

Migrant Colony

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Often when people are making art, they like to tackle worldwide problems and issues, and often forget to look at what is right in their backyard. For years I have been going to a school, which is located a short walk from the largest Grey-Headed Flying Fox colony in South Australia. A select few trees in the botanic gardens, are what 40,000 bats call home, and yet hundreds of people pass through the paths of the gardens and take no notice of what is going on above them. Having been at a school which neighbours this colony for the past 4 years has led me to become involved with their habitation and invested in their quality of life and the struggles they face. Despite having limited natural predators, they are constantly fighting for their survival in a world which has pitted against them and deemed them as pests. With rises in climate change, more and more of them are dying off every summer, with record breaking numbers of 4500 dying in the summer of 2019. Additionally, they are having their food sources cut off by local farmers in Adelaide's foothills and agricultural regions.

This is because they traditionally eat the flowers and nectar of native plants along the East Coast, but since migrating down to Adelaide, their native food sources have become limited, and due to this they have adapted to eating the fruits grown up in the hills. This has since caused an uproar from farmers, as these tens of thousands of bats are eating their produce each night. This has led to farmers placing large nets around their fruit trees to protect them, but this is also inadvertently causing the bats to become stuck within the nets and starve due to lack of food.

In my practical piece, I decided to shed light on the issues that an already vulnerable species are having to face, especially as there has been no attention brought to an environmental injustice which is occurring right next door. How I did this was I explored the concept through a body of work, exploring a series of mediums and incorporating multimedia into an immersive yet educational experience for the audience.

The main aspect of my final piece was my bat structure, this combined the use of cyanotype, ceramics, sewing and woodwork into an installation which visualised the key issues explored above. I collected leaves and flowers from the botanic gardens and used them as a stencil for a series of cyanotype printing onto fabric. This fabric was then sewed into the anatomical shape of a flying-fox and stuffed and wired until it resembled one. I did this for 25 bats of varying sizes. I then wanted to highlight their limited access to food, so I created ceramic flowers and leaves to represent such. In the final product they poke through a net at the bottom of the structure, showing how the bats food is so close, but they cannot access it. I made a point to make the ceramic vibrant and bold in contrast to the structure and net they are within, so that the main focuses would be the bright red and greens of the ceramics, and the blue of the cyanotype bats. In addition to the installation piece, included other visual and auditory elements to make the experience more interactive. I went and captured a series of photographs of the bats in botanic park, in addition to recording their movements and sounds. I then used all these media aspects to include in my body of work.

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The photographs are their own element, giving a closer view of the animals and their behaviours in their natural habitat. Then I used a short recording of the bats and their flights between trees to project onto the roof above and behind, to immerse the viewer into believing they were in the midst of the chaos and hecticness of this large colony. And then the final element to tie it all together, I used a recording of the bat noises, and played it from four points across the room, so that the viewer had the subtle background noises further plunging them into the raw experience. This body of work was inspired by a series of artists, each aiding in a development in my technique with a specific medium or skill. The main artists I were influenced by for my main installation were Anna Atkins and Angela Valamanesh. They were great inspiration, not only because they are women who have delved and shown great knowledge in the connections of the science and art fields, but because of their raw skill and desire to produce art unique to what anyone else had thought to have done, in their time. Anna Atkins used her knowledge of chemical concepts to capture the very first photographs with the use of cyanotype of canvas papers. The cleanliness and precision of her work allowed me to have an ideal example for how my cyanotype images should turn out, to capture the environments which these bats are living within. With Angela Valamanesh I was less inspired to appropriate her work and was more driven to emulate the techniques and skills she possessed with the clay and ceramic mediums. Allowing me to strive to make my pieces as accurate as possible. With the photography elements in my work, my main inspiration was Trent Parke, and his work with not only taking photos, how they were able to give off a specific aura, solely based on how he edited them. I attempted to emulate this style through a lot of trial and error, and resulted out of hundreds of photos, a few I was happy with the display in my final work.

My installation and body of work connects to my concept and the issues behind it because it in multiple ways. The bat structure is the main element, and it captures the majority of the concept and highlights the struggles the bats face every day, trying to access food that is consistently trying to be taken away, or barred from their access. This then leads them to starving or having to fly even further every night for a chance of sustenance. Further connections can be seen by my use of cyanotype of the fabrics used to make the bats. I purposely collected leaves, flowers, seeds, and plants from their surrounding areas in the botanic gardens. This links the installation to its intended concept further with the incorporation of accurate flora which can be found all around botanic park. Furthermore, I also cyanotype printed nets onto these fabrics, and having them being covered in this netting is able to further impress the issue of the bats becoming dying within them. The additional pieces of the work such as the photos, sounds and projections are utilised to make the experience more immersive, and support the statement being made with the bat structure. It is used to consistently humanise the bats and remind the viewers of how close they are to us, and how they deserve to be treated with the same respect as all of Australia's native animals.