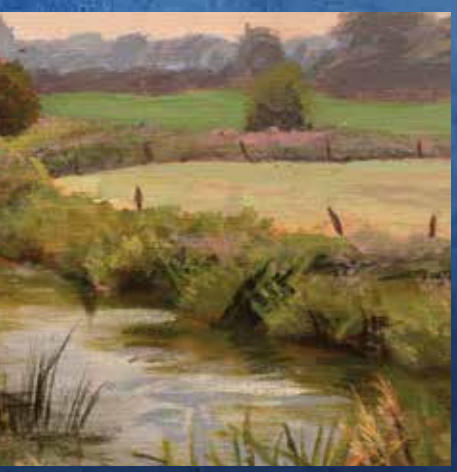
RAW Arts Awards 2025



RAW Arts Awards 2025

This publication includes all eligible entries received for the 2025 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.

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.

Welcome

From the Mayor of the City of Greater Bendigo

Welcome to this special volume to commemorate the 2025 RAW Arts Awards — a vibrant celebration of our region's youngest creators and storytellers.

Each year, the RAW Arts Awards shine a spotlight on the depth of talent and imagination among young people in Greater Bendigo. In 2025, we continue this proud tradition, showcasing remarkable submissions across visual arts, literature, short film and performance. Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to every entrant who dared to create and share their work — your courage and creativity are the heartbeat of this initiative.

RAW began as the RAW View Youth Arts Festival in 1997. The City of Greater Bendigo is proud to support these awards, cultivating opportunities for creative exploration and expression across all ages and artistic styles.

To every parent, carer and educator who encouraged an entry — thank you. Your support helps spark lifelong passion and possibility.

To our judges, we extend our gratitude for the generous energy and expertise you've brought to the task of nurturing emerging talent:

- **Visual Arts judge Sara McQueenie** — artist, curator and disability advocate, presenting work in Mystery Unfolds – Outsider Exposition and as a key artist in the project We Are Untold
- **Short Film judge Kain White** — artist and educator with over 25 years of practice in painting, drawing and animation, whose own journey began with a RAW Arts Award
- **Literary judge Pam Harvey** — writer, story coach and academic, known for her work as PJ Harvey and Juno Harvey, and a champion of the arts within health education
- **Performing Arts judges Kristen Beever** — creative producer, designer and committed arts advocate across theatre, education and community; and **Colin Thompson** — drummer and event organiser, best known for the *Bendigo Blues & Roots Music Festival* from 2010 to 2022, whose dedication to local music continues through venues, festivals and mentoring

I also wish to acknowledge the incredible staff at Bendigo Venues & Events, whose behind-the-scenes efforts make these awards shine each year.

RAW has helped launch many creative careers — and for others, it's a first step toward a lifelong love of the arts. Wherever your artistic journey takes you, may this experience inspire you to keep exploring, expressing, and imagining.

Mayor Cr Andrea Metcalf

Literature Award
Winner: Kayla Barnfield
Highly Commended: Matilda Wilby

Performing Arts Scholarship
Winner: Emma Gleeson
Highly Commended: Matilda Wilby

Short Film Prize
Winner: Tilda Picken
Highly Commended: Yasmin Russell

Visual Arts Award
Winner: Geordie Williamson
Highly Commended: Jorjiah Sjaardema

Winner

Emma Gleeson

Performing Arts

Music

My name is Emma Gleeson, a 14-year-old singer/songwriter from Bendigo, Victoria. Music has been a tremendous part of my life since I started playing guitar at age six with Min Miles. Over the years, my passion has expanded to include singing, piano, and songwriting.

This past year, I've been part of Bendigo Young Buskers, which offers young musicians performance opportunities and support. I've performed at various venues like The Goldmines Hotel and the Dahlia and Arts Festival. As a student at Victory Christian College, I have had lots of opportunities in relation to music and performing arts. This year I am playing Princess Jasmine in the College's production of Aladdin. I wrote an original song called 'Who I Am' with two of my classmates recording it at Empire Recording Studios in Melbourne. Our song was shortlisted into the 'Indie Pop' category, and we were given the opportunity to perform this song live in Melbourne at the awards night for the Kool Skools competition late last year.

I also competed in the Showdown at the Soundshell in Girgarre, where I won second place with my originals 'Safe with You' and 'Monster.' Music is an escape for me, allowing creativity without rules.

My goal this year is to perfect more original songs and work on my piano skills. My dream is to pursue a career in music and inspire others.

My song 'Broken Songbird' reflects the struggles of bullying and exclusion in school. I aimed to capture the emotions of both the victim and the bully, recognizing underlying insecurities.

Winner

Kayla Barnfield

RAW Arts Literature Award

Submerged

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Ray didn't open his eyes. He didn't want to. He was still half-conscious, and, dimly, he wondered what the sound was, and why it didn't stop.

A few moments later, he became vaguely aware that he was lying on something hard and uneven. Not rocky, but uncomfortable. When he tried to lift his right hand, he noticed that something was pushing down on it, and when he relaxed, his hand took a long time to hit the ground again. The air was warm, but strangely thin, and something cold and wet was trickling into his mouth. Ray coughed, trying to spit it out, but it wasn't working; his mouth was filling up with water, he couldn't breathe.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP.

Ray's eyes flew open. He was lying on the seabed. Ten feet above him, sunlight danced on the surface of the ocean. His helmet was half-full of water; red lights were flashing on his visor, and the beeping sound had changed to a high-pitched wail.

"WARNING. OXYGEN DEPLETED. WARNING. OXYGEN -"

Ray pushed himself off the seabed and kicked hard. A couple of seconds later, he had broken above the surface; coughing, his vision blurry, he watched the water drain from his helmet as, one by one, the alarms stopped. A swarm of fish swam cautiously by, giving him disgruntled looks. At least, Ray imagined that they were disgruntled...

Ray shook his head firmly, splashing water in all directions. He was fully awake now. He pulled off his helmet and looked at it; there was a large crack across his visor, where the water had leaked in.

"Well, that's wonderful, isn't?" he muttered to himself.

He wondered how long he'd been underwater for. He'd only meant to go exploring for a few minutes; there had been some interesting fish near the reef that he'd wanted to look at. But then... Ray thought for a moment. Some sort of eel had turned up and frightened the fish away, but it had been at least five times the size of any ordinary eel he'd seen, and its body had crackled with electricity. When Ray had tried to swim back to the submarine, it had charged towards him...

"Scans indicate that your vital signs have returned to normal," Iris said tonelessly. As usual, the artificial voice sounded completely unconcerned. "According to data analysis, most drownings occur -"

"I'm alive, aren't I?" Ray cut in irritably. He knew that Iris wouldn't listen to him, but it was strangely comforting, hearing his own voice; it had been such a long time since he'd talked to anyone that, a few weeks ago, he'd started talking to himself.

Iris did not approve of this habit.

"After long periods of solitude, it is common for signs of mental decline to be exhibited in abnormal behaviour," it said sternly. "Self-talk is usually a symptom of -"

Before it could continue lecturing him, Ray lifted his helmet above the waterline. "Just fix this before anything else shows up," he said curtly.

Iris obediently began scanning the helmet, although it sighed as it did so. It had a surprising amount of sass for an outdated piece of technology.

Ray looked back towards the submarine, which, thankfully, was still where he'd left it. Although there were no other humans around to steal or damage it, he'd been worried that the giant eel might have tried to attack it.

A couple of bright yellow fish swam past, brushing against Ray's leg. Even through the waterproof suit he was wearing, he could feel how sharp their scales were. The creatures in this ocean were different to anything he'd ever seen before; they seemed fiercer, stronger... more resilient.

And, in most cases, more dangerous.

"Helmet is now repaired," Iris said dispassionately. "Oxygen canisters are at approximately twenty-three percent. It is recommended that -"

Ray jammed the helmet back on his head and began swimming towards the submarine. The sun would be down within the next couple of hours, and he didn't want to be out in the open when night fell, especially if the eel decided to come back.

"Good evening, Rose," Ray said as he entered the submarine. The girl in the photograph didn't move, but Ray smiled at it anyway. "How was your day?"

Rose didn't respond. Her expression remained frozen in laughter, eyes half-closed, diving helmet tucked under one arm. Her short black hair was soaked, and she was still wearing her diving suit; she'd just come out of the ocean when this photograph had been taken.

Ray shrugged. "Well, I hope it was better than mine," he said, as he removed his helmet. "I went to look at those three-eyed fish I told you about and got attacked by a giant eel."

He went to the corner of the room and started taking the oxygen canisters off his back. "In other news, I found another wrecked submarine this morning – before the eel turned up, of course. Nobody was inside, but there was nobody outside, either, so..."

Ray finished placing the oxygen canisters down and walked over to the control panel.

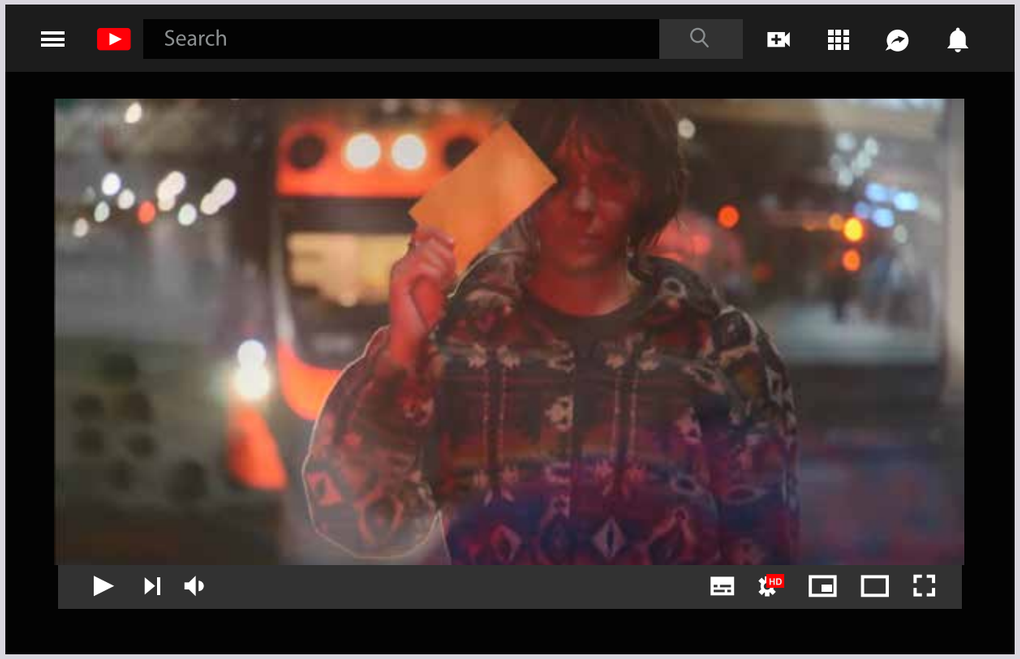
"Yeah, it's been a long day," he said, flicking a couple of switches, "even though I was out for half of it. And I still want to take a better look at those three-eyed fish. But, you know, I can try again tomorrow."

He looked up at the photograph and smiled.

"Tomorrow," he said. "Maybe tomorrow, someone will find us, and we'll finally get out of here. Wouldn't that be nice?"

Of course, Rose didn't speak, but Ray knew what she would have said.

Winner



Tilda Picken

RAW Arts Short Film Award

Stand There

> *This short film follows a girl stuck between love confessions and the overwhelming emotions in true love, the right choice and her own identity.*
>
> *Within this narrative, I hope you see the humanity in the people and relationships that can completely side rail our lives, in the most mundane and beautiful ways.*

Winner

Geordie Williamson

RAW Arts Visual Arts Award

White Noise
- OCD with Yasmin Arkinstall
Oil on Stretched Linen Canvas

Highly Commended

Matilda Wilby

RAW Arts Performing Arts

Music Theatre

My name is Matilda Wilby, and I fell in love with musical theatre in 2023 during my third performance, an operetta called 'The Pirates of Penzance' by Gilbert and Sullivan. I was thrilled to be cast as the lead female role, Mabel, with the Nexus Theatre Company, where I rehearsed with a passionate and supportive group. Performing on stage at the Capital Theatre, particularly during Mabel's grand entrance, solidified my desire to pursue a career in performing arts. By the end of the run, I had earned several accolades, including the Strategem Community Foundation Performing Arts Scholarship and the Music Theatre Guild of Victoria's award for Junior Lead Performer in a Female Presenting Role.

