

TRANSFORMATIONS

40 Years of the Open Foundation Program



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transforming lives – transforming visions

An exhibition of art and illustration celebrating 40 Years of the Open Foundation Program

At the University Gallery, Callaghan Campus 5 to 15 November 2014

At the Library, Ourimbah Campus 17 to 29 November 2014



2014 marks the 40th

Anniversary of the establishment of the Open Foundation Program at the University of Newcastle. The English Language and Foundation Studies Centre is proud to celebrate this significant milestone in the life of the University of Newcastle and its communities with this magnificent exhibition entitled 'Transformations'. The theme signifies the profound and life changing experience of staff and students alike as we work together to assist students to achieve their goals through their learning journeys.

We are grateful to the generous support provided by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Caroline McMillen, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Andrew Parfitt, and the University of Newcastle Gallery under the leadership of Gillean Shaw. However, it is to our former students, now such accomplished artists, to whom we say our most heartfelt thanks. Without their willing participation, their creativity and their passion, we could not have mounted this transformative exhibition.

In many ways their stories, contained within, are illustrative of the stories of all Open Foundation students who have found their path and their passion through the Open Foundation.

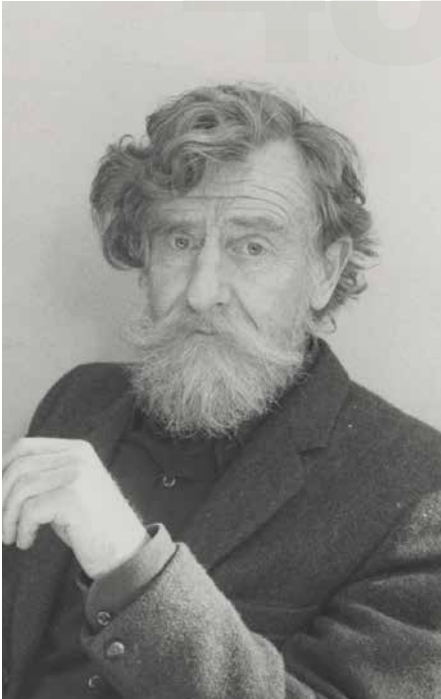
– Associate Professor Seamus Fagan

Director

English Language and Foundation Studies Centre

University of Newcastle, NSW.

40 *years ago*



Dr Brian Smith, founder of the Open Foundation Program in 1974. Photograph courtesy of Cultural Collections, Auchmuty Library.

the University of Newcastle embarked upon a bold educational experiment to facilitate access for local adults who wanted to go to university but did not have an entry qualification. In 1974, the Open Foundation was offered at the Callaghan campus as a pilot face to face enabling program, and 80 students were accepted for enrolment.¹ Since then the program has been offered every year, and this year, just over 2,220 students enrolled in a program. Although the original form and structure of the program has remained, the Open Foundation has not only grown in numbers but it has also changed in line with a consistent concern for the mature-age student experience, especially around breadth and relevance of course offerings and flexibility of mode and location. The Open Foundation is now available in a variety of modes - part time, intensive and part time online - and is offered on-campus at Callaghan and the Central Coast, and on-line with on-campus support at Port Macquarie.

The Open Foundation was developed by Dr Brian Smith, then Head of the Department of Community Programmes. Since its inception the program has been a significant part of the University's relationship with its regions. Dr Smith believed the program to be particularly relevant in a community with extremely low participation rates in higher education.

Dr Smith's vision has resulted in a major resource to the communities of the Hunter and Central Coast – and more recently a wider community through the online mode of delivery – and approximately 36,000 students have studied in the program. Most of the students who successfully complete the program go on to undergraduate study at the University of Newcastle. Students have been awarded bachelor, honours, masters and doctoral degrees and graduates of the program can be found in all the professions.

