

Adoption Stories:

Pictorial representation as a key to understanding

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'CONNECTING PAST. SECURING FUTURE'

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PRESENTED BY

THE NSW COMMITTEE ON ADOPTION AND PERMANENT CARE INC.

My presentation today is broadly about disenfranchised mothering, so I will begin in the manner of Dr Christiane Northrup when she gives a presentation on mothering.

I wish to welcome my ancestral mothers here today. I welcome

My mother, Molly of Birchgrove;
Her mother, Mary of Birchgrove;
Her mother, Mary Knowles of Argyle,
Her mother, Susannah of Auchinlech;
Her mother, Isabelle of Tobermory;
Her mother, Charlotte of Ayrshire.

I ask them to stand with me and bear witness, these mothers of my matriarchal lineage, who are still my mothers, in spirit.

I am their genetic and spiritual continuance. For me and my daughters and granddaughters they loved, toiled, came to Australia, struggled, procreated and died. But most importantly, the thread of all my abilities can be seen weaving its way through their lives, their hearts, their minds. They are my history and my future, and I am truly fortunate not to be deprived of any of the colour, or the drama.

A.N. Wilson, in his book "After the Victorians", page 156 ventures –

"Philistines fail to see that artists even in their posturings, hold up mirrors to what is going on in societies, they take soundings of society's cohesion, more well-being, strength or lack of it. That is why totalitarian regimes persecute poets and composers with just as much rigour as they devote to silencing overtly political opposition. Stalin and Hitler both had violently strong views about Art and Music. One method of dealing with the troublesome messages by which poets or painters instinctively telegraph to the rest of society what has become of the human spirit, was to send them to prison".

I hope my messages will be *troublesome* to you, as I take up this same tradition – the tradition of Goya, Frida Kahlo, Edvard Munch, Picasso, and the early Australian Goldfield artists, and meld it with the tradition of the War artists, Victor Hele, William Dobell, Lambert and Drysdale.

My focus is the period in Australian social history from the 1950s to the late 1980s. Most of my subjects are young women who became the scapegoats of the Post World War II era. Many young Australian men simply didn't return, and died in foreign lands where they were buried. So who did these young women think they were?

A revolution had begun in the minds and hearts of the young women, and historians will have to acknowledge the beginning of the sixties as a genuine second wave of feminism in Australia, even if the revolutionaries were, for the most part, teenagers.

Although Australian women were granted the vote years before their sisters in Great Britain, it did not follow on that Australia's "fair go" philosophy would embrace young women who dared to challenge the patriarchal structures nicely in place, giving the father prime power over the nuclear family.

My work records the truth of events. These events were shrouded in secrecy, but maintained by malfeasance. On another level, my work records psychological responses to such events. How did the young women view their predicaments? How did they view the perpetrators of a system that saw them incarcerated and ultimately dismissed? The Homes for Delinquent Girls, and unmarried pregnant women

(for they were never allowed to feel like “mothers”) were “baby farming” ventures, ruled over, in most instances, by former nurses.

My paintings look at Hospital practices as viewed by the recipients. How did the young women see the “service providers”? My paintings look at the experiences of adopted people. Now adults, the people whose images I canvassed, were not shy in expressing their feelings, or their interpretation of events. I have used symbolic images to portray a psychological state.

Ex-nuptial children were referred to as “bastards”. Such a term derided one’s parentage, cast aspersions on generations before, and had the potential to damage future progeny of the “out of wedlock” child.

I don’t expect you to like my work – but then, like Francis Bacon, I am not painting “pretty pictures”, and I don’t care if my work is “liked”. Usually an artist paints a work, and when it is displayed in a gallery, they stand back, without comment, meet and greet the people who have come to view the work. And then all mill around, drinks in hand, as though they have been invited on a completely different pretext! They engage each other, with backs to the walls of pictures and engage the pictures, by way of a furtive sideways glance!

I do not afford the viewer of this presentation such a luxury. There is no cause for vanity, or self-congratulation on the part of those who engaged in the self-regulated industry of newborn “re-assignment”.

Truly, the adoption “experiment” was a verification of the fact that *self-regulation does not exist; it is a myth*. Nobody can be entrusted any role in baby trafficking without being supervised, monitored, watched twenty-four hours a day, and called to account immediately if any infringement of the law is witnessed, or implied.