Before this, I had roles in Bendigo Tribe Youth Theatre's 'Puffs' and 'Annie', but it was with Nexus Theatre that I found the most supportive community. I had previously taken drama classes and, in Year 8, started singing lessons with Kathleen Moore. I actively sought out opportunities after this, winning BSE's Musician of the Year in both 2023 and 2024, playing Elle Woods in 'Legally Blonde' in 2023, and enrolling in piano and musical theory with Mr. Briggs. I also performed as Gabrielle in 'Cinderella'.

This year, I was awarded a scholarship to attend WAAPA for a week of intensive musical theatre workshops. This experience enhanced my skills in singing, dancing, and acting and motivated me to work harder for my goals. Currently, I'm rehearsing for 'The Music Man', where I play Marian Paroo, and I'm enrolled in VCE Theatre Studies and Music at Bendigo Senior Secondary College.

Performing has always brought me excitement and joy and I intend to let that passion grow- now and into the future.

Highly Commended

Jorjiah Sjaardema

RAW Arts Visual Arts

Undine rising from the waters
Charcoal on paper

Highly Commended

Matilda Wilby

RAW Arts Literature Award

The Tin Man

A convict man born of the bush land
Eyed by the law
To win the bread
Once old man's dead
The Tin Man's life is born

A boy reaches for a critter
In the creek, he crouches
He slips, he falls, and for help, he calls
And the Tin Man's help did answer

Thus gifted to the Saviour Man,
For his kindness and gamble,
Is an honour in the form of a green silk sash
To the saviour from the saved

An officer comes to keep the law
A controversy of events to follow
The Tin Man claims lies
Sold by the trustworthy mouth of law

The Tin Man's mother- accused of abetting
She is sent to be locked away
For three hot summers
How lonely she must feel
How brave she must be

Now the Tin Man runs
And to join him, are his brothers
Into the bushland they set off
Away from the Law Man's land

Yet still, the Law Men chase them
Through gum tree's arms and over creek
"Destructive- disruptive", declares the Law Men
"Breakers of the law are what they've chosen"

The Law Men rest
And wait til their billy boils
Out come the gang men 1,2,3
The Tin Man calls for Law Men's surrender

"I asked politely", the Genteel Man did say
But alas, they draw their guns
Four lawmen shot as if they're prey
No longer father to their sons

The gang now run
The Innocent Man- pursued- persists:
"No crime has been committed",
They run on

Soon the gang men come to a place of wealth
"A building so grand",
Exclaims the Poor Man's band
"It is meant for us, the people
Not for Law Man's hand"

So into the grand bank, they go
To have what's rightfully theirs
The bank lady- soon hostage- proclaims,
A Kind Man stole the money
The Honest Man declares, "to all, I will be fair"

The people's rogue, our Tin Man now is
And from the Law Men, the people keep him
But now come Devils; set out to find him
Black Devils: our Scared Man calls them
The men known to the sun-scorched land

"No wrongs I've done", our Wronged Man states
In a letter he trusts to be seen
But in trust, our Loyal Man puts too much
His words; now judged too late

En masse, the Law Men are rallied
To war, they set off valiantly
And from scraps our Tin Man musters his defence
For his band's final revolt

The smell of a battle kept waiting,
Hangs heavy in the air
The leaders ready their loyal men
A simple Inn- the gang men and their leader prepare
Their hero- Man made of steel

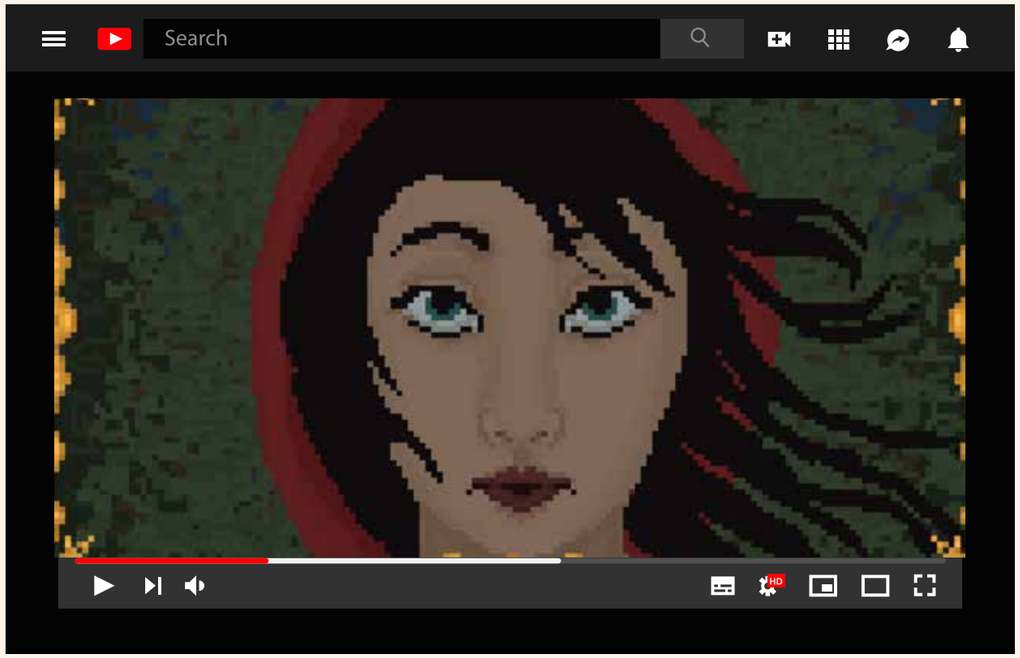
The Law Men charge
To take down the criminals for what they are
Guns wreak havoc, none question why
Blood lust taints the hearts of the law

Still, our Soldier Man fights the law
Alongside his brave battalion
But soon their defence is burnt to the ground
And only he remains

Our Last Man stands,
Shot down despite his steel
And under his armour endures
A memory made from green silk

On death row, our Tin Man lies
In another convict's stead
"Ah well, such is life"
Says Ned- our Tin Man- dead

Highly Commended



Yasmin Russell

RAW Arts Short Film Award

Cerise and the Wolf

> *A tale of a young girl cloaked in red, determined to visit her grandmother.*

Sofie Sawka

Midnight Snack

Gouache and Coloured Pencil on Watercolour Paper

Jobe Thomson

Raindrops on Senso-ji Temple

Raindrops fall on Senso-ji Temple. As I watch them trace delicate trails on the slope of my umbrella I am reminded of her standing in the garden in her gumboots and laughing at the weather. Streaks of water run down the angle of her cheek. She likes the rain. She always has. We watch her outside the kitchen window, Dad and I, and exclaim that she's a madwoman. Maybe we were mad. Maybe we should have joined her.

It is incredible how such a trivial moment can become an integral memory. Each day there are happy moments and sad ones, mundane and thrilling, quiet moments and loud. And of all of these across the vastness of my time on Earth the memory I recall now is that of Mum in the rain, on a day without a name, at an hour untold, her joyful figure forever emblazoned in the recesses of my mind.

The smell of wet pavement mingles with the smoke of hot grills and car exhausts and produces the aroma of Tokyo. I follow the tour guide through the thin alley running thick with people in dark raincoats. All our umbrellas are raised to the sky and I see them fleetingly from above, bloomed like flowers to soak up the rain, most of them black or clear, some others colourful, vibrant ships in a sea of uniformity.

I see Senso-ji ahead. Its lights glimmer like beacons through the rainy haze. The red pillars seem to radiate in the grey-blue light of evening. Its steepled roof dominates the skyline overhead. I see the fierce visages of Buddhist gods glaring down upon me, casting their judgement or perhaps reading my soul. There is so little left there to read. Would they be surprised, those omniscient entities, or have they seen it all before and shall again?

Mum is dead but she should not be. Cruel is the winding, twisting thread of fate, such that my mother, one so profound in her kindness, so complete in her compassion, should be taken and others remain. I cannot be a man of faith for I see no grand design in the unjust cessation of her life; where murderers and rapists yet dwell upon this Earth and those that were jewels in an ocean of bedlam wither and die.

Toru is my guide. He says he has lived in Tokyo all his life and has never left Japan. He speaks English very well. He studied it all through his schooling. Now he teaches his three children English in his spare time, after long days trekking through the city, the same routes again and again. His line of work is a cycle of best eateries and subway rides but he appears happy, or maybe he just pretends to be.

I am alone tonight. Dad and Tommy stayed in the hotel room with ghosts and shadows for company. Hudson and Levi went for a drink in the city. There is a grief between us now so thick that it is almost tangible. When we are together I think it is most prevalent, for we become five planets suddenly devoid of their sun, and in the silence much is left unsaid. If she were here she would fill it with a joke or laughter or merely her presence, but she is gone now and shells of us remain. We are discarded carapaces. All our happiness gone with the molted bug.

We leave Senso-ji and cross the street to a ramen restaurant. The red sign on the window casts neon reflections in the puddles that have formed on the road. I watch the boxy Japanese cars come past and disrupt the reflections. One moment the water is calm, a mirror of the outside world; the next it's gone. And in its absence still the world goes on, just as how one day I'll be gone and the Earth will not cease in its turning, not till the Sun explodes and engulfs the world in flame and ruin. Yet even then nothing is definite, for the universe twinkles on in this web of existence that is the cosmos of everything and everyone is subject to its rule of disorder and entropy.

We both order and sit at a bench looking out the window across the street to Senso-ji. The rain is bucketing down now, cascading over the window, the world without a haze without definitive edges or borders. Inside the shop, it smells like warmth and humanity. Toru makes small talk and I watch as he removes his sopping baseball cap and places it in his backpack. His head is hairless and shiny in the overhead light. There are heavy wrinkles there, lines of worry, lines of smiling, of happiness and regret.

The ramen is hot. The steam clouds my glasses so that I remove them and place them on the bench beside me. Mum wore glasses too. She wore the type with big black rims that suited her quite well. She was a beautiful woman, full of life, with an easy smile. I have her green eyes and Dad's dark hair. Isn't it curious how two entities can become one? Entwined forever in a cycle of recreation.

We didn't want to go on the holiday anymore. She's been in the ground two weeks and we jet off to Narita Airport; it doesn't seem right. The seat next to me empty on the plane. A ticket bought and wasted. I see Mum and Dad's room as it is and as it remains now. He hasn't touched her clothes, or her side of the bed, or even the book on her bedside table with the bookmark midway through. The remainder of those pages never to be flipped through and interpreted by her eyes. A story incomplete.

Toru's looking at me. He sees something is not right with me. I haven't talked to him much. Perhaps he thinks I'm a rude foreigner. How he's looking at me! His shrewd eyes seem to see right through me. To the dark recesses within, those same depths the gods at Senso-ji saw into and passed by. A cold shiver runs down my spine and I divert my gaze.

We leave the restaurant. I'm walking down a rainy street in the heart of Tokyo. Everything is slick and black and wet and shiny. It is a little street and overhead the peaks of the

highrises seem to meet and coalesce, forming a tunnel through which I pass. Toru is here leading me along. There is no one else, no cars, no immediate sounds. I am shivering. The wind has grown cold and the rain has seeped through my jacket. I am unaware of how much time has passed. My phone is flat. The others are probably asleep, or black-out drunk.

Ahead is Senso-ji. It is quiet now. Senso-ji rules the quiet. It is an island of calm amidst the bustling city. The crowd along the market road has dispersed. The doors to the temple are closed. The plaza below the front steps is empty. There exists Toru and me and the towering temple spires. We sit on the front steps. Toru spreads his legs out leisurely and stretches. The rain does not bother him. I am saturated.

I last saw her on the day she died. I was in my car outside the house. The key was in the ignition. She came running out carrying a plastic tub full of baked treats. I said thanks and she said she loved me. I said it too, without thinking, the words uttered without meaning or true purpose. Mum watched me drive away that day. I could not have known that was my last "love you" while she still breathed. If I had, would have I spoken them differently? Would have I held her and told her not to go? That a horrible incident could change the trajectory of our lives forever?

I see her now crossing the plaza. The part of a person that remains when their physical form has died. The soul or spirit or presence or whatever it is called. I think about all the ways that soul passes on. I see it crossing a barren rocky plain beneath the shimmering sun to an empty place that some say is Purgatory, or the lavish gardens of Heaven. Or perhaps her bones have become the soil, the dust of her flesh and blood spread with the winds across the world; minerals once made in the hearts of dying stars hovering in the boundless depths of space that became her freed once more.

