

Body of Work

Our body of work is one of great complexity and possibility. The body, through its very own existence in the world belongs and experiences¹. In doing so, the body hears and can be heard; it sees and can be seen; it touches and can be touched. Belonging and experience are entangled within the body as a sentient being². These inextricably entwined aspects of being and belonging shape, and are in turn shaped by our experiences and encounters with self and other. It is this interactivity between self and other that our artists and teachers in **Body of Work** speak to, for and from in ways that for some may be reassuring and for others unsettling.

When we permit ourselves to linger in being unsettled, we open ourselves to the understandings of significance and consequence that can emerge when learning is uncomfortable. This is where we may come to recognise where the threshold of our comfort lies. So many of us – young and old alike - are perplexed by our bodies, and so often we grapple with confusion or discomfort about our bodies, in our bodies; in isolation. There is a place for uncomfortable learning, where individuals can speak together, create together and come together; sharing personal learning and encouraging each other to re-examine their own approaches to teaching and learning. As teachers, learners and artists, we need to keep revisiting where we situate ourselves and our bodies within this story, and challenge our comfort zones to ensure we remain open to cultivating healthy perceptions of self, as inextricably bound to and situated within our bodies. The body is a site of practice where mutual respect and understanding can be discovered through difficult journeys and uncomfortable learning is often a part of that process³.

In our art classrooms, our teachers grapple with navigating the challenges and maximising the benefits that digital mediums and communications create for our young people. We seek to cultivate positive learning journeys for young people who are integrating online and digital technology into their everyday lives in increasingly complex ways⁴. How bodies, and perceptions of bodies, become implicated in this fast evolving space, is now creating increasingly complex challenges for teachers and schools to navigate, and paradoxically presents a source of anxiety and yet unprecedented opportunities for powerful learning.

The Internet, and its' associated digital technologies, has created a space and mediums through which many curiosities and propensities can be indulged; and it is a space that is proving exceedingly difficult for care-providers, parents and guardians to exercise protective measures⁵. Attempts to impose regulatory restrictions are not only being undermined by network architecture, but also suffer the unintended consequence of encouraging evasion and subterfuge of increasingly ingenious children⁶. A recent study in the UK around how young people are encountering the body in digital space suggests that the average age for first exposure to extreme pornographic content is 9 – 12 years old⁷. Closer to home, a study conducted by the Australia Institute⁸ indicates that children's exposure to and consumption of destructive body discourses within pornography has the capacity to intensify investments in problematic constructions of gender and sexuality, and cultivate obsessive focus on bodies and sexual acts, and tolerance for sexual violence⁹. Cultural anxieties have also been articulated in recent decades, with fears being grounded in long histories of efforts to 'protect children'¹⁰. Often glossed over in moral panics about young people's sexual activity is the failure to acknowledge that ultimately, most young people move into adulthood as healthy and responsible

¹ Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. (C. Smith, Trans.). London: Routledge.

² McMahan, J., & McGannon, K. R. (2016). Whose stories matter? Re-vising, reflecting and re-discovering a researcher's embodied experience as a narrative inquirer. *Sport, education and society*, 21(1), 96-113.

³ Simpson, A., & Moore, S.J. (2008). Uncomfortable Learning: Connecting to Country, *Synergy*, 28.

⁴ Crofts, T., Lee, M., McGovern, A., & Milivojevic, S. (2016). *Sexting and young people*. Springer.

⁵ Stauffer, S. M. (2014). The dangers of unlimited access: Fiction, the Internet and the social construction of childhood. *Library & Information Science Research*, 36(3), 154-162.

⁶ Murray, A. (2007.) *The Regulation of Cyberspace: Control in the Online Environment*. Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish.

⁷ Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (2016). Children may become 'desensitised' to damaging impact of online porn. Retrieved from <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/news/children-may-become-%E2%80%98desensitised%E2%80%99-damaging-impact-online-porn>

⁸ Flood, M. (2007). Exposure to pornography among youth in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 43(1), 45-60.

⁹ Flood, M. (2002). Pathways to Manhood: The Social and Sexual Ordering of Young Men's Lives, *Health Education Australia* 2: 24–30.

¹⁰ Heins, M. (2001). *Not in Front of the Children: 'Indecency', Censorship, and the Innocence of Youth*. New York: Hill and Wang.

sexual beings¹¹. It is imperative that we be proactive in equipping our children with the diagnostic skill and understanding to recognise and resist destructive body discourses, and support them to encounter their own and other's bodies in ways that are positive, healthy and nourishing. **Body of Work** encourages the audience to reflect upon the various cultural, social, personal, spiritual, emotional and physical meanings and agendas we embed within and ascribe to the body, and how the body performs as a site of and for learning, teaching and expression.

We are fortunate to have a national guiding curriculum that recognises the criticality of self and social awareness as key general capabilities¹². Within the general capabilities, teachers and schools are required to cultivate learning experiences within their subjects that support students' development of self and social awareness. In supporting teachers to facilitate learning experiences that foster behaviours and dispositions inherent to healthy self and social awareness, we can ultimately position our children to develop critical understandings and diagnostic skills to discern healthy and positive ways to encounter their own and others bodies. The Arts and our art teachers have an integral role to play here, as it is in Arts learning contexts that imaginations can be opened up to new perspectives and to identify alternatives to dominant discourses. The connections that might be made in and through the Arts are experiential, where encounters with the world can become newly informed¹³ (Greene, 1995).

You can say really important things in a piece of art. It changes your perception of the world. You centre yourself and things pour out¹⁴

Where provision of Arts learning is meaningful and continuous, has administrative supportive, and enlightened teachers, Arts experiences are increasingly recognised to bring richness and depth to learning and instruction that is critical to healthy development of self¹⁵. Art education in Tasmania finds itself in an exciting period of purposeful growth and forward vision, where teachers around the state recognise the rich opportunities Arts learning provides to help our young people cultivate and reconcile healthy perceptions of self and other. In the era of sexting and revenge porn, teachers and students today are navigating a complex, ever changing and confronting technological terrain that has the potential to profoundly impact upon the ways we encounter and perceive the body.

So, here our bodies stand together at the threshold of critical learning that has the potential to be uncomfortable and to unsettle us. From here, do we take each other's hands in our own, or avert our gaze? Might we not redirect conversation from one of fear, avoidance and denial to bold confrontation and support for our teachers and children to embrace healthy decisions, as they make personally, socially and culturally significant meaning and sense of the multifarious representations of bodies they encounter? For this to happen, what needs to be in place for teachers, artists and learners to best challenge and counter negative or destructive depictions of bodies and self? It is hoped that the conversations that unfold around our **Body of Work** will linger in this complex space.

It is about standing and embodying the work. It is about revealing oneself taking risks, and accepting and embracing the vulnerability inherent in those risks. It is about moving away from a sleepy, protective posture of being folded up, or folded into oneself, and moving toward a tall, open, awake, and graceful stance¹⁶

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¹¹ Roker, D. & J. Coleman (1998). Introduction, pp. 1–20 in J. Coleman and D. Roker (eds) *Teenage Sexuality: Health, Risk and Education*. Amsteldijk, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers.

¹² *Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority* (2013). General Capabilities – Personal and Social capability; Critical and Creative thinking; Ethical understanding; Intercultural understanding. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/languages/general-capabilities>

¹³ Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

¹⁴ Fiske, E. (Ed.) (1999). *Champions of change: The impact of the arts on learning*. Washington DC: Arts Partnership & President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

¹⁵ Fiske, E. Ibid

¹⁶ Fiske, E. Ibid