

With the Wattle

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In October of 2021 at age 17, I was diagnosed with Endometriosis. The WHO has provided the following definition for the condition: *Endometriosis is a chronic disease where tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus, causing severe, life-impacting pain and/or infertility. The condition affects 10% of women and girls globally. There is no cure for the condition.*

Due to the complexity of the condition it takes an average of 7-10 years between onset of symptoms and diagnosis. I consider myself to be incredibly fortunate to have been diagnosed within 12 months and to have had two surgeries. As this is a topic that is incredibly prevalent in my life I decided to develop my major into a visual allegory for a woman living with endometriosis.

As endometriosis is a condition that only affects women, I was interested in different feminine traits such as being emotive, nurturing, considerate and passive. I then decided to explore these ideas further by investigating how women have been visually depicted in art throughout history. To achieve this, I studied two contrasting art periods; 18th century Rococo and 21st century Feminist Art Movement.

The Rococo period showcases traditional femininity- beautiful women in ornate costumes, posed to depict scenes of love, youth and theatrical entertainment. To analyse Rococo art I studied oil painting and compositions by artists Fragonard and Watteau. Both of these artists place strong emphasis on asymmetrical composition and contrasting colours to create dramatic atmospheres. In order to incorporate Rococo stylistic features in my major, I painted a woman with a pale purple dress positioned asymmetrically on the canvas surrounded by contrasting atmospheric greens and blues.

I wanted the costuming and theatrical elements to convey the idea of 'playing a part', representative of the pressure I feel to act normally and appear capable despite being in a constant state of debilitating pain.

I then explored the Feminist Art Movement and how non-traditional art mediums such as textiles are used by female artists to reclaim and redefine what it means to be feminine. Studying artist Emily Ferris allowed me to develop the technical abilities required for embroidery; a medium I previously had no experience with. After falling in love with the ability to layer and blend threads I chose to embroider hundreds of leaves onto my major piece.

I purposefully chose thread colours that matched the background so that it is only under closer examination that the embroidered leaves become noticeable, thus adding a layer of complexity and depth not visible from a distance. This effect enabled me to illustrate the long and complex examinations required to diagnose endometriosis. I then added light satin threads to different parts of the leaves so that as the viewer moves closer and around the painting, the light catches the threads at different angles. This effect creates the illusion that the leaves are moving in the wind, representative of the ever changing circumstances of living with a chronic illness.

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The final stage of creating my major was to incorporate the colour yellow; the international colour for endometriosis. I achieved this by angling the woman's head downward to draw the audiences' focus to the branch of golden wattle grasped lightly in her hand. Wattle is ideally suited to withstand Australia's harsh climate and natural disasters. The resilience of wattle represents the resilience shown of women with endometriosis, who like plants, withstand extensive hardship and remain strong, but also have delicate soft flowers.

The strength and delicacy of the wattle reflects the strength and femininity of women with endometriosis.