I'm crying. I'm bawling like a baby. It's all too much. The apparition I saw across the plaza has disappeared. She's gone. I know she's gone. Does time heal all wounds? Or merely bound them in gauze, one atop the other, so that we are all of us patchwork people with wounds deeper than oceans.

Someone is clasping me by the shoulder. It's Toru. He understands. I see it in the depths of his eyes. That he has loved and lost and done it all again. And he doesn't give in to the grief, or the pain or the hurt. It becomes him in ways a hundred scholars could never understand. He is the grief and the pain and the hurt, and the memory of those he loved and lost. And the grief I feel will be there for Mum because I loved her, and it will be there for Dad and Tommy and Hudson and Levi because they loved her too, and the hundreds of others Mum touched with her kindness during her short tenure here.

Toru smiles at me and nods. He's telling me it's okay. Somewhere I see Mum smiling. Beneath the yellow glow of a hundred lanterns I hug Toru and wipe the tears from my cheeks. There is music playing. Music! A jazz bar nearby. I haven't yearned for music in so long. Trumpets blare. A piano. Drums. I'm smiling now, and standing.

"It's so beautiful here," I say. "Let's go listen to the music."

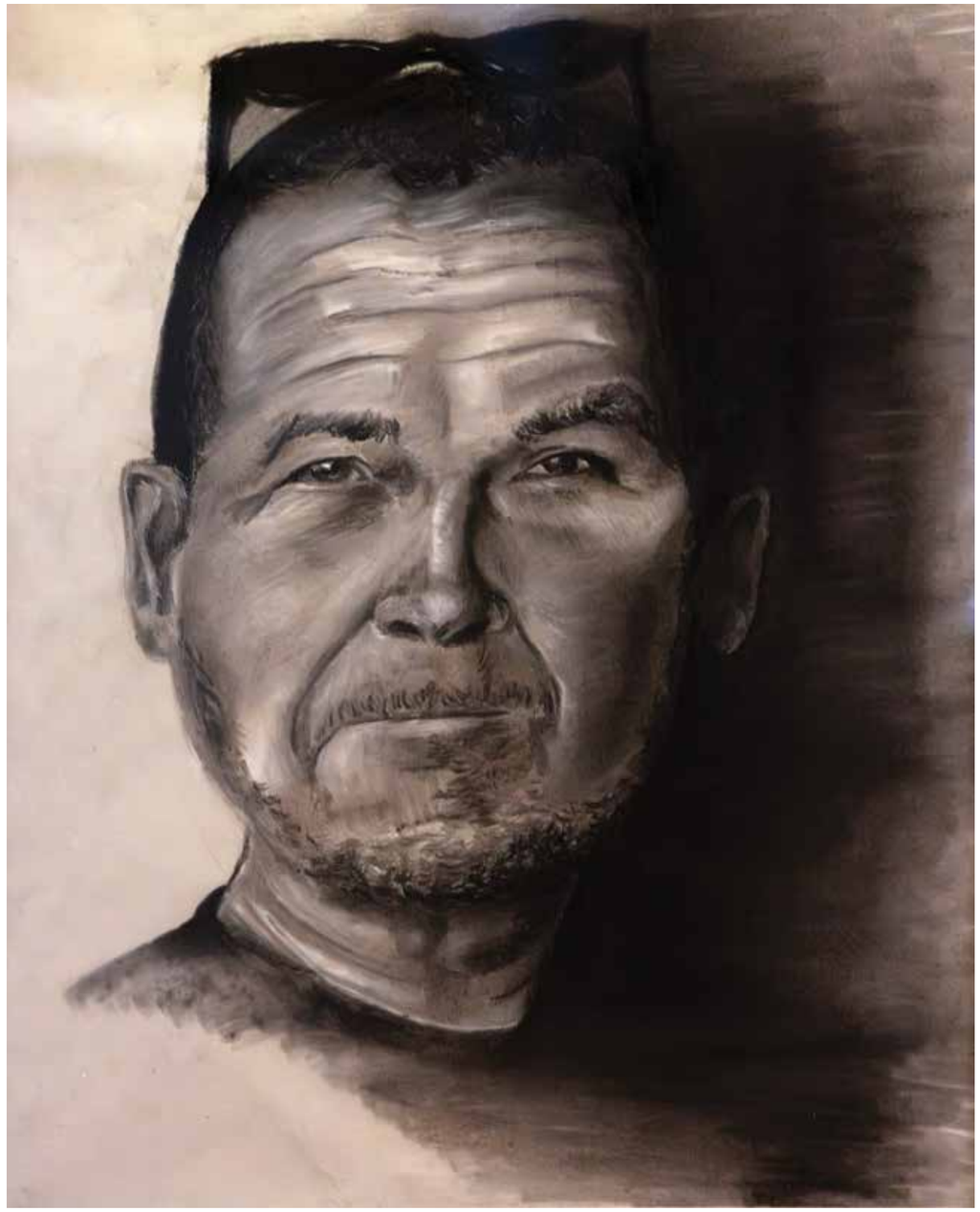
We pass once more beneath the raindrops falling on Senso-ji Temple.

Annelise Henderson

Swimming in green
Mixed media on canvas

Yasmin Russell

City of Petals
Acrylic on canvas



Claire Salt

Worn Silence
Charcoal

Tahlia Giffard

Henry
Watercolour

Jay Moore

When Robots Take Over The World

When robots take over the world no one will bat an eye, few will notice really...

People will pay to watch it happen; art galleries and concerts filled with love for the new copying machines that keep the people of the world busy, slow and lazy for as long as it has lived.

I will die when the robots take over, my body will live but my love, what I live for, what made me alive and the art of the world will die, with only robots to blame.

I will meet the same people, facing the same problems caused by the same robots everyone dead but forced to accept it, otherwise shunned and mocked for their hate of the robots.

Although it seems it's not the robot's fault, they were made by us, by those who want more money, who don't seem to look at humans as their equal. Maybe it's not the robot's fault...

So, when the robots take over the world, please pay attention, as maybe it's not the robots' fault.

Tobi Abbott

Threads of Music
Acrylic on canvas

Ava Liebert

Gaze
Oil paint

Kelly Anonuevo

Lucky
Mixed media

Levity Camilleri

Letter for my sister
Acrylic on canvas

Mabel Hogan

Where the moon meets the falls
Watercolour

Amber Bray

What if I am never loved?,

12:00am

I wake to the grating sound of my ringtone, blaring with the intensity of a siren in the quiet darkness of my room. Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I press the bright and blinding green button. I am met with whoops of excitement and joy, along with descriptions of beauty. I drag myself from my lonely bed and add yet another wedding to my already strained calendar. It's my fiftieth birthday today. My only gift, a reminder of what I lack: someone to be loved and cherished by. I have never known the feeling of being adored and wanted by something other than my cold pillow, begging for warmth. I reach into my drawers, graying hair cascading over my face. I fish out my newest leather-bound journal. I begin to write out my ever-flowing thoughts. Pen scratching out a rhythm. What else can I tell my troubles to? After what feels like an age of ticking clocks and a scraping pen, the noise in my head finally subsides.

Throughout my existence, I have often been praised for my work ethic, my commitment, my motivation. Though, in sincerity, it distracts from the consistent emptiness that lives and burrows deep within my soul. As to be treasured by something, other than one's cat, is the goal and gift of life. At least in the one I dream of.

Gently closing the cover, hiding away the freshly marked pages, I slip the journal back into the drawer. I lightly step back towards my bed, cold feet making brief contact with the bare linoleum. Retreating from the lingering chill of the room, I crawl beneath the heavy covers. Settling into the comfort of my queen-sized bed, big enough for two, used by one, I swiftly succumb to the arms of sleep that wrap me in their warmth.

9:00am

I am awoken again, though this time by the light of morning and the buzz of life beyond my window. I have once again escaped the lonesome of night. Today will be the same as everyday. An endless routine that has inhabited me for years. Although, I am to do one thing differently. I must go buy a dress for the upcoming wedding. During the call that had disturbed me from my slumber so violently last night, I had been informed that the freshly engaged were to be married 3 days from now. They were too excited, they had exclaimed, too alive with the urge to love each other. I had not planned to spend my long weekend wallowing in self pity, but it is simply too difficult not to in a circumstance such as this.

I pick out a red and navy floral dress to wear underneath the burning sun and the searing, judgemental eyes of the outside world. I throw my frizzy, dull hair into a messy bun atop my head. Slipping on some simple flats, I exit the house. A piece of burnt toast slathered with vegemite held between my lips.

The day rolls on like an incredibly old film unwinds; quiet, colourless and boring. After countless hours of attempting to shop in bland, sparse and beige washed stores that claim to be designer, I settle upon the first brightly coloured dress I've seen in what feels like a millennium. It's blue, orange and slightly ugly. It hardly matters though, no one will be looking at me anyway. I pay what I think is an absurd amount of money for a piece of shabby fabric and make my way back to the comfort of home.

The sun setting, I push through the door and collapse on my couch, feet screaming at me for my poor choice of footwear.

The next day unfolds in the company of previously watched TV shows and an immense amount of carbs.

The sun rises again on a new day. The day of the wedding.

2:00pm

I climb out of my somewhat nest of a bed, shaking the dreariness from my head. Noting the 'pm' time on the clock I urge myself to get ready quickly. I have to leave in 2 hours. I throw on my unattractive dress (I definitely regret the purchase). I slowly drag myself to the bathroom. I begin painting my face under the fluorescent light, erasing the fatigue from my darkened under eyes. Once I am satisfied that I have removed at least 2 years from my appearance, I adorn my only pair of heels, eat breakfast and exit the comfort of home, petting my cat on the way out.

I call a taxi; second thoughts already swirling in my mind, butterflies bracing my stomach.

The taxi driver pulls into a car park opposite the small church. I find my arms stiff, feet rooted. I look out the window, taking in the crowd of people in their suits and pretty dresses, regretting my chosen garment for the occasion even more. I catch the driver looking at me quizzically in the rearview mirror, silently asking the question that I'm battling with to answer; do I go in?

12:00am

Fumbling with my keys, I unlock my front door. The sky has darkened, leaving the world quiet and eerie. I stumble into the house. My painted layer of face has smudged and worn. Shedding my atrocity of a dress and discarding it on the floor, I sink beneath the covers of my queen-sized bed, big enough for two, used by one. My thoughts travel to what the bride might have looked like, what the vows could have read and the love, loneliness and judgement I would have had to endure if I had climbed out from that taxi. The effects of alcohol thrum in my skull as I lay my head on the pillow. Room too silent, heartache too loud, I allow sleep to take me into a dream filled escape. My cat snores peacefully beside me.

Jaslyn Giudice

Grandpa

Watercolour

Avery Chignell

What is Denial

What is denial
Denial is knowing something
But completely disregard the facts
That are quite clearly telling you something else

You see that's what the dictionary and other people
Who have never experienced denial before will
Tell you.

But that's not the entire truth denial is more than that
it's seeing something That's not there
despite everyone screaming at you

There's nothing there they say
It's gone.
But yet you still see it
Right in front of you its there
How can they tell me it's not when i see it
Clear as daylight.
But then once everything catches up to you
And finally the screams of desperation to save you from
The water you didn't realise you were drowning in

You suddenly start feeling and seeing
All the waves that are constantly trying to keep you under
While this entire time you had no idea you were barely keeping your head above the water
And you can't help but feel so stupid at how you didn't see this before
And hurts. It hurts so much that it feels as if you can't breath as if
You will never see the light of day again.
As if your heart has been ripped out of your chest
Then after it's been spat and stomped on
It's just shoved right back in as if nothing happened
That's denial, true denial.

Rhiannon Truscott

Fields in Bloom

Acrylic

Ossian Hartje

Suspended - Self portrait (boy or girl

Photographic print

Chloe McCullough

Healing Potion – Recipe

Blue Honey: Blue honey is much like regular honey but with a deep royal blue hue. It can only be acquired straight from a nest of purple night wasps. These wasps have a lethal sting and will protect their nest without hesitation. But they can be temporarily stunned by simply spraying them with Pixie dust. Gather half a cup.

Feather of a feather'd black tail lizard: The feather'd black tail lizard can commonly be found around flame ruins as they produce heat and feather'd black tail lizards are susceptible to cold temperatures. Gather one feather.

Charred willow bark: Charred Willow trees are a common tree in rainforests. But they only produce their bark during winter to protect it from freezing over so it's good to collect a good supply. When winter turns to spring, their bark naturally peels off, making it a good time for harvest. Gather one cup.

