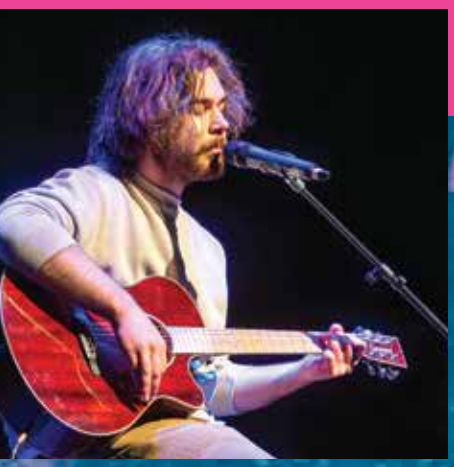
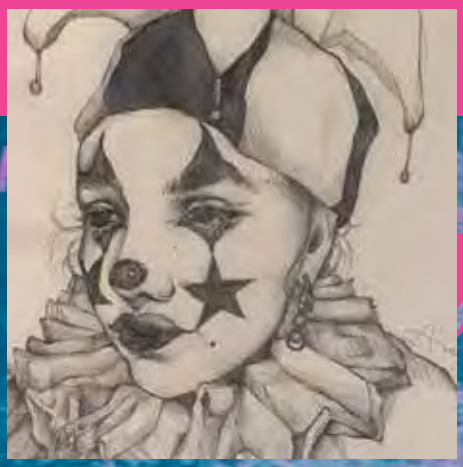
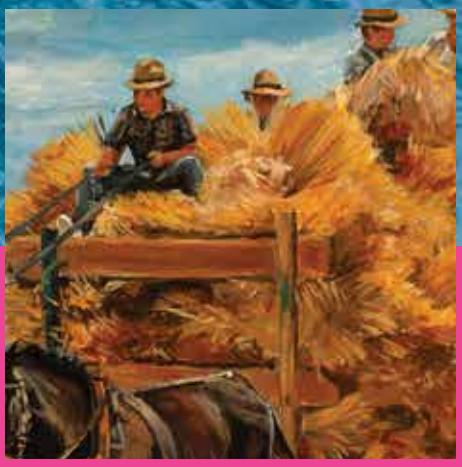




RAW Arts Awards 2024



RAW Arts Awards 2024

The City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country.

We acknowledge and extend our appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung People, the Traditional Owners of the land.

We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Peoples.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

This publication includes all eligible entries received for the 2024 RAW Arts Awards – an Awards program open to creatives aged 25 years and under.

Some material may contain adult themes and/or language and may be considered inappropriate for younger readers/viewers.

For information about the City of Greater Bendigo's RAW Arts program go to www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/RAW or email raw@bendigo.vic.gov.au

Photography of artwork and opening celebration by Bill Conroy, Press1 Photography.
Catalogue design by Jacqui Lynch, Preloaded Design.

Welcome

From the Mayor of the City of Greater Bendigo

Welcome to this special volume to commemorate the 2024 RAW Arts Awards.

The RAW Arts Awards are always a wonderful celebration of young artists in our community and 2024 is no exception. Congratulations and thank you to all artists who submitted to this year's awards. We received wonderful applications from visual artists, writers, film makers and performers.

The RAW Arts Awards is our annual showcase of youth creativity, dating back to the RAW View Youth Arts Festival in 1997.

The City of Greater Bendigo is always delighted to use these awards to help foster the talents and artistic pursuits of young people in our region.

At the City, we strive to cultivate a creative community and provide opportunities for people of all ages and artistic styles to share and promote their skills.

I would like to acknowledge the wonderful parents, carers and teachers who have encouraged the young artists to make a submission this year. It's so important for young people to have this support.

I would also like to thank this year's RAW judges for their time and enthusiasm in supporting the next generation of artists:

- Visual Arts judge – Curatorial Manager at Bendigo Art Gallery, Lauren Ellis
- Short Film judge – multimedia artist, software engineer, educator and founder of the Bauhaus Metaverse™, Ivan Sun
- Literary judge – Bendigo-based writer, artist and musician, Bridget Robertson
- Performing Arts judges – local musician and co-founder of the Bendigo Blues and Roots Music Festival, Colin Thompson, and Creative Producer with CreateA, John Willis

RAW would not be possible without the wonderful staff in our Bendigo Venues & Events unit. Many staff support the administration, staging and technical rollout of the awards, and the exhibition and showcase.

These awards have been a launchpad for many young people who have gone on to professional careers in the creative arts industries.

You never know where something like this may lead and I wish all our entrants well for their future.

Mayor Cr Andrea Metcalf

Literature Award
Winner: Phillipa Pearse,
Highly Commended: Kayla Barnfield

Performing Arts Scholarship
Winner: Liam Duivenvoorden
Highly Commended: Emma Gleeson

Short Film Prize
Winner: Coen Gould
Highly Commended: Kayla Barnfield

Visual Arts Award
Winner: Sofie Sawka
Highly Commended: Keira Long

Yo Bendigo/*Ambedo* Award
Winner: Ben Martin

Winner

LIAM DUIVENVOORDEN

Performing Arts

Music Theatre

It feels cliché to start at the beginning, but then again, where else would I start? I've been performing in some way or another for my entire life, whether that's dressing up as a fairy when I was four years old, or putting on made-up plays with friends for our parents when I was eight. When I was ten my parents enrolled me in Helen O'Grady's Drama Academy (now the wonderful Props Theatre). It was here I first experienced what it was like to perform with any level of skill.

In 2017 I entered the BSE Academy of Creative Arts. ACA was amazing and opened up so many doors for different opportunities, primarily the world of musical theatre.

In 2019 I took up dance lessons at Bendigo Ballet, that year I also gained a lead role in BSE's musical 'Me and My Girl'.

During the pandemic years I auditioned (virtually) for Bendigo Theatre Company's Tribe Youth Theatre production of 'Cats', which we eventually performed in Jan 2022.

I started singing lessons with Kristie Woodward in 2021 and I was asked to join the ensemble for BTC's 'We Will Rock You'. This was wild from start to finish and I loved it. By the time we took the final bow on opening night I felt like I had truly become a part of a community. I was in the Nexus production of 'All Together Now!' and sang in 'Bent Broadway Bendigo' as a part of the Bendigo Pride Festival.

In Year 12, I was part of BTC's major musical for the year; Charlie and the Chocolate Factory where I managed to land the role of Willy Wonka!

After 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' the last few months of year 12 were a struggle, but I pulled through pretty well, receiving a few academic awards and even getting the Dux for Drama at Bendigo Senior Secondary College.

Instead of going straight to further study I decided to take a gap year, which included some great opportunities: Offbeat Theatre's 'Macbeth: Murder on the Dancefloor', playing Lennox and 'Bent Broadway Bendigo'. In 2023 I also joined BTC's Tribe committee as a Youth Officer, and had a wonderful time behind the scenes.

Looking forward, I had my heart set on study at Victorian College of the Arts. I auditioned for three of their courses: Music Theatre, Theatre, and Acting. Preparing for my auditions was terrifying, but after weeks of frantic filming and rehearsal, I submitted my self-tapes, crossed my fingers, and anxiously waited. I received two callbacks and after the in-person auditions, in front of the department heads I received the call...

I GOT IN!

The VCA has been a dream so far; I'm surrounded by likeminded people, with diverse opinions and approaches, but a commonality in our shared love of theatre, performance, and art.

I'd love to expand my creative vocabulary in the next few years as I complete the course. I still love music so much and desperately want to pursue it alongside theatre. There's a piece of advice I see thrown around a lot in regards to being an artist as a job: "If there's anything else you could do, do that", and when I first heard it, I didn't really get it. But as I mature it's starting to make more and more sense to me. And I'm more and more sure that I'm doing the right thing by pursuing this. To be a little pretentious; art can change the world, it is the ultimate human expression; and I want nothing more than to immerse myself in it.

> *We can see Liam drive to make performance and performance making his focus. He has pushed himself to grow and develop, including community involvement and working with others around town too.*

Winner

PHILLIPA PEARSE
RAW Arts Literature Award

Dreams

The clock reads 4:50. 10 minutes. 10 minutes and I'll do it all again. Maybe tomorrow will be different, maybe tomorrow I'll do something different.

I watch as the hands of the clock methodically tick around on their endless circle; never changing, never faulting. I can't help but think of myself, on my own perpetual journey. Except mine isn't endless. One day, my journey will end, and that'll be it for me. The end doesn't scare me, it never has; but life does. A life of not going anywhere, of not seeing anything; a life of trepidation. They're the thoughts that fuel my melancholy.

As I pack my briefcase and drag my coat over my shoulders, I sense that feeling I know all too well; déjà vu. It's the same heavy brown trench coat and the same weathered briefcase, at the same time, in the same place; for the last 23 years. The only difference, the grey of my hair and the scuffs on my shoes. But, same as always, I follow the familiar crowd of men filing out the doors right on 5:02. Sometimes, I see a new face. A bright young boy with his whole future ahead and it makes me sad and almost angry to think of his possibilities he hasn't yet wasted. Once again, I'm surrounded by the same dull faces who look like they've seen too much life, and the smell of newly lit cigars making the air just a little hazy. We're all just copies of one another, on the same path from the moment we awake at the command of the sun, to the moment we drift off at night. That's when we're unique, when the dreams take over, and we can go anywhere, and be anyone. Some people are secure enough to let their dreams out and live with their eyes open, but my dreams don't leave my soul, they stay locked up tight. For fear of change? Maybe. Or for the general assumption that I just can't and won't make them happen.

The new blooms of geranium begin to line the footpaths beside me. I hadn't realized I was almost home; the smell of cigars have been replaced by freshly cooked dinners wafting from kitchen windows. I turn down the quaint street leading to my house. The bare branches of late winter trees overhang the roof. This place looks unrecognizable when spring arrives, and the pink and white blossoms take over. Why would I ever want to leave this place?

I pause at the front door, my hand resting on the brass. I can hear the chatter and laughter of the children getting ready for dinner, and Alice laying the table with the fancy plates. She loves making a big deal out of dinner, even if it's just the four of us. Niceties like these are ones that make me adore my life and keep me staying. But every day when I reach this door, I stop, and I think. Behind this door is comfort and warmth. There are people whom I love so dearly. But behind me lies the unknown, of places I've only seen when my eyes retire at night. I have a decision to make. My thoughts become antithetical, but only for a second, and I don't surprise myself when I turn the handle and choose certainty.

Instantly, I'm met with excitement from people who have been waiting for me all day, while I was standing outside the door deciding if I should even walk in. The guilt takes over and I wonder, why do I ever dream of leaving a place filled with people who show me so much love? And whom I love just as much.

The clock chimes 4 times. 4am. The house is quiet, aside from the tick of the old grandfather clock, and the gentle drip of the kitchen faucet. I hate myself for my thoughts. I hate that I even dare to dream of the possibilities. But I just can't rid my brain of the idea I'm meant for more.

But in the end, I know I'll always settle for comfort and regret, even if it means living in perpetual trepidation. So, I'll go on every day, the same as the day before, dreaming of the life I could have if I let my heart take the reins for once; and live beautifully.

> *Shows a really good grasp of language, impressive characterisation, and a strong voice. The narrative arc is insightful and meets the criteria well by being both inspiring and thought-provoking.*

Winner

COEN GOULD

RAW Arts Short Film Award

Hunted

Watch the video
https://youtu.be/_IKWIhAsll8

> *In Hunted, the utilisation of Lego stop-motion animation provides a wry perspective to the familiar action/ thriller scene typical of blockbuster movies. The film creates suspense and anticipation through careful attention to composition, soundtrack, and scene building. The Lego approach made me appreciate the film techniques without the potential overcrowding of visual elements in live action that can distract the critical eye.*

Winner

SOFIE SAWKA

RAW Arts Visual Arts Award

Electric Blues

Gouache on Cold Pressed Watercolour Paper

> *Electric Blues stands out for its highly accomplished execution, a photo-real effect created in fine-brush gouache painting. Even more impressive is the artist's dense composition, attention to detail, and choice of 'everyday' subject: the musician in this home studio has been depicted with clear affection and admiration, but with a powerful trace of sadness implied by the title.*

Winner

BEN MARTIN

YoBendigo/Ambedo Award

Setho - HOTME$$ Ft. Juiceboxx

> *"Congratulations to the RAW Arts Ambedo prize winner of 2024, Ben Martin! The YO Media team were impressed with the quality and meaning shown in his short film titled 'Setho - HOTME$$ Ft. Juiceboxx'. We look forward to seeing what he does next!*

YOBENDIGO/AMDEDO AWARD

This is the third year of the YO Bendigo/Ambedo Award in the RAW Arts Awards.

Ambedo is a 100% youth-run magazine. By young people, for young people. The aim of the YO Bendigo/Ambedo Award prize is to recognise one entry from all the entries to RAW 2024 that spoke to the experience of being a young person living in Greater Bendigo in 2024.

