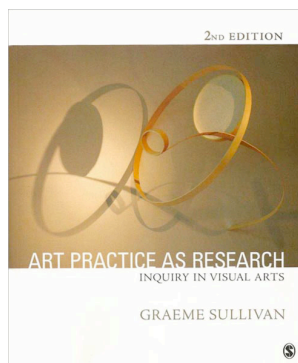


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Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts

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281 + xix pp. illus.

This is a substantially updated and revised edition of a book that was originally published in 2005. Its purpose is to ‘explore and explain the capacity of visual arts research to create knowledge that can help us understand in a profound way the world we live in and how we learn to make sense of it.’ While the focus is on visual arts there is much in the book that could be applied to any of the creative arts, including literature. As well, the book is suitable in particular for research communities within academic institutions, aiming to stimulate ideas about research, which go well beyond the accepted scientific model approach.

Art Practice as Research is organised around three parts and then subdivided into eight chapters. Part I is titled Contexts for Art Practice as Research. Part II is titled Theorizing Art Practice as Research and Part III is titled Visual Arts Research Practices. The first section sets out to place art research within the context of history and ‘reviews some of the practices used by artists in modern times as they respond to the challenge of the new’. Within this framework reference is made to the Enlightenment and the way this movement influenced not only philosophers but also scientists and artists. Sullivan writes that: ‘The patterns of practice that emerged during the Enlightenment saw the scientist and the artist share a common purpose in wanting to understand how the world works’. He later compares the insights provided by modernists and postmodernists in literature in framing how people interpreted a text with the advances in neuroscience, which give a ‘fuller picture of the biology of vision’ and thus how images may be considered and interpreted.

It is not just the research undertaken in order to produce a piece of art, but the art practice itself which has worth, thus moving away from the more readily accepted and rigid idea of what research entails. This assertion is tested and explained through a series of illustrations, reproducing an artwork and an explanation by the artist of what she or he set out to reveal in it. Sullivan provides diagrams that illustrate the theoretical relationships between the practices of visual arts research and the domains of practice located around visual arts research. Visual arts research practice describes both a process of enquiry, and in its manifestations through visual art, leads others to question and explore, thus adding to the sum of knowledge. A geographer and an artist or photographer may explore the same territory seeing it from different angles and perspectives. The result of their observations will differ, but each is valid.

The final section provides strategies to assist conceptualizing and planning a visual arts research program.

This book is aimed directly at visual artists, but creative writers could adopt many of the ideas and strategies expressed therein. It certainly robustly refutes the idea that non-scientific research and activity is less valuable and therefore to be less valued than that of the scientists.

Emily Sutherland is a Visiting Scholar at Flinders University. Her doctoral thesis was concerned with historical fiction. At present she is co-editing a book, which looks at the concept of using historical research with integrity in fiction and film.