Glow eye mushroom: The glow eye mushroom is a mushroom easily recognizable by its bright red cap and two bioluminescent eye-like spots. These mushrooms are a good food source, so these eyes are to trick creatures into thinking it is a creature. They can be found growing on large trees. Gather one.

Barbed Fern: These annoying plants can be found practically anywhere no matter the environment or climate. But be careful of their poisonous barbs, you won't die, but you might throw up. Gather five.

Wild Boar tusk shaving: Wild boars live in colder climates and have black, brown or white fur. You can either kill the boar. Capture it using a trap, or tackle it. Gather two shavings.

Method:

1. Get your cauldron and fill it with 5 liters of clean water over high flames. Wait until it begins to bubble before adding your charred willow bark. Leave for 7 minutes to allow the bark to soften.

2. Add your barbed fern, Wild Boar Tusk Shavings, and Feather of feather'd black tail lizard. Stir slowly until your potion becomes a dark murky brown colour. Bring your flames down a bit and leave to boil for 18 minutes.

3. Once your 18 minutes are up, swiftly add in your glow eyed mushrooms and blue honey, stirring quickly. Your potion should start to bubble furiously. Keep stirring and don't let it overflow. Once the bubbling settles, stir slowly until it starts to radiate a gentle glow. This is how you know it's ready. Wait to cool before drinking.

4. (Optional) If you would like to preserve your healing potions shelf life, add a cup of pink herbs at any point in the recipe.

Yasmin Russell

The Peppercorn Tree

Rose plucked the long, fern-like leaves as she perched herself in the peppercorn tree. Will would be proud of her for climbing this high without his help. A smile crossed her face at the thought of his reaction, the earth and pepper smell of the broken leaves wafting through the air.

She drummed her fingers along the rough bark as she peered down, eyes darting to the base of the tree to find him. It wouldn't be long now, Rose thought as she straightened out her long pink dress. Grandfather always made her wear it when she was going to meet Will. While it was patched in several places and the once vibrant pink had faded to a dusty rose, she didn't want to go against him. He was one of the lucky ones from the war, if luck was the word for it. And she couldn't argue—without him to look after her, who knows where she would be?

The kookaburras called out as she dangled her legs, but she could not stay here forever. Finger drumming turned into hasty tapping, until Rose could not sit still anymore. She hiked up her dress and descended the peppercorn tree.

How dare he not show up?

She huffed as she leaned back against the tree trunk, arms crossed. The kookaburras continued to sing, as though mocking her loneliness. Rose watched them congregate in the distance and stuck her tongue out at them. They didn't seem to care.

Well, if he's not going to meet me, I'll just have to find him.

Will had always insisted they met at the tree, but he was also always punctual. He couldn't be upset at her for going to his house, not when he didn't do as he'd promised.

Rose passed house by house as she strode along the dirt footpath until she arrived at a large dwelling hugged by a wooden veranda. Wind chimes clinked in the slow wind as she rapped her fist against the door.

It didn't take long for someone to answer. But her heart dropped in her chest as she realised it was not Will who had answered her call. Built larger, stronger, and with a heavyset jaw stood Will's father. He loomed over her, thick brows furrowing as he took in her figure.

"You ain't s'posed to be 'round here. He ain't interested in you."

Rose's throat tightened. "Sure he does. I've been waiting for him."

Will's father pursed his lips. "Listen girlie, he ain't goin' to be seein' you no more. You're not welcome 'round here, or near William. Poor girl like you just ain't good for him."

"Is he inside? Can I come—"

"Seems like you didn't hear me, girlie," he interrupted, taking a step forward. "You scurry off now."

Rose moved, starting a sprint that would take her right past Will's father and into the house. She knew he was inside. They were meant to meet at the tree and she had to tell him off for not being there on time.

Pain blossomed across her face as she slammed into the arm of Will's father, sending her to the ground. She watched in shock as the crimson dropped, landing in between the grooves of the wooden grain, staining it red.

Rose's body began to shake as she lay, with no choice but to continue to listen to Will's father. "Stupid girl. Go run back to that pauper of a grandfather. An' if I see you here again, you'll wish you never came back."

He turned around to face the house, but not before Rose lifted her head, peering through the open doorway. There, Will stood watching her with wide eyes from behind the corner of a wall. She could just make out the words he was mouthing to her. *Run away.*

And so, she did.

Bunching up her dress, she fled from the veranda, the wind chimes echoing through her mind even as she furthered herself from the house. Will's father yelled something else out at her, but she couldn't hear it over the chimes and the wind and the kookaburras and her anger.

She slowed her pace as she reached the peppercorn tree. Kicking at the fallen leaves, she fell into a heap of cloth and dirt at the base of their tree. Rose brought her hand up to her face, feeling the skin. The trickle of blood had slowed, but it wasn't the injury that caused her pain.

Will would never have abandoned her. Not like this. She needed to get him out, to see him, to talk to him. But the sky was setting. She wouldn't be able to make it home before it got too dark for a young lady alone, and so it left her with only one option.

Rose climbed the tree again, balancing herself between two large branches as she found her position to rest in tonight. Grandfather would be distraught, but there have been days when she and Will would lose track of time. He would know that she would always find a way back home.

Sleep came to her fleetingly, her consciousness ebbing and flowing with dream-like delirium. It wasn't until the light of dawn and the sound of breaking branches below that her soul was jolted back into the tree. Her head throbbed, but she set it aside as she peered down between the branches and leaves.

Could it be?

Will crouched down in front of the tree, his dark hair speckled with what morning light had managed to make its way past the leaves. And he was crying.

Rose called out to him, flying down the tree with a rush that even she hadn't anticipated, her tiredness dissipating at the sight of him. His eyes shot up, red, raw and teary, as he watched her descend with astonishment.

"Rosalie?"

"I knew it! I knew you'd come. I knew that if I waited long enough—WILL!"

As Rose's feet reached the ground, she saw just what her trip to his house had cost. Bruises bloomed purple and grey across his neck, his left arm cradled close to his body. He went to stand to meet her, not breaking their eye contact, but his leg gave out beneath him.

Rose knelt beside him, bringing her hand to his cheek, surveying the damage. She furrowed her eyebrows as she took in the scene in front of her. What they had done to her Will.

No. He will not go back to them. He is hers.

There wasn't time to waste. He needed help. But there was no one nearby that she trusted to not bring him back to his father.

"You stay here, and rest for the moment," she started. "Just breathe, I'm going to bring you to my Grandfather. He learnt some first aid from the war, he'll be able to help. And he won't tell."

Will nodded absentmindedly as he watched Rose run off. She needed to bring him home somehow.

There.

A wheelbarrow rested in the front of someone's yard. She raced towards it, her feet slogging in the muddy dirt as she approached. Rosalie went to drag it out, but it was wedged into the thick mud. She gripped her calloused hands on the handles and gave it a large tug with all the strength she could muster, as it broke free from its muddy restraints. The release sent her flying. She toppled onto her backside, her dress and hair caked in mud. Rose groaned—she'd have a hard time getting all the dirt out of the dress, if it was even salvageable.

But she didn't have time to stop. Who knew when Will's father would come looking for him?

And so Rose picked herself up out of the mud, carting the wheelbarrow to drier ground and raced it over to Will. He cast her a strange look.

"It's not elegant, but it'll get you there. Now let me help you get in."

She leaned the wheelbarrow against the trunk as she loaded him in, and began to push him towards her home. He didn't say a word throughout the trip. Grandfather had told her something about shock.

Will was a lot heavier than she had thought he would be. But the anger she felt at his father was enough to keep her pushing. A mother drying laundry on their hills hoist called out to them as they dashed through the town, but nothing could stop Rose.

Grandfather was waiting on the porch, empty beer bottles scattered to his right. The porch light was on—how long had he been waiting?—and he jumped awake as they approached. He hobbled down the stairs, taking in what a sorry sight they were.

"Rosie, what happened? Are you hurt?"

"Please, Will is hurt. I … I went to see his father and he got angry and it's all my fault and I'm sorry I didn't come home and I'm sorry he did this to Will," Rose babbled, tears growing as the heaviness of her aching muscles set in.

"

Stand aside. I'll handle it from here."

Grandfather grunted as he hauled Will inside, bringing forth a strength his body hadn't used in years. He laid Will out on their ramshackle kitchen table to observe the wounds. And after what felt like hours, he made his judgement.

"Go get cleaned up Rosie. He'll be alright."

And so, she did. She scrubbed and dried and threw on her nightgown, leaving the muddy dress aside on the floor. It was not her priority. By the time she emerged into the kitchen once again, Will was looking better. Asleep on the sofa, arm put in a makeshift sling, it seemed like he was finally finding the rest he needed. She sat perched on the arm of the sofa, above his head, watching the rise and fall of his chest.

Rose, finally allowing herself to know that Will was alright, laid down on the other sofa, draping the blanket her Grandmother had knitted over her body. Sleep nearly found her once again, but before it could, her eyes opened at the sound of a metallic ring as it echoed throughout the house. Her Grandfather stood by the door, his old gun—the one he had told her never to touch—in his hands.

He gave her a curt smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Everything will be alright, Rosie. Will can stay with us now. I'll make sure everything will be *alright*."

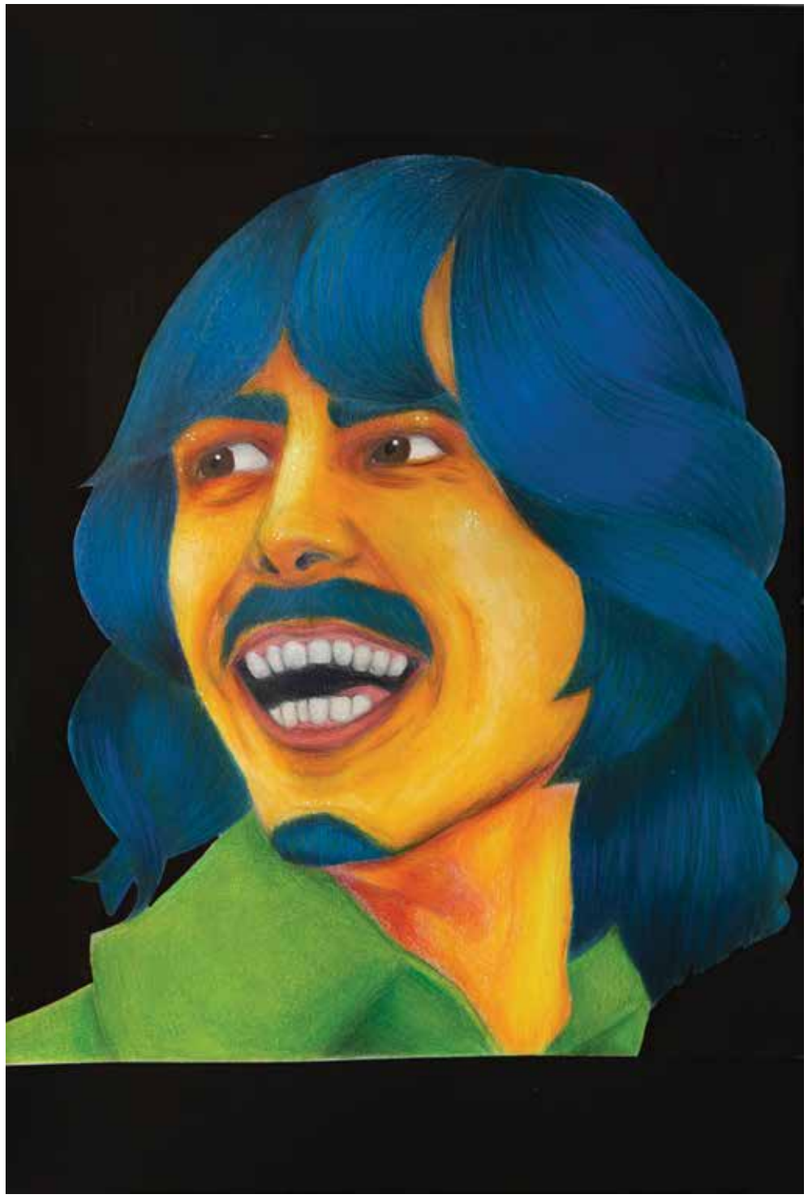
She took in a deep breath, looking from her Grandfather to Will, and the gun. And she bowed her head in a nod, before turning over to sleep. The flywire door screeched as he left. And Will was finally safe with her. No longer did they need to meet at the peppercorn tree.

