

Enduring Memories

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Enduring Memories is in acrylic landscape polyptych reflecting themes of nostalgia and remembrance. This body of work was inspired by a desire to explore the fickleness of enduring memory, and the ways nostalgia can warp one's recollection of the past.

Before beginning my research process, I felt very overwhelmed by the thought of choosing a thematic area to explore. As such, I began by research by visiting a multitude of galleries and exhibitions, including the AGSA "Free // State" Exhibition, and over 7 exhibitions within the Barossa Arts Festival, in order to gain a broader scope of art styles from which to draw my inspiration. It was at this point which I began to notice I was gravitating heavily towards depictions of Australian landscapes, as they elicited feelings of familiarity and nostalgia. I was particularly inspired by the works of Australian artists such as Gary Duncan, Talia Dawson, and Sera Waters, who all used their respective media to lovingly capture details of the South Australian landscape, and native flora, in a way which was both informative and nostalgic.

I commenced my thematic process by focussing particularly on the work of Gary Duncan and Talia Dawson, who I found helped me to gain an understanding of the ways in which natural iconography and landscapes can be used to convey or evoke an emotional reaction from viewers. I discovered that landscapes could generate emotional or familiarity responses in audiences, which then prompted me to move on to looking at the ways in which artists can depict nostalgia and the sense of remembering. I was particularly inspired by the work of Liam Symes, whose vibrant, distorted reimaginings of his childhood memories led me to examine the ways I recall images and events from my own childhood, particularly at my grandparent's rural property where I made many of my most vivid childhood memories. I adapted Symes' use of bright, surrealist colours in my own work, to create a borderline unnaturally-vibrant landscape reminiscent of an older Technicolour film, evoking a dreamlike atmosphere within my body of work. Through a visual exploration of the ways I remember aspects of my childhood I learnt that my memories, even of still images, are incredibly fluid and difficult to grasp. This led me to examine the presentation of blurriness or unfocused subjects within art. The pieces I discovered in this vein of research greatly influenced my final paintings. Research into painting techniques for out-of-focus or slightly blurred landscapes led me to the work of impressionist painter Claude Monet, whose obsession with capturing the intricate play of light and shadow across static settings greatly inspired my final choice of landscape; with the striking shadows of the trees arcing across the foreground and the golden sunlight hitting the trees and the tips of the mottled grasses surrounding their trunks.

Furthermore, the en plein air painting style and relevant themes of Victorian artist Gregory Alexander's work inspired the planning and final presentation of my landscape polyptych. Using images taken of landscapes within my grandparent's property, I began to plan a layout for my polyptych design, experimenting with changes in setting, colour, angle and composition to best embody my theme of nostalgia. My final landscape was framed using the rule of thirds to draw attention to the eucalypts central to the landscape, which hold great geographical and personal significance.

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Eucalypts are sturdy, resilient trees native to Australia which can live for hundreds of years and were a fitting, though perhaps ironic, focal point for my piece; which comments on the ways in which enduring memories can be distorted by time. The cropped framing of my landscape depiction results in some of the trees stretching past the edges of the canvas, reminding viewers that the past expands beyond the memories we obtain.

When I began the process of refining my skills prior to creating my blurred polyptych, I experimented with numerous forms of artistic media and application methods. I attempted to use digital media, lino print, watercolours, embroidery and stitching, various pastels, and acrylics; periodically investigating different methods of painting including impressionism, magical realism, and contemporary styles. My final work incorporated aspects of these painting methods in the brushwork, techniques and colours used, and my experimentation with several forms of media built my confidence in my abilities.

With initial plans to explore a multimedia approach for my final practical, I quickly realised working with a more familiar medium may help me add depth and detail within my work. Not only would refining my skills- rather than learning a different medium from scratch- allow me to complete a more skilful practical outcome, returning to a highly familiar medium seemed very fitting given the overarching themes of nostalgia and familiarity I wanted to explore within my work. I had very little experience working with lino, pastels, embroidery, and stitching, and I quickly found myself returning to acrylic paints to complete my responses. As this medium has been in my artistic repertoire for many years, I was able to spend more time refining my painting techniques and place a greater focus on ensuring my theme was exhibited strongly within my artworks. This led me to choose to work with this medium for my final body of work.

In working with a variety of materials in the leadup to creating my body of work, I worked to overcome my fear of beginning artworks and confronted my perfectionist tendencies by challenging myself to create quick and descriptive pieces under timed conditions. From such exercises I gained confidence in my ability to reflect my perceptions in my art, and then critique and improve in following attempts, which I believe has allowed me to successfully develop and refine my final polyptych.

The focus of my final pieces was the way in which time blurs memories until they become nearly unrecognisable, and I intended to explore this idea through the gradual blurring of my landscape images as the paintings progressed from left to right. I felt that this was successfully communicated in my final body of work due to the skills I built in rendering textures and capturing blur throughout my folio and preparation.