



**James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series 2016-2017
Helga Groves Digital Story**

Interviewee: Helga Groves

Interviewer: Jane O'Neill

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Legend: Helga Groves (HG)
Jane O'Neill (JO)

JO: Helga, firstly thank you very much for inviting me here to your studio today. Let's start with your formative influences. In your practice there's a persistence of liquids. How would you describe how your experience of growing up in Queensland fostered this connection with water?

HG: I was much more conscious of tropical storms and floods. I'm conscious of it being very much a part of the southern hemisphere, because my work deals with the southern and the northern hemisphere extremes. My mother came from the northern hemisphere. It took her many many years to acclimatise to Queensland. She was a bit obsessed with weather and she kept a weather diary. It was the extremes of the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere that really started to come through in my work at a certain point, and I have made bodies of work addressing all those things, about aspects of Finland and water. I've translated those ideas through many different materials like fishing line and Perspex.

JO: Your topology series, you're in a way mimicking organic processes?

HG: What I do with each body of work, in preparation for each body of work, I will go to the place, it could be Iceland or Finland or Wilsons Prom or, and when I'm there I will document what I see and I bring that back to the studio. I spend a lot of time with that to kind of get a sense of the colours. So all those things come together to get as close as possible to what the source material is. And every body of work is an experimentation. With the topographical paintings I do, I do the drawings. I trace the drawings and then I transcribe them onto the paintings and then behind the layers that come after that, and then I work back over the top to bring them back to life in a sense.

Before I make a body of work I see it in my mind, but it's not necessarily how it will turn out. It's a starting point.

JO: In your work there's this shift between macro and micro views. I was thinking of the topology series the way that the line drawings mimic the shape of growth patterns of lichen, but at the same time it forms like a larger scale cartography of ... You look at them and you're like is this a really large land mass that I'm looking at, this sort of lines-

HG: What it does is it takes on a new reading. Once it's on that scale, it does take on a map-like, the terrain, a map version of a terrain.

This is part of a new body of work I'm making at the moment. It evolved out of a short research trip I made to New York last year to cross-reference the physical geology of Central Park in New York with significant rock specimens from around the world.

It's a very good example of how over time through heat and pressure, rock can be folded, created from siltstone to marble and slate as granite is lifting up from beneath it, and in effect it describes the process of mountain building in a specific area in California.

It begins and ends With the same pattern. However, throughout the visual journey, throughout the centre three panels there's a disruption and a flux, which has always been part of my work, is that sense of flux.

It took some time before Perspex really entered my work, but it has sustained throughout my practise. I come back to it because it's a transparent or translucent material that has colour if that's what I choose. I've used it as a vessel for photographs, or wrapping fishing line around

JO: As domes

HG: That's right. To cover the work. I've used it sculpturally. I've used it in two dimensions for projecting animations onto the surface. However, mesh and fishing line, metals, slate, silicon,... I've utilised those as well.

I think the most significant works I've made with mesh were after residency in Vietnam in 1995. I discovered a street that only sells mesh and metals.

I was drawn to it because it has a translucency and I could layer it or I could spray paint it and I could work with it that way. It goes back to the sensibility that I bring to my paintings or the process that I work with of layering.

I won the Moet & Chandon prize. The winning work I made was a work I made after my experience in Vietnam called The Perfume River. It was a maturing process, going to live in France.

I would spend a lot of time walking through the village and observing the lace curtains that everyone has in France. I was looking at the time ... Because I had made the meshwork, so I was looking for a French equivalent to that. Lace is like a mesh in itself. I made a body of work addressing all of that, but I used the lace as a template, which I spray painted through over and over and over again, till the end result was almost like a x-ray, looking through old papered walls from history.

JO: Can we talk a little bit about the way that your work sits within the language of minimalism yet always retains a sense of the handmade?

HG: Yes. Both exist. I think in terms of a minimalist aesthetic with my work... that's my initial approach. However, because they're handmade by me I consider my work as low tech apart from pieces that I have to get laser cut for something. Everything else, even the handwoven fishing line, it may end up as a minimal piece, but in the process of making it it's handwoven. It's not mechanical. There isn't a mechanical aspect to it.

JO: What kinds of creative activity happened in your home as you were growing up?

HG: Both my parents were artistic. They could draw and paint. They didn't have any formal training. It was a very nurturing home in regards to making art as a child. The only

thing I wanted to do was be an artist. I didn't have a Plan B, and no doubt it was a result of the environment that I grew up in.

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