Caitie Hore

Feathered Friends
Acrylic on canvas

Lily Aylmer

Serendipity
Acrylic on canvas



Minna James

Here comes the sun

Coloured Pencils, Grey lead, Acrylic Marker

Jorjiah Sjaardema

Homesick

The world continues to spin,
But not for us.
Whispering dreams through scattered dust.
No need for noise, or need to speak,
We've poured it out in tear-stained weeks.
Just float with me, don't look ahead,
As we're most alive,
When we are dead.

Let's hide our faces from the light,
Let the silence hold us tight.
You're smile waits for the summer skies,
As shadows past behind our eyes.
We're phantoms now,
Passing through,
I see the ghost in me & you.

We drift like smoke through memory's flame,
No past to hold, no need for name.
In summers hush, we found our place,
A fleeting touch,
A warm embrace.
The world forgets but we remain,
Forever still in falling rain.

Now winter wraps our souls in grey,
The sun feels years and years away.
We're soaked in storms that never cease,
No calm, no warmth, no sweet release.
Each drop a weight we cannot bear,
Each gust a ghost that chills the air.
Still, in cold we ache and pine,
For summer's touch,
For sun to shine.

Ksenya Wightman

Flowered Quilt

Fabric

Coen Kendal

Jerseys
Digital photograph

Melanie McLean

Ambivalencia
Oil paint

Olivia Rogister

Flowers (Collective
Digital photography on canvas

Mia Lahtz

Behind the Misunderstood Soul – Autobiography

In the beginning, I was just a child who felt too much in a house that didn't seem to take any notice. My words were often ignored or talked over, so I learned to keep them inside. Most days started on a cold bus, forehead pressed to the window, pretending the road would lead elsewhere. Joy showed up in small ways, such as a warm seat, a quiet moment, or a song on the radio. But under it all, something heavy was always there. I didn't have the words yet. Just the ache.

My early years of adolescence were an explosion of expectation, of self and of others. Friendships formed like constellations and broke like glass. Some laughed with me in daylight but disappeared at night. Betrayals weren't always loud. Sometimes they'd arrive with silence, avoidance, or a shift in tone. I began to learn that not all people mean what they say, and not all connections last forever.

One day, something shifted, not all at once, but enough to notice. The darkness didn't leave, but it stopped being nameless. I started to recognize the patterns, the way I reached for a vape like it could calm the storm, the sting in my throat that felt like control when everything else was slipping. The way I hurt myself in quiet moments, trying to make the pain on the outside match what was already screaming inside. It wasn't for attention. It was for survival, the only way I knew how to feel something… or nothing. But little by little, I found language for the war within. The notes app. A late night message. The quiet courage to say, "I'm not okay." Naming the pain didn't fix it, but it gave it edges. And once it had shape, I could begin to face it. Not erase it. Just sit beside it, without being swallowed whole.

There was always tension between mum and I, like we were two forces constantly butting heads. We would argue over everything, big and small, things that didn't even matter. It felt like we couldn't see eye to eye, and every conversation seemed like a constant battle. I barely went to school, and when I did, it was just to show up, but I'd skip class and hide in the bathroom. It was the only place I could escape the noise, the pressure, and the constant feeling that I didn't belong. I didn't have the words or the energy to explain it to anyone, so I just withdrew, trying to stay under the radar while everything around me felt like it was falling apart.

There were days when even my own mind would turn against me. Thoughts spiraled like smoke in a sealed room. Anxiety clawed at the edges, and depression sat in the corners like a patient shadow. Friends didn't always understand. "It gets better," they'd say, as if drowning could be solved with a deeper breath. So I learned to smile as armour, to laugh while going 'crazy' inside.

In the in between, I drifted. I wasn't chasing love or validation, just trying to understand myself. There was one person, though… a friend. She reminded me of everything I wanted to become. Being around her made me question who I was, what I stood for. I think I admired her more than I admitted. But when it came down to it, she chose a path that didn't make sense to me, one that felt like betrayal. Still, I held on to the idea that a sense of self was possible. Even when it hurt, I kept hoping that one day I'd look in the mirror and finally see someone worth staying for.

Friendships have been a battleground for me my whole life, relationships that seemed to slip through my fingers or leave me questioning my worth. I'm still learning, still figuring out how to trust, how to give and receive love without fear. It's a work in progress, one where each misstep teaches me more about myself and the kind of people I want in my life. The process is messy, but I'm learning to honour the journey, setbacks and all.

Healing wasn't a straight line, it was a slow dance with setbacks. But I began to choose people who chose me back. I learned that isolation didn't mean brokenness. I tried setting boundaries, even when my voice trembled. And on the days the darkness returned, I no longer mistook it for truth. Just bad weather passing.

Now, I carry my story with room for growth as I'm still learning, as I'm still trying to live day by day, but with the knowledge that everything happens for a reason and it will shape you and challenge you everyday that you live. I have a life of living and learning ahead of me and many more challenges that won't stop me.

Days will be rough and that's okay.

Be kind to yourself.

You matter.

Noah Dunstone

Queen Codswallop III and the Gut-Bucket Trial of Vaudevillian Dilettantes

Digital painting

Tahlia Andrews

Music

My name is Tahlia Andrews, a 15-year-old musician and performer in Year 9 at Bendigo South East Secondary College. I have a passion for the arts, starting as a dancer and later performing at local festivals and gigs.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, I taught myself the ukulele and then acoustic guitar with a $40 guitar from an op shop. Last year, I auditioned successfully for the Academy of Creative Arts (ACA) and gained confidence through performances and collaborations with other young musicians. I am also the lead vocalist for the BSE Stage Band, performing at school and community events.

Thanks to my experiences, I received an Ulumbarra Foundation Holdsworth Bursary in 2024 to help cover ACA costs and purchase new equipment. I've been busking and performing with bands, including my duo Cadence with my cousin George. We have played at the Moonlight and Farmers' Markets in town, as well as other events, such as the Sustainability Festival, earlier this year. On my own, I have also performed at various markets and events, including Funloong Fun Day, Play in the Garden Day, and the Newstead Live festival.

Recently, I performed the national anthem at the Bendigo Braves basketball games and at a dawn service on ANZAC Day. Both of these experiences were very special and provided me with the opportunity to represent not only myself, but also the youth music community in Bendigo, which is a vital part of my life.

This year, I aim to start writing original music and would love to attend songwriting workshops. I also want to learn music theory and take private guitar lessons, as I'm primarily self-taught. Currently, I take vocal lessons with Taylah Chisholm, which have helped me explore my vocal range and style.

Charlotte Rowe

Music

My name is Charlotte Rowe, and I am 17 years old, studying at Bendigo Senior Secondary College, NETschool Campus.

I've loved singing for as long as I can remember. I joined the school choir in Grade Four, which sparked my passion. Singing helps me manage my emotions—whether I'm sad or happy, it always makes me feel better. While I'm not always great at expressing my feelings verbally, music allows me to share my emotions with others.

My first performance was in Prep during a school production, and my first solo was singing "Tale as Old as Time" from *Beauty and the Beast* in Year 7. Initially nerve-wracking, I found it felt natural and I've never experienced stage fright since! I try to connect with my audience, understanding that they're human too, which helps me stay relaxed.

My grandfather, who loves music and has been in choirs, has inspired me greatly. He drives me to school every day, and we often sing along to the radio. My family is very supportive; my mother loves hearing me sing, and my sister encourages me to pursue it professionally. I studied with Miss Jennifer Schatzle for about five years and developed perfect pitch, then took lessons with Christina Finch at BSSC NETschool. Though my focus is on completing Year 12, I still engage in singing whenever possible. While I've experimented with songwriting, I find my true passion lies in performing. Singing allows me to express emotions and connect with the audience. I've been in musicals like *Legally Blonde Junior* and *Madagascar Junior*, as well as performing for the Bendigo Theatre Company. I even auditioned for *The Voice* at 16.

I love sharing my emotions with an audience, and I plan to continue performing, including at the upcoming RoA showcase in 2025. My ambition is to pursue singing as a significant part of my life, despite the challenges in the industry.

Amarisa Annear

Dance

My name is Amarisa Annear, and I am a 13-year-old in Year 8 at Girton Grammar School. My family has lived in Campbells Creek, Victoria, for the past four years, and we are actively involved in the Bendigo community, particularly through my ballet studies.

I am a passionate ballet dancer and love its technical aspects. I love performing and enjoy storytelling through my performances. I like bringing classical ballet stories that have been around for many years to life, as well as new stories that have been developed recently.

I have been dancing since I was three, focusing on classical ballet. I was invited to join the elite classical ballet program at Le' Ecole Ballet School in Melbourne, where I studied both classical and contemporary styles. For the past three years, I have studied at the Extension Ballet Studio under Miss Emma Atkin, attending classes three times a week and practicing at home, which has led to several awards.

At the Extension Ballet Studio, I performed as the Fairy of Generosity in "Sleeping Beauty" (2022), the Spanish Doll in "Coppélia" (2023), and had the honor of being Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz" (2024). These experiences taught me not only about performance but also the importance of supporting my fellow dancers.

I have participated in various statewide programs, including the Ballet Teachers Studio Workshop in 2022 and 2025, and attended classes and workshops with the Australian Ballet during school holidays. In 2024, I successfully auditioned for the Victorian State Youth Ballet Company, performing in "The Little Mermaid" and "The Nutcracker" alongside professional dancers. In 2025, I successfully auditioned for the Melbourne Youth Ballet Company, performing in Le Bayadère also alongside professional dances.

The recognition I have received for my skill has shown me I may have the opportunity to follow my love of ballet as a career. This is something that I am considering and wish to continue to attend workshops, classes, competitions and perform for Victorian and National ballet companies such as Melbourne Youth Ballet Company to continue to develop my ability.

Rowan Egan

Music

My name is Rowan Egan, I'm a 13 years old musician who plays guitar, harmonica, percussion, and I sing.

My musical journey began as a toddler at Skip's "Nappa Dacka" sessions, where we would rock inflatable guitars and bang on tin cans. At 7, I started learning guitar with Jo Woodward and soon joined the Axedale School band led by Kaine Flemming-Marsh. Then I met the best teacher in the world: Peter Gavin! Pete got me playing Harmonica in no time and invited me to perform with Jade Byrd at the 2022 Blues & Roots Festival- Best weekend of my life!

I've since had various opportunities to play publicly, including the Moonlit Markets, Bendigo Show and the Axedale Carols.

In 2023, I took singing lessons with Louise MacGregor, jammed with my best friend Ruben, and we formed a band called "The Evil Cucumbers." I was honoured to play at the "Blues and Roots Mini Fest" and graduated as Axedale Primary School Muso of the Year.

While I am now at high school, I recently went back to Axedale to help with the Music Program- It felt great to be helping younger kids in a space where I truly feel at home.

The thing I love about Music is that it brings people together, people you might not usually talk to or meet.

I've also been so fortunate to have had great teachers who have understood me and worked very hard to bring out the best in me. They inspire me, not just as a musician, but as a person.

I hope to be a world-famous musician someday, but in the meantime, I'd just like to "pay it forward" with other musicians, by being encouraging and supportive of anyone new to the scene and extending the generosity that's been given to me.

Tessa Ginnivan

Music

My name is Tessa Ginnivan, and I am very passionate about ballet, having loved it for as long as I can remember. I started dancing at the age of 3, and I am now 12 years old, in Grade 6. I have been training at The Extension Ballet Studio in Bendigo for the last 5 years. I remember when COVID-19 hit Australia, my old ballet school shut down, so I would practice ballet in my room, hoping that COVID would end so I could return to ballet.

My teacher, Emma Acton (who won the RAW Performing Arts Award in 2009), is a big inspiration to me, as she is a beautiful dancer and an encouraging teacher.

Last year I was accepted into the Victorian State Youth Ballet and it was a wonderful experience and very inspiring. At the time that I was there, they were performing a production of The Little Mermaid. The youth ballet group performed three roles, including sea clams/oysters, kitchen maids, and ballroom dancers.

Every year my ballet school holds an end of year concert; I have played many roles in them and here are a few: Snowflakes and Waltz of the flowers in The Nutcracker, Little Red Riding hood in Sleeping Beauty, Townspeople, Irish Doll and leading the 4–5-year-olds in the Music Box Doll in Coppelia, and Munchkin and Emerald City Residents in our production of The Wizard of Oz.

