

Growth; Connecting Self with Nature

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My works are based in the self-portrait and land art genres and are an expression of my emotional growth shown through materials and concepts sourced from a personally significant environment on my property in the Adelaide hills SA. My inspiration grew from realizing the beneficial effects immersing myself within the nature, heritage, and wildlife of this place, would have on my mental health and wellbeing. After experiencing a traumatic event in 2022, and the strenuous effects that year 11 had on my mental health, I was left feeling isolated from the people around me, and sought no comfort being in the areas I initially used to feel safe in. I had been neglecting the farm due to school and a suggestion to spend more time in nature came forward, resulting in more of my time spent up on the property. One element of the farm that always spoke to me were the oak trees surrounding the property, and how they'd shift colour and lose their leaves as the seasons changed. I resonated closely with these changes in my own emotional experience, and how nature would always bounce back after a significant change. My initial feeling of unease is reflected in the first stage of this series, where the outcome is a combined appropriation of nature and my own reflection in it, where the use of found natural materials from the property became the very surface upon which I would represent my journey back to self. The flows in the first work, attempt to guide the viewer to the second artwork, which attempts to reflect the physiological growth of my health from immersing in the natural environment and engaging with the seasons of change. Together, they signify my journey, mental, spiritual, and physical health and development and combine to represent the benefits of nature and creative pursuits in healing and personal growth.

I have been influenced by a range of artists and artworks and have learned many new mediums and techniques in creating this work. Artists such as Tamika Gunstan and Sophia Smith, linked with self and land art as well as memories of childhood and change. Their work, through being in the landscape noticing the subtleties of time, time of day, passing seasons and years, light, shadow, growth and decline and the connection between the viewer of the artwork and its representation in painting drew me to a new way considering composition. Queen Balling by Camila Scalzic applies a similar connection through representing nature's structural beauty with bees in their individuality and connectedness operating in a fragmented but whole social network. Visiting the SACE grad show in 2023, also inspired my representational compositions. Jess Madigan 'As flowers disappear' allowed me to read art differently; as a narrative of collected elements creating a whole story. In the work, I was drawn to how emotional grief was represented through delicate moments and the use of colour, moving from grey scale to full colour in small iterative steps across three pieces. Gabrielle Clark, 'My father's healing hands', connected similarly where the work's gold additions to her portrait linked to Kintsugi or the Japanese technique linked to the repair of broken objects, highlighting imperfections and giving new life and beauty.

The self Portrait element of my work, considered my expression, body language and gaze, coupled with experiments and exploration of realism, expressionism, art nouveau styles, broader techniques and mixed media, tools and technologies. I explored a range of natural and found materials including developing my own paints from found

materials and utilizing wood surfaces found on my property. In developing new skills I wanted to incorporate these into the resulting image. I wanted the mood to fit the landscape and the colour and imagery to connect within the work as well as with the viewers experience of the work. I explored watercolours, gouache, and pigments / mediums derived from the land on my property. I also explored digital media in creating the mood from my sketches in order to refine the images before transferring to the final surface. This in itself was a complex journey, where I learned new skills in cutting and preparing wood from fallen trees on the farm to paint on. These were cracked and absorbent meaning gesso and watercolours were not the best materials, however were beneficial on paper in developing planning imagery, sketches, brushwork, lighting and mood which I transferred to final ideation images for painting in gouache, acrylic and my developed pigments and materials, when corrected digitally. Exploring gouache enabled a transfer of these experiments to the wood. I explored texture through sand, ash, soil researching Jonna Jinton's earth pigment recipes, mixing acrylics and binding mediums. I also explored flower pressing, and collage assemblage using oak leaves and flowers from my farm to reflect change and new beginnings. I explored oakwood, pine and other woods in my folio and chose to keep the raw cut shapes from the panels I had gathered on site in order to configure them in a connected way where the cracks and age rings evident in the tree were incorporated into the final image connecting each with imperfections and healing as integral to the final piece.

I chose to use shielded body language, connected to the word grain, its splits and disconnects as they are linked to disconnects in mind and body, human and nature, dark and light, spiritual connection and life's broader dualisms, such as damage and repair, healing and growth. My intention was to connect each artwork together in a narrative where I applied Art Nouveau stylistic methods including body language, colour theory and nature linking colour, representation of time, the context of my farm, and my time spent with it to the work. Understanding the delicate but evident connection to my developing self-identity is the outcome.