

A few years ago, in a West Hobart suburban sitting room, I had an experience that altered or, perhaps, I should say, distorted my perception of dancing, forever. I loved dancing at parties. I would be the first person out of my chair when the stereo was turned up and the lights turned down. Half singing, half yelling along to the musical anthems of my time, I can still remember my sore throat from Gloria Gaynor's disco hit, "I will survive". Out of pitch and only remembering half the words, my shuffling shoes would unfortunately tread on others' feet, bumping into backs of other dancing couples, who were always holding drinks, or getting up close and personal. In short, if Fred Astaire had arrived at any dancing engagement I was attending, he would never have picked me to be his 'Ginger'. I was a dancing disaster! Dancing was a releasing, but entirely frustrating experience for me. I felt limited by my uncoordinated, awkward body, as well as out of sync with the groove of the music and my surroundings. However, back to that significant, 'dance altering' experience in West Hobart. Probably due to the consumption of too much amber fluid, somebody had cranked up the obligatory dry ice machine. Suddenly, I couldn't see further than my nose. In fact, I couldn't see my nose, or any other part of me, for that matter. I had completely disappeared! Occasionally a flash of a hand would appear from somewhere and then would disappear again. I think it was my hand, but this was impossible to confirm since it would vanish as quickly as it had appeared, into the white fog. After I decided not to panic at the loss of my body, for the first time in my dancing life I was no longer constrained by the limitations of my physical being.

I was responding entirely as a vibration, a groove, a feeling. For that one brief moment, I was the music. Flashes of coloured light and feelings of heat became me. It was liberating, exciting and entirely exhilarating. Never before had I felt that way. And I might add, I have never experienced that feeling since, until I saw Alan Young's dancing paintings.

I first met Alan Young when he was as an Under-Graduate student in the Sculpture Studio at the Tasmania School of Art in Hobart in the late 1990's. During this time, I became closely associated with Alan's art ideas, observing first hand his dynamic and unique art making and the bittersweet, poignant and humorous drawings of his daily life in his visual diaries. Alan has a rare, extraordinary ability to capture the abundant energy and enthusiasm he has for living, in his artwork. He invests within each of his finished paintings a sense of movement, visually recording his journey through life. His imagery reflects his place in the urban environment, but there is little traditional narrative in his work. Instead, Alan has the ability to present a type of three-dimensional space, where past and present events exist in a type of timelessness. Iconic images melt into the distance, only to reappear and be redrawn in the foreground, reinforcing important events and places that Alan may have passed by, noting the characters he may have observed or been in conversation with. Alan has been relentless in his pursuit of making art, ignoring any negative perceptions or restrictions regarding his disabilities; in fact, he has used his unique position in the world as the immediate subject of his paintings.

The first time I saw Alan's dance paintings I was astonished at how he'd captured the experience that I described in my first paragraph. His love of dancing, and the freedom that it allows him, is very evident in his colourful painted surfaces and imagery.

The disrupted perspectives, and fragmented forms that he painted encapsulate his joy of dancing and the moment of being totally immersed in the music. His synaesthesia-like paintings are visual expressions and responses to the immediate combination of his mind, body and musical beats that surround and envelop him while he was dancing. His paintings depict no sign of awkwardness or self-consciousness; rather, his imagery captures Alan's sense of bodily liberation and aliveness. The work bounces with unrestrained patterns and rhythms, and are as exciting and invigorating to view as much as they would have been to Alan when he experienced them first hand on the dance floor.

By Anna Phillips