

Life in a Box!

Ruby Schwarz

I have spent the last three years living in a boarding house, surrounded by a tight-knit community of people from all over Australia and the world. These experiences inspired me to create my final work, *Life in a Box!* a still life acrylic paint and markers painting on a 61cm x 75cm wooden canvas. By focusing on still life, I explored the symbolism within a myriad of objects and delved deep into my own emotional connections and those of my fellow boarders.

I was inspired by the works of Susan Young, along with artists from the Fauvist movement, with their bold and vibrant colours. I found that utilising this slightly exaggerated colour scheme attracts the viewer's eye and creates an overall positive tone of the artwork. During these investigations, I explored a wide variety of mediums, including oil paints. I found this specific medium very challenging to work with, with its viscosity and long drying time something I was not used to. This revelation led me to settle on the combination of acrylic paint and POSCA pens, as they were quick drying, allowing layering, have a striking colour palette, and can create clean, crisp lines.

Through my research, I also explored vanitas and how artists add meaning to their work through symbolism. Symbols were prevalent during the Dutch Golden Age, with skulls representing mortality, candles the passing of time, and flowers showing growth and life. Drawing from vanitas, I incorporated organic elements such as leaves and strawberries, symbolising life and the fruits of heaven, to contrast the manmade items. Other elements have deeper symbolism, meaning created through the experience of boarders. The table-tennis bat and Milo represent friendships, the mask the struggles of COVID-19, and the textbooks the reasons we're actually here; to gain a better education.

I decided on a birds-eye view for my final work, as I felt it allowed the objects to be seen unobstructed when compared to the "traditional" composition, also allowing me to incorporate the red crate; this is used at the end of each term to store miscellaneous items over the break. The harsh geometric shape of this crate is broken up by the addition of draped fabric, contrasting the textures and soften the final composition. POSCA pens let me add finer details, such as dots and lines, to create a sense of pattern and repetition within the work, tying all elements together.

I believe that I have accurately captured the heart of the boarding house and the strong emotional connection felt by those within it. The utilisation of media and colour creates a bold aesthetic, with the subject matter personifying both mine and my fellow boarders, experiences and memories of our time living on campus.