

## *When Life Gives You Oranges*

### **Madison Caldwell**

In May of 2022 my Grandad was diagnosed with terminal cancer. My Grandad has always been my hero, a man who no matter what he faced has shown resilience. When I realised, he wouldn't be able to bounce back this time was a hard reality to face. As someone who manages Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, I needed a healthy way to express the anticipation of grief and maintain a sense of equilibrium. My First real experience with death, was when my thirteen-year-old dog Diesel died. His whole life he would lay in the backyard of my grandparents' house under their orange tree. When he died Grandad laid him to rest under the tree. Young at the time, I was devastated that I wouldn't be able to pat him again however, I could still sit under the orange tree which brought me comfort. The orange tree has become symbolic of my relationship with my grandparents and representative of special memories with family. The Orange is symbolic of resilience and strength and as such, became a pivotal theme in my practical work.

Photography has long been an instrument of expression for me. Discovering I had an affinity with this media was unlike anything I had experienced before. It was like being able to breathe again. This year I have pushed myself to explore a range of different media. Experimenting with painting, printmaking, collage and drawing in pencil and charcoal. Throughout the art-making process I have discovered new techniques and refined skills. This mixed media exploration in combination with the research of several practitioners and their works has allowed me to bring new qualities to my photography, informing the way I approach light and composition.

As a result of my Visual Study investigation, I discovered the work of John William Keedy whose repetitive use of post-it notes to visually represent his struggles with OCD. This work became a significant influence on my practical exploration. Additionally, the Simulated Life series by John Brack introduced me to the way artists use the element of repetition to create a visual narrative. Through the repetitive use of pencils often simulating battle formations, Brack draws the viewer's attention to the key themes of human conflict. The use of repetition in my own work is not only a compositional technique but is symbolically representative of my compulsion to find order, to organise, to repetitively structure in order to gain or regain a sense of balance.

Australian artist Jeffrey Smart typically created hyper-realistic paintings with technical precision that reflected qualities of photographic media. Exploring aspects of scale and perspective within a composition and the representation of light was a significant influence on my practical exploration. Smart's approach to scale led me to consider the way young children draw themselves and members of their families as much bigger than is realistic. For a child, this is an unintentional visual representation of how much these people mean to them.

This conceptual approach to scale was foundational as I created the main image of my grandparents' hands. Composed in the controlled conditions of the studio, I used a simple lighting style to ensure the subject matter was soft with a warmth reminiscent of Smart's low-lit works. The impact of scale is representative of the importance of my grandparents and the compositional focal point of hands as the subject matter, depicts tenderness, aging and the inevitability of time.

## OFFICIAL

In response to the anticipation of my world being thrown into a state of disequilibrium, the use of repetition of five oranges in different stages represents my strategic approach to controlling my world. Through the repetitive process, I maintain control when things start to spiral. The incorporation of an anomaly represents the discordant element of grief. The repetitive use of a restricted colour pallet creates unity, tying together each aspect of the work.

The final sequence of imagery supported by the installation elements represents the struggle to hold things together, the resilience to rebuild after loss, knowing that even though the inevitable is pending and a new normal will replace what currently exists there is comfort in the process and in the symbols that represent what we once had.

This creative process has been emotional and challenging but this work means everything to me.