



## An Overview of the struggle to create

I hope you won't skip reading this introduction as it may aid your understanding of this book and open your mind and heart to the creative process. This book is not meant to be about me or what I can do. It is written to inspire, comfort, and support all people who have a goal for a creative life.

Having always been fascinated by the way things came together in the act of creating, I longed to find methods to step back into the flow without the struggle. The insights I gained are now part of this book and in gathering together the resources to document my findings I was made acutely aware that the creative journey is a process made up of many milestones. Just as a child does not revisit the steps taken when learning to walk, so we all move on to new ways of thinking. Some of the issues that once seemed so important are no longer seen as hurdles. There was a time when I thought that, although there were many joyous moments and I loved what I was doing, struggles would always abound and the creative path by its very nature was bumpy and difficult to navigate.

What was to change my thinking and consequently my creative output was the realisation that I needed an altruistic focus, far above the mundane that had been my mainstay. Writing an honest, passionate account of the journey required that I address this book in the first person which was not the easiest choice to make. The chapters come from my experiences in the environment and studio, and consolidation of my research on the creative process. The reader is continually directed back to the need to have a focus for creating, as this is what promotes the creative flow. Each new discovery becomes another story.

*Gleaner or Gladiator: the struggle to create* represents the creative journey that involves the visionary gleaning inspiration from many sources, and then taking responsibility for the struggle to formulate or construct something worthy from this information. Having sought out and read many books in the search for understanding the creative process, I wanted an intellectual and spiritual answer to the things that were happening to me. At university I struggled with my need to be a painter and I knew thankfully that many before me had chosen not to accept advice that easel art was dead. Being told to be authentic, decided my path. I was going to be true to myself. I knew I wanted to paint the beautiful aspects of the world and not the depressive news that makes our nightly viewing.

Left Sunrise viewed from the artist's studio gallery at Tallegalla, Queensland  
Photograph © Peter Marshall 2006

Searching for answers turned up books written by seasoned artists, illustrated with their own and other artists work showing techniques and ideas. Books on creativity written by inspiring therapists, teachers and scientists offered insights into many areas of art and life. Some of these were written in a way that took many readings to begin to understand. Even though I read and absorbed what I could of these books, and sought inspiration from international artists such as Max Ernst, the search for understanding was laborious, and progress slow.

When I left university with a visual arts degree in 1994, I had little understanding of my direction. I continued to work and exhibit but real growth eluded me. Five years later, a two week workshop on the creative process by a visiting Canadian artist and teacher caught my eye, and attending it changed me forever. It took another two to three years and much more research before I saw the benefits of that workshop, but I still remember those amazing new insights. Everything about my artwork at the time was challenged. The effect on me must have been very obvious as another workshop participant asked whether I would continue to paint.

My next real insight came via an artist who also lived far away. Exhibiting in Shanghai in 2003, led to my visiting the studio of noted Chinese abstract artist Zhou Changjiang. Exposure to his work put me in a spin. It was something in the work, the spirituality, energy and essence that affected me and I went home wanting to have that in my work. Unknown to him, as we didn't speak a common language, he had become my mentor. This book is written as a means of sharing some of my experiences, and to confirm to others who have an interest in the creative arts that it is about the process and the journey, not the outcome. I have included appendices on both these artists to show how the creative process is elusive and many things to many people. Hopefully this book will become a resource for the reader to return to for confirmation of their own journey.

While not overtly a 'how to book', it may shorten another's struggle by offering insights into an artist's mind and practice. I believe it will have value as an educational tool, especially for art students. It has been written and formulated to present information, in a way, that may offer the novice or non-arts person some understanding of contemporary art. I believe with a little lateral thinking it can be applied to any area of the arts or life, although it has a primary focus on painting. Areas in the creative process overlap and so will the chapters in this book. Each has a particular theme and may address issues like motivation, research and artist block but areas like inspiration and flow cannot be categorised because they permeate everything, and are continually a topic of discussion.

The artworks and photographic illustrations are mostly my own, to best convey how producing individual art requires reliance on your own resources. They link the artworks to the environment in a way that reinforces how ideas and images incubate in the sub-conscious recesses of the mind and surface at just the right time. At the end of the book I include references to some of the resources I found useful and easy to absorb along the journey, and these may further assist the reader to research their own interests.

Over the years I have found collaboration with other artists, musicians and in particular poets has enriched my journey. In writing this book I have spent valuable time with a philosopher, which has enlarged on my ability to think abstractly about the creative process. In particular it has confirmed and consolidated my research and voyage and fired the passion to turn the next corner and ascertain what lies ahead on my never ending road to discovery. It is my sincere wish that you find this book a useful tool for your own journey.

Lyne Marshall