Highly Commended

KEIRA LONG

RAW Arts Visual Arts

Music

Tah Eh Thay Maung

Mixed Media on Canvas

> *Tah Eh Thay Maung 2023 embodies the joyful and uplifting potential of friendship, the subject has been so warmly and beautifully animated by the painter you can feel the connection between them. This work feels vibrant and fresh, but also underpinned by a strong foundation of deep values and shared understandings between painter and subject. The blend of realism and non-figurative elements, including the striking patterning surrounding the subject and bold colouring, makes for a very powerful and balanced composition.*

Highly Commended

KAYLA BARNFIELD

RAW Arts Literature Award

Phantom Island

> *Well-written with strong dialogue. A lot of effort has been put into editing, and it shows. Characterisation is strong, with a lovely arc to the story as well.*

Patch reloaded his gun and aimed.

BANG! The barrel beside the target exploded, spraying wood chips across the grass. Feluka and Eel both crossed their arms, frowning at him, and Feluka marked another miss onto the roll of parchment he held.

Patch grimaced, lifting his gun for what felt like the hundredth time. The trees and barrels in front of him were embedded with stray bullets, while the target itself was completely unharmed. He'd been trying for almost an hour, feeling Eel's frustration and Feluka's disappointment burning into his back.

"All right, that's enough," Eel snapped, and Patch's shoulders slumped. "You clearly need more practice. Don't waste my time again until you can actually fire straight."

He snatched the pistol out of Patch's hands and stuck it in his holster.

Patch took a deep breath. "Sir, I – I have been practicing," he mumbled. "Every day."

"Ha!" Eel waved his hand at the target. "This would suggest otherwise. You've clearly got no talent, and probably no ability either."

Feluka glanced sympathetically at Patch before turning to Eel. "He's telling the truth, sir," he said. "I've seen him."

Eel gave him a scornful glare. "You've only just joined the crew, Feluka, so stay out of things that don't concern you."

Feluka pulled a face behind Eel's back, but otherwise didn't respond.

"As for you," Eel snapped, scowling at Patch, "you'd better learn how to shoot real soon, or you'll be stuck on Phantom Island with the fishermen and merchants for the rest of your life."

Eel turned around and strode off. Feluka hesitated for a moment, then put the parchment down and followed him.

Patch pulled out his knife and threw it into the ground.

"I take it things didn't go too well," a familiar, slightly amused voice said.

Rena stood behind Patch, watching with a small smile as he bent down and tried to yank his knife out of the dirt.

"About as well as the last time," he muttered. "And the time before that. And the time before that."

Rena walked over to him and pulled the knife out of the ground with no visible effort. Patch accepted it back grudgingly.

"You know," Rena said thoughtfully, frowning in the direction that Eel had gone, "he's an absolute nightmare, that one. Don't take it to heart, he does it to everyone."

Patch scowled. "Bet he didn't do it to you."

Rena raised her hands. "Hey, just because he's my half-brother doesn't mean we're alike. You should've seen his face when I passed the test. Wanted to give me an automatic fail for, and I quote, 'firing that bloody gun too loudly'."

"Yeah," Patch said sarcastically, "but you hit every single bullseye on the target first try, am I right?"

Rena grinned. "Your point? Pretty shots mean nothing when up against an enemy. I've never hit a moving target in my life."

Patch shrugged. "Neither have I, so you're still winning."

"It's not a contest, you know." Rena raised her eyebrows at his disbelieving expression. "I mean it! Anyway, Chris's ship leaves in three months, so that's plenty of time to pass the test and join the crew."

Patch frowned, looking down at his knife. Being hopeless at shooting and almost as bad at duelling, this weapon was the only one he really knew how to use. "I've been practicing for eleven months already," he admitted. "Still haven't gotten anywhere. Maybe it would be best if I just became a street merchant instead."

"Are you serious?" Rena asked, shaking her head. "C'mon, you'd be a great pirate! You've even got the eyepatch to prove it."

Patch reached up to touch the black cloth covering his right eye. "Yeah," he muttered, "just a shame I lost my eye in a fishing accident rather than an actual act of piracy."

Rena frowned, then sighed. "Daniel."

Patch turned towards her immediately, eye flashing in anger.

"That's not my name," he snarled. "I told you never to call me that again."

"Fine!" Rena rolled her eyes. "Patch. If you ever feel like you need help, you can always ask someone instead of trying to figure everything out yourself."

Patch scowled. "I don't need help. I can do it by myself. You'll see!"

"Great!" Rena grinned, beginning to stroll away. "Glad to see you're not giving up!"

Patch's mouth opened as he realised that Rena had just gotten her way – again. "Seriously?" he called after her. "That's real helpful, thanks a lot!"

Rena didn't answer, but Patch could tell that she was pleased with herself.

He sighed, looking first at the undamaged targets, then, reluctantly, up towards the nearest lookout tower, where he knew his sister kept watch with her rifle. Patch didn't really want to ask Paige for advice, but if she could help him improve his aim, it would be worth it.

When Patch entered the room, Paige was sitting with her back against one of the walls, playing the guitar.

"Hey," Patch said, without much enthusiasm.

"Hi." Paige didn't look up from her instrument, which she continued to play. "Haven't seen you in a while, I thought you were practicing for the shooting test."

"Uh..." Patch wondered, not for the first time, if Paige was ever bothered by his frequent absence. "Yes, I've been training, and, well..."

"You still haven't passed." Paige's statement burned, even though Patch could tell that it wasn't malicious.

Patch frowned. "How did you do it?"

"Ah," Paige said, finally looking up at him, "that's easy. Have you ever seen me use a pistol or revolver?"

Patch tried to think. "No? I mean... not that I remember, anyway."

"That's because I'm even more hopeless than you." Paige got to her feet, setting her guitar against the wall, and walking over to the window. She picked up the rifle, reloaded it, and aimed it at a distant speck on the horizon, looking through the magnifier placed on top. "I use the weapon I'm actually good at. That's the secret. Play to your strengths. See?"

"No," Patch said, frowning. He glanced out the window, trying to think of any strengths he might have, but nothing came to mind.

Paige sighed. "Patch."

He looked back towards her.

One of Paige's hands still held the rifle, but she'd placed the other on her hip. "Do you remember which gun Dad used?"

Patch tilted his head. "Trick question. He used a cutlass for everything. If an enemy was out of reach, he'd get closer. But that's got nothing to do with me – I can't fight with swords or guns."

"Then find something you're good at." Paige smiled at him. "I did it. Dad did it. Rena did it. I mean, if even Chris did it, you can definitely do it."

Patch shrugged. "Maybe, but Eel won't let anyone who can't shoot go on Chris's voyage."

"Trust me," Paige said. "It'll be worth it. It was for me." She set her rifle back against the wall, picked up her guitar, and started strumming it.

Highly Commended

EMMA GLEESON

RAW Arts Performing Arts

Music

My name is Emma Gleeson, and I am a 13-year-old songwriter.

I have always loved performing and I have been playing guitar and singing since I was six years old. I have had lessons with Min Miles for this whole time, continuing private lessons with her this year after beginning secondary school. I have also been involved in music opportunities at my primary school St Francis of the Fields, joining in the choir, ukelele club and school rock bands. This year I have started in year 7 at Victory Christian College and I am excited to continue in their music programs.

When I was 11 years old I began performing in public through my primary school rock bands, performing at local halls, pubs, and festivals. I approached local events organisers to busk at their markets and community festivals and have since been invited back as the main entertainment for further events. I was also given the opportunity to record music at a local community recording studio, which led to me starting my own YouTube channel. Any money that I have made so far through my music I have saved towards purchasing new equipment to support my goals. I hope to soon be able to use some of the money saved to purchase some recording equipment. I will continue to do whatever I can to make it as a professional musician.

I have been lucky enough to win a number of awards for my music including the St Francis of the Fields Music Award in 2023, and the Victory's Got Talent competition at my high school.

I wrote the music and lyrics of my song 'Safe with you' one afternoon during the school holidays. The song is about my dad and how he has always supported me with my music. Dad has come to all my gigs, taught us both how to set up my equipment, and given me feedback on my songs.

After writing my original song 'Safe with you,' I spent a month or so working with my music teacher, Min and her family to record it and film a video clip. I have learnt so much already about recording through this experience and am grateful for their support.

Ever since I started taking music lessons, I knew that I was in the right place. I believe that music speaks louder than words and that everyone can have some sort of relationship with music. I want to continue playing and making music for the rest of my life, it is all that I want to do, and it always has been.

> *There is something so genuine about her songwriting and singing, which is lovely to see in someone so young. Emma has managed to gather around her lots of people to support and encourage her and that comes through is her pride and ambition.*

Highly Commended

KAYLA BARNFIELD

RAW Arts Short Film Award

The Virtual Doorway

Watch the video
https://youtu.be/xHkzxHFI2EY

> *The Virtual Doorway uses digital 'storyboarding' animation to share the joys of creative expression and shared social experiences in a virtual world. This ode to the metaverse stood out with its sustained narrative and cohesiveness achieved through thoughtful use of visual elements and a dynamic soundtrack.*

TAHLIA GIFFARD

Friendship for Eternity

Watercolour

LEAH ANDERSON

Work in the field

Acrylic

LEVITY CAMILLERI

This Summer

This summer, I spent two weeks exactly trying to be interesting. I tried to take risks, force myself out of my comfort zone. I snuck out of the house and walked around at night because I wanted nothing more than to accidentally stumble into some depraved mystery that I could dedicate my restless mind to. I gave up on that because when I walked around all I found was endless mosquitoes and foil chip packet wrappers, shining like fallen stars in pale moonlight. At first, I would rush towards the sparkle, because when you're thirteen and sleep deprived it's easy enough to convince yourself that litter poking out of a mound of dog excrement is a beautiful crystal necklace. I gave up on that too. I think, despite my best efforts, I was more interesting before I got so disillusioned.

This summer, I spent a week and 6 days learning how to ride a bike. My dad really wanted to teach me, so I figured why the hell not. He's kind of obsessed with trying to teach me stuff, because he wants me to be kind of obsessed with him. I like him a lot, but I want him to just leave me alone sometimes. Riding a bike was really fun though! The helmet crushed my quiff and so I learned to ride without it, learned how to sharply pull over onto the dead grass and gravel of the nature strips whenever I heard the rumble of a car behind me. I learned how to fall and how to land in a way that didn't hurt my fragile head. When my dad found out I stopped using the helmet when he wasn't there, he got mad but told me he's just disappointed, which is absolutely a lie. Parents act like the worst thing they can be is mad, and they are always pretending like they aren't. I'd rather they just got mad at me though to be honest. But I suppose I get it – I'm learning things that he doesn't want me to learn, things that he didn't teach me.

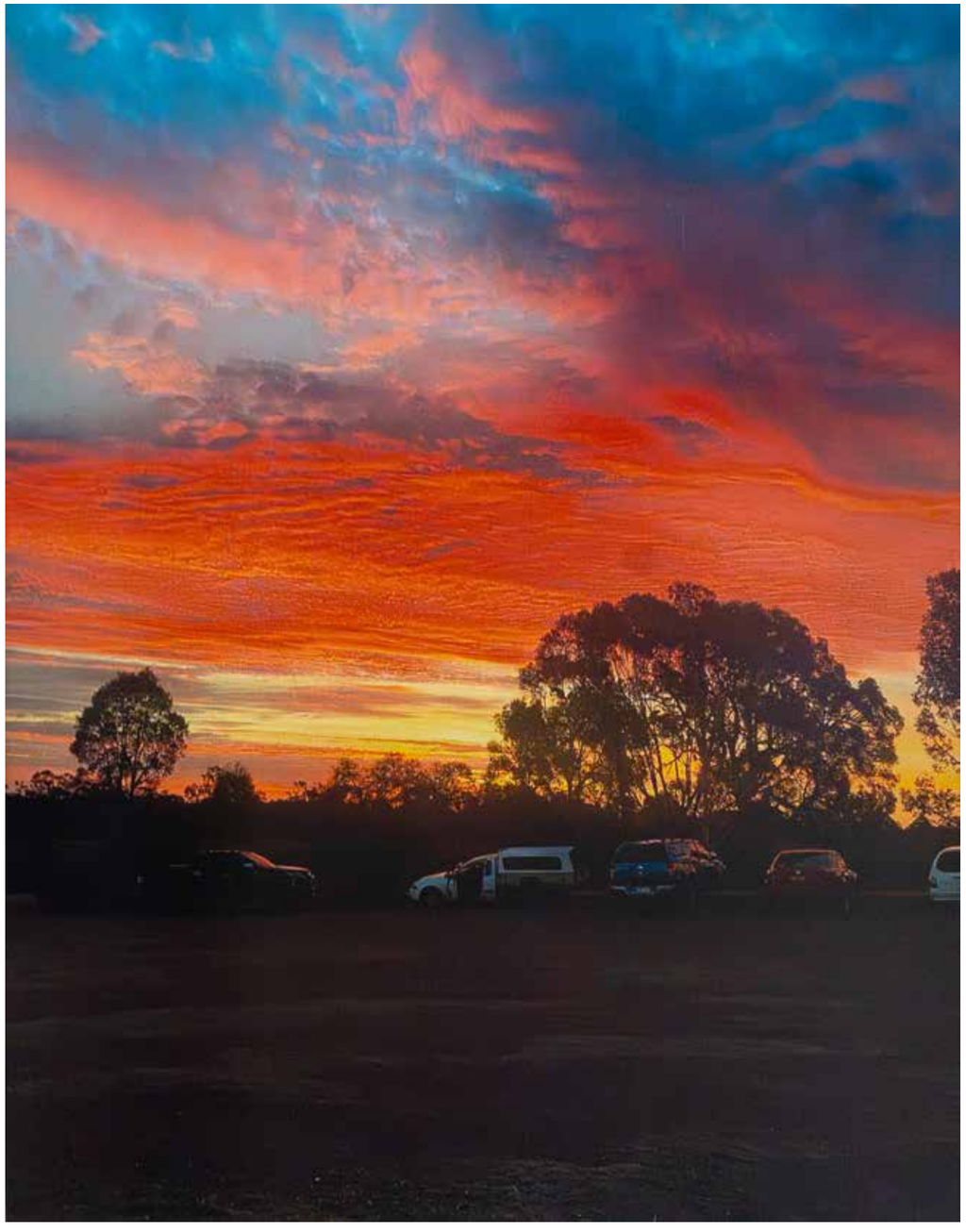
This summer, I spent one week and two days trying to do my maths homework. Ugh. Maths makes my brain feel like it's rotting, my skull caving in like a decomposing pumpkin, and all my interesting thoughts are spilling out of the ruptures. In the end I didn't even do it – I got my boyfriend to 'help me with it.' He broke up with me at the end of the summer, but I didn't really mind – My auntie showed me how to gel back my hair and she gave me a special oil to help me get a beard sooner, and so in a month or so I'll have anyone I want. She told me to look nice for the girls, and I almost laughed, but on the outside I didn't. She wouldn't have given me the oil if I told her I like guys.