In the early years the program offered a limited number of courses, and prepared students for entry to the Bachelor of Arts degree. Over time courses

in Geography, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Visual Art, Aboriginal Studies, Sociology and Environmental Studies were offered, and students have been accepted into all Faculties of the University. The Open Foundation Visual Art course was first offered in 1991, with local artist, Dr Gordon Rintoul, as its first Course Coordinator. This popular course has been offered continuously since that time.

The exhibition “Transformations” showcases the work of nine students who studied Visual Art as part of the Open Foundation program, and who have gone on not only to study the Bachelor of Fine Art or the Bachelor of Natural History Illustration, but also to exhibit their work professionally. Among this group are distinguished University Medallists and PhDs. Their transformative educational and artistic experiences can be thought of as representative of all of their fellow students in the Visual Art course and indeed in the Open Foundation program itself.

The achievements of the nine artists and illustrators in this exhibition, and those of all of the Open Foundation students over the last 40 years, are celebrated within the exhibition theme of Transformations. Time and time again over the years thousands of adult Open Foundation students have gone forward to meet the changes and challenges they encountered as they sought to transform their lives in a positive and life-enhancing way through higher education. Invariably this advance transformed perspectives, meanings and identities and enabled personal creative expression to occur.² Thus transformation was and is at the centre of the educational experience, just as it is when artists transform materials to create new forms, structures and meanings in art, and as it is when we invite the transformations that art itself can inspire in us. In this way you the viewers of this exhibition are encouraged to go forward to meet the images and illustrations before you and allow them to transform you.

– Associate Professor Josephine May and Dr Keryl Kavanagh

¹ Anon, 'Courses for Adults', University News, No 78, 28 February 1974, p.5. [online accessed 20 September 2014].

² See for example, Cathy Stone and Sarah O'Shea, *Transformations and Self Discovery: Stories of Women Returning to Education*, Common Ground Publication, 2012.

Annemarie Murland



ABOVE TOP: *Once We Were Fishermen I*
2014, oil on canvas on board, 60 x 60 cm

ABOVE: *Once We Were Fishermen 2014*,
oil on canvas on board, 60 x 60 cm

OPPOSITE: *Colour as Form – Landscape*
2013, oil on paper on board, 79 x 53 cm

Higher education came to me later in life. Born in Glasgow, 1962, I migrated to Australia in 1990. As part of the process of migration I sought to redefine myself in this new space, Australia. A space and place where I did not know or recognise myself, education provided a gateway to renegotiate my identity and sense of belonging.

I entered the enabling program at the University of Newcastle, 2002, which provided a unique space and experience of learning. Questions of knowing, meaning and understanding were addressed and answered through acquired knowledge; dialogue, discussion and studio based learning activities. During this time I found my visual and literal voice, which facilitated the continuity of my academic journey.

I am currently an accomplished artist, researcher and educator at the University of Newcastle, School of Creative Arts. I have an exemplary academic record, receiving a University Medal and Faculty Medal for my Honours Degree submission and earned a scholarship for the duration of my PhD candidature at the University of Newcastle (completed 2009). The thesis, *Migration, Memory and Landscape: Recontextualising Personal Experience through Contemporary Abstract Painting* critically examined the complex interactions between the phenomena of felt experience and the visual as a vehicle for finding material form. Along with a formal written exegesis, the creative component incorporated poetry, documentary photography, video and an exhibition of drawings and paintings as an installation. This cross-disciplinary approach proved particularly effective in providing a visually literate means to explore a personal migrant experience within a contemporary global context. Encouraging ways to express this interface has subsequently been a core concern of my teaching and research endeavours to date. My studio-based research seeks to define the complex nature of visual praxis and its

place within traditional spheres of knowledge production, universities, and the broader space of contemporary visual culture.

Migration continues to be the defining core of my research initiatives and collaborations that continue to expose the transience of identity through a contemporary visual lens. My creative practice is heavily endorsed with a Celtic vernacular, with particular emphasis on how place [Glasgow] and memories of place, ancestry and heritage, impact our sense of identity and notions of belonging.

