

## Practitioner's Statement

### ***Absent***

Sophie Horvat

'Absent' is an insight into my personal identity and its stunted progression as a result of my mother's death last semester. I did not feel comfortable or ready at this point in time to depict my mother; rather I felt it more appropriate to distance myself from my audience, mimicking the distant feeling experienced in various stages of grief. I aimed to achieve this distance through a self-portrait with a blank gaze directed at the audience, drawing viewers yet also alienating them through my vacant expression. After attending the Robert Hannaford exhibition at the Art Gallery of South Australia, I was fascinated by the use of charcoal and its ability to capture a range of tonal variations. Research into contemporary artist Elly Smallwood prompted me to consider the contrasting yet dynamic relationship between charcoal and oil paint. Smallwood's work fascinated me in the style and spontaneous execution as well as its peculiar composition and palette. In turn, I decided to explore the same mixed media composition in an attempt to convey the change in my identity as a consequence of my personal loss.

My colour palette was comprised exclusively of cool tones. After experimenting with both cool and warm tones, I decided that the emphasis on the cool created the desired melancholy feeling, contributing to the overall meaning of my piece, not dissimilar to that of Pablo Picasso's 'Blue Period' after he experienced the loss of a very close friend. I decided to use the rich dark tones created by the charcoal work to convey the dark emotions that come with loss. 'Absent' conveys in a visual way the unknown nature of life after death contrasting against the blank white background, symbolising the absent feeling that comes with grief.

Achieving a form of expressive spontaneity in technique throughout my piece proved to be a challenge for me. I found that in some areas the addition of each paint-stroke of colour contributed to a more complete feeling, the opposite of what I was intending to achieve. In order to combat this, I tried to spontaneously add strokes of varied tone and change of hue in a more random fashion in an attempt to avoid appearing contrived. I drew inspiration from artists such as Elly Smallwood and Ahn Do with the application of strong use of line work seen in the charcoal sections of my piece and the liberal application of colour, similar to Do's expressive and vibrant palette knife portraits. Composed upon a square canvas, I aimed to create an uneasy feeling as though such a portrait should warrant a rectangular canvas in order to capture the whole face and expression. By creating an open composition with the forehead section deliberately cut off, I aimed to create an allusion to the unseen facets of our lives that we all experience and endure. The contrasting red lips work as the focal point of the piece, drawing the viewer's attention to the face. This highlights the focus on the development of my personality and the interactions that come as a result of spoken word. The tilted pose works to promote balance, equalising the negative space created by the blank background. By using modulated line in the composition (in the contour of the hair) I was able to create visual movement around the face as well as share with the viewer some of my features in my self-portrait - 'Absent'.