

This Section of *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* appears in each issue of the Journal and is dedicated to all forms of creative production born of an intimate and individual urge, often secretive, unbound from the conventional art system rules. Through short descriptions of the Outsider art work of prominent artists and new protagonists often hosted in community mental health services, this section intends to investigate the latest developments of the contemporary art scene, where the distances between the edge and the center are becoming more and more vague.

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Julian Martin. Abstracting the shape

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On the Left: Not titled 2001. **On the Right:** Julian Martin at work in the studio.

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'Julian Martin has a capacity for abstracting the shape of the everyday into an elegant geometric formalism that must have Giorgio Morandi turning in his grave. Kitchen cutlery is arranged as an arcane alphabet that speaks, not so much to domesticity, as to the very possibility of language' (The Age, 2009).

Martin was two-and-a-half when his autism was recognised. He never spoke. He avoided direct gaze and, most of all he wanted order, routine and rhythm. People, with all their inconsistencies, their need for eye contact, even physical contact, he could leave (Lester, 1997).

Martin first came to Arts Project Australia in 1989 as a 20-year-old, and continues to work there 3 days a week. The Victoria-based centre of excellence was established in 1974 with the mission of supporting artists with intellectual disabilities, promoting their work and advocating for their inclusion within contemporary art practice.

His early works were abstracted monochromatic figures and profiles, and in these, a strongly idiosyncratic and original style was evident. The next phase of his artistic journey saw a series of flattened totemic figure paintings, highly coloured and framed as if trapped inside a fishbowl.

Around 1992, his work changed again as he embraced pastel, continuing with the figures, but elaborating the face, with coloured diamond shaped patterning on the body, creating an effect of jewel-like prisms. From here, he moved on to what became his trademark or signature style – a repeated template of a mask-like face off which he based many of his works, all different with subtle variations of features, colouring and shading. Sometimes the hair would change ever so slightly, or the number and positioning of the teeth within the ever-present grin, or the colour of the face itself from a single pastel hue to daring combinations of shading. At one point, Martin became fascinated with scouring the edges of the features with a compass needle so they became torn and ragged, again revealing his intense way of working and fascination with surface.

What was evident throughout this period (and remains so today) is Martin's uncanny ability to handle with deft skill and precision a notoriously difficult medium and to apply it to his highly original creations. Many of these early 'faces' were self-portraits which he drew after being given a mirror by one of the arts workers in the studio. As his work developed, so did his capacity for abstraction and interpretation of a wider range of subject matter. He began using visual images from newspapers and magazines as the basis for his work, bringing to these the same flattened perspective and attention to surface. These explorations were interspersed with regular returns to the template form of the face, which he would repeat sometimes for many weeks, before again exploring a new direction.

The new directions have encompassed recurring themes such as letters of the alphabet, logos, kitchen utensils and tools. Alongside this thematic exploration has been a continually evolving approach to colour, to the point where Martin works with a highly selective

range. What does not change is the pure matt surface that he is able to generate in his work and the cleanly edged delineations of the images. His passion for drawing is reflected in the way he is able to reduce forms to their most elemental state, so that they are purely two-dimensional. There is no attempt at realism or illusion. His works are drawn with an unerring hand, with no rehearsal or change. They emerge in an intense and internally driven manner in which the pace of his output remains constant and intense (Daye, 2009).

Martin's work has been shown widely in recognised commercial and non-commercial galleries both in Australia and overseas. In 1993, Martin was a finalist in the highly prestigious Moët et Chandon Art Prize and in 2004 he participated in a group show at the Phyllis Kind Gallery in New York. He has exhibited at Australian Galleries in both Melbourne and Sydney, and has been regularly featured at the Arts Project Australia stand at the Melbourne Art Fair since 1994. In 2014, a major retrospective of his work was mounted at Arts Project Australia, and the catalogue 'Transformer' produced. Martin is currently represented by Arts Project Australia and in the USA by Fleisher/Ollman gallery, and has exhibited at the last two Armory Shows in New York.

The work of Julian Martin is intriguing. It is sophisticated yet, in a sense, also naive. Martin has not 'trained' as an artist. His has a completely personal approach to art making. Breathhtakingly original, with a singular and consistent vision, Martin is an extraordinary talent (Daye, 2009).

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Conflict of interest

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About the Author

Sue Roff since 2009 is Executive Director at Arts Project Australia, the international renowned studio

and gallery that supports more than hundred artists with physical and intellectual disability. Under Roff's management Arts Project Australia has become a model of excellence in the promotion of outsider art by strengthening connections with the contemporary art world.

Roff was the National Manager Cultural Development at the Australia Business Arts Foundation, and also a

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Roff is a Williamson Community Leadership Program Fellow (2001) and has been a judge for the Melbourne Awards for the past 2 years.

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