

Practitioner's Statement

The History Keeper

Grace Hopton

Throughout my childhood I spent countless days tagging along beside my Nanna on her beautiful farm, nestled at the foot of the Grampians with the velvet giants cradling the land. Nanna, my mentor and protector was my inspiration.

I began by travelling to the farm and photographing my Nanna in her home and adventuring around the property capturing the character of the farm's rustic structures. Something that stood out to me was the vibrancy of the garden, nurtured and tended to by the hands of Nanna in amongst the aridity of the cracked clay landscape. Using the lino printing techniques of Australian artist Margaret Preston, and the soft, cubist techniques of visual artist Dorrit Black, I studied the landscape and elements of Nanna I cherish dearly. Continuing to experiment I found myself looking at ways to combine all of these elements into one piece.

When visiting the National Gallery of Victoria I came across the work of installation artist Louise Bourgeois, a cell containing four wooden chairs, a physical embodiment of her family, inside the confines of a glass cube. I explored the idea of literally 'capturing' elements of my Nanna through the construction of a physical cell. This idea caused me to return to the farm to collect the weathered materials which would become a starting point for the construction of the cell. I scavenged the scrap heaps of discarded farm junk and forgotten treasures, and returned home with lichen covered fence droppers and rusting coiled fencing wire, wearied throughout generations of farm life.

Although a challenge, I constructed the cell using woodwork techniques ensuring the rustic, elemental aesthetic was maintained whilst guaranteeing the cell was structurally sound. After brainstorming ideas for the centrepiece of the cell, I selected the element of glass in the form of jars suspended from the ceiling of the cell. The inspiration for this element of the structure blossomed from my love of Nanna's sweet jam served to me for breakfast, lunch and dinner during my stays on the farm and her pantry cupboard lined with Fowlers jars filled with home preserved fruit. Amongst the collection of jars I accumulated was an assortment of rusted tins and bottles. Within the installation, the transition of old rusted jars in one corner, to a cluster of pristine glass jars represents the cycle of life and how I have grown as a person through Nanna's deep care for me. The jars' contents; plants, cotton, soil, water, rusted bolts all reflect the trail of new life that grows in Nanna's footsteps.

The final composition represents all that Nanna has taught me to love and appreciate. Her beauty and radiant happiness are the building blocks of the farm. Like every lifeform, the cells and the minute organisms are crucial to life and harmony. In amongst the aging structures and the harsh reality of farm life, Nanna's delicate love and attention are the foundation of farm life and without it the landscape, the property and most of all myself, would not be what we are now.

Practitioner's Statement

What We Found

We Found Joy

We Found Happiness

We Found Colour

We Found Harmony

Grace Hopton

An interest in travel sparked from a volunteer trip to Sri Lanka in 2013 led me to create a series of multimedia collaborations which seek to emphasise the harmonious beauty buried amongst the unorganised chaos of the Indian Slum. This is expressed through etching, textile manipulation and embroidery. I began working with the idea of travel and the way the liveliness and vitality of Indian culture are so often overlooked by those looking to experience foreign culture and life. Through research I came across journalist Kevin McLeod's documentary 'Slumming It' where he immersed himself in the culture by taking up residency in the world's largest slum, Dharavi Slum on the outskirts of Mumbai, India. This led me to further research of Indian slum culture and the importance of recycling throughout the poverty stricken jungle of housing and micro-capitalist empires.

I looked at the importance of textiles in day-to-day life, hessian for sack manufacturing and muslin for clothing. Using rust-dying techniques, I aged and weathered textiles to create stressed compilations of cloth, worn and decaying like the initial appearance of a slum. It was from here I came across the work of embroiderer Maurizio Anzeri, an artist whose primary technique was manipulating old photographs by embroidering bright, geometric patterns over the central figures of portraits. This concept opened a new door allowing me to see the beauty of the slum from an insider's perspective, a realisation of the magnificence recognised only by those seeking to unearth it.

The new focus for the piece became the faces of the slum. Through the study of faces, I fell under the spell of the spiritual beauty and power of the coloured clothing worn by the religious Sadhu Men of the slums and the women in their bright saris. I used etching techniques on rice paper to capture the beauty of age, wisdom and colour through line and embroidered in the colour of the clothing, which was then mounted onto the different aged fabrics. The harshness of line in the faces was softened by the weathered textiles which created a flow between rubbish and beauty, the unwanted and the loved. Using Indian woodblock printing, intricate patterns were added to the compositions emphasising the delicate balance maintained through recycling and the people's deep appreciation for the vital resources which they at times are denied.

Together the four pieces attempt to capture the beauty of the slum in ways that many people fail to appreciate. Although finding a clear path to represent this concept was difficult to see at times, by concentrating on the basic elements of line, texture and colour I was able to portray the beauty of the people in a captivating and natural way. By standing back and looking at each stitch, each rusted scar on the fabric and each line of the human face, we can see past the unwanted and beyond the rubbish to find joy, to find happiness, to find colour and to find harmony.