

Practitioner's Statement

Untitled

Carla Gallasch

My body of work strives to highlight the omnipresence of change in our lives and the way we emotionally respond to it. I have used the sky as an avenue for exploring this concept due to itself having a transient nature, thus being a visual metaphor for life. The fundamental source of inspiration for my work sparked from Catholic Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast who stated:

"Look at the sky... Surreally note how different it is from moment to moment... We just think of good and bad weather, but this day right now is unique weather. A kind that will never be the same ever again".

These words resonated with me as I realised life is a direct parallel to the sky; it has its shades of lightness and darkness (joy and sadness), our moods often fluctuate and it is always changing much like atmospheric weather patterns. Research led me to discover that many artists have similarly been captivated by the sky's sheer beauty and linked profound symbolic meanings to it in their work. Artist Jim Thalassoudis painted dramatic sunsets as a powerful symbol to engage an audience in contemplating ideas such as mortality, the façade of beauty and culture in his work. Wanting to trigger similar responses, I developed the concept of the changing sky reflecting changing emotions throughout life and floating clouds being like fleeting thoughts that affect our moods. Other artists like Kai Allison and David Yu used photography to examine how nature has the ability to alter our states of consciousness. This influenced me to use my own photography to capture unexpected expressive skies of intense and subtle colour palettes that have had a significant personal emotional impact.

Initial experimentation with an array of different mediums, such as charcoal, watercolour, acrylic and oil paints, as well as with the different styles of art movements like impressionism, realism and expressionism, allowed me to see the sky in a myriad of ways. The use of changing styles and media echoed the changing skylscapes I was studying. Carla Hananiah's abstract paintings of Australian skylscapes particularly caught my interest; with their marble-like aesthetic evoking emotion rather than realistically depicting the subject matter. Though the medium she used to create the viscosity for marbling went unknown, after seeing Emma Sulivans work of a similar style at the *Helpmann Academy exhibition*, I chose to experiment with her medium of a mixture of acrylic paint and PVA glue.

My first series depicts the sky at different periods of the day to symbolise how changes in life can momentarily effect our mood. I essentially worked from my own photography, selecting images that encompass a variety of composition principles like emphasis, aerial depth, movement and emotive colour. Each sky pulsates a different aura through various weather formations and colour palettes. The morning sky work, inspired by Carla Hananiah's gestural application and use of complimentary colours, depicts irregular, expressive clouds to elicit feelings of wonder. The noon sky presents clouds differently, where their dominating size is proportional to the landscape and their dense appearance, built through rich colour, empathises their potency, suggesting feelings of urgency. They appear to hang heavy in the sky, just like worries weigh on our thoughts. To juxtapose this work is the twilight sky, where its cloudless nature and delicate tonal graduation evokes the

peaceful serenity that comes with closure to the day or the closure of a chapter in our lives. Influenced by Louise Hearman's dark, gothic palette, the monochromatic charcoal night sky work depicts ominous, dark clouds which symbolize troubled feelings and times of deep lament. The use of diagonal line in the sweeping forms depicts cloud movement, like tribulations that roll into our lives. Each medium was carefully selected to assist conveying these concepts and the diverse styles emphasize the changing nature of the sky and life itself. Nonetheless, there is a sense of unity as the landscape suggests the sky is presented from the same location as well as the standardization of the canvas sizes. The use of both realistic and abstract styles creates balance, demonstrating how life is leveled with times of sharp clarity and others with pensiveness. Additionally, the presentation of the works horizontally indicate the vastness of the sky and thus the cycle of life.

My second series stemmed from my interest in the more expressive concepts of artist Carla Hananiah as I was given more liberty with my painting style and could powerfully exude energy and emotion into the work. I wanted to highlight the link between energy and change, in that energy and emotion is never lost but converted into other forms. I was fascinated by the way a mixture of PVA glue and acrylic paint could behave when tilting the canvas, causing it to drip and marble. Abstract Expressionist Artist Jackson Pollock dripped fluid paint and controlled its flow through unconventional application styles such as using sticks to flick the paint. His intention was to express his feelings rather than illustrate them. I applied similar concepts to my final work by pouring the fluid medium straight from the bottle onto the MDF board. By vigorously shaking, banging and flipping the canvas I controlled the medium to achieve aggressive marbling and intriguing, warped forms. The final pieces, essentially embodying the energy I exuded in their creation, became a visual representation of my emotion and vitality that I used to create the art. The simplified continuous, contour lines I used for the collaged landscapes create contrast against the gestural colour application and line-less forms of the sky. Colour schemes vary between the landscapes, particularly where the harsh desert sky uses warm, pure hues, whilst the serene floating icebergs are accompanied by skies of calming cool colours.

In my third artwork, a portrait was used to illustrate human's response to change, again, using the sky as a metaphor. The portrait depicts my sister's response to the sky, where her expression of squinting with a relaxed open mouth portrays a sense of uncertainty- a feeling we may acquire when we are confronted with new changes to our lives, breaking our comfortable routines. Artists Martine Johannah and Henri Matisse both worked with saturated and unconventional colours to illustrate shadow and use them for their expressive nature rather than descriptive. I applied this to my final by intensifying the pink and purple tones in the shadows. The asymmetry created through positioning the subject to the right of the frame, leaves a large blank white area, which appears to continue past the frame to create a sense of ambiguity and being lost.

My body of work enlightens the viewer about how life is abundant with exciting and discouraging change which gives us the opportunity to grow and choose how we emotionally respond to it. As a practitioner, I have become more conscious of the natural world's overlooked elements and found metaphorical inspiration in them. By exploring mediums which required both spontaneity and concentration, I have developed strong versatility.