I have an exhibition in Dublin, 15-23 January 2015 at the Centre for Creative Practice. And, during this time I have been invited to present a guest lecture at the Burren College of Art, Ireland and at the University of the West of Scotland to discuss my practice based research initiatives.

My academic and artistic achievements to date would not have been possible if it had not been for the Enabling Program at UoN: *a space where potential is celebrated and rewarded.*

– Dr Annemarie Murland





Ashley Whammond

Not having any aspirations for tertiary study at high school, I applied the commensurate amount of effort to my Higher School Certificate exams and achieved the logical TER (Tertiary Entrance Rank) score. The exact number, however, will forever remain a mystery as the numerical scores were kept from the worst 15% of students in Australia. The reason, I assume, is to save them from severe depression. However, without any definite numerical ranking there remains, at least in my mind, the possibility that I might just be the worst. Armed with the indifference that such a possibility imparts I worked in factories for a few years, went to pubs, and occasionally drove to Newcastle to smoke pot with my uni friends.

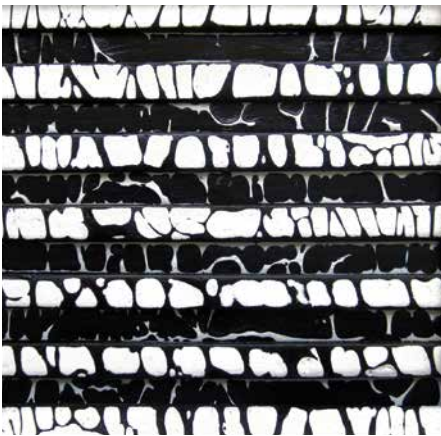
I became attracted to the student lifestyle, which seemed to be just like mine for the most part, but with less work and more interesting people. After moving to Newcastle a friend told me about a program that would enable me to become one of these interesting student people. I enrolled in Open Foundation in 1997 and chose English Literature and Film and Fine Art as my two subjects. While my performance in these classes was good enough to get me a respectable score for university entry, I had stopped caring about such numbers by the end of that six months. The critical analysis skills that Dr Keryl Kavanagh had ignited in me, the fascinating complexity of art introduced to me Dr Gordon Rintoul, and excitement about further study now filled my mind.

I went on to complete a Bachelor of Fine Art, an Honours year, and I began my academic work at Newcastle as a casual tutor and eventually lecturer while I was completing a PhD. I have since worked at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University and now at Southern Cross University where a group of students are preparing to graduate with knowledge and skills that I have helped them acquire. This was not the future that the HSC and its unknowable TER allowed me to imagine, but it was one made possible through Open Foundation.

– Dr Ashley Whammond

ABOVE and OPPOSITE: Ashley Whammond
I have wasted my life (detail) stills from video





TOP: Aubry Byrnes *Reflections/Refractions II* 2013, oil and acrylic on board, assemblage, 25 x 25 cm

ABOVE: Aubry Byrnes *Earth Lines I* 2014, oil and acrylic on board, assemblage, 25 x 25 cm

OPPOSITE: Aubry Byrnes *Coast* 2014, oil and acrylic on board, assemblage, 25 x 25 cm

Aubry Byrnes

Open Foundation changed the course of my life. After two years of Art School, I undertook a religious mission overseas and was unable to re-enrol in my previous program. Feeling that this part of my life was now inaccessible, I worked in a factory until discovering the alternate pathway into university through Open Foundation which I studied at the Ourimbah campus. This nurturing and supportive environment reignited my passion and joy in education and art and I now live my passion through my vocation – art and arts education.

– Dr Aubry Byrnes

Completing a research based PhD in Fine Arts at the University of Newcastle Australia in 2012, Byrnes is also a Masters graduate of the College of Fine Arts in Paddington. A former lecturer in painting, drawing and interdisciplinary practise at the University of Newcastle, Byrnes was awarded the University Medal for academic excellence in 2003.

