

## Practitioner's Statement

### ***The Wreck of the Admella***

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Since early childhood, I have spent time at the beach. My appreciation and passion for the ocean is due to my familiarity with the seasonal changes of nature in this environment. Visits to Long Bottom Beach and Glenelg have allowed me to appreciate the beauty of Australia's coastline. My best childhood memories are associated with the beach, my reason for exploring it as my subject matter. My initial starting point for this painting was my visit to the Art Gallery of South Australia where I was open to identifying artworks that would assist me to determine my personal aesthetic. I was drawn to seascapes, particularly those by James Shaw such as *The Rescue* and *The Admella* because of the cool colour palette and his chilling interpretation of the ocean.

I began my exploration of my subject matter by referring to the following statement by John F Kennedy, '...we all came from the sea... all of us in our veins have the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea – whether it is to sail or watch it - we are going back from whence we came.'

My definition of beauty is accepting all aspects of something and someone whether good or bad and still seeing the beauty within it. In *Salt Water*, the imagery in Ken Knight's paintings has influenced my approach to photographing the coast. I was intrigued by Knight's statement, "Through the elimination and reduction of detail, I can convey reality strongly and more robustly". His vision has been applied to *Salt Water* through the reduction of detail. Tan Kent Keong's cool, dark tonal colour palette and use of impasto appealed to my aesthetic. "Keong's bold use of painting knives, unrestrained strokes and licks give his works his signature style." Fred Kleinberg's paintings of waves, particularly *Reborn*, has been the most significant influence on my painting technique where I aimed to achieve a free, liberated, expressionist application of paint. Focussing on the sculptural quality of the paint allowed me to further refine my aesthetic. Kleinberg uses "the friction between the brush and the canvas to present a physical representation of emotional thinking." This connection between technique and emotion resonated with my connection with the ocean as a subject matter. Completing my Visual Study, in which I investigated impasto techniques used in portraiture, also assisted me in developing my visual language. *Salt Water* was a vehicle through which I convey my fascination with the ocean.

*The Wreck of the Admella* was influenced by the work of Valerie Hegarty. Her practice of appropriating well-known historical paintings which she theatrically reconstructs "to falsify their ruination, as each work is rotted and battered nearly beyond recognition." The visual irony of Hegarty's work, the process of creating and destroying, was a catalyst for me pushing my own technical exploration. Hegarty's *Sinking Ship* based on Edgar Allen Poe's poem "A Descent into the Maelstrom", the story of man's survival of a shipwreck, has been the main influence for this work. Hegarty's reinterpretation of historical paintings led me back to considering James Shaw's *the Destruction of the Admella*, which is still to this day, Australia's worst maritime disaster. After 9 days, 89 on board gave into the power of the ocean and dehydration. Revisiting Shaw's seascapes discovered earlier in the year at the Art Gallery of South Australia, it was a most appropriate choice of subject matter for me to

apply Hegarty's aesthetic. Shaw's paintings of the *Admella* are considered valuable in documenting Australia's history as "they depict every object with equal clarity." The name of the ship "Admella" is derived by the boat's regular voyages between Adelaide and Melbourne, delivering supplies. Locals combined the names of both cities in naming the ship. With close inspection of Shaw's composition, evidence of survivors clinging onto the ship's rails and broken mast is noticed, highlighting their desperate struggle for survival. Even though this occurred in the 1880s, the current issues of refugee sea voyages came to mind. The following quote from the Advertiser encapsulates the meaning behind my work; "It is the magnitude and bulk force of the sea which overwhelms the spectator with awe and wonder and, in the case of shipwrecked people, with feelings of terror." Hegarty's technique of theatrical destruction is an innovative way of communicating this concept. *The Wreck of the Admella* was intended to commemorate the loss of lives by emphasising destruction. From closely observing Shaw's *Admella*, it made me realise the power of Shaw's imagery as historical documentation.

In keeping with Hegarty's practice, I deliberately chose an old frame; destroying parts of it allowed me to make a connection to the theatrical destruction of her work. Verdigris and rust mediums have been used to age the frame and connect with the sea. The application of gold leaf juxtaposes the destruction, and also makes a connection with Shaw's painting, framed in gold on the gallery walls. After the discovery of Hegarty's work, I chose to demonstrate the destruction of the *Admella* by burning parts of the painting and used a soldering iron to do this. This tool allowed me to control the areas I wanted to be destroyed by using it like a drawing tool. I have replicated Hegarty's 'melted' effect by the inclusion of a painted puddle below the painting, further emphasising the theatrical quality of the work and its subject.

Through the completion of this painting, I believe I have successfully achieved my goal of exploring the beauty and drama of the ocean. I have been inspired by my reference artists to investigate unique ways of expressing my personal connection to my subject matter.