I call my presentation “Dramatic Art”. If you feel me take you by the hand and lead you on a journey of confrontation with the “silenced ones”, then don’t resist. It will be a “bad trip”, but it will be memorable. If these images stay with you for days, and you can’t get them out of your head, then you will have an understanding of the young mothers and their trauma, which still lingers within the psyche. If you feel just a smattering of the helplessness felt by the babies, then maybe that will inspire you to seek other measures for alternate care.

The first exhibition of these works was accompanied by the warning:

*“Patrons are warned
that some images in this exhibition
may disturb some viewers”.*

I pass this warning on to you.

*Jan Kashin
Teacher, Artist, Activist, Publisher,
Reunited Mother*

"Study for Carramar Babies"
Acrylic on Canvas



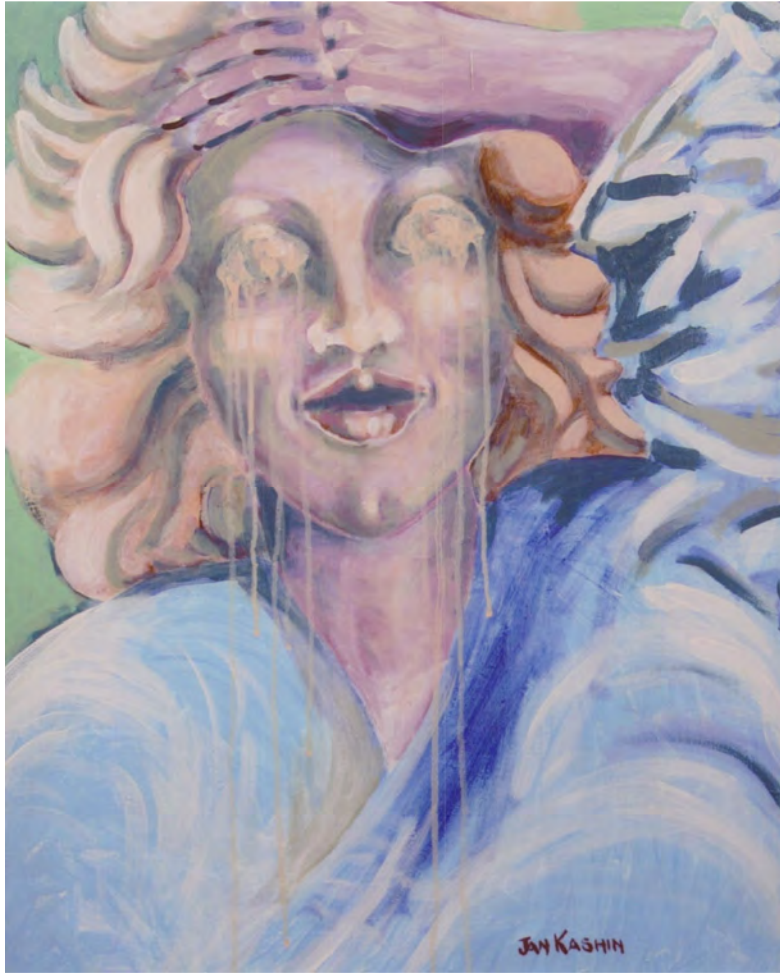
"Carramar Babies"
Acrylic on Canvas