Byrnes has exhibited extensively, both in Australia and overseas with work included in private collections in the Philippines, Britain and Australia. In Australia, his work has been selected for the Muswellbrook Art Prize, Gosford Regional Gallery Art Prize and the National Tertiary Art Prize and he has had numerous solo exhibitions at the Wallspace Gallery in Sydney and has participated in group exhibitions in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and Perth.

“I am seduced by surface and by reductionist form, each compels sentient connections between the viewer and a work of art. Surface engages the eye and stimulates a longing in the hand to touch, whilst reductionist forms demand time and elicit contemplation - key factors of the viewing experience”.

“Paintings are intimate and require a slow read”

Byrnes regularly expands the physicality of paint into three dimensions in his work... there is a stillness that his paintings bring... “It’s like sitting on a rock in the bush, or by the ocean, all on your own. You fall into a reverie... this is the gift of painting”.

– Dr Peter Hill, Associate Professor Fine Art, RMIT University



Bernadette Drabsch



My academic path began with very tentative footsteps as a mature-aged student during a year of Open Foundation at the University of Newcastle, studying both Ancient History and Visual Arts. The cross-road at the end of my enabling year caused some dilemma in deciding which avenue to follow, Ancient History or Art? My mind was made up after receiving a particularly high mark for Ancient History and my undergraduate journey began with a Bachelor of Arts. However, whilst I thoroughly enjoyed studying Latin, Ancient Greek and the classics, my love of art never departed and I continued to draw and paint during this time, holding three successful solo exhibitions. Eventually my paths merged when I wandered over to the Natural History Illustration department for some elective subjects within my BA, undertaking courses in scientific illustration and field studies. After much deliberation I decided to leave my Ancient History family and undertake my honours year under the banner of Natural History Illustration and travelled to Pella, in Jordan to work as an illustrator on an archaeological dig. This culminated in a collection of artworks and a related honours exegesis/dissertation, entitled 'Tabula Recens Antiquae Terrae - A fresh account of an ancient land'.

My time in Jordan also introduced me to the 6000 year old wall paintings from a site near the Dead Sea called Teleilat Ghassul, that were to become the focus of my PhD research project. This four year endeavour successfully merged all of my prior academic training and practical expertise and combined all of my passions - ancient history, archaeology and natural history illustration. In addition to being a fascinating project to work on my PhD also opened up many new paths to explore and I now feel that I'm at the beginning rather than the end of my meandering academic journey.

I love drawing natural subjects and I love Ancient Greek literature and was fascinated to find many references to cicadas in Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides

– so the combination of the two seemed perfect for this exhibition. This project not only reflects the transformation of the cicadas but also my transformation and the metamorphosis that has taken place internally during my academic life-cycle. I started in Open Foundation as a weak and fragile creature and have gradually morphed into a confident and out-spoken individual. The other reason that I chose cicadas is because of their vitality and their love of life – it is almost like they know life is short and they need to make the most of every minute – to me they epitomize the saying ‘eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die’.

– *Dr Bernadette Drabsch*



OPPOSITE TOP: Bernadette Drabsch *Eloquence* 2014, watercolour and watercolour pencil on 300gsm Arches paper

OPPOSITE CENTRE: Bernadette Drabsch *Autochthony and re-birth* 2014, graphite on 300gsm Arches paper

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Bernadette Drabsch *Eros – the winged lovers* 2014, watercolour pencil and graphite on 300gsm Arches paper

ABOVE: Bernadette Drabsch *The winged soul* 2014, ink on 300gsm Arches paper



Dom Freestone

As you embark on any journey, you will inevitably have an idea of how long it should take to accomplish your goal. Life however cares little for the dreams of the individual. Now a passionate design student, I was at one stage of my life an Engineer with the Royal Australian Air Force.

The choices you make in this moment may seem inconsequential and quickly slip out of memory. However, every now and then one of these seemingly insignificant choices leaves a lasting effect on your life. For me it was the choice to dive into a dam in country Victoria, I don't remember what I hit but it left me unable to move. Face down in the water unable to turn myself over I was waiting to drown, fortunately for me my friends came to my rescue saving my life and sending me on a completely different journey.

