

Preservation

Anook Simpson

The outdoors.

Enjoying the wide-open spaces close to home.

Travelling to far corners of my beloved country and exploring places of untouched beauty.

My artwork, *Preservation*, was inspired by a love of nature fueled by travel and the intoxication of fresh air and expanses of trees and mountains. Yet, also by my fear that we have reached a point of no return, that the unique and incredible plants and animals sharing this planet could soon disappear forever.

Despite increased awareness and a growing sense of panic, action is not being taken. Farming, mining, urbanisation, pollution and the introduction of invasive species are all leading to habitat destruction, the number one cause of extinction. In Australia alone, we have lost over 100 species of plants and animals, whilst a further 1,700 iconic species, many of which define our country, are critically endangered.

I viewed The Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize and was influenced by artists similarly exploring the natural world. Inspired by *Beetles, bugs and butterflies*, an artwork by Jennifer Keeler-Milne, a series of glass containers enclosing warped butterfly shapes, I decided to create a series of seven sculptures enclosed by seven second-hand jars, symbolising human's entrapment of nature. The number seven is often considered to represent completeness and perfection, juxtaposing our destroyed and broken world. The jars signify the work of science to right human wrongs, but their curvature warps the 'specimens', symbolic of human interference.

Each jar holds an endangered Australian plant or animal from the major species groups; mammal, plant, sea creature, insect, bird and coral, with the central jar representing all extinct Australian species. Each sculpture was created using different techniques to best represent the subject and depict that species' story.

For my mammal, I printed 50 etchings of a Gilbert's Potoroo to represent the approximated 50 individuals remaining in the wild.

For the coral, I chose the brightly coloured Organ Pipe Coral, and, inspired by the textile works of both Helle Jorgenson and Vanessa Baragao, created a woolen coral in white, complemented by a series of smaller corals crocheted using natural cotton and discarded plastic bags.

To represent the usually colourful Gouldian Finch I was drawn to the works of Anna Wili-Highfield and Tom Hill. Initially, Wili-Highfield's technique of sewing torn paper onto wire sculptures piqued my interest, however, I followed Hill's more simplistic approach to plain wire sculpture. This appears skeletal, symbolic of this species' demise.

The delicate 3-dimensional paper sculptures of Amanda Hamilton inspired my creation of a White Spider Orchid using wire and white paper. The simplicity and delicacy of this technique powerfully represents the peril faced by this and other often overlooked plants.

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Inspired by the Japanese art of kirie paper cutting, I decided to delicately cut my Green Sea Turtle from a plastic milk bottle. Accompanied by a seafloor of discarded glass found on the beach, this medium illustrates the greatest threat to sea creatures, ocean pollution.

For my Richmond Birdwing Butterfly, I created a small-scale butterfly using embossed paper, wire and a carved candle, before enclosing half the outside of the jar with handmade paper, infused with coffee and crushed leaves in the distinctive shape of the butterfly's chrysalis. This divide between the butterfly and the chrysalis symbolises habitat fragmentation which causes separation from resources imperative to this insect's survival, particularly the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly Vine, which they rely on, represented through the crushed, dry leaves.

The final jar is filled with slips of white paper with the scientific and common names of every extinct Australian animal and plant written in black ink. This powerfully portrays the devastating impacts of our actions on Australian species.

The series of sculptures is predominately in neutral colours to symbolise the innocence, fragility and vulnerability of these species. The lack of colour removes their defining vibrancy, leaving behind a washed-out and pale world. I endeavoured to use recycled or repurposed materials wherever possible to encourage viewers to reuse and minimise the environmental impact of this artwork.

Additionally, I wanted to incorporate a more personal aspect to portray the importance of conservation and environmental protection to me. Looking through my Australian holiday photos reminded me how captivated I am by our vastly diverse landscapes, from lush forests to pristine beaches, stark deserts and expansive mountain ranges.

I researched Australian artists Fred Williams and Clarice Beckett, both renowned for their landscape paintings, and experimented with how they portray this beautiful land. I particularly appreciated the tonal, soft, muted style of Beckett's paintings, which, through light and shadow, capture the essence of her scenes. I was also inspired by Williams' works which consist of a series of linear paintings through which I could illustrate the diversity of Australian landscapes.

Although influenced by these artists' styles and compositions I felt acrylic paints were too harsh and bright. Instead, I explored the medium of silk painting which has an immense delicacy and softness of colour to complement the white and natural-toned sculptures in the jars. When hung, the soft movement of the silk represents the ever-changing nature of the environment. Further, its transparency and delicacy symbolise the fragility of the natural world. To achieve greater detail in my paintings I used anti-spread primer on the silk to prevent bleeding and create more defined shapes without the harshness of Gutta. This series of three silk paintings highlights the landscapes that Australian species rely on to survive whilst also portraying a divine beauty that should be respected and appreciated.

The final composition of stark jars complemented by colourful, delicate and beautiful silks aim to raise awareness around the fragility of nature and the increasing threat of habitat destruction on not only endangered but all our beloved Australian native plants and animals. I aimed to share the incredible natural world that I love so that others can experience its wonder and share an appreciation of the land we depend on, in the hope, it will inspire actions of change towards a future of harmony between nature and man.