"Sister Marsh, may I see Baby Benson" (1)
Acrylic on Canvas



"Sister Marsh, may I see Baby Benson" (2)
Acrylic on Canvas



*"Sister Marsh, may I see Baby Benson" (3)
Acrylic on Canvas*



"The Benevolent Society's New Toys"
Acrylic on Canvas



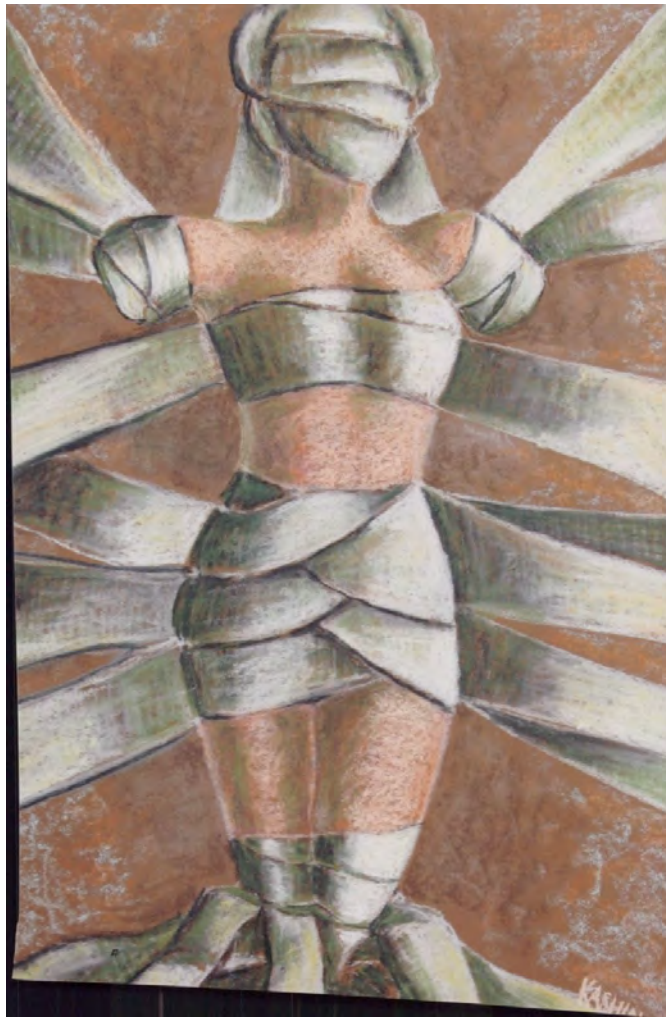
"Lyn"
Acrylic on Canvas



"Mutilation" (a)
Pastel on paper



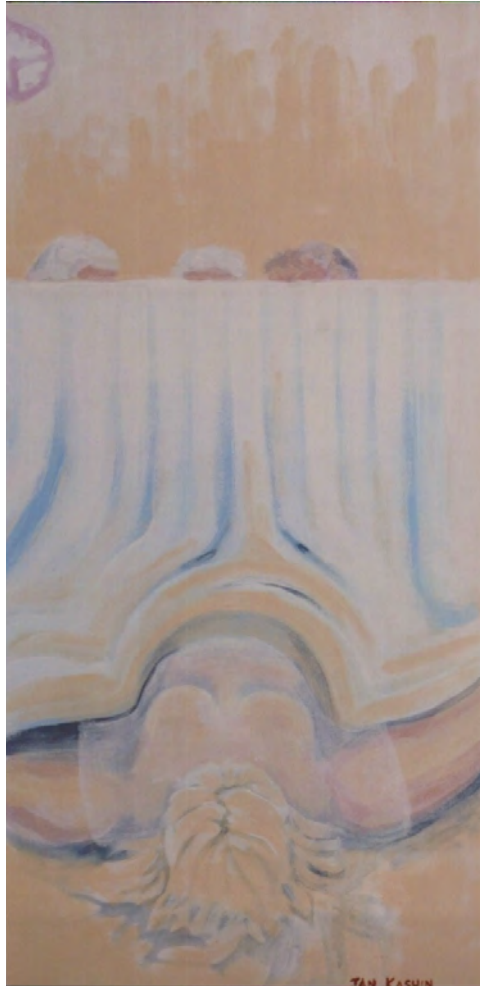
"Mummification" (b)
Pastel on paper



*"Dummification" (c)
Pastel on paper*



"What is this for?"
Acrylic on Canvas



"The Birth of David"
Acrylic on Canvas



"I remember you, Nurse"
Acrylic on Canvas



"The Friday Quota"
Acrylic on Canvas



"The Warrior Princess"
Acrylic on Canvas



"When the matron was sure I was drowning she came in and helped herself"
Acrylic on Canvas



"New Life – the Truth"
Acrylic on Canvas



Study for "You don't get this one"
Acrylic on Canvas



"You don't get this one"
Acrylic on Canvas



"Mine"
Acrylic on Canvas