That seemingly insignificant choice left me a quadriplegic. I would spend the next year of my life in hospital and rehab, learning how to live my life in a wheelchair. When I got out, life was very different to how I had remembered; my friends were gone, my independence was gone and any dreams or plans I had once had were gone, I slipped into depression and began to give up hope. That's when I found the power of art, it was art that gave me something to do each day, art that strengthened my resolve, art that brought back my lust for life and healed this once broken man.

Open Foundation was one of the most rewarding and confidence building experiences of my life. It showed me that I was still capable of achieving my dreams. I realise now that the choices we make in this current moment are far from insignificant, they are shaping our future and turning us into who we truly are.

– Dom Freestone

TOP: Dom Freestone *Zapper* 2014,
photograph, 72 x 98 cm

ABOVE: Dom Freestone *Evolve* 2014,
photograph, 70 x 93 cm

OPPOSITE: Dom Freestone *Zoltan* 2014,
acrylic on canvas, 102 x 102 cm





ABOVE: Luke Thurgate *untitled* 2014,
charcoal and wash on paper

OPPOSITE: Luke Thurgate *untitled* 2014,
charcoal on paper

Luke Thurgate

Open Foundation was every bit the turning point it billed itself to be. After seven years of false starting, I found myself on a bus to the University with my final assignment completed. I remember feeling the entirely new sensation of academic pride and my elation at this small achievement did not go unnoticed on the return ride home.

One Bachelor of Fine Art later and I found myself with a studio, a reputable exhibition profile and a job in the visual arts industry. I spent the next six years working across education programs, various roles at Newcastle Art Gallery and my own studio practice.

In this period I ran programs for NSW Department of Education and Training, Newcastle Art Gallery and various local schools. I helped develop and deliver children and families programs at Newcastle Art Gallery where I worked as a Gallery Assistant and Technical Officer. I also maintained an active studio practice, exhibiting my work at galleries in both the Hunter Area and Sydney.

My years at University of Newcastle and the ensuing period of work were formative. The contacts I established are still part of a professional network I engage with today. In 2011 they led me to Adelaide after Nick Mitzevich, Director of Art Gallery of South Australia offered me the position of Coordinator of Exhibitions and Public Programs. This role brought together the skills and experiences I had cultivated in Newcastle and gave me the opportunity to apply them to bigger programs servicing a wider range of audiences.

In January of 2014 I was recruited by Adelaide Central School of Art, where I am currently Project Manager and a Lecturer within the Drawing Department. Having come full circle, I remain grateful to the team in the Open Foundation Department. Their commitment to equity, opportunity and achievement was life changing.

– Luke Thurgate





Prue Sailer

The Open Foundation program at the University of Newcastle was the catalyst that ultimately enabled me to change my approach and outlook on life.

My artistic passion has always been there, waiting patiently beneath the everyday challenges of working, raising children and running a home. The feeling that I was capable of more, on a creative and academic level, prompted me to apply for entry to University. At that time, my confidence level was not high - I wasn't sure if I was 'smart' enough to get through Open Foundation, let alone a degree. However, the determination to prove to myself that I could do it, along with dedicated teachers that made the courses interesting, brought good results and entry into the Fine Art degree program.

Much of my work in Fine Art was inspired by the natural world and with the encouragement of Dr Trevor Weekes I did my Honours year in Natural History Illustration, when I was awarded the University Medal, the Faculty Medal and the Graham Gilchrist Award for Natural History Illustration.

Why stop there? I applied to do a Master of Philosophy and subsequently upgraded to a PhD entitled "Wild Visions: An Artistic Investigation into Animal Vision", which I completed in 2013. I have presented my research within the University and at a conference in Italy. The associated artworks were exhibited at the University Gallery and the Manning Regional Gallery in Taree.

