

Practitioner's Statement

Recesses of the Mind

Abbie Hay

My artwork explores ideas about the depth of a child's imagination. My starting point was the concept that children have a different view on the world to adults. Everything a child hears, sees and experiences contributes to the development of their brain and behaviour. Developing fears, having nightmares, engaging in 'imaginative play', and dreaming of a more exciting, magical world is all part of growing up.

Reading the Grimms' Fairy Tales led me to the conclusion that literature has a strong impact on a child's perception of the world. The painting "The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke" by *Richard Dadd*, is a fantasy image which caused me to recall my own childhood. My mother read me stories by author and illustrator *Shirley Barber*; I became engrossed in a world of fairies and elves. The painting in the top left of my work reflects the love and obsession I felt for this fairy tale world.

The next milestone in the development of my ideas was the concept of childhood fear, and its impact on a child's perception of the world. The painting in my assemblage, of a child running away from a pair of emus, explores the idea that real life experiences trigger fear. The image of the bird eating the girl depicts an exaggerated scenario that the child creates as a result of fear. The obscure, imaginative imagery of *Hieronymus Bosch* influenced me. Bosch's bizarre, dark scenarios often makes no sense at all, which I could associate with the mind of a child.

The style of *Goya's* Black Paintings was the form that I wanted to use. The darker panels of my piece are influenced by *Goya's* dark, twisted, painterly images because I felt as if this style reflected nightmares well. The Fairy-Tale World of illustrator *Arthur Rackham* was another significant inspiration to me. As he did in his works, I attempted to reflect a single one of my own strange, imaginative narratives into each panel of my piece.

Oil paints were important; their characteristic vivid colours were vital in expressing a child's vibrant imagination. Their capacity for blending also appealed to me. My assemblage was intended to be a reflection of a child's mind. The various heights of the panels correspond to the levels of a child's imagination, with the black box being the walls of the mind in which imagination is contained. Each painting reflects a memoir in the child's journey of growing up. The dark, frightening images are positioned towards the back of the box because these memories tend to be pushed away, back into the depths of the mind. The lighter, cheerier experiences and dreams are positioned at the front, as this imagery is generally what we associate with childhood.

This work encourages the viewer to understand that the journey of growing up involves many different experiences which, in the end, shape the kind of person that a child becomes. I believe that this has successfully portrayed my own experiences and reflections on childhood.