

Killing Our Roots

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'Killing Our Roots' is a multimedia artwork featuring pyrography, coloured pencil, and acrylic/alcohol marker on a 190 x 35 cm slice of naturally edged pine. This artwork was inspired by my love and appreciation of trees, and how they are underappreciated and overlooked by many. It is rather dystopian and sombre, like the audience is staring into the soul of the tree, cut down to make the artwork. Before making this piece, I found out about the Horrocks Highway development plan, and that the local council was removing over a kilometre of old gum trees where I live, in order to build an unnecessary overtaking lane. Seeing the construction begin churned my stomach, in helplessness, anger, and sadness. There is simply nothing I could or can do about it. Creating this artwork was therefore extremely meaningful to me and will stand as some form of apology or tribute to these trees – many of which are older than us today.

This artwork's main medium is pyrography, which uses a heated instrument to burn designs into the wood. I used my pyrography tool in several unorthodox ways to get the effect I needed, such as using the flatter, metal side to burn instead of the nib, and using the pointed edge to scratch texture and dent the wood instead of burning it. These techniques worked well in expressing the rough and fibrous textures of the tree trunk, which was quite effective. The tones achieved through burning, caramelised browns and blacks, assist in the dystopian atmosphere of the piece by making it look dark and smoke-stained, like the aftermath of a bushfire. It is eerie and still, yet something feels alive. This effect was also achieved using the blowtorch, which allowed for soft gradients and shadows in stark contrast to the highly defined and hatched-in effects of the pyrography tool.

I added colour to the image, in order to highlight focal points and create more contrast between the foreground and background, which is difficult to achieve with burning alone, as you can only make things darker not lighter. I was inspired by the artist Zdzislaw Beksinski, who is known for creating dystopian and surrealistic landscapes, often involving trees and nature. I was especially interested in his application of colour: with its smooth and impeccably blended nature, and otherworldly colour schemes. I first used a white Prismacolor pencil to bring out the light elements, then black to push back the dark elements. I also used blue and green to subtly colour the sky. This enhanced both objects and spaces, and furthered the dystopian nature of the piece, whilst clearly separating the main tree from the background, controlling the visual hierarchy.

This artwork successfully communicates my concerns, and I am satisfied with its execution. I wanted to create a piece that inspires people to consider the little details of the environment around them, and to appreciate things like trees, torn down for the sake of 'progress', and I think that was achieved.