Currently, I am fortunate enough to be teaching into the Natural History Illustration undergraduate program and, along with my colleagues, am a founding member of the Natural History Illustration Research Group. I am also teaching into the Enabling Program in Design Drawing for Newstep, while continuing to develop my professional art practice and pursue exhibition opportunities.

Thirteen years ago I could never have imagined that I could achieve these things. Small steps, beginning with the enabling program and much support

from teachers, family, friends, fellow students and colleagues, have enabled me to identify and build on my artistic and academic strengths. I am pleased to have the opportunity to help and encourage others to achieve the same.

– Dr Prue Sailer



OPPOSITE: Prue Sailer from the series *Duality 1–5* 2014, oil on board, 20 x 20 cm each

ABOVE: Prue Sailer *Zebra Finch's View* (detail) 2012, oil on plywood 70.5 x 97 x 73 cm

Sharon Taylor



My transformation story began in 2006. My children had started school and returning to the workforce was on the cards. A casual conversation with a friend led to my enrolment into Art and Australian History in the open foundation course at the University of Newcastle. The original plan was to attain my HSC equivalent and possibly complete a teaching degree. The course provided a challenge, but from the first day I was hooked. The art classes provided excitement and stimulation and the history course helped to refresh and refine long unused skills in research and writing. My lecturers were intelligent, generous and real, truly inspiring. During the Art classes I was introduced to ceramics and this is where I found my new passion. On completion of the Open Foundation course I was accepted into the Bachelor of Fine Art degree, majoring in painting and ceramics. I graduated with Honours in 2010.

I am currently employed as the technical officer in the ceramics studios at UoN, where I have the privilege of sharing my passion for clay every day. I have been creating and exhibiting my ceramic work in the Newcastle area for about 6 years. My ceramic pieces are sculptural, using texture, form and colour to echo the natural landscape. I am continually inspired by the great Australian outdoors, trees hills, mountains, the coastline. My pieces are hand built, usually abstract forms, both large and small and almost always in multiples. With clay there is always something to learn and a new technique to try, endless possibilities for hopefully many years to come.

– Sharon Taylor

TOP: Sharon Taylor *Rustle, Ripple and Sway* 2014, hand built ceramic, 90 to 110 cm high

ABOVE: Sharon Taylor *Reach 2 (detail)* 2014, hand built ceramic, 160 cm high

OPPOSITE: Sharon Taylor *Natural energy* 2014, hand built ceramic, 75 cm high x variable width





