or cure of disease: The pedagogical purpose of the formerly animate specimens, now held in a suspended state, is to stay the perceived passing of time on the body.

Counter intuitively a major attraction of The Wilson Museum for the artist was the restriction of any camera or recording equipment. The Wilson Museum has access restrictions derived from the Anatomy Act, 1877 demonstrating the need for security, and the discipline’s sense of respect for the donors and their families. Similar to the artist’s other outlet for drawing, the life model studio, these in situ drawings are the only form of recording of the specimens. For this project, the artist was limited to direct contact with the specimen, or individual, and therefore obliged to work from the drawings, and the one perspective.

The exhibited drawings and prints are separated from the education of medical practitioners, for they are manipulated, both by the artist’s experience, artistic influences, and ever-present Spanish ancestral connections. The works are further changed by artistic influences, and ever-present Spanish ancestral connections. The works are further changed by artistic influences, and ever-present Spanish ancestral connections. The works are further changed by artistic influences, and ever-present Spanish ancestral connections. The works are further changed by artistic influences, and ever-present Spanish ancestral connections. The works are further changed by artistic influences, and ever-present Spanish ancestral connections.

The unique printed work, or smaller print run has become more satisfying for Ameneiro. Flipping the ‘impression’ of the editioning printmaker on its head, Ameneiro feels that, “as printmaking itself has changed so much over the last twenty to thirty years, I’ve found myself more and more interested in those aspects that capture the ‘human-ness’ (for want of a better word) of the medium. The aspects of the printmaking medium that reveal the evidence of the hand at work.”

Dr. Thomas A. Middlemost, August 2016

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Dedicated to the memory of Maria and Antonio Ameneiro.

2 A Beauchene or ‘exploded skull’, is a disarticulated human skull, that has been reassembled on a movable armature, with all the cranial bones mounted on their own hardware, for display and study. The method of display was developed by the mid-1800s French anatomist Claude Beaufreche.
3 Dotovskiy, F., op cit. [Dotovsksy in The Idiot, writes, while drawing wider, more holistic conclusions about nature, and humanity in the painting of the dead figure of Christ: “Nature appears to the viewer of this painting in the shape of some enormous, implacable, and dumb beast…such a being as by himself was worth the whole of nature and all its laws, the whole earth…”
4 Quick notes for Tom, unpublished notes by the artist for the text August 2016, p7.
7 Quick notes for Tom, op cit.
8 Ameneiro’s polycarbonate plate, drypoint editions are limited to five very different works.
9 Quick notes for Tom, op cit.

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HEAD OVER HEAD

Humanity

Tony Ameneiro’s exhibition, Head Over Head is a vehicle for the artist to visually interrogate existential quandaries regarding humanity. Essentially the drawings, monotypes, and drypoints depict a snapshot of time. He is attempting to reconcile universal, human questions that plague us all, as we age. The intention of the artist is to depict a hopeful regenerative cycle, a respectful depiction of humanity; life and death, entwined and organically advancing.

Both he, and I have recently suffered the death of a parent. We both have children. We are currently row to the realities of dying, and death, and the promise of life. We are tied, like his work, in the inevitable decrepitude, and entropic spiral of life.

There is a profusion of Art Historical references regarding death and dying, particularly images of Lamentation and The Deposition from the Cross. ‘The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb’, 1520-22, by Hans Holbein the Younger, as discussed by Fydor Dostoyevsky in The Idiot is my first thought, when viewing these works. Dostoyevsky, discussing the painting through the characters of Myshkin and Ippolit, states that the confrontation with mortality within the painting can destabilize faith.

Dostoyevsky, like Ameneiro, focuses on the face of the subject, stating: “But the face has not been spared in the least; it is nature alone, and truly as the dead body of any man must be after such torments”. The forty-three facial muscles in our faces carry a great deal of our animate humanity. The heads within this exhibition are a window on our humanity.

Subject/Influence

Ameneiro’s ongoing subject matter stems from studio models, Beauchene skulls, and wax anatomical models from the 18th Century in La Specola: The Museum of Zoology and Natural History Florence, Italy. Most recently his current, and direct, influence is the human specimens, the earliest from 1916, in the Shellshear Museum of Physical Anatomy and Comparative Anatomy, and Wilson Museum of Human Anatomy at the University of Sydney.

The prints and drawings fashioned from living models are, at times, hard to decipher from the specimens, and one shouldn’t endeavor to resolve the works’ origin or chronology. Some specimens and skulls are labelled and that text is an indicator of the subject matter. Ameneiro states that he brought elements of portraits from the life-drawing studio to reinforce the notion of mortality flowing naturally into life.

The exhibited work should be seen as a holistic statement, not analyzed individually. Mostly the large format display in exhibition of numerous, tightly packed, large scale, monotype prints, pictorially combine to form a field of humanity; defined by its most recognizable feature, the face and head. The larger than life scale of the facial depictions is important. Ameneiro has worked on a large scale in the past, however, he interprets an heroic nature in the face. Goya’s etchings are a constant source of inspiration for the artist, and The Disparates series of etchings by Goya where: “Two headed women, men and women conjoined to form a creature with two heads and four feet - become routine”. In the world of the disparate, a woman sprouts a second head as she runs, panicked, toward shelter among a crowd of crones may be an influence. Janus headed figures, and the Pagan ‘Green Man’, or foliate heads, representing a human connection to nature, are also ongoing influences.

Ongoing themes in the artist’s work

A row of depictions of heads, as a landscape, also functions like a map. Both landscape depictions, and maps are continuing themes in Ameneiro’s work. He lives in Mittagong, across from paddocks and fields on which he regularly walks.

The origin of the Head Over Head works within the artist’s oeuvre stem from the wax model duplicated, red muscle tissue of anatomical models from the Florentine: La Specola museum. Ameneiro’s earlier work: the more traditional botanical specimen depictions of flowering heads of the Gymea Lilly; and skulls in three-colour soft-ground etching; lithograph; monotype; and pencil drawing, from 2000 onwards, could be read as studies for the Head Over Head concept.

The impressively large 224 x 152cm, 2013 colour, multi-plate monotype ‘Large Flowering Head - Derecha’ as displayed in the Flowering Heads exhibition at the Maitland Regional Gallery from 17 May-11 August, 2013 is in a state of transformation from, and or possibly to a botanical specimen. This natural mutation, a transformative metamorphosis, on a massive scale imposes the hopeful dominance of nature, an overcoming resilience of the natural, growing, and changing form to rise above the destructive influence of human nature. A theme further explored in the Head Over Head work.

Hopeful regenerative cycle

The rationale of the exhibition is the hopeful circle of life, and death: a regenerative ouroboros, of life following death-giving life anew.

Ameneiro is fascinated by the relationship between the teaching specimens at the University of Sydney, their donors, and the educational purpose of the specimens. He muses over the complex and intertwined interactions between the deceased human specimens, and their educational value in healing, prevention,