



SPHERES OF BRILLIANCE

How do we classify brilliance? Is it by the discoveries which can have a profound effect on our existence, or by obsession and determination to succeed in a chosen field. Is it talent, genius, greatness or all of the above? Are these the characteristics needed to make an artwork a masterpiece? In a search across a broad spectrum of brilliant people I found many similarities.

If we were to model ourselves after the masters of any creative industry, significant insights and growth would be the result. A great example of a genius was the multi-faceted artist and inventor, Leonardo Da Vinci. Although born around 500 years ago, he remains recognised today as a mastermind of art and design. Like many of his time he received little reward, but never ceased to continue with his life's work.

If an incredibly inventive mind and an insatiable passionate curiosity were such a strong part of Da Vinci's approach to life, it is not surprising he discovered a magic and mystery which enabled him to produce works of genius. He observed nature intensely and related it metaphorically to human existence. In his notebooks he wrote, 'Iron rusts from disuse, stagnant water loses its purity, and in cold weather becomes frozen; even so does inaction sap the vigour of the mind'. He also wrote 'Where the spirit does not work with the hand there is no art' and 'I have offended God because my work did not reach the quality it should have'.

Is it important then to understand life in the same way that Da Vinci did? Early Chinese and Japanese scholars believed that the greatest masterpieces of art come from those who have been great scholars or philosophers, and who lived closest to nature. An Australian example of this mastery was artist Ian Fairweather, who lived a hermit's life on Bribie Island when I was a child. He achieved great satisfaction from his work, feeling the process was like a quasi-religious experience. His contemplative spiritual work came out of felt experiences that dated back thirty years and encompassed his life in China, India and Bali.

In a book from 1911, titled *On the Laws of Japanese Painting*, Henry Bowie discusses an artist transfusing into an artwork the felt spirit of what they are drawing or painting, and being for that time, the mountain or tree that they create in the art. He also discusses an element called *Ki in* which scholars in China and Japan believed to be 'spiritual elevation' and a distinction of great artists. It manifests as a 'clear character' which is recognised in truly great people who have a unity with all, and a caring for all living things.

Something unique to all artists is their unconsciously formed mark making, which exists in much the same way as individual styles of handwriting which develop with little conscious thought. Stilling the mind, to step back from over inclusive and repetitive thoughts, and allowing this uniqueness to emerge, has always been part of ancient and modern Eastern art practice. In more recent times it has been used by Western artists like Cy Twombly. He understands the profound ability of being able to tap into the unconscious mind and uses meditative practices and techniques to go to another level of creativeness prior to painting. He has been known to wait for the moment, contemplating the blank canvas almost trance like, until compelled to make the first mark. In seeking the secrets of masters I was able to relate to this aspect, as a state of unconsciously experienced flow is conducive to working at our best, empowering us to achieve greater creativity.

Brilliant people it seems, have many talents and move across different genre. Einstein was a scientist who played the violin. He may not have been renowned for this but he used the violin to centre himself so he could work with mathematical equations. He formulated the Theory of Relativity which still remains the basis for many scientific discussions today. The question is, do we all have this capacity for genius? I know that I would love to be so inventive, and certainly have the capacity and ability to acquire knowledge, and develop concepts and ideas to combine with strong technique. The human brain has a great capacity to abstract and bring the unknown to consciousness. In this sense, the questioning mind can use what talent it has to think and find meaning in various ways, which may include thinking scientifically, philosophically, and inventively.

Much scholarly discussion and empirical studies have been focused on talent, and at what time in life it will arise. Professor Anders Ericsson is a world leader in research into *deliberate practice* which looks at what takes people into the area of genius. Debate is ongoing as to whether this ability is present from birth or developed through study and practice. His theory that there is no such thing as innate talent; that it arises from practice, fails to explain how masters such as Mozart composed music at the age of six. Without the same background of research, individual beliefs can only be based on experiences and the information gleaned from various sources. What is undeniable is that by the age of five and six years old, or even younger, creative individuals will often report an enthusiasm and passion for a specific area. Whether this can be seen as talent is debatable, but I believe that both a combination of talent and deliberate practice are what makes some more successful than others.

Left : Seeing the Light, 122 cm x 122 cm, acrylic on canvas 2009 Artist's collection