

## *Dreams in Iso*

### **Sam Anastasios**

“Dreams in Iso” is a collection of ceramic sculpted face masks featuring imagery of Australian landscapes painted with underglazes and a clear final glaze. “Dreams in Iso” is about how COVID-19 has “masked” up the natural environment during the last few years making environmental experiences difficult. Each mask acts as a gateway into a part of the natural Australian world, such as a desert, a forest, or a beach. The impact of the pandemic forms the reasoning behind the name – only daydreams provide the escapism of these environments due to social isolation preventing local travel.

The richness of Australian wildlife is very important in “Dreams in Iso”, and an emphasis is placed on the masks which accommodate the environment as they attempt to stop the spread of COVID-19 and in time borders opened so that the land can be explored. I was inspired to explore these topics because of my occupancy within Australia, the landscapes I have seen, and the lockdowns I have experienced as part of my normal life since 2019.

The masks have a double meaning. The most relevant is their relationship with the COVID-19 pandemic, during which masks were a necessity to stay safe, but I have used the idea of “masking” something up to discuss how the natural Australian landscape was taken over by the European settlers, who covered up parts of Indigenous Australian culture in order to form their own utopic world with beautiful sunsets, wildlife, and freedom, ignoring the cost of life and culture that came with it. I have used the symbol of the mask to show how the Colonialists covered up the country with their own idealistic version of Australia, hence the influences from early colonial painters, such as John Glover and Joseph Lycett.

The clay utilised in the making of the masks is much more solid and impervious than a normal surgical face mask. The opaqueness alludes to the realism of the dreams and the strong barriers which are placed in way of getting out of isolation and into the real world. The landscapes appear curved on the three-dimensional surface of the masks because our perspective of the natural world has been distorted since we’ve been locked inside. Furthermore, the black background on which they sit allows emphasis on the masks and unity with them together. This is important because it reflects upon the idea of togetherness needed during COVID-19, and how people are stuck in the same situation.

Walt Whitman, a famous poet, once said to “keep your face always toward the sun and the shadows will fall behind you”, which in a sense is what I am doing with this piece. I am looking towards to the good times and places of the past and the future so that that the present may fall behind me, with “the shadows” obviously representing the sadder times. The masks cover up the shadows, and they can respond to the beautiful landscapes of this country. That is why for the selection of landscapes, I wished to represent a large variety of locations around the country, including the deserts of Western Australia, the cliffs and forests here in South Australia, and the beach-side regions along the Eastern coast. I also purposefully left out any man-made structures which may have been present in my reference photos in order to keep the environments natural. All of the environments also show the sun-struck sky, which further reflects upon the quote from Whitman, where keeping our faces toward the sun helps the viewer to look to better times. In this case, the faces, being the masks, are literally being aimed towards the natural world.