In all of these performances, I have been nervous and excited at the same time. At the end of each concert awards are presented, and last year I received the Outstanding Commitment award. I am also entering into my first dance competition this year.

I want to have a future in dance, as well as trying out new things. It is my dream to be a principal dancer with the Victorian State Ballet when I am older, as I have had the opportunity to dance with them before. It would be lovely to do it again, but for a full-time job.

Zaliah Moses

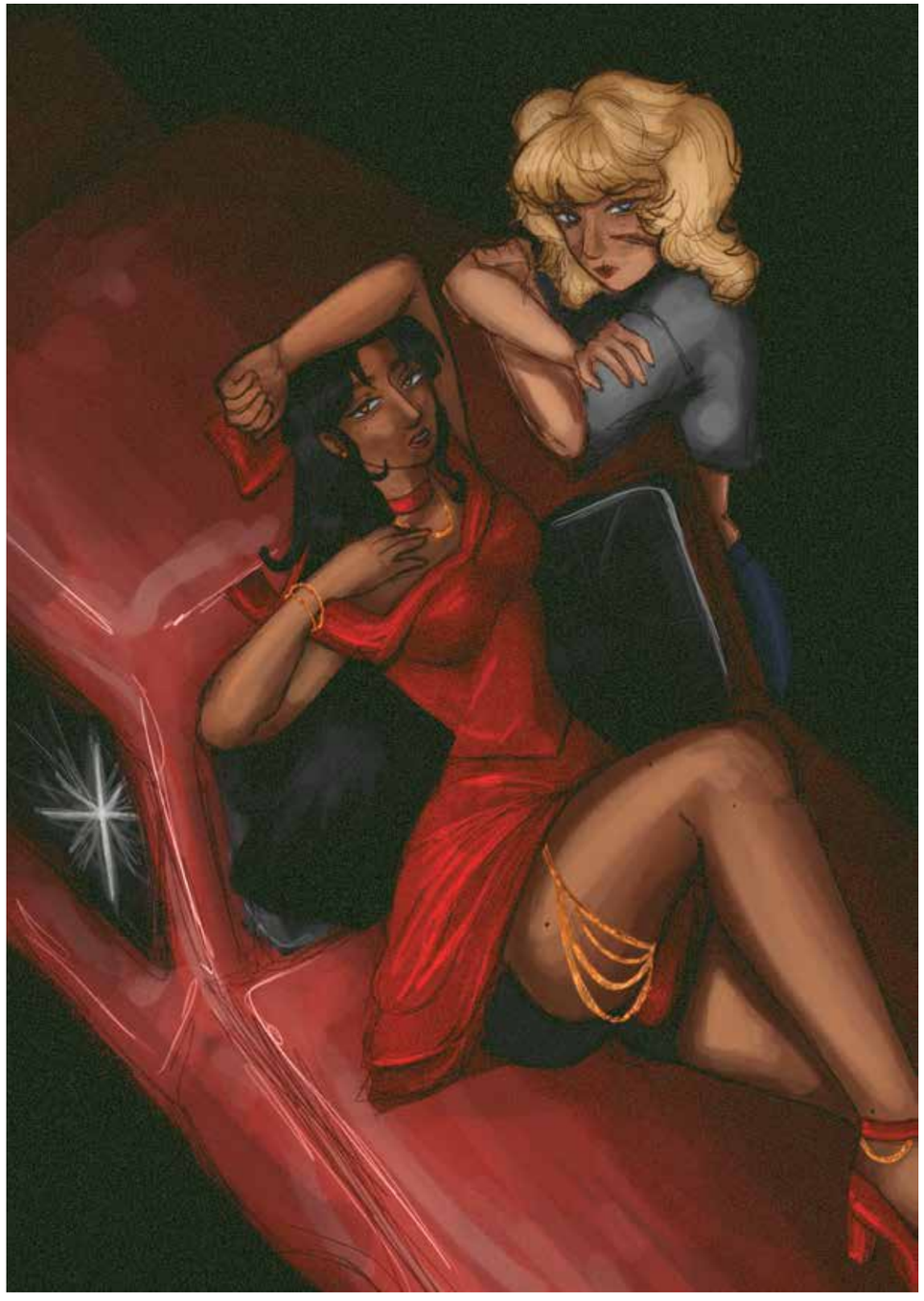
Music

From a young age, music has shaped my creativity and confidence. Although I initially kept my voice hidden, I began singing on stage with my youth church band and truly stepped into the spotlight last year. That moment, when my mother, who had no idea I could sing so well, was moved to tears, reaffirmed my commitment to music.

Since then, I have dedicated countless hours to refining my vocal abilities and teaching myself guitar, piano, and ukulele. My passion continues to grow as I seek new musical opportunities. I have performed at my school's music recital and community Christmas carols, leading the younger kids in the choir. These experiences have enhanced my stage presence and solidified my dedication to music.

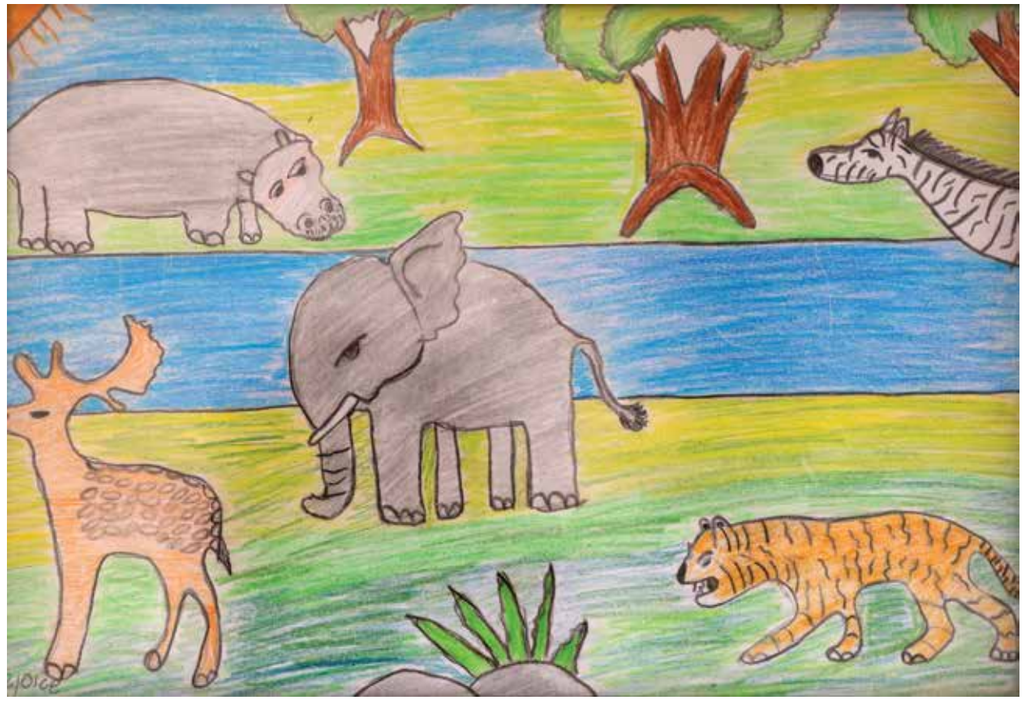
I currently take weekly lessons with Tara Flinn, who encourages me to explore new techniques which I can incorporate into my performances. I would also love to take guitar lessons and learn the violin.

I believe I have the talent and passion to excel in music. I aim to be selected for the Kool Skools program, where I hope to write and record an original song. This opportunity would be invaluable in developing my artistic abilities, and would not only enhance my musical education but also help me make a meaningful impact through music.



Avery Godfrey

Fast Time
Digital drawing



Rejoice Hanna

Wild Animals
Pencil on paper

Daisy Saunder

Time and Trinkets
Photography

Mollie Hartje

Remnants of You

By the time the morning comes, you're gone.

Our bed seems wastefully large without you, as I stretch out my limbs and sweep the sleep away from my eyes.

I listen for your footsteps in the halls and hear nothing.

I look for your figure around corners and see nothing.

I call for you only for my words to reach nothing.

You'll be back in the evening, I imagine.

Full of stories to tell of your day, of grievances and happenstances and coincidences, you'll sit in your favourite chair and ramble until the sun sets and the stars shine and our fingers grow cold. We'll warm them with hot chocolate (for you) and chai (for me) as we sit on the couch and watch our favourite show together. We'll fall asleep halfway through an episode (it's okay, there's always time to go back and rewatch it) before we slowly make our way back to bed.

Then, by the time the morning comes, you'll still be there.

There's a loaf of your favourite bread in the cupboard, and I take it out to toast a few slices. I think of how you always have it, with that blueberry jam you swear by, and slather the jam over my slightly burnt toast. It tastes like bumping into each other in the bathroom as we brush our hair, like reminding each other not to forget our keys or wallets or phones, like quick goodbyes as we go our separate ways.

I'll remind you to pick up another jar before you get back home.

Your scarf hangs on the hook by the open door, swaying gently as the cool air creeps in. I think of how you wore it when we first met all those years ago, as I wrap it around my own neck and step out the door. It feels like cold winter mornings spent cuddled up in the warmth of our bed, like the windy days you wrapped your scarf around my head to keep my ears from the cold, like late nights soaking up as much warmth as we can from the couch before we have to move to bed.

I'll remind you to take it tomorrow to keep off the cold.

I listen to your favourite album as I start up the car, energetic jazz flowing smoothly through the speakers. I think of the way you dance to it, humming along to your favourite parts with your eyes gently closed, the evening sun lighting up your face. It sounds like late night drives back home after a night out, like road trips to the coast as our holiday plans finally come to pass, like coming back home together after a busy day.

I'll remind you to get another copy for in the house.

Everyone only has nice things to say about you.

I don't think that it's the place for them to say anything bad, anyways.

They recall all the times you made them feel happy, feel safe, feel loved.

They celebrate you, your life, your efforts, your achievements,

as I stare at your back like a brick wall.

By the time the evening comes, you're beside me again.

We walk through our favourite park together as the flowers bloom and the ducklings make their debuts, savouring the warm sunlight that hits our skin through the trees. We talk for hours on mundane things, laugh over bad jokes, and take photos of insects. You manage to get a perfect photo of a ladybug, but my phone doesn't want to focus on it. I try, anyways, and we set the matching photos as our phone backgrounds.

I wish that we could stay here, like this, forever.

But you're already gone.

In time,

I will forget the sound of your voice as you talk about your day.

In time,

I will forget the way that you move as you dance beside me.

In time,

I will forget the look of your face as the evening sun shines upon your smile.

Piece by piece, I will lose what remains of you.

This much I know.

This much I hate I know.

But,

I will never forget how it felt to be by your side.

I will never forget how happy you made me feel.

I will never forget how much I love you.

When I feel sad, I will eat your favourite bread with your blueberry jam.

When I feel lost, I will wrap myself up in your scarf until I find my way again.

When I feel lonely, I will listen to your favourite album and dance.

I will never be rid of you.

Not completely.

Not ever.

By the time the morning comes, I will be alone.

My bed not as warm as it used to be, as I pull more of my blankets around me in a futile effort to wish the night back.

I listen to the birds as they sing their morning songs.

I look to the window as the rising sun catches on the dancing dust motes.

I call sweetly to my dog as she wakes gently at the foot of my bed.

I'll be okay in the evening, I think.

Full of stories to tell of my day, of grievances and happenstances and coincidences, I'll sit in your favourite chair and ramble until the sun sets and the stars shine and my fingers grow cold. I'll warm them with chai (for me) as I sit on the couch and watch our favourite show. I'll fall asleep with my dog on my lap halfway through an episode (it's okay, I've seen it ten times over) before making my way to bed.

I'll be okay in the morning, I think.

In time,

I will be okay.

I will be okay.

I will be okay.

