

## **Amelia Pascoe – *Opticks***

The inter-relationships – connections and tensions - between science and art have been an ongoing source of inspiration. Not just the disciplines, their immediate concerns and broader contexts, but also how together they affect the way I think about and operate in the world. My studies in contemporary jewellery have provided an additional lense through which to explore and frame these interests. A lense which promotes reflection, refraction, inflection and results in outputs that can stray towards the edges.

*Opticks* is a sideways look at my practice and process. It started with a contemplation of my journey from science to contemporary jewellery, and the experiences, inspirations, and discoveries that have continued to pave the way. With the snip of an idea sparked by a volumetric flask loosely bearing my name, a curiosity about the craft of glass blowing, and an ongoing preoccupation with the concept of transformation (in all its many guises), a body of work started to take form.

### **More information**

#### ***The Reservoir***

In his paper *The Reservoir*, Terrence Rosenberg (n.d.) explores different features of scientific (Apollonian) and poetic (Dionysian) research methods and the critical role that together they can play in creative practice. The Apollonian method tends to be characterised by linear, logical progression of ideas aimed at testing a predefined proposition and grounded in existing knowledge. In contrast, the Dionysian method favours divergence, the subjective, the inferred, the unexplored. Rosenberg uses analogies of grounding (working on solid substrate) and centripetal forces (movement towards the centre or known) to explain Apollonian processes. Analogies of open water (being immersed in and at the mercy of the environment) and centrifugal forces (the simultaneous pulling away in different directions towards the unknown) are used for the Dionysian. He then discusses the potential for each approach to help inform, define and complement the other. He makes much of the role of the intuitive hunch – a slim, singular, instantaneous spark that ignites whole new worlds of possibility – for both. At the end of the paper he offers a framework that draws on both models for developing a rich, imaginative and poetic field of research.

Without having had a name for them, I have been acutely aware of these Apollonian and Dionysian tensions and challenges in my own practice, and over the years have been actively engaged in seeking ways to break free from and balance my naturally Apollonian tendencies. Rosenberg's paper required some deciphering, however, the effort paid off and his explicit discussion of these concepts resulted in some significant and transformative insights. My attempt to map out some of my key research interests using Rosenbergs framework (refer Handshake blog, 05 April 2017) helped confirm the numerous interconnections between seemingly divergent paths and has been directly responsible for new leads in my investigations through making.

#### ***The Age of Enlightenment***

The Age of Enlightenment refers to the period in history where humankind started to shift its focus from religion as the source of all truth to a greater understanding of the world through science. This new way of thinking was a coup for those already working in the field, and captured the imagination of a much wider cross-section of society. A whole new class of amateur scientists was born – some of who were responsible for profound discoveries – and ideas and influencers started to be reflected in the arts. Some scientific theories developed over this time have been little improved upon – Isaac Newton's *Principia* (1687) and *Opticks*

(1704) are still considered among history's most significant works. Other theories are now the source of some amusement. Fire, earth, water and air were the core elements from which all other matter was thought to be constructed. Phlogiston was the name coined for the substance thought to be the active agent in combustion. The year 1687 when Newton published *Principia* is often cited as start of the Enlightenment. However, while considered a genius Newton also had his eccentricities. According to Gay (1966), *he was also odd in his religious views and intensely interested in alchemy. He spent untold hours reading Egyptian and Hebrew history, trying to fix the dates of Biblical events right back to the Creation. And some of the notes in his private papers suggest that he seriously believed in the elixir of life and the existence of a philosophers stone.*

This period in history is fascinating to me – the coming together of science, religion and the arts in new ways, the intriguing characters, profound discoveries, ridiculous beliefs and endearing stories. Playing on these ideas and sometimes taking on the role of amateur scientist-artist - to come up with my own interpretation of theories and inter-disciplinary applications - is something that continues to appeal and has been a recurring theme in a number of my projects.

### **A few references**

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