

# Enhancing connection to the natural environment through drawing

Elaine Matthews Venter





## Artist statement

As a visual artist, I am inspired by a deep sense of connection to the natural environment. When I first immigrated to New Zealand from South Africa ten years ago, the experience of leaving a loved and familiar landscape resulted in a profound sense of loss, and feelings of intense home-sickness. While doing research towards a master's degree in arts therapy at Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design in Auckland, my research thesis focused on how arts therapy in nature could address feelings of home-sickness, dislocation, and eco-alienation for a group of immigrants.

In order to heal my displacement, and to find connection to my new environment, I started to make drawings of the constantly changing skies. Finding beauty in my new surroundings, and immersing myself in making these drawings allowed me to fall in love with Auckland. The careful attention which drawing requires enabled me to acknowledge and accept the wonder of the wet, windy, changeable weather. The process gave me a way to recover by providing a creative space for grieving the loss of home. Making these drawings enhanced a connection to my new environment, and encouraged me to see the landscape with a fresh and unbiased gaze.

I would like to invite the reader to re-view the images, and to reflect upon the sensual and emotional impact of their own natural surroundings and constantly changing skies.

On left – left to right, top to bottom:

Figure 1. Elaine Matthews Venter, *Wet Afternoon, Glenfield*, 2013, soft pastel on paper, 210 x 297mm.

Figure 2. Elaine Matthews Venter, *Late Summer Evening, Waiake*, 2014, soft pastel on paper, 210 x 297mm.

Figure 3. Elaine Matthews Venter, *Late Afternoon, Looking West Towards Greenhithe*, 2013, soft pastel on paper, 594 x 840mm.

Figure 4. Elaine Matthews Venter, *Stormy Night, North Auckland*, 2013, soft pastel on paper, 210 x 297mm.

Above:

Figure 5. Elaine Matthews Venter, *Afternoon Walk, Long Bay*, 2013, soft pastel on paper, 210 x 297mm.