

Practitioner's Statement

Hanging Plates

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My second practical was a continuation of the Premier's ANZAC Spirit School Prize Tour that I was a part of last year. After learning about some of the extraordinary stories of survival in prisoner of war camps, I wanted to focus my attention to the positive spirit of the soldiers, rather than the injustices of their unfortunate circumstances.

After speaking to members of the RSL, I was introduced to the story of Australian man, Leslie Greener, who was a prisoner in Changi Prisoner of War Camp during WWII. Speaking to his children, my practical developed into a story of Greener's life, and how he portrayed the ANZAC Spirit. I was particularly influenced by British artist, Anthony Gross, who painted his war subjects in watercolour and pen. I was also interested in artists Leslie Oschmann, Allyson Mellberg Taylor, and South Australian Tracey Chaplin, and their media; ceramic plates. Similarly to my first practical, my family also proved to be rather influential. Growing up in a family particularly interested in war, our bookshelves were filled with personal and historic accounts of conflicts, which is where my personal aesthetic stems from. Fortunately, I was able to find novels both including, and written by, Greener, and thus I was able to further delve into his life.

There are seven plates, symbolic of the lack of the lack of food in prisoner of war camps, each with a specific connection to Greener, his life and work. The largest plate contains a portrait of Greener exhibiting physical wounds, which is symbolic of the psychological wound soldiers and prisoners endured. The ship, accompanied by the title of one of Greener's newspaper articles, "a man may hate another, but should not hate a nation", is representative of the divide between nations during war. The Japanese decal plate symbolises Greener's friendship with his former captive and how, despite previous wrongdoings from Japanese soldiers, he does not remain bitter. The knees, exhibiting bruises and scars, represents the physical torture the prisoners were exposed to. The shirt represents Greener as a soldier in his uniform, rather than a prisoner. The lizard, as well as the hand, is representative of the book, 'The Happiness Box', which Greener produced for children prisoners in a nearby camp. I felt it was crucial that the book be included, as the humanity and good spirit Greener showed was widely influential in this piece. The rope around the hand represents the controlled circumstances in which the book was produced, and hence the rope around the wood proved to represent the ways in which prisoners, despite these circumstances, were still able to live, and potentially thrive.

The transfer paper used to print the paintings onto the plates didn't come without any hitches. Finding a printer which was compatible with the paper proved a challenge, and, in addition to this, some plates were removed and swapped due to their surfaces, as transferring the image was an issue. However, it is the vague, yet suggestive nature of each image which make the piece not only representative of Greener, but of an entire generation of captives in WWII.