

## *A Tribute-Ellie Walton*

### Body of work

When debating possible ideas for my final prac I was drawn to two main concepts—traditional Japanese culture and the universal human struggle to accept death. These concepts were eventually refined into my body of work: *A Tribute-Ellie Walton*.

Inspired by two events prior to beginning the year 12 art curriculum—a school trip to Japan in December 2016 and the passing of Ellie Walton in January (a young girl battling brain cancer whose story I had followed for several years)—my initial thoughts were to choose one or the other to consider in my final work. After researching artists whose work related to the idea of mortality, such as 'The Black Rose Diaries' by Trent Parke, I felt encouraged to further consider the idea of death particularly in relation to the loss of childhood and confusion that follows the passing of a loved one. With permission from her family, I chose to use Ellie as the subject of my work as her heartbreaking story showed such vulnerability and honesty on a subject that otherwise is overlooked quickly as audiences don't want to accept hard truths. From analysing Parke's indirect way of depicting loss in his black and white photographs, I decided to think about symbols and images that hold significance in relation to Ellie's struggle; for example her scans of her brain don't show directly her pain and the effect of the cancer but they still represent it. Robert Hannaford's drawings and paintings 'Self-Portrait' 2005, 'Self-Portrait Royal Adelaide Hospital' 2010, showing his battle with cancer with the tubes and scars being very symbolic of his journey, coincided with the concepts I was exploring with Parke's work and the tubes and surgical equipment was decided on as an object I could consider. Hannaford's work also influenced the medium choice for my pracs as I liked the realism and richness that the oils achieved in his paintings.

My major piece is a series of three painted wooden panels and a canvas all depicting symbolic and direct references to Ellie's journey: her yellow hospital gown, the tubes and equipment attached to her arm post-surgery, her brain scans, and a cropped image of her under anaesthesia with the top of the oxygen mask visible.

The monochromatic black and white panel is representative of Ellie's slow and painful deterioration with the distortion of the lower scans alluding to the loss of purpose her family feels with her passing. Having had her initial tumour, the size of a third of her brain, removed at the age of four months old, the scans also show the progression of the tumour growth; as the tumour grows, Ellie's quality of life deteriorated with her bright personality and reality becomes a blur. The marble-distortion of the scans was inspired by the formation of cancer cells such as leukaemia—a cancer which has personally affected my family. Through my exploration I found the cells could be represented through water marbling techniques and then finally the concept was implemented to the final panel.

The panel of Ellie's hand attached to the various monitors and equipment also shows this 'distortion' through selective focus and the ambiguous strokes—similar to Hannaford's style—fading to white at the bottom of the canvas. I felt this further confronted the viewer with the heartbreaking reality of her death as 'fading to white' is often synonymous for passing away in literature and film. The third yellow panel is less focused of this life journey and instead captures the childhood innocence of the cartoon characters that adorned Ellie's old hospital gown. The intention of including this panel was to show the contrast between innocence and pain, childhood and illness with the images all connected by the colours yellow and grey—the colours used to signify childhood and brain cancer but also the colours that hold archetypal meanings of hope, happiness and joy, and loss,

emotionlessness. The powerful inner conflict between beauty and pain within these images pays homage to Parkes' work and though an upsetting reality, the paintings express that beauty can be found in everything despite the world's tragedies.

As an extension of my paintings, I concurred that I should introduce my Japanese inspirations into the body of work to create a more universal message. Whilst in Japan, the tradition of hanging cranes at temples and shrines was of interest to me and upon visiting Peace Park in Hiroshima the traditions origins became evident. Sadako Sasaki, a young girl who died in 1955 at the age of 12, as a result of radiation from the atomic bomb (dropped in 1945), popularised this tradition as she was told that it one was to fold 1000 paper cranes, a wish for health would be granted. Knowing the reasoning behind the chains of origami, I introduced them into my body of work as an installation that extended my work from the wall of my paintings, creating a more interesting and dynamic experience for viewers and helped clarify the intentions of my work.

With the cranes representing prayers for health, the end of wars, peace etc. and my paintings showing loss, pain and beauty, the works come together to convey a thought provoking statement on mortality and even the need to not look away from the confronting and disheartening elements of society (whether it be war, illness, etc.) but to accept them, feel empathy, and then hope and work for a brighter future. I feel the work is summarised eloquently with the inscription on the bottom of the Children's Peace Monument, constructed in honour of Sadako, in Peace Park, Hiroshima: "This is our cry, this is our prayer: for building peace in the world".

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