I love you,

I miss you,

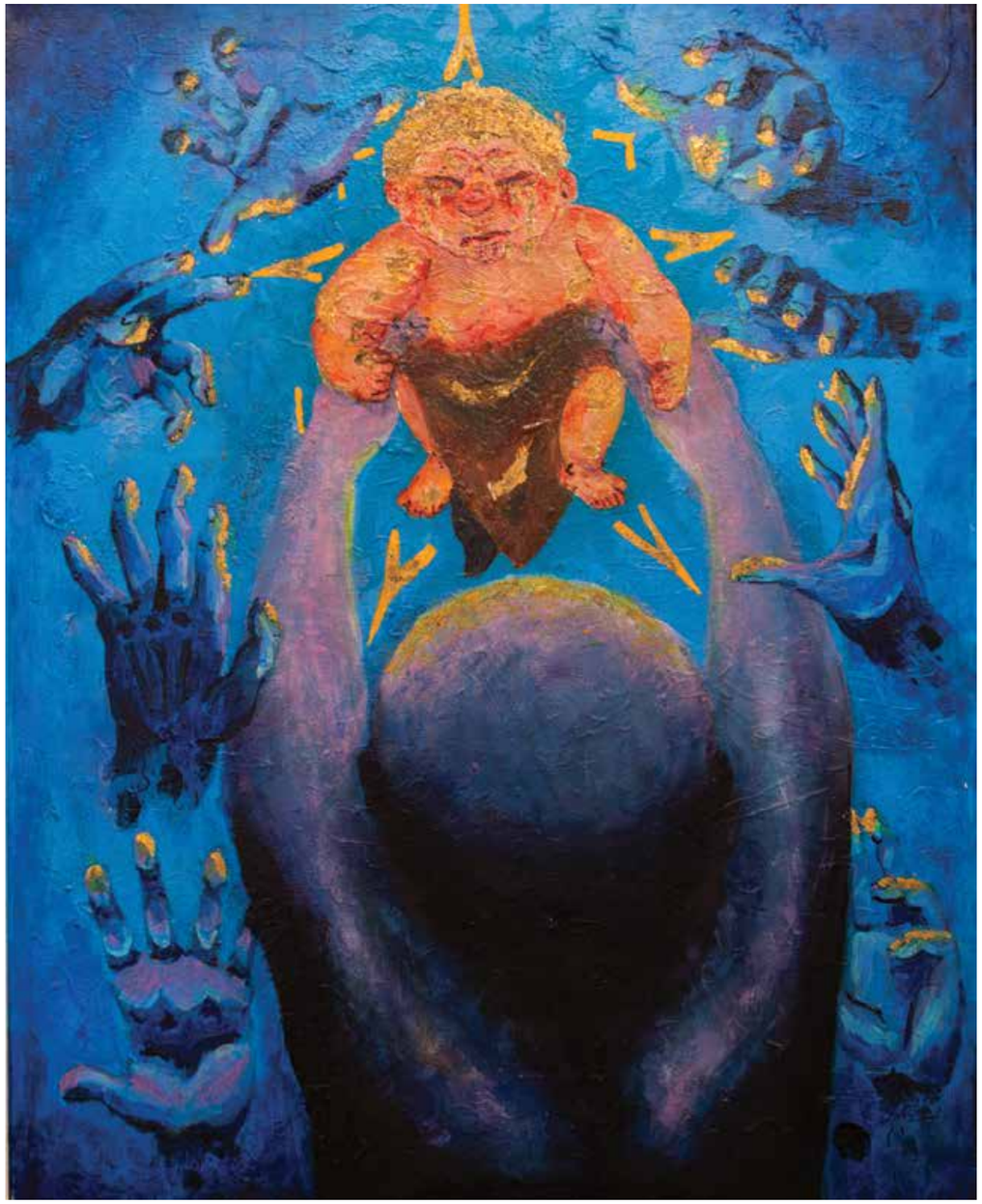
and I will never forget you.

Thank you.

Bryce H

933 Lines

Photography



Jay Moore

The golden child
Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas

Eve Steptowe

Floral Elegance
Digital Art

Jay Perennial

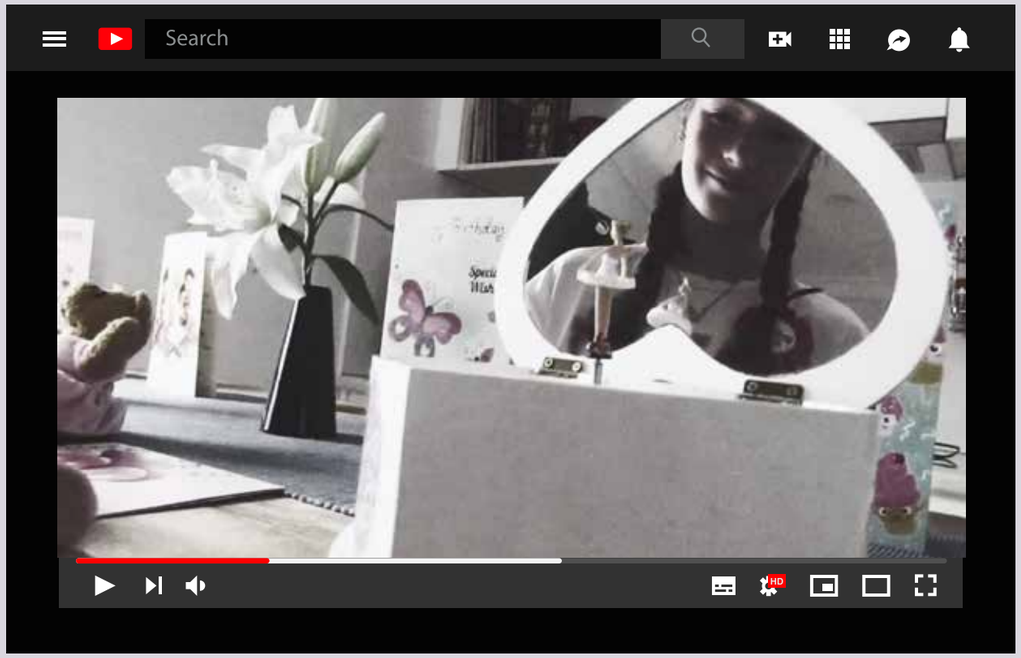
Braids
Pastel and pencil on paper

Aimee Parry

Burning Memory
Photography

Lucia Fitzpatrick

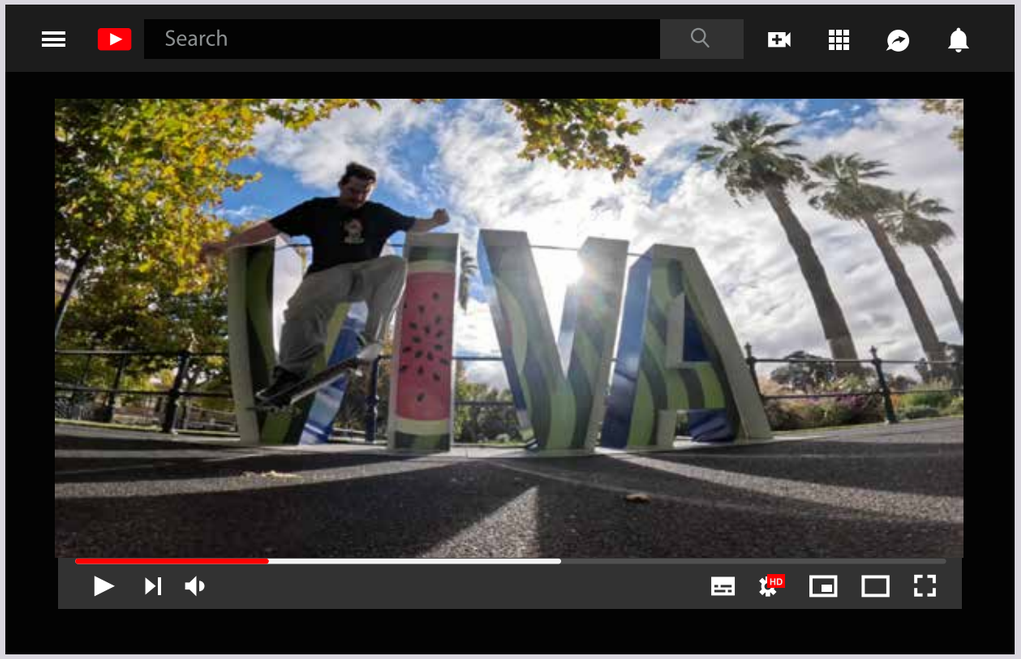
Portrait of Mana
Oil on canvas



Maleah Alford

The Ballerina

Short Film



Tim Conroy

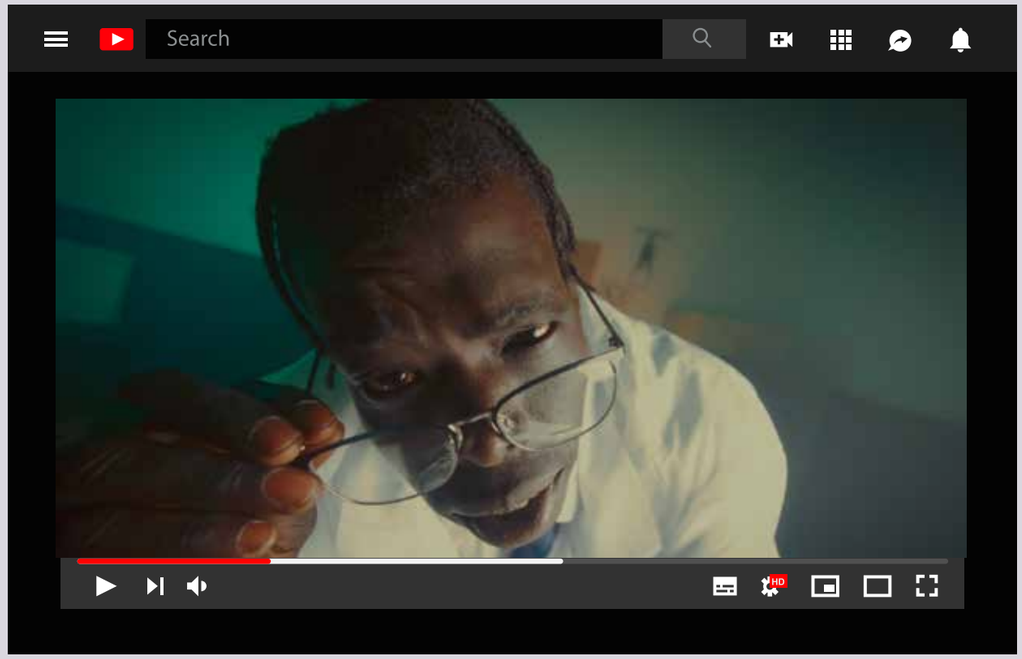
Viva

Short Film

Coen Gould

Hunted 2

Short Film



Ben Martin

Kobe

Short Film

Lucy Perdon

X-ray Vision

Acrylic,Cotton thread, Felt, Sterling silver and Cyanotype on denim

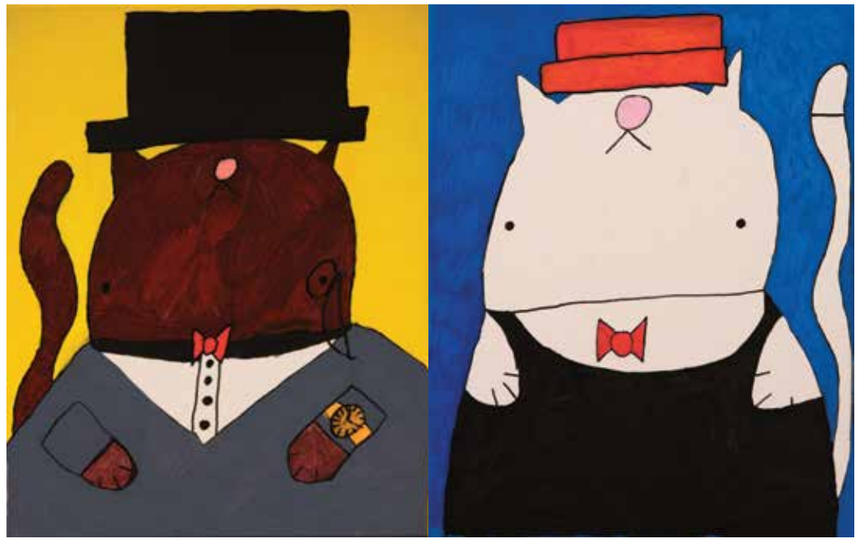
Esther Johnston

Visions

Acrylic on canvas

Abby Smith

Flowering
Multimedia



Jacob Kendal

Posh cats
Paint pen on canvas (diptych)

Abilene Beckwood

Sunshine
Acrylic on canvas

Jedda Dunkley

Dragon
Cardboard, clay, feathers, wood, paint, glass, foam

Summer Saunder

The Prospect of Fruit
Acrylic paint

Zara Murphy

Blissful waters
Pencil and water colour

Emilie Kinsella

Microplastics
Acrylic paint, plastic

River Farrow

Hand of human nature

Painting

Levity Camilleri

Um, Like,,

Um, so I'm here today,

To talk about, like, politics

From, like, the perspective of a teen girl

And does it minimise my, uhh, my point

If you need both hands and, like, a foot

To count the number of times I say 'like'?