This summer, I spent four days hanging out with my best friend Clementine. She was named after the song – "Oh my darling, oh my darling, oh my darling, Clementine, thou art lost and gone forever, dreadful sorry, Clementine." I hope she is never lost and gone forever because I absolutely adore her. She's the only one who I would ever talk to about my deep and profound things, like the way I believe that everyone is innately good, or the fact that I don't love the god that I believe in and do love the god that I don't. She never calls me weird or tries to confront me about how I'm sometimes endlessly sad, she just sits with me and talks. This summer she asked me if I wanted to kiss her and I quoted the song again – "I'm dreadful sorry, Clementine." At one point I actually did think that I was in love with her. But now I've contemplated it, I realise that I just love her in the normal way.

This summer, I spent two days in Boort at my brother's farm. There wasn't much to do there at all. The only thing I liked about it was that at night, I felt like I could see every star in the sky, and whenever I played my favourite song, it sounded like the only music in the whole wide world.

This summer, I spent every single night lying awake, wishing that I could put into words the discontentment I feel. My life is okay on the outside. I am just so supremely consumed by boredom, by wanting more. I sometimes think that I'm the only person who feels this way. Everyone I know is either happy or sad, not this state of limbo in which every emotion is at once clamouring to be allowed to exist in my dull mind. I just need to escape.

This summer was too God damn long.



LOGAN BLYTH
Sunset
Photography

MATTHEW BOROMEO
The Fugitive
Graphite on paper

VANESSA CAMPI

Mermaid

Pencil on paper

BETH FOWLER

In the Woods

Beth's Perspective

I walk alone along the dry, dirty path, the sun shining through the trees as it slowly sinks below the horizon, birds crowing and laughing in the branches above me. I look behind me as the campsite disappears behind the hill I walk down, the trails of smoke from campfires still visible. The darkness begins to set in as the sun falls lower and the sky turns a brilliant shade of orange, and I hear a stick break in the distance. My head snaps towards the sound, and I can just make out a tall man, clutching an axe, staring at another person walking through the trees who I recognize is Sylvie. Her family is camping near mine, and I noticed her at first because she's so tiny next to everyone else. She also spots the axe man, and immediately starts sprinting away from where he is, and he chases after her.

Without hesitation I start running too, and I'm around 200 metres behind the man, who is not far behind Sylvie, and I know I won't be able to catch up to either of them, but still I run. I hear her screams of terror, the birds mocking us as they watch us go.

I notice Sylvie beginning to slow down, swatting the bugs out of her face, and the axe man is now only a few yards behind her. My lungs are on fire, my legs feel like lead, and I trip in the near darkness, crashing to the ground. To my horror, I see Sylvie also trip, and she too goes flying into the leaves below her, her arms flailing.

The axe man finally reaches her. I try to stand but I can't. Sylvie gets back to her feet, but it's too late. He lifts the weapon up above his head, and swings it down into Sylvie's neck, her head coming clean off and falling to the ground. Her legs collapse and blood spills all over the rocks and leaves. I watch the axe man slowly turn around, and I quickly move behind a tree, praying he didn't see me. I pick up a long, spiky stick to defend myself with, look over my left shoulder, and almost scream because he is right there, with his axe already up in the air. Before I can even hit him with my stick or try to run, the axe comes down, right across my body. I cry out in pain, my arm dangling at my side, drenched in blood, and I make eye contact with the axe man as he slowly backs away, turns around and runs. I watch him disappear into the darkness as I sob silently, and my eyes fall shut.

I hear the soft, peaceful sound of a river trickling, the laughter of people enjoying their night back at the campsite just over the hill, the rustling of leaves blowing in the wind, but at last, the birds have gone quiet.

WILLOW COOPER

Decaying changes

Pencil and Acrylic on paper

MACKENZIE DAVIS

Butterfly Kisses

Charcoal, colour pencils and makeup

NOAH DINEEN

Waking Up

Acrylic on paper

SAMMY JOHNSTON

Please Understand

"Oh, I don't go to those sorts of things,"
I say when invited to a party.
I smile and laugh along, later, when I hear the stories.
Does not mean I find it amusing.

I explain to you that I don't like drinking,
most people upon hearing 'I don't drink' perhaps assume I've had a bad experience myself.
I haven't.

I explain to you, why I don't like drinking.
Few people are like you, in that I explain it at all.
It's a compliment.
I know people for years and don't tell them.
I explain to you that I don't like drinking.
"It ruined my life."

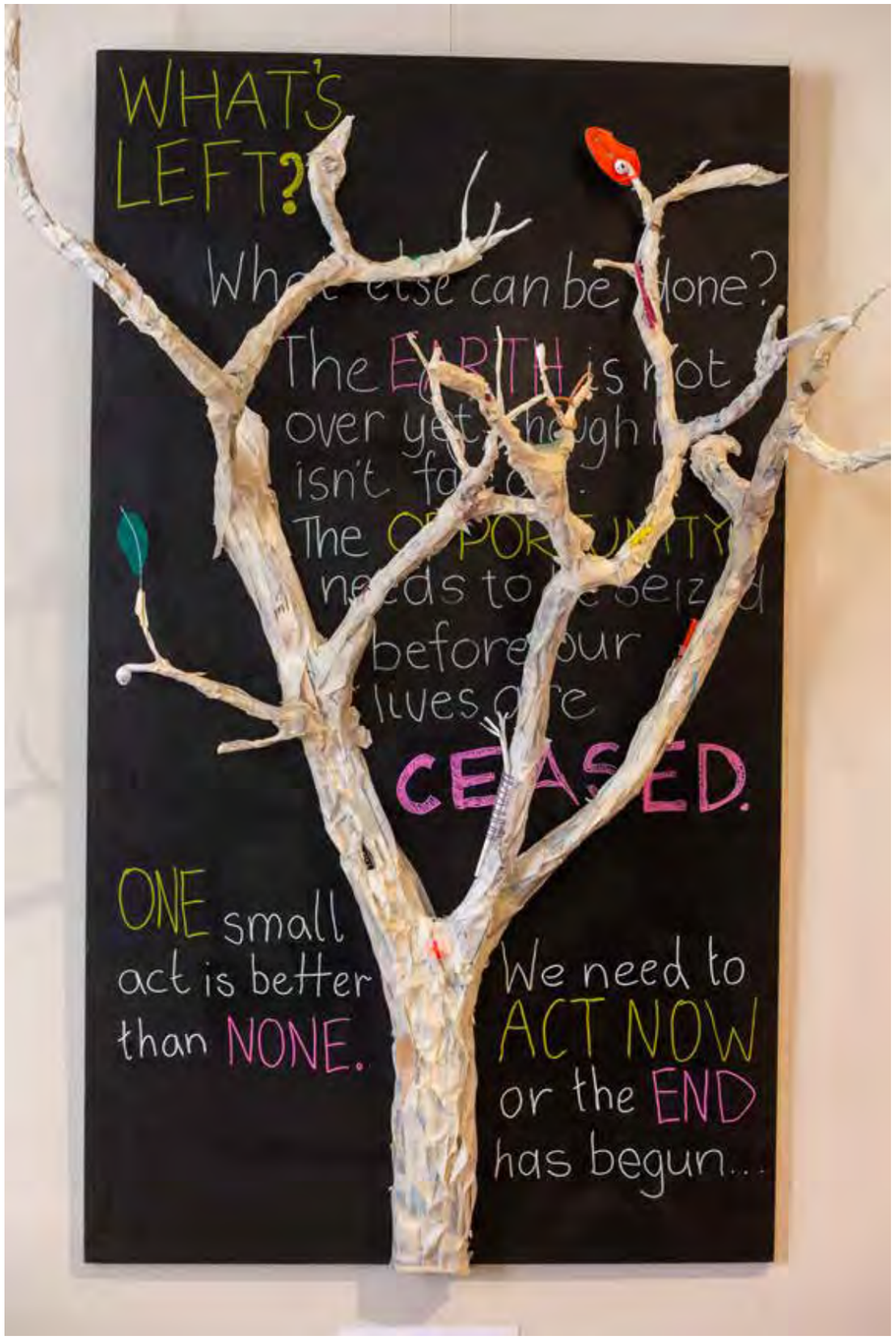
I've noticed that the word 'alcoholism' rings hollow when I say it,
I don't see a change in people's eyes.
They nod along as if they understand, they don't.
I hear about their drunken escapades anyway, or they show me.
I explain to you why I don't like drinking.
I hope one day you'll understand.

I explain to you, why I don't like drinking:
you'll never meet my dad.
He can't walk me down the aisle.
I don't like drinking.
I don't like it.

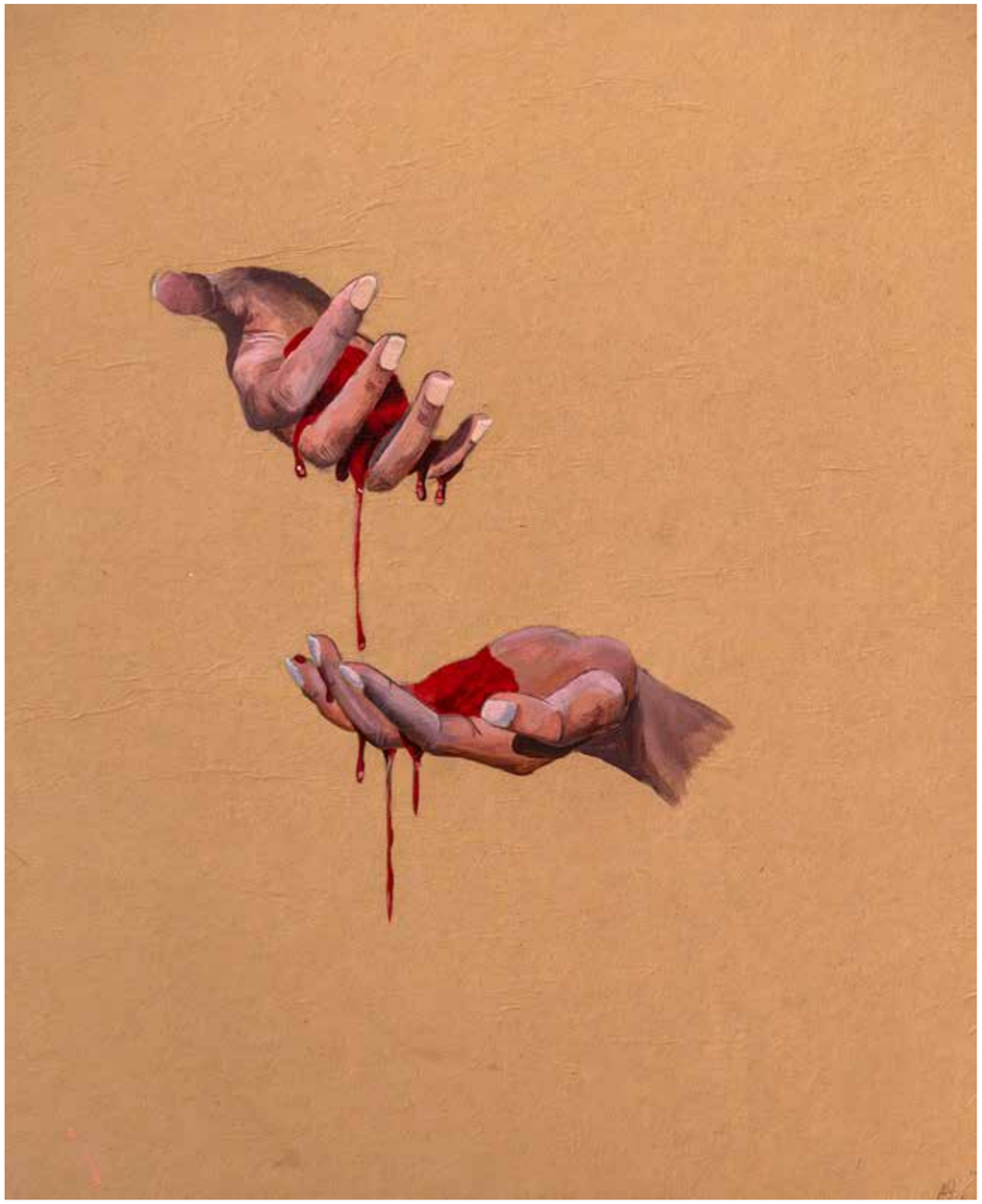
NOAH DUNSTONE

The Shenaniganical Shelf Life of Inventiveness in Popular Culture

Digital Painting



GEORGIE FAWCETT
Left
Mixed media



AMY FREEMANTLE
Untitled
Acrylic

MATILDA LOVETT

You Didn't Notice

You didn't notice, did you?

