We brush towards all these traits, touching elements of flow, meditation, mindfulness. However, our intention is to create, not to reach enlightenment, to do the best drawing we are able at that time, the conditions of which determine its potential.

Getting lost, flow, meditation all metonyms for practice, contemplation, learning and openness, ultimately revealing the connectivity of origin, intention, observer.

Drawing has a unique quality of observation, of a practical skill which potentially opens opportunity through a 'Meta Praxis' - to dream, communicate, transcribe memory - making visible our abstract and imagination. Sensual, immediate, minimal and physical, it teaches us to look. It is childlike and sophisticated, primitive and profound; it is a primary expression of ontology. I can learn and contribute to the nature of my being.

I draw as a meditation, as a way of letting go, contemplating, being with whatever comes. It is a solitary activity even if surrounded by others. Mostly, I draw outside; I settle with silence, calming a loud mindset with a feeling of the wind, the light, picking up detail of texture, decay, growth. Mistakes, frustrations, rain splodges, insect trails, I accept them all. These drawings are, for me, a warming up to see. A ritual 'preceding making'. They are my happy place.

I also make more technical drawings for my practice, from scribbles to finished watercolours, often a gift as part of a commission. There are many efficient, proficient, exact methods of delivering technical images of portraying jewellery. I find the method of choosing beautiful textured watercolour paper, along with the personality of a pencil line, a dimensional exploration of intent. Hand tints of colour portray and add a hand-crafted signature and vitality to the drawing.

"Drawings are not simply things to look at; they are a direct form of positive communication. Part of the reason they communicate so directly is drawing belongs to everyone. Acts of drawing occur all the time- someone applying eyeliner, doodling while on the phone, or making someone a map on the back of an envelope. We are all mark makers."¹³

Through drawing I am able to interpret lived experience visually, emotionally, aesthetically. The many routes of drawing teach me about representation, illusion, perspective, grace, politics, culture - all connectors to the intellect, the body, the senses, the spiritual - a correspondence within and towards my vital human traits.

¹³ Kovats, 2007, Introduction

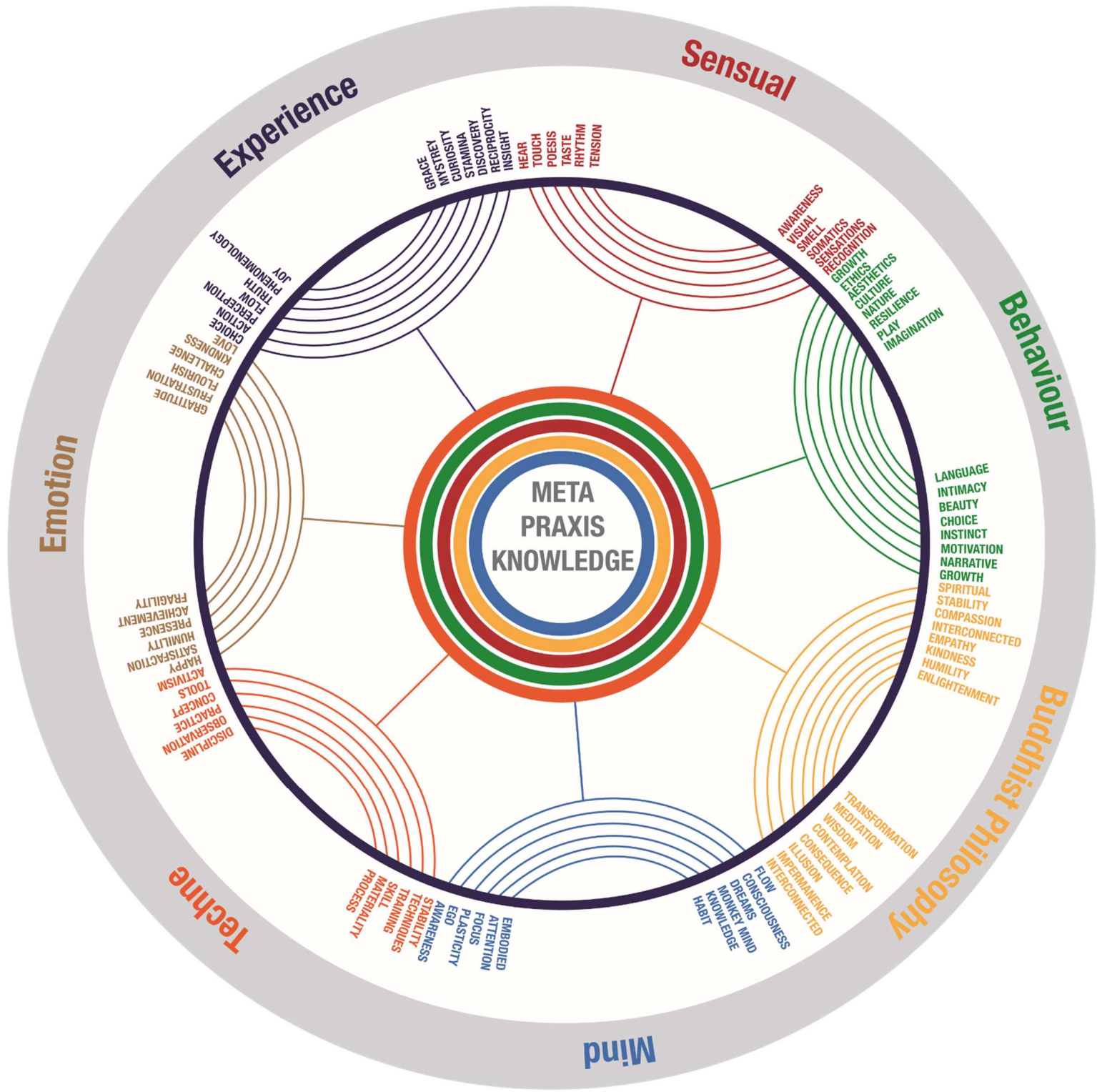
Meta Praxis

'Meta Praxis' is the potential for human flourishing through an awareness of practice and the value of making craft as an explicit knowledge pathway. Within and beyond the practice, this pathway has the potential to put us in touch with the essential vitality of life and its human value.

The exposition and articulation of 'Meta Praxis' and its potential is the original contribution to knowledge. This research leads us through interdisciplinary schools of thought (craft practice, Buddhism, anthropology, and neuroscience) to make connections and to set out why and how making craft is an explicit knowledge pathway and what is its importance for human thriving.

Chart

The chart represents possible reflections, encounters and human traits explored within the 'reflections'; each has multiple, personal and potential pathways represented in the chart. As the reader engages with the writing in each text, it is possible to explore these routes of knowledge and relate them specifically to the idea of 'Meta Praxis'. The texts are the reflections of practice, with relevant encounters affirmed through an interdisciplinary approach.



**META PRAXIS
CRAFT PRACTICE: A WAY OF BEING**