Tanya Hoolihan

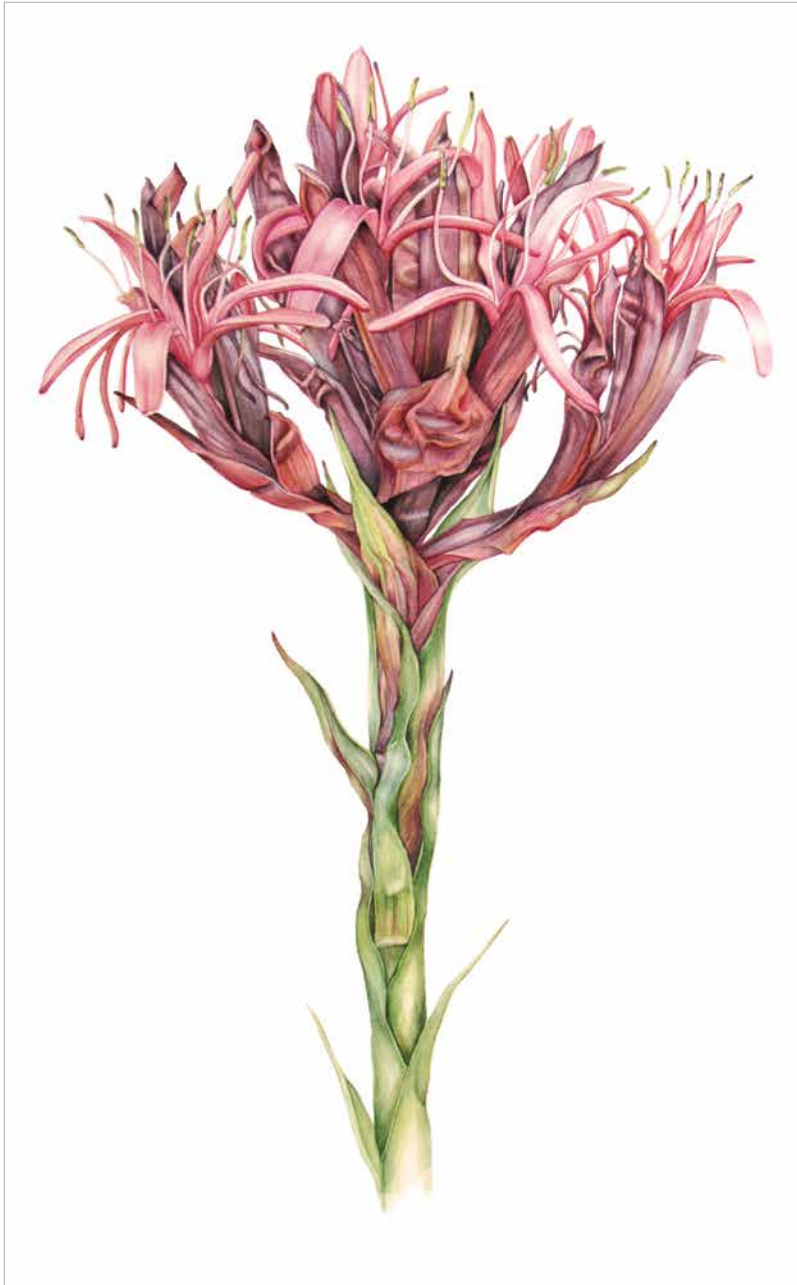
In 2005 our family business which had been the main focus of my life for the past 25 years, was sold. Suddenly I was faced with the question – “what now?” The world was at my feet, yet seizing opportunities became more of a dream than a reality and the thought of stepping outside the world in which I lived seemed almost too daunting to consider. However, by chance, I became aware of a degree in Natural History Illustration on offer through the University of Newcastle and I was determine to enrol regardless of the challenges placed before me. As I had not completed my year 12 Higher School Certificate, I needed to first undertake the Open Foundation Program.

I had always loved school and therefore it was easy to find the discipline and motivation to study, yet finding the courage to undertake learning as a mature age student was another matter. I reluctantly enrolled in the program after considering Open Foundation was a necessary requirement needed to gain entry to University. However Open Foundation became so much more than just a mere stepping stone. The program was life changing and has set me on the pathway of learning that I am still travelling on today. The support from lecturers was amazing and I was totally surprised by the genuine desire they had for my success.

Since undertaking Open Foundation I have completed a Bachelor Degree in Natural History and I am now undertaking PhD research. In 2013 I received the University Medal, the Faculty Medal as well as the Graham Gilchrist Award for Natural History Illustration. Without the support and educational grounding I received in Open Foundation these achievement would not have been possible.

The Open Foundation program was more than a means to an end, it laid down the ground roots of learning that introduced me to a whole new world of higher education.

– Tanya Hoolihan



OPPOSITE TOP: Tanya Hoolihan *Aeonium* 'Velour'
2012, watercolour on Arches paper, 76 x 65 cm
(framed)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Tanya Hoolihan *Hylocereus*
sp. 2012, watercolour on Arches paper, 63 x 77 cm
(framed)

LEFT: Tanya Hoolihan *Doryanthes excelsa* 2013,
watercolour on Arches paper, 78 x 60 cm (framed)

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OPEN FOUNDATION CELEBRATING 40 YEARS



ABOVE: Sharon Taylor *Natural Energy* 2014, hand built ceramic, 75 cm high x variable width
COVER: Aubry Byrnes *Horizons* 2014, oil & acrylic on board, assemblage, 25 x 25 cm



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