You didn't notice that extra birthday candle.
As you closed your eyes and made a wish.
You don't wish anymore.
You pray instead.
You pray to not wish anymore years away...

You didn't notice.

The last time you would be gently tucked into bed
The last time you would leave the playground and never go back
The last time you would cry over not getting the front seat in the car

You didn't notice.
When you started to care more about your hair and makeup getting wet than the chalk on the sidewalk
When you stopped searching for the monster under the bed
and found it in mirror instead
When you started to count the calories in your head

You didn't notice.
That grandparents didn't last forever
That your parents were growing old too
That you would drift from the people you imagined your life with

You didn't notice.
When you got your last participation trophy
When you stopped believing in Santa Clause's magic of Christmas and replaced it with material wish lists instead
When you stopped playing with those plastic phones because you had a real one now
It was not a toy but an addiction

You didn't notice.
Did you?
But now you do.
You are reminded every time you blow out another birthday candle.
That you're older.
That you're tired.
That your imagination does not run wild.
That you can't remember how to be a child.
You notice now, don't you?
That the time has gone too fast...

TUNDRAECHO DUNKLEY

Evelyn the Microraptor

Paper Mache

IVY GRIST

Saturated Summer

Acrylic on canvas

SARA HANCOCK

Dasypodia Selenophora,

Oil on canvas

EVIE MEWS

Seventeen

I've never been more scared of growing up.

I sit at the dining table, next to my baby brother, wispy hairs crawling over his upper lip, which doesn't tremble anymore when he stubs his toe or doesn't get what he wants.

Across from my mum, who scolds me for my posture, only because she cares, though.

Across from my dad, who only just got up from his computer on the end of the table to eat his dinner. Our table once fed people on an old ship, that's what dad says. You can tell, because there are holes on those great plinths that the slab sits on, to screw into the deck.

Once we were sailors, says my grandpa. I've never liked boats though, they shake like his hands never used to, and they make me feel ill. Once we were sailors, but I'm not.

They take the money, but you don't even notice, says my cousin. They just take it out of your pay slips, every fortnight or however long, and your HECS debt gets paid.

What happens if you die before you can pay it off? I ask.

Well, then your children have to pay it.

What if I don't have children?

Then your parents!

What if I don't have anyone?

She just laughs. Well, you probably wouldn't worry about it too much if you were dead, anyways.

What'll you do when I'm dead?

Says my mum as she closes my bedroom door, having just dropped off a neat basket of carefully folded laundry. The pretty pink of my favourite jacket peeks out at me from the middle of the pile. I honestly don't know what I'd do if she did die, but that wouldn't happen to her. She loves us too much.

My friends are all growing up now, and I'm starting to meet people who have already grown. It's not so scary when you have a plan, or some savings, or some friends that love you very much. But I still cry when I think about the future too hard, and sometimes I forget to brush my teeth as much as I should, and I break things and don't know how to fix them.

The flowers I got for my seventeenth birthday are wilting now. They are all different colours, mostly little yellow ones, with deep red roses suffocating beneath them. My favourite was the lily, the big pink lily, that stood proud atop the rest, filling my room with a sweet, floral scent to cover the dusty sickness that sits in my carpet, and hides under my couch, the couch that sat in the living room of my childhood home.

We could open a bookstore and a spa all in one! Says my friend, laughing across from me in the warm morning light. People would come to get nice and clean and buy a good book afterwards. I laugh with her and hope that we'll stay friends forever.

One day, I will cook my own dinner and sit at my own table. I don't know who I'll be sitting with, but maybe they will be kind and full of laughter, and maybe they will ask me about my day, and maybe they will listen when I tell them. Maybe I'll scold them for their posture, but only because I care, though.

JAY MOORE

I am a piece of paper

I am a piece of paper.

I was born a piece of paper, my name and gender etched onto my skin

I am a piece of paper, my intelligence written on me in numbers and letters

I am a piece of paper, my pain written out on me by the doctor

I am a piece of paper, my name scratched out and re written

I am a piece of paper, looked at and assessed for everything I did and everything I have

To the people above me I am a piece of paper, I show them my name, my age, my gender, and everything that went wrong

I am a piece of paper, passed along as I move

Each item I own and every dollar I own written on to me in bold

I am a piece of paper, my name read aloud as I die

I was a piece of paper, that's all I was.

RAPHAEL HANNA

Egyptian History

Pencil on paper

MUKU TWIN

Vase

Mixed media

ROSE NORTON

What am I?

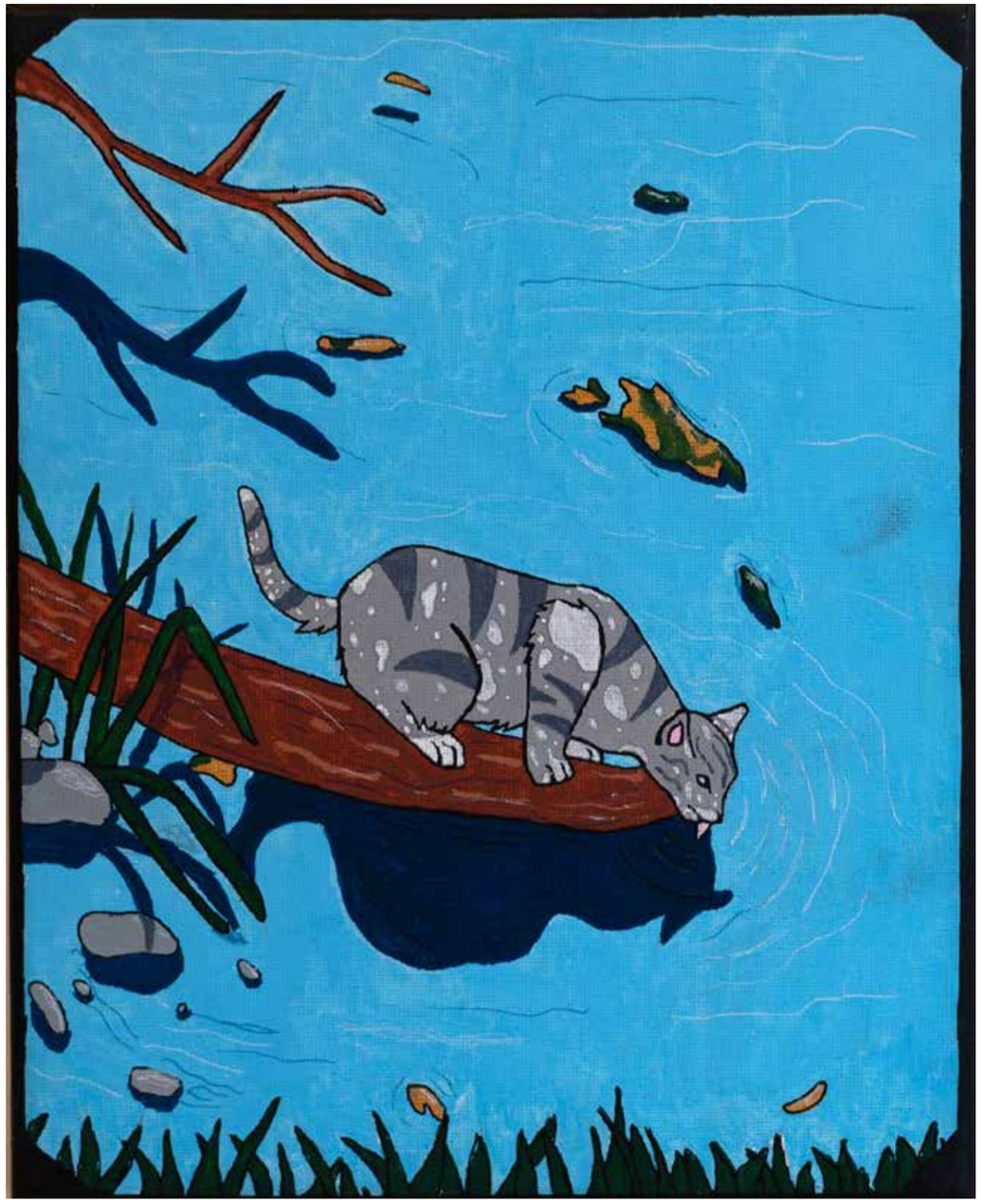
What am I?
A human, I know;
But what part do I play?
What speech do I say?
Am I to follow the winds,
or sway with the seas?
Am I to lead and inspire,
fulfil my heart's desires?
Shall I love? Shall I hate?
Will I find my perfect mate?
Am I free? Am I caged?
Or will I be so enraged,
To destroy what is loved,
to feel no pity to the world above?
Is that human?
Is that monstrous?

Unsure, to and fro
At a crossroads I know.
To find my path
I must finish this task.
Choices I must make
Before a very important date
Too soon, too fast,
How am I not supposed to ask,
Why?

ANNELISE HENDERSON

Otherworldly Reimagining

Collage



ALYIAH WATTS

Untitled

Paint pen on canvas

ELLA GROSE

Running through my head

Acrylic paint and Prismacolour pencils

CHLOE PENNO

Death by 11 Chickens

Their hungry mouths snap open and shut. Quick feet outrun me. I sprint, panting, but I can't make it away from the hungry beasts behind me. One catches up to me and digs its sharp mouth into my back. I scream in pain and try to wiggle out of its lethal grasp. The others screech at it, not wanting to miss out. They stab towards me, and one snatches me out of one deadly grasp to another. My skin twists in their beaks and I dangle, squeaking with terror and pain. The beast sprints away from the others, not wanting to share but they catch up. And so, I get tossed, from mouth to mouth. Wicked, beady eyes staring into mine with hunger, ever so soulless. But then, an opportunity. A bigger beast distracts the ones hunting me down and I fall and fall and fall to the ground. But I survive. I crawl, my injured leg dragging behind me, under a log and attempt to catch my breath. I can't run. I try to hide but it does not last. The feathery demons have found me, and I know my time is up. As I feel their sharp talons ripping through my fur, I see the bigger creature staring at me. Its eyes seem to whisper as it stands there.

"I'm sorry I could not save you," It says.

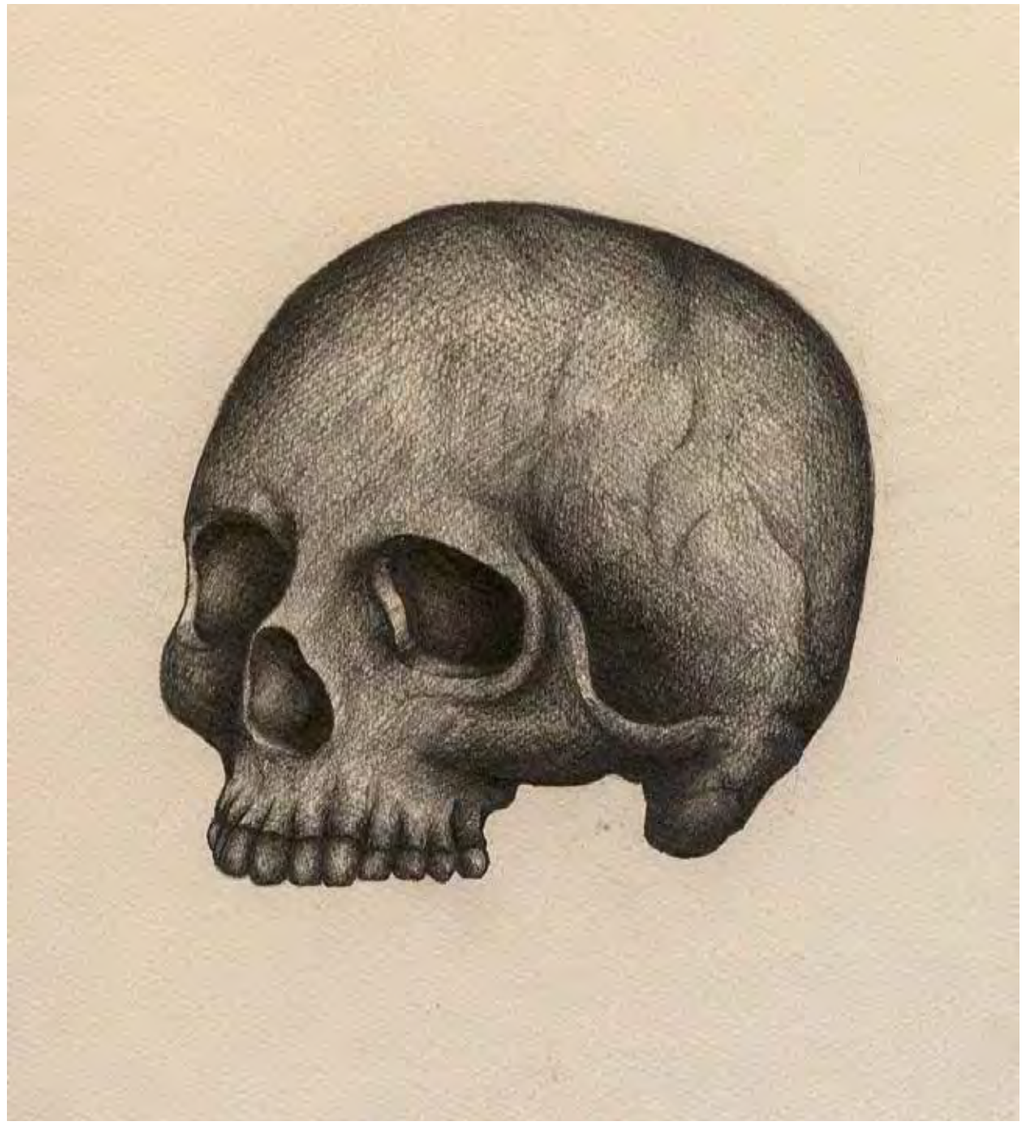
"It's okay. For I am but a mouse and who is to stop 11 hungry chickens."

ARKIE STARR MACRAE

Through Fire And Flames

Digital Painting

DAKOTA WILLIS
Blood raining on a skull
Oils



PIP JOHNSON
Skull no.1
Graphite

ROSIE PORTER

My Reflection

I walk into the bathroom, my apologetic, dense reflection looking back at me. Turning, on the tap, I begin to wash my hands, distracting all the thoughts inside my head.

"Hi," I hear a voice say.

I jump back, the voice so loud and identical to mine that it could've been from inside my own head.

But that wasn't what startled me. It was the fear that the voice I had heard wasn't from my own head at all. And the fact that I had been living alone for years made this tiny thought send fear through my spine.

I look up to see my own reflection looking at me, but this time it's different. Instead of my scared, blank expression staring back at me, the reflection looks almost villainous, and mischievous. I then realise that the person staring back at me is covered from head to toe in splatters of dark red liquid that look quite a lot like blood. So, although it looks and sounds like me, whoever or whatever is staring at me isn't my reflection at all.

"W-who are you," I stutter, my back against the wall.

My reflection laughs at me, as if the answer should be obvious. "I'm you, silly," they respond, smirking.

I stare at them, viewing the blood on their body. "You can't be me, because...because...I'm not."

"Covered in blood," they interrupt. "You're in denial." They pause looking at the blood splattered across their hands and then back at me. "Obviously."

I pause, sighing. "You're not even real. Get out of my head." I roll my eyes, realising how foolish I've been before walking back over to the tap and beginning to wash my hands once more.

"It's not that easy to get rid of me," they say smiling, watching me try to erase them from my mind.

"Go away, go away," I whisper to myself, ignoring whoever it is in the mirror that is still there.

"No," they respond almost jokingly, as if they find this whole act hilarious.

I feel the anger and fear rushing inside of me, until it can't be stopped. "Go away," I scream.

I look up at my reflection, as they stand there staring at me smiling and for a moment I wonder if this really is all in my head. "What am I on about, of course it's in my head," I whisper to myself.

I look up at my reflection, as it just stands there and smiles. "Look, all you have to do is tell me what happened," they tell me. "Then I'll leave."

My mind floods with questions. What happened? What are they talking about? When are they talking about? "When, what are you talking about?" I question.

"Before," they respond calmly. "What happened before?"

"You mean with my friend. We were just hanging out and talking." I take a couple steps backwards towards the back wall, my mind confused and complexed.

"And then what happened," they respond, moving their head closer to the mirror.

I look at them confused. Why are they asking this? I try to remember what happened next, but nothing comes to my mind.

"I," I begin to say. "I mean, they left, and then I went to wash my hands."

"Why," they say, their face almost touching the other side of the mirror.

"What," I respond slowly.

"Why did you go to wash your hands," they say.

"I...I," I begin to say, no words coming to my mouth. It's as if this question, a question that I don't seem to know the answer to, has shut me up. And I don't know why. "I don't know."

"Yes, you do," they respond.

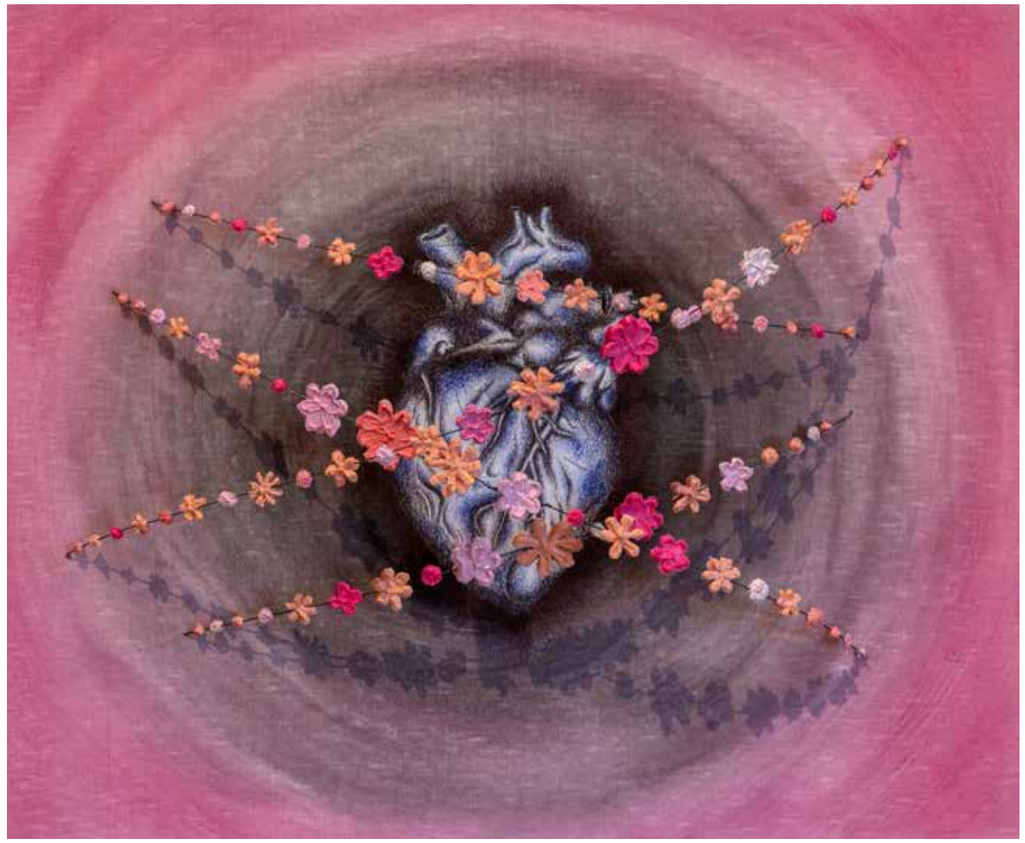
I look at them, this question confusing me and suddenly beginning to annoy me. It's as if the last few seconds have been erased from my mind and I can't even remember why I went to wash my hands. "Nothing happened. I didn't do anything, I don't know what you want to know."

"Really," they respond. They lift up their hands. "Then why are your hands covered in blood?"

I step forward confused, staring at my reflection. But as I walk towards it, my reflection begins to become clearer and take the shape of who I really am. But then I realise, it's not the reflection that's changing. It's me.

I look at my hands and see dark, red blood splattered all around them. I look to my left and see red blood covering the sink, my mind beginning to clear. I see a knife on the right side of me, blood dripping off the tip.

I look back at my reflection, my face reflecting it perfectly, now mischievous and villainous. "She deserved it. She deserved everything." I look back down at the sink before washing the blood off my hands and walking out, the body of my ex-best friend lying on the kitchen floor.



EMMA HINES

The Mask

Mixed media

ROMAN MARTIN

Music - songwriter

My name is Roman Martin. I'm a 19 year old musician and have been playing guitar for around 11 years. I picked up piano at around the same time, and then drums in year 7, being taught by Gavan Moncrieff all the way up until 2023.

I have been singing for as long as I remember, taking lessons for a while when I was younger. As a kid I didn't really take music seriously, but the further I got into it and the more friends I made who shared the passion, the more drive I had to perfect the art.

For a long time, the goal of my musicianship was to make a large impact, go to a big important university and dedicate the rest of my life to being as prolific a musician as I could possibly be, chasing perfection. At some point, I decided to step back from that, and make music for myself, as it wasn't particularly my style to "automate" the musical process.

The song "Ophelia" was written early in April and took all month to finalize. The title floats somewhere between a placeholder and a real person I met earlier this year, and the song itself is about the complicated feeling of having a person in your life with their own issues, and as much as you desire to change them, or help them as much as possible, nothing really changes. But at a point you come to realize that you have no other option to take it as it is, and play the hand you're dealt, as I think it's better to have loved than to have lost. The lyrics to this song changed an incredible amount from when I first met the person, to where we stand now, and I couldn't be happier with the outcome. I hope it reflected my soul as best as possible!!

Recording this song was kind of a terrible process, having changed methods about 500 times. It started as a full piece, with a whole lot of production and just not enough time. With my incredible intellect, I painstakingly deciphered "eh, whatever", and stripped it all the way down to acoustic, which I feel fits the feeling of the song much better.

If there's anything I'd like to do in the future regarding music, it'd be to teach the importance of the impact that music has on people. As important as it is to learn to play an instrument, I think the core of music is finding beauty and shared experiences in the lyricism. It allows you to connect with the music on a much deeper level, allowing you to go on and create more intimate, personal music in the future.

RYAN MCPARTLANE,

Music - singer songwriter

My name is Ryan McPartlane and I am a 15 year old singer/songwriter in Year 10 at Bendigo South East College. I have been a singer my entire life, starting from when I was a toddler going along to singing lessons with Mum and Dad. Since then, my singing skills have always improved and I am very grateful to my parents for getting me to start singing young. I picked up a guitar when I was 10 and my dad started to teach me. After a year, I began to teach myself and became better by watching tutorials on YouTube and learning songs by ear.

This is my fourth year in a row applying for the RAW Arts. Last year, I was lucky enough to win the RAW Arts Awards with my original song "Moving On" that I had released earlier that year. I was so excited that people thought my own original stuff was really good and it boosted my confidence so much.

This year, I am applying with another original song called "Will You". I wrote this song last year in around April or May. I wrote the song about my girlfriend and asking the question to someone if they will be by your side and helping you no matter what. Unlike some other songs I've written, this song took a while fiddling around trying to figure out what sounded best and I finished writing it late last year.

I have been performing this song live around Bendigo and actually did a rough recording of it at Bendigo Records as a part of my award for winning the Battle of the Bands last year. I am still working on recording and producing this song, hopefully in upcoming months.

Since last year, I have been playing in a band with my school mates called "Funkle". It started as a band in the ACA program at BSE and now has grown to us playing gigs all around Bendigo such as at the Handle Bar and Bull Street Festival at Easter this year. I have really enjoyed playing with them and it has been a lot of fun playing music together. That didn't stop my solo music however. Just recently, I played on the Groove Tram, which was a great experience and I performed at the Summerwave Music Festival in Kerang in February.

ROSE NORTON

Music - Voice

Music has always been a focal point in my life, from hearing it in the car and singing everywhere as a child, to learning violin and taking singing lessons later in life. It's helped me find opportunities and comforted me when I've needed it.

I currently study classical singing with Louise Mathews though I also sing other genres such as folk, jazz and pop. While it would be great to do more classical performances currently, there are few opportunities to do so in Bendigo especially as an emerging singer, so I've only sung classically at competitions, Langley Estate and retirement homes. However, I do have performance experience from singing in other genres such as jazz which I've sung at open mics, The Vine, The Moonlight Market, school events, busking, and Yo Bendigo Events.

I am also part of the Bendigo Youth Choir, which has been a great place for me to make friends and connections in the music community around Bendigo. With the BYC I got to sing with the Bendigo Symphony Orchestra in "Deep Sea Dreaming" which was my first time singing with a live orchestra. I have also recently joined the jazz club to gain more connections and hopefully join up with people to play jazz at gigs and events.

This past year has been a tricky one; finishing VCE, leaving home and commencing study at La Trobe University. There were a lot of challenges, including the death of my cat Dragon, but I managed get through, and even got DUX of music repertoire performance at Bendigo Senior Secondary College and managed to win the musician of the year at BSSC.

While my voice matures, I am studying dentistry at La Trobe University, in order to always have a stable career I can fall back on if ever I need when I pursue music. I hope to break into the classical music industry once I've finished university and have a voice that companies will want on their stages. I aim to study some European languages such as French and German during this time to better prepare for the range of repertoire required for classical singing, as well as learn about different operas, composers, song cycles, etc.

OLIVE DAVIS

Music - songwriter

I grew up around musos and blues fans. I remember sitting in pubs when I was little, watching people play their instruments, feeling the bass through my chair. My mum sang in her choir while my dad blasted Bowie on his tape player; I fell in love.

I've always loved fiddling around with words too. Lyrics, poetry, and fiction always made more sense to me than most other things.

One of my first performances was when I was seven, busking outside Rosalind park, singing Christmas carols. Then I received my first instrument, a Fluro green ukelele. Shortly after I wrote the song 'Sunshine and rainbows,' (which was about sunshine and rainbows) and took a shine to the whole process.

I play in a Rock band: 'The Unknown', we've been together for five years, since the Crusoe College drum teacher assembled us in year seven. We've performed at YoBendigo, the Bendigo show and at the Golden Vine open mic. We're all in the same music class at BSSC now, which means we get practice time and access to equipment. Being in the band is my most favourite thing. My band members are some of my best mates, and I have music to thank for that.

I have also been the lead in my high school's musical 'Big Fish', which gave me a supportive environment in which to bond with others over music.

There was a period in my life, where I had decided exactly who I was going to be, down to the major and minor of my university course. My plan did not include music, so I quit my bass and guitar lessons, opted out of the next school musical, and stopped writing songs altogether.

I regained consciousness after the covid buzz died down, and was left with bits of ambition, parts of a plan, and a damaged relationship with music.

I started writing again, but it took time to build those skills back up. I had lost years of growth and learning. I write about that time a lot now; but it still stumps me.

I don't have a plan anymore; I have no idea what I will do with my future, but I want to fill it with music. I'd like to take music further, with my own lyrics and my band. I would like to eventually record my songs and publish them.

Music has given me so many colourful opportunities, and I've been so lucky to experience it in many forms.

YASMIN RUSSELL

Amber

My ancestors awaited me, placed delicately on a soft and plush cushion. The epitome of beauty, Sir Toluin had once told me. But it was not beautiful to me. The crown was a mismatch of clashing colours, clustered together along the metal. The arrangement had to be changed as royalty passed, to make room for their respective jewels.

My grandmother was a pale purple, placed off-centre in a radiant cut.

When I was a young princess, she would tell me she wished nothing more than to see the world in peace. She would tell me stories of young heroes who valiantly saved the day. It took me a while to learn that no such people truly existed. Yet I admired the kindness and charitable nature she had shown others. Her death was peaceful, and I am forever grateful to the Gods for it. She deserved it.

As my fingers clasp around the headpiece, my thumb rubs over the amethyst with gentle reminiscence.

I did not always understand how my grandmother could tolerate my grandfather.

While she'd been a calm mauve, his ashes had been forged into a large, blood-ruby piece. It disrupted the crown, its boldness too stark even among the rainbow. He has always been a bold man, ruling with a clenched fist. But while he'd been tough, he was also smart. But not smart enough to avoid what was to come.

I channelled his rage and passion as fuel, as the guards passed my hiding spot.

My aunt was a unique woman.

My grandparents had a difficult time marrying her off, as her personality was strong and strange. They did eventually find her a suitor, but they were hesitant to send her away. She could not be nurtured by my grandmother's love from across the sea, and could not be protected by my grandfather's guards on foreign land. But they had sent her anyway, for that was what she was born to do. She had been so young that they did not think to ask her what stone she preferred. When the ashes returned as the war began, they chose citrine.

As I snuck past the guards at the castle doors, I remembered the fate I may have avoided.

I sold my father as soon as I met a travelling trader.

He was not worth much as a puny peridot, and was not worth much as a ruler either. It was his failure that set me on this path, and so I felt that I did not owe him anything. He'd heard the threat of his dear sister's death, yet tried to ignore it. He was a weak ruler, and proved even weaker when the invading kingdom drew the knife on him.

I used the money to secure a horse, with the hope I would have enough to spare to not have to sell anyone important.

They say obsidian represents protection, clarity, and cleansing.

My mother represented all those things. She was my rock when things got bad. They had to make her stone quickly, the final memento they could give her after the guard betrayed us. I watched the armoured woman slash her knife across my mother's neck. It had given me a scar that even the best physician could not heal.

As I recalled the way the blood sprayed, I could almost feel the steel on my neck.

My younger brother did not have time to be immortalised into stone.

The young prince was never of strong health, falling into coughing fits when he was only a babe. He was the only thing keeping me at the castle as my older brother took the broken throne. I stroked his hair as he had told me he wished to be an emerald. A servant had told him they were a healing stone. I wish they had worked. He was a good boy. He would have made a good king.

I kept him in my mind, as I shared what little I had with the urchins along the road.

My older brother was not worthy of a stone.

He had thought our father to be in the right, thought his foolishness was wisdom, and put the crown's needs over the people. For his short rule, our people starved as he feasted. He'd always harked on about how he wanted the centre place, as a proud and ruthless garnet like his grandfather. But as I had slit his throat, I thought his blood was not worthy of such a gem.

Yet now with my stomach grumbling, I wished I could partake in his immoral feast.

I'd never needed to consider what gem I was to be in my youth.

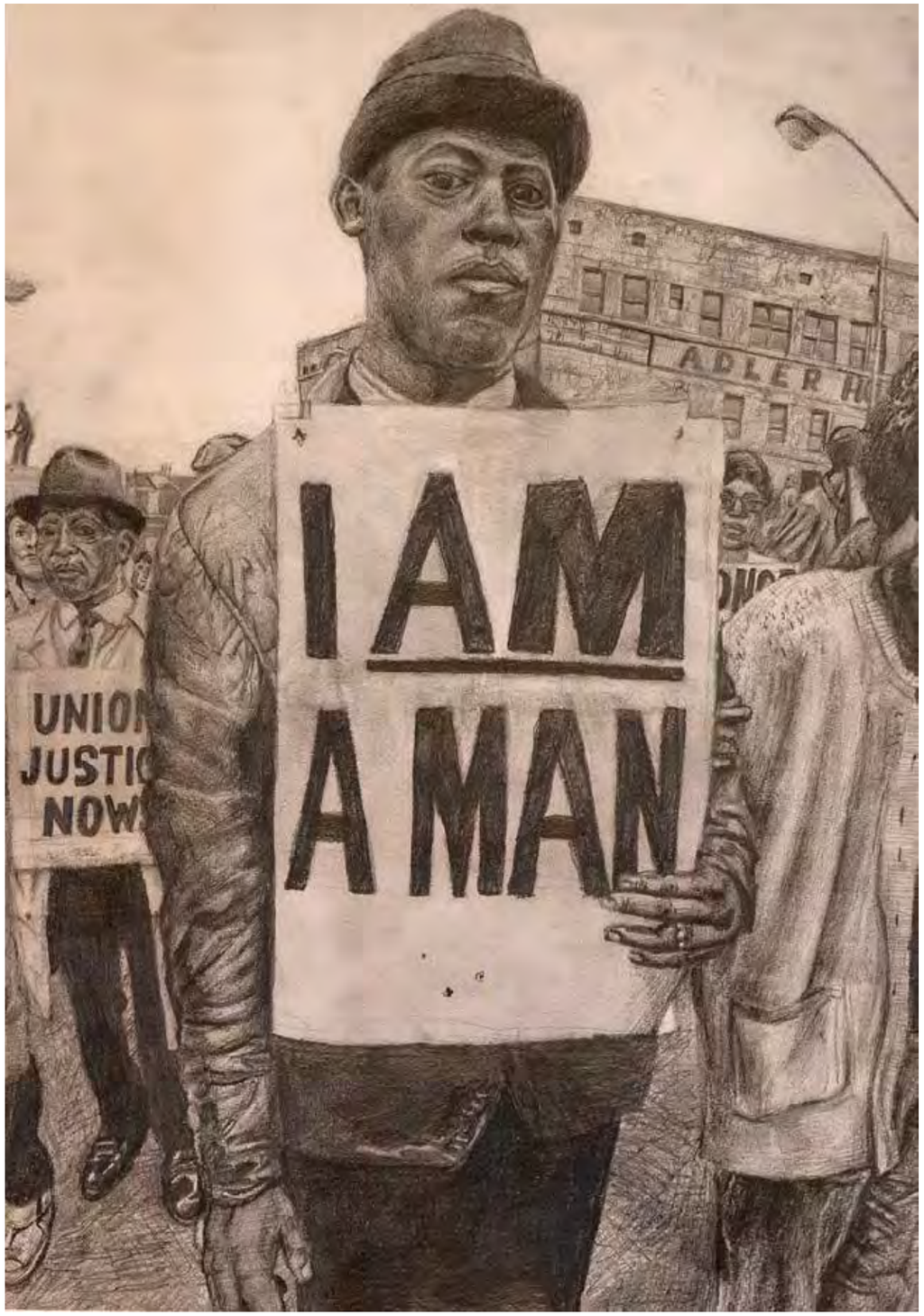
It had practically been chosen for me by my mother. But now I know for sure that I want to die a natural death and be returned to the earth. I have slowly sold off my family jewels over time, careful to keep their origin hidden. My ancestors are scattered across the lands and seas, and I am free. The kingdom's quarrels are far from me now.

I gaze out into the peaceful meadow around me, as the sun sets and amber rays merge with my resting face.

KAYLA BARNFIELD

People Killing / People Dying

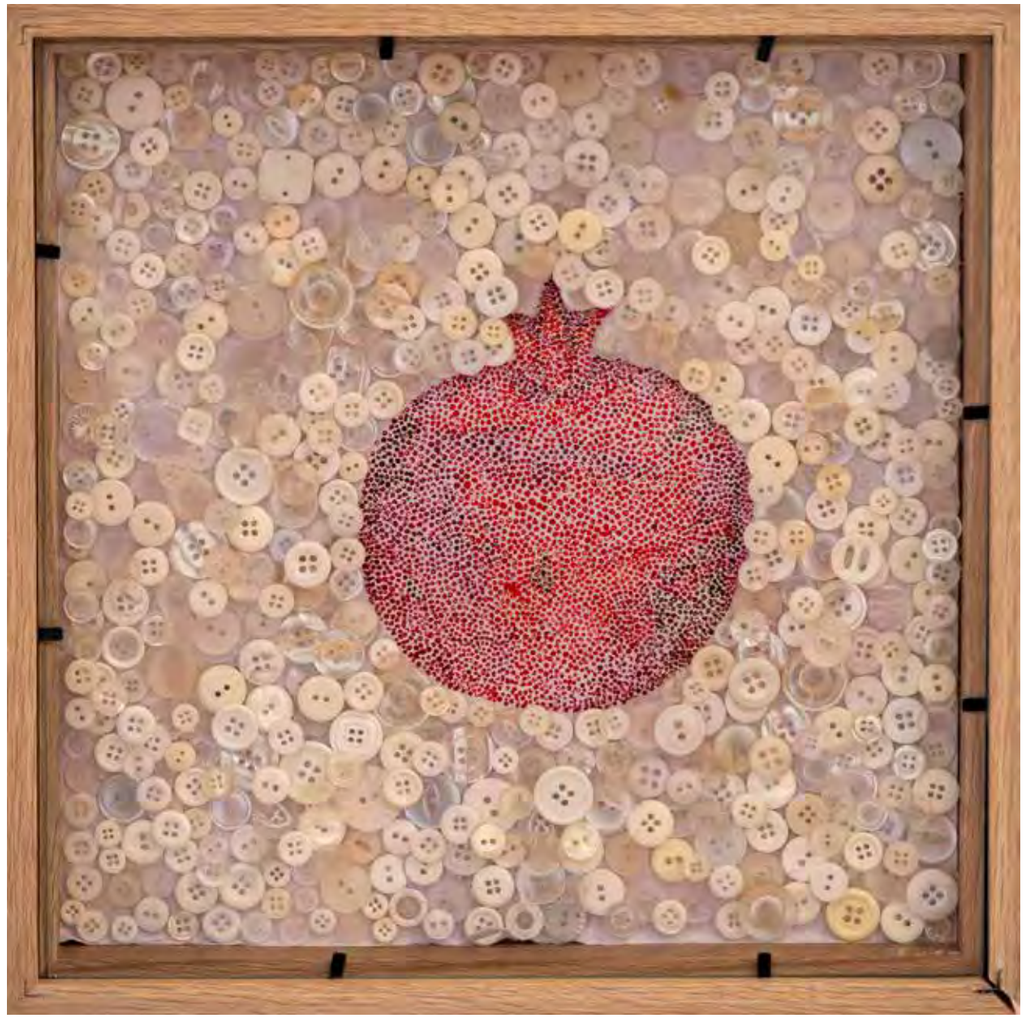
Digital



ZAK WESTCOTT

On Strike

Graphite on paper



OLIVE SALMON-WATSON

gewr

Watercolour and mixed media

MOMO

The Melody of Those Now Gone

The land shone as bright as the sun itself. Never a day did its creatures know thirst or hunger and never a day did disaster befall upon them. There was never a war, never a missed season, never a day did the land, or its creatures suffer. The creature's cultures were rich and flourished upon generations of traditions imbued with kindness and honesty and care. Healthy and happy they were, led by their adoration and care for their land and each other. Night was never to fall upon such prosperous land, as they danced and celebrated the rising sun.

As I found myself on the path there, an outlander had joined me. They were like a firefly on a warm summer's night, glowing brightly and floating gently through the air. They had a much-too-large backpack that made up almost half of their stature, yet they carried it with ease, determined to make it beyond the dust-covered stone path we had found each other on. I would have asked them where they hailed from, but I already knew, for I too had left that same place now desolate by the hands of the gods.

As we walked through the land, we noticed the earth growing livelier alongside us. There was something truly magical about the land, something pure, something healing. It was something that was not made but just was, something that could never be reproduced by even the most faithful.

Creatures both big and small came to greet us on our journey, climbing upon the outlander's backpack and weaving their ways through the trees. They welcomed us with food and water, offering places to rest. The outlander however was determined, and we continued walking together through the night.

The moon crept up into the sky, peering down on a now quiet land. The trees stretched out as far as they could, creating a tunnel for our safe passage at night. Although the outlander could not escape the moon, a mark upon their hand shining under the slivers of moonlight. They asked me to fetch a cloth from their backpack – one of incredibly dark material through which no light could penetrate – and wrap their hand in it. As I did, they watched the glow in my eyes fade, the moon losing its reach.

We arrived at the heart at daybreak, the sun rising eagerly into the sky, warming our cold and weary bodies. We watched as the shadows danced, wrapping themselves around the grasses and flowers, listening in delight to the orchestra of birdsongs. The air was sweet, the sound of morning bells ringing true as the creatures of the land woke to another day.

As we walked to the town centre, music began to flow through my very being, seeping through our skin and into our bones we soaked up their morning cheer. The creatures were setting up a festival – each vendor had something unique from one another, their wares ranging from musical instruments to historical artefacts and artist's supplies. We, strangers to the people and the culture, simply were then a part of the crowd as it moved and shifted like waves in the ocean, up and down the cobbled lanes.

We watched as the seasons passed together, in this new home. We carried with us music and the creatures paid us with warm beds to sleep in and a plethora of food to fill our bellies. We sung lullabies and funeral songs and accompanied weddings as we became so enamoured and engrained within the land it felt and seemed as if we were one. Before long, the decennial festival that welcomed us was to be celebrated again, and so the outlander and I set out to attend.

I waited at daybreak at the end of the path upon which we had first met, speaking to one of the children as they evaded helping their family set up their stall. The sun was at the rooftops when the outlander came, upon their head sitting a lopsided crown of flowers, the sun captured in their petals.

After a few short words, we set off through the crowd, listening to the mixtures of languages and music, watching as people weaved their way into the tapestry the streets had now become. Before long, we had made our way to a second-hand instrument stall as I ran my hand over an old yet familiar lute. It had been crafted with such love and care that it had lasted the past century with no qualm, waiting for familiar hands to hold it once again.

I plucked its strings and hummed along to the familiar melody surrounding us. It was melody I could never forget, a melody that since our arrival had become one with the land, a melody that the outlander once wished would guide their people to the refuge upon which they and I had surrogated ourselves.

It had been a long time since I had played.

The outlander laughed, gesturing towards the lute, 'Only you would find company in a centuries-old instrument.'

I pierced through its body a flower plucked from the outlander's crown, looping it through a small hole now fit for such purpose, 'I think it's beautiful.'

The outlander felt at their crown, petting where the missing flower once sat, 'The flower, or the far-too-old lute?'

'How much?' I asked the stall holder, a sweet elder who we'd helped with her leaking roof the season prior.

'Is it not already yours?' she asked, 'I believe it has found its owner once more. You owe me nothing but a promise to keep it well.'

I thanked her and offered her a performance.

'That is no ordinary lute, is it?' The outlander asked after the festivities died down.

'Of course, when playing your melody, it certainly becomes more than just wood and string.' I remarked.

'Though, as I am sure you are aware, that melody is not mine. Nor is it the melody of this people. It is the melody of the god that stole my people away.' They paused, as the words danced upon their tongue, before finally spilling, 'It is your melody.'

The sun had set, and the moon began to rise. The mark on their hand glowed as my eyes watched on, the foreign light bursting from within us pulsing as one. There was no disdain towards me, only pity.

'It was my melody, from millennia ago, then it became yours, and with your effort it was reborn into something beautiful to which even the sick and elderly dance to.'

'I'm glad I was able to create something beautiful,' they started, looking up to the moon, as they felt its lifeless pulse under their skin, 'even if it was all for nothing.'

That night, we watched as gods spilled from the moon, discovering a place previously unreachable to even them. The gods were jealous, though they were also curious as to how the land had prospered, how the fragile creatures created such a wonderous nation without the power and watchful eye of the divine. They wanted to understand how the mortal creatures weaselled their way through their hardships and transformed them into new opportunities.

They watched as the creatures slept, their breaths pulling life into them through their nose, down into the depths of their lungs and into their blood, pulsing and beating and surging through their chests and arms and hands and legs and feet. They watched as the mortal's hearts beat loudly to them, much as the land did, and sought to mimic their blooming existence. A foolish mockery it was, their breaths birthing not life but concealing death. They were not there to give, but to take. Their existence was not blooming, but desolate.

The gods then walked among the mortals for many years, a few even coming accustomed to the mortal's way of life, coming to love and adore the world that they had created even without the power of the divine. Though, there were always the many that could not understand. They were too entrenched within their old ways of destruction, like oil to water they could not find a way into the blooming hearts of the mortals they loved and lived to hate, and so they stayed within the sullied soil they refused to toil.

The gods had once acted as children eager to please, as they ripped the lungs from their peers to simply gain praise and empty adoration from those of them that remained. Tearing away wings from fledglings, the vocal cords of lambs, the buds of flowers from their stems – they watched as their creations found themselves anew, only to watch them crumble as they took their newly born

independence and beauty away. They could not change so easily, and it was only a matter of time before they grew tired of playing pretend.

I was not strong enough to stop the gods from disposing of the nation like a child bored of their toy. I was not willing to. I watched on from a far-off field as I played the outlander's melody. It was a betrayal that had happened many times before, the sickly-sweet melody they once sung accompanying the destruction and dismantling of all that they once held dear.

The land was desecrated by the arrogation of the gods, their anger and jealousy materialised in the form of large looming pillars of dark silver, like rough needles piercing the delicate skin of a newborn babe. They cut open the heart of the nation and watched it bleed as it was torn limb from limb. It screamed in its agony, begging for mercy that would not come. The earth then sat shattered, broken, dismantled – lain out for all those to see as a reminder of power incomprehensible like crackled, dry skin spread across a canvas and hung in a desolate gallery.

I watched as the bright colourful fields turned to deep, dark charcoal. Not even the glow of a million fireflies could do anything against such darkness. I watched, I listened, I sung – and eventually, I ran.

As I reached the path we once walked down together, I stumbled across a familiar face. The flowers that once glowed upon their head were wilted and dry, almost as if one touch would reduce them to ash. The embrace of an immortal is cold, distant, and frigid. It is a pale comparison to the warm, welcoming, and all-enveloping embrace of a mortal. Though the outlander was cursed to be neither, when I held their marked hand and they embraced me for one last time, we were warm.

Air once sweet became stark. No longer did the grass dare to peak above and out of its coffin, neither did the bushes or the trees. They remained trodden on below, a hopeful parasite under the skin that had not yet made itself aware to those that would defile it. The earth remained coated black with everlasting night, stars forever faded under the glowing, pulsing, all-enveloping silver of the god's wrath.

The gods had stumbled upon a blossoming rose in a bed of weeds and as they slowly grew jealous of its beauty, they plucked it away. Leaf by leaf, petal by petal, thorn by thorn, they dissected the unforeseen anomaly, until all that remained was the dirt beneath it. Where once fell rain like tears of pure fell only the bodies of new arrivals. This place that once was warm was cold, once full of life now empty, fireflies lingering on the horizon. The gods treated the land as their prize, the creatures of it as the birth of rebellion.

Though, I could do nothing but what I have always done – play the melody of those now gone.

OLIVIA LEDLIE,

Cheese Tree - Glochidion Ferninandi

Watercolour

AVA LIEBERT

Clown

Grey lead pencil

MATILDA COMPSTON

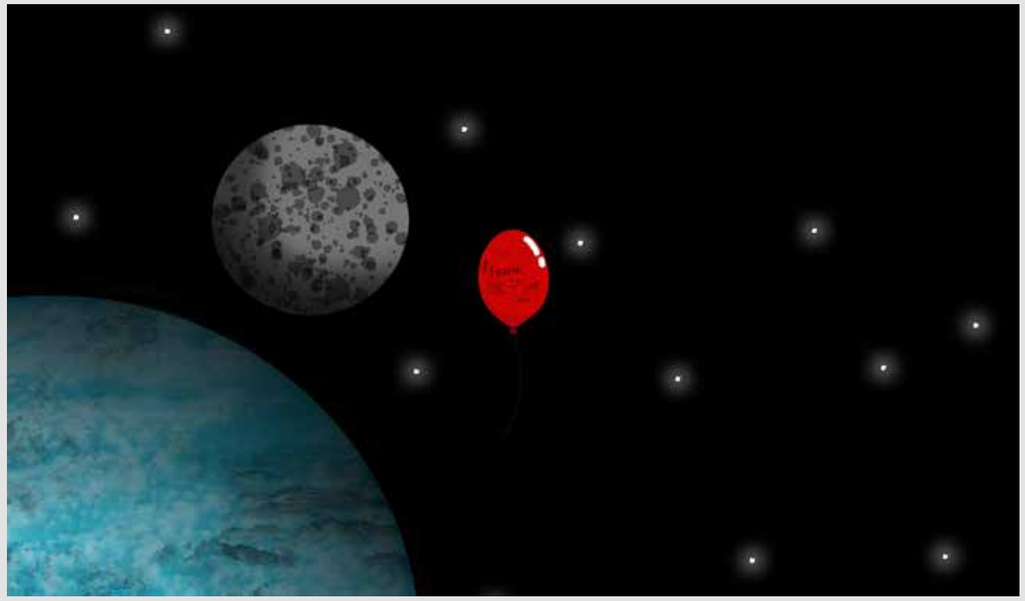
Sundays

Acrylic paint and Posca pens on canvas

SARA HANCOCK
Field of Vision
Short Film

ROSIE PORTER
right person wrong time
Short Film

ANNELISE HENDERSON
Stitched
Short Film

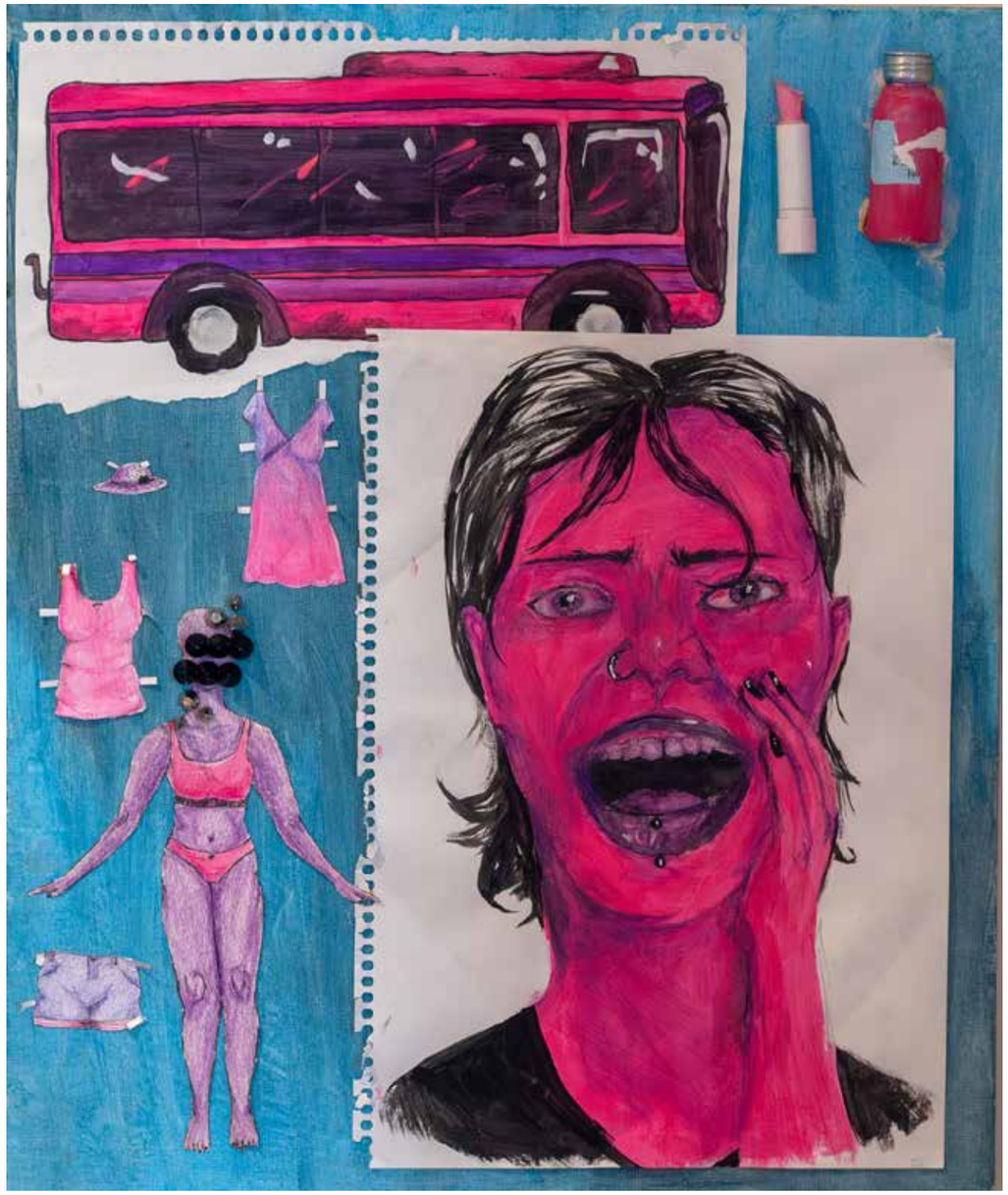


JIN TURPIE
The Balloon
Short Film

YASMIN RUSSELL,
A Shopkeeper's Tale
Short Film

MELANIE MCLEAN
Fire of the Phantasies
Oils

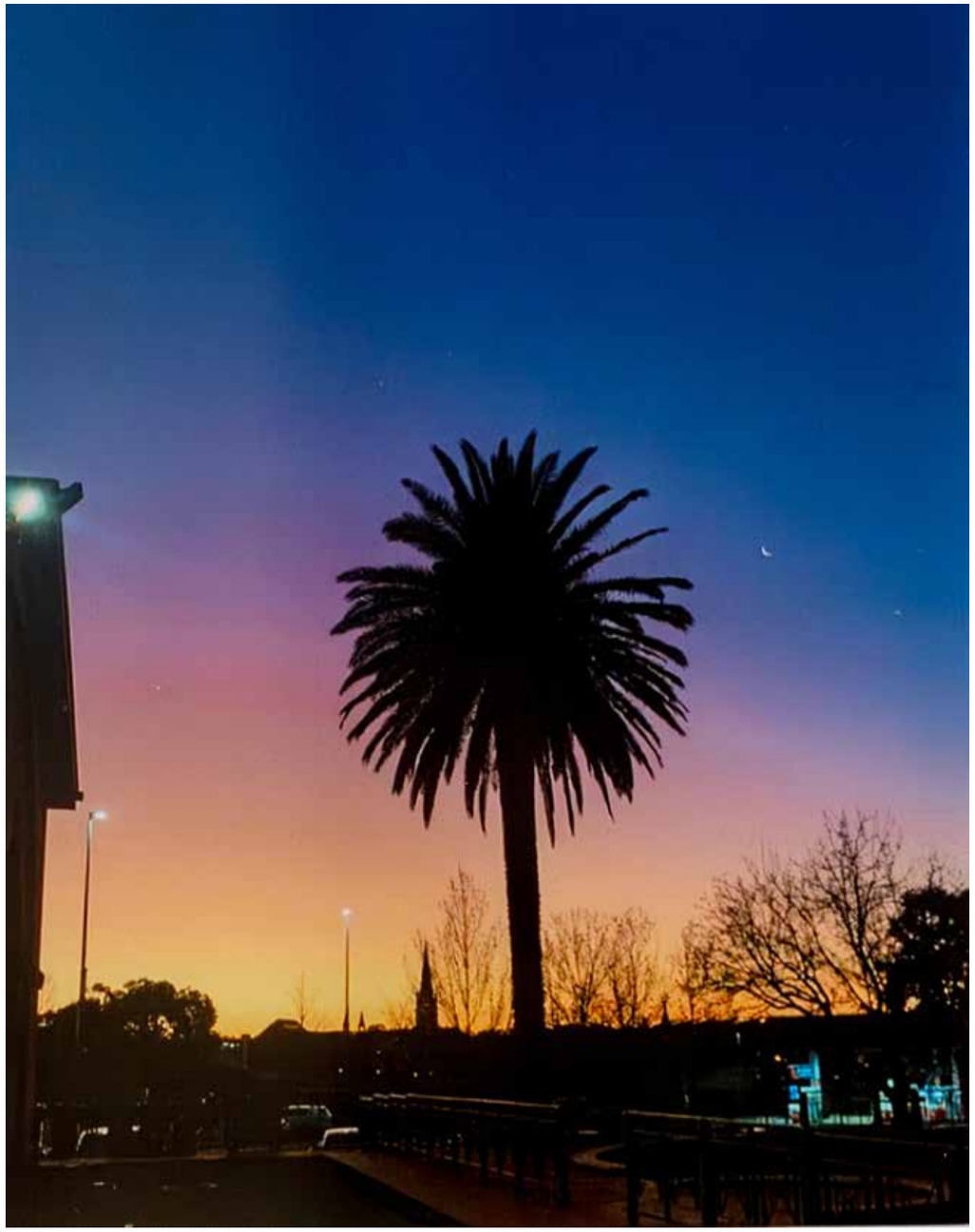
REJOICE HANNA
Rainbow
Pencil on paper



LEVITY CAMILLERI
Catalling
Collage

JAY MOOR
Zombie
Sculpture

LOTTE TAYLOR
Apathy
Acrylic on canvas



CARMELLA SAGGERS

Sunset

Photography

ROSE NORTON

While I don't know what happens after death,
I hope our souls are free from the pain of life

Pastel and pencil on paper

EMMA ALEXANDER

Entomology Class

Mixed media

OSSIAN HARTJE

Untitled

Digital Print

TOM OLDHAM

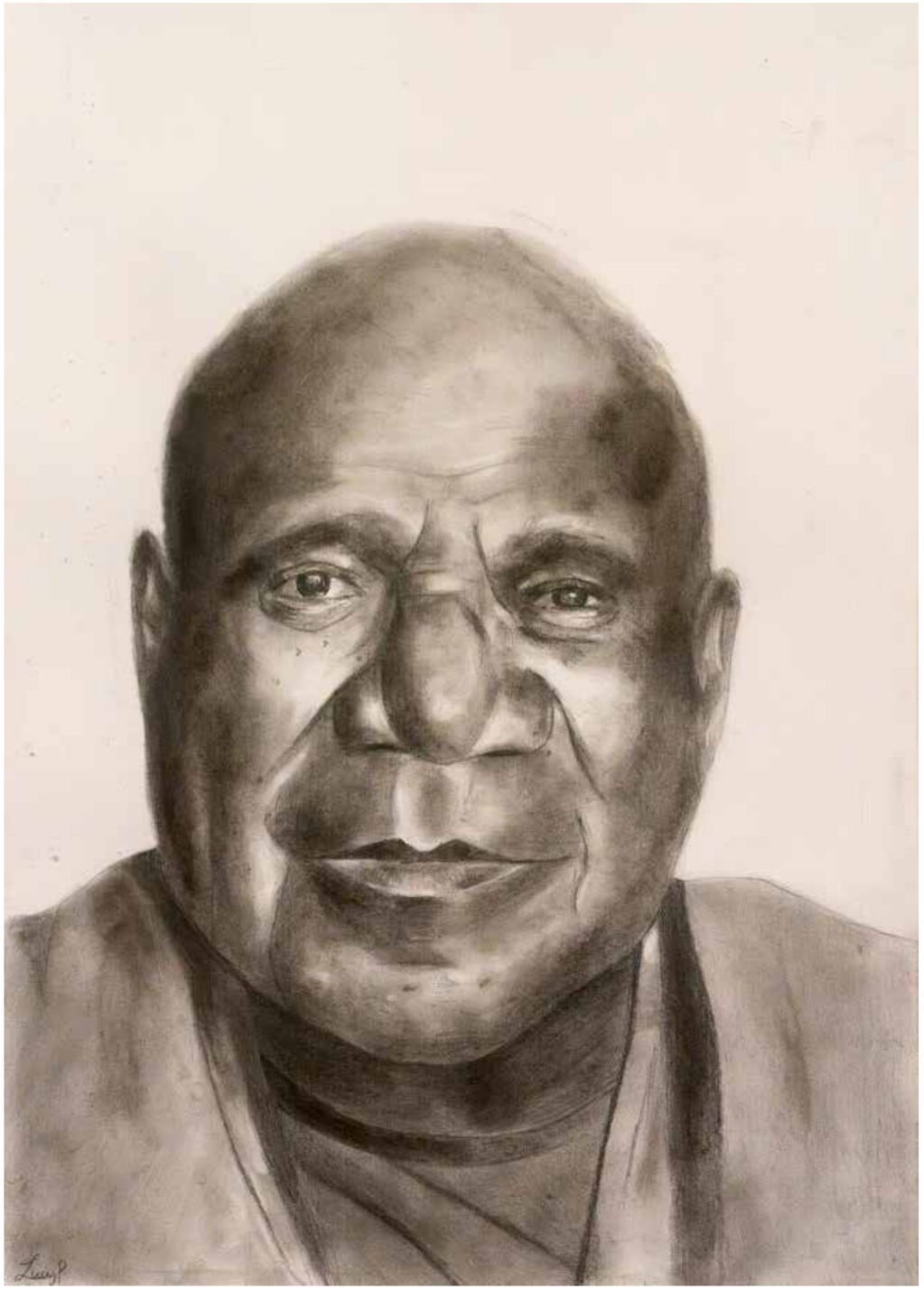
Swooping Magpie

Acrylic on canvas

EMILY JADE KLOESTER

Perspective

Biro pen, paint and acrylic



LUCY PALMER

Archie Roach

Graphite pencil on paper

OLIVIA BLUEMORE

Woods

Liv's perspective

Standing behind an ancient gum tree I watch. And I wait. I see Sylvie walking through the forest. Now is my chance. If I can't have her, no one can. I grab my axe and step out from behind the tree. I was supposed to go unnoticed, but I step on a stick. She turns around. She sees me. She realizes who I am, and what my motives are.

She starts running. I chase after her. I can smell the strong scent of eucalyptus and oranges. I can hear her screams for help, but that's background noise. All I can hear are cockatoos and cicadas. I'm gaining on Sylvie, who is beginning to tire. The hot thick air coats me like a blanket.

Ahead of me I watch Sylvie trip on a rock; this is it. She stands up but it's too late, I'm already there. I swing my axe down and her head comes clean off.

If you're wondering what it sounded like, it was like a movie sound effect, squelching. Blood doesn't immediately squirt out of her neck though. Her legs collapse and blood gushes out, over the rocks and leaves. As I turn away, I see movement in the trees. It's probably nothing, but I can't risk having witnesses. I slowly walk over and as I look past the tree, I see an unknown girl standing there, ready to hit me with a stick. But I'm quicker. I swing my axe across her body. And I leave her. Silently sobbing as her life extinguishes. I hear the low trickle of a river and far away voices from the campsite, but the animals have gone quiet.

YAZ HARDIE

ελιά *(eliá)*

Plaster bandage

OLIVIA ROGISTER

Diptych: Normal & Paint on Developer

Developed film

YASMIN RUSSELL,

Ophelia D'larosa

Acrylic on canvas

CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO

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bendigo venues & events