Do I minimise my fucking point,

When I, like, swear,

Like just then,

Or do I just do it because, um,

It, like, helps meet your expectations and shit?

Cause yeah, you can't listen to an eloquent teen

And understand my point and not just, like, my language skills

Does it minimise my point

If I like, have to go back and repeat myself

And make up scripts in my fucking head for the points I have to say

Or does that just mean it, like, fits the diagnostic criteria?

Yeah, I'm like, autistic, but that doesn't mean shit

It doesn't, um, mean you don't need my perspective

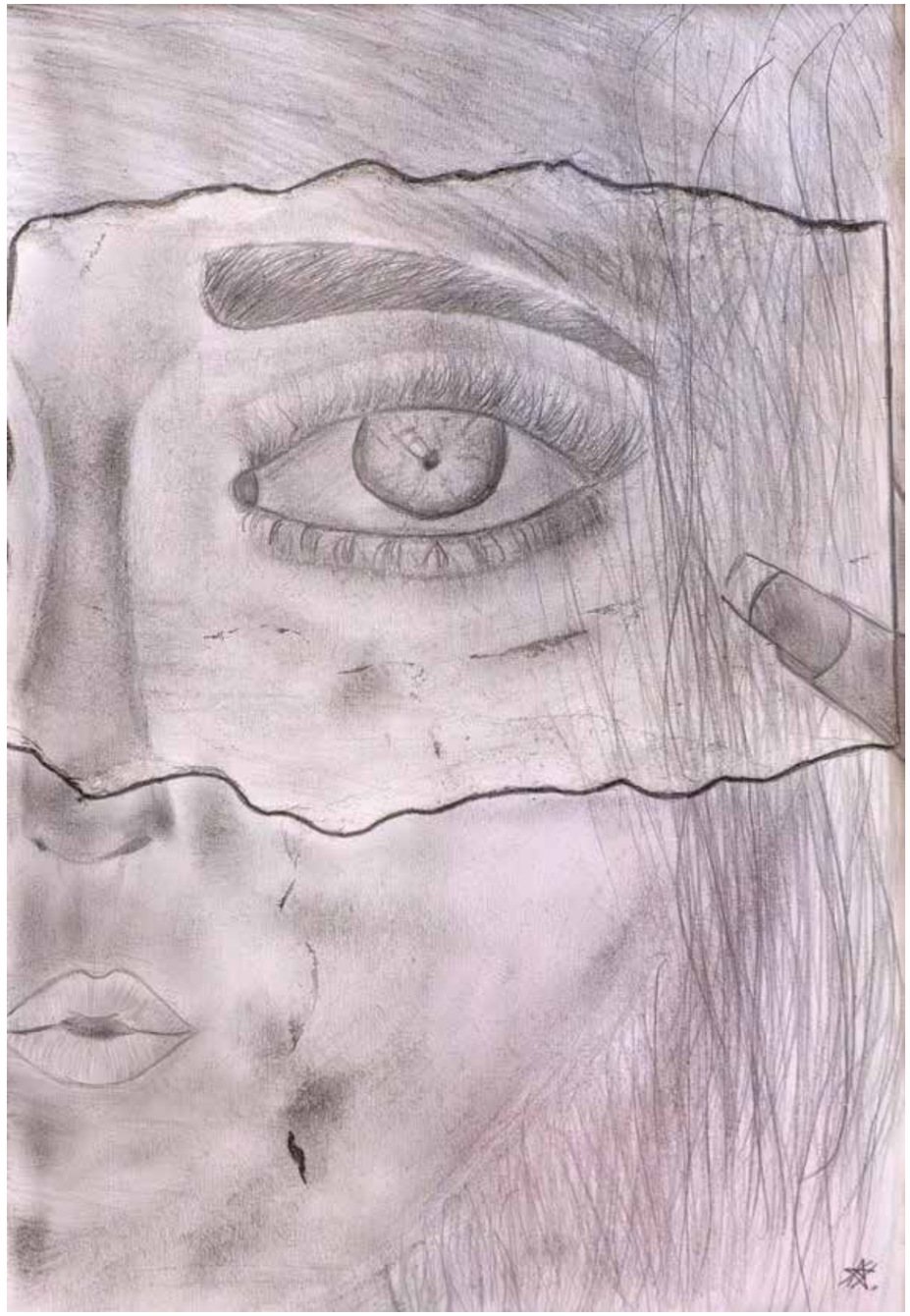
Or that I'm, like, dumb

I swear to god, I'm like, sick of being spoken for and spoken over.

Mackenzie Davis

Pieces of Us

Coloured pencils



Alyssa Hilson

The Face

Pencil on paper

Lexi Jenkins

Pearl
Digital Art

Mia Power

Blending in
Acrylic

Wren Crennan

Misery / Hostility
Acrylic on canvas

Noah Dineen

Polar
Wax pastel

Mj Gibbs

VISION

Fine liner pen and sharpie

Arkie Starr MacRae

Iris, Voice of Olympus and Keeper of the Spectrum

Digital

Raphael Hanna

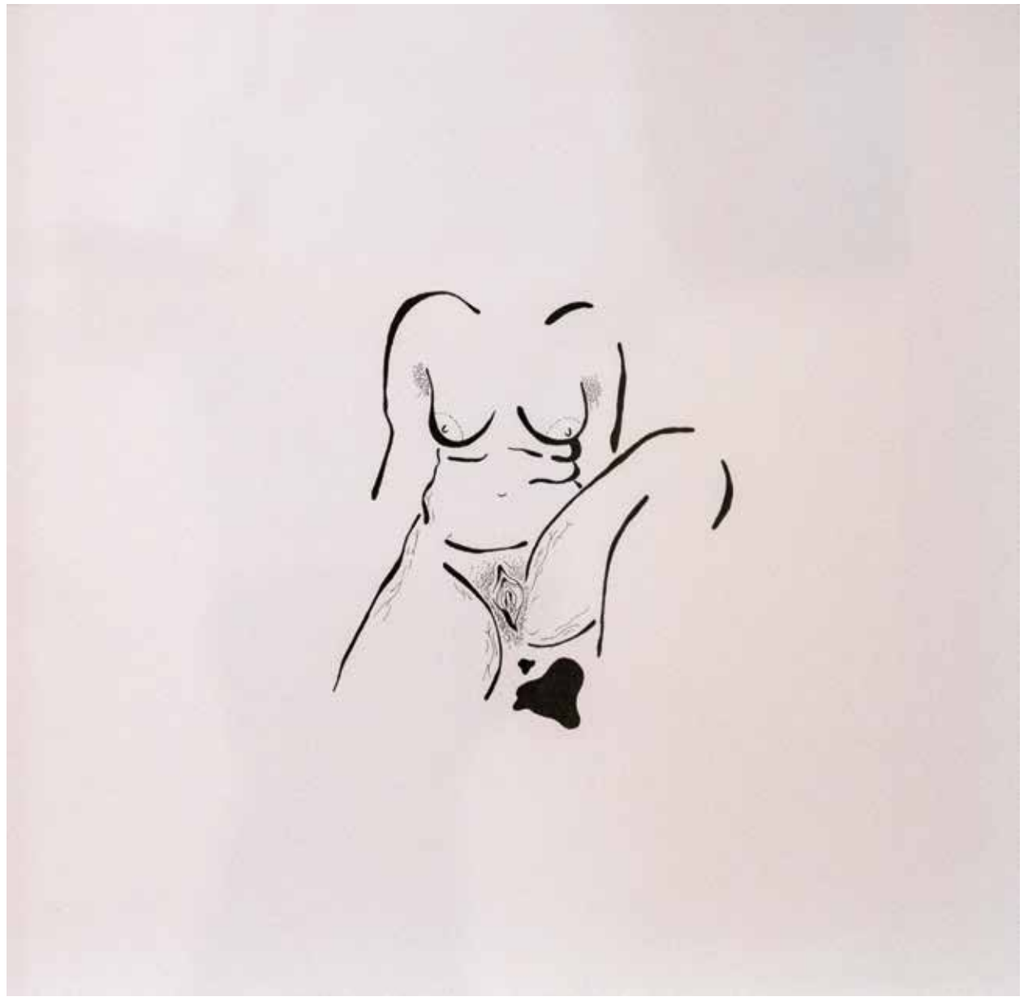
Jesus Christ - The Good Shepherd

Pencil on paper

Yazmin Hardie

Arsenic

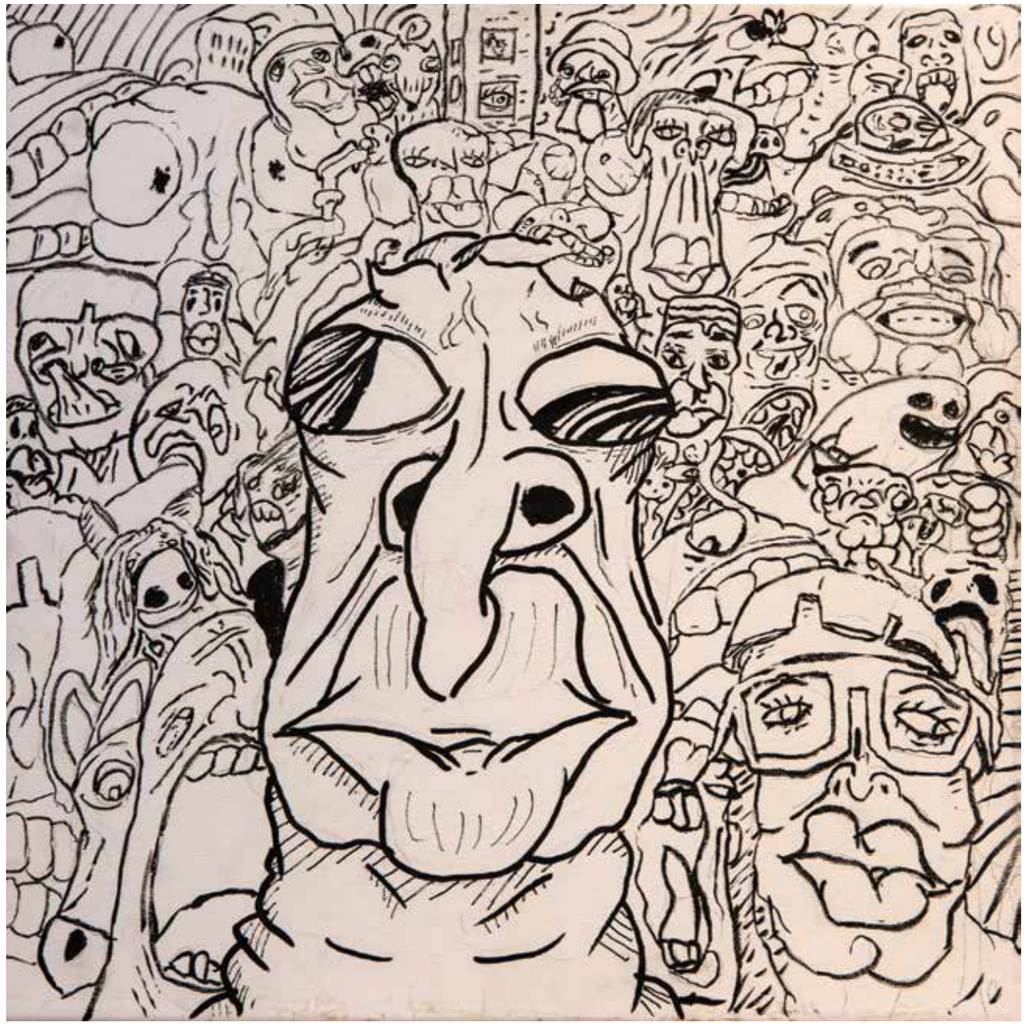
Digital image on canvas



Emily Sheahan

Uncontainable

Fine-Line Pen on Paper



Zephyr Farrow

Zephyr's creation

Canvas with posca markers

Summerlee @slfmedia

Luminating the Invisible
Digital photography, Canon EOS 1000D

Esther Ford

Grief
Watercolour and graphite

Jannine

Tainted hope
Acrylic

Chloe Penno

Blanket of Flowers
Embroidery

Chloe McCullough

Flowers
Acrylic paint and marker

Sara Hancock

Untitled
Digital drawing

CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO