

The Curse of Indecisiveness

Maddie Thelning

"I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet."

The looming end of my schooling life brought the infamous pressures of future decision making, something I have always struggled with. Whether it be what to have for dinner, or the more pressing issue of what to do with my life, my indecisiveness has always proved to be my downfall. The quote which inspired this piece, from Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, not only resonated with me due to the relatability of the metaphorical narrative, but the beautifully depressive imagery that leaves its audience feeling eerie and uncomfortable about their future. Inspired by the poetic experience, I attempted to visually recreate the emotional impression it leaves on its audience.

Whilst visiting the Tarnanthi Exhibition at the Art Gallery of South Australia, I discovered Yhonnie Scarce's piece *Thunder Raining Poison*. Captivated by the hundreds of glass yams trickling down from the ceiling and consuming the space, I was left with a similar sense of inspiration. Particularly intrigued by the way Scarce enhances and exposes the visual fragility of glass and her use of fruits, not only in *Thunder Raining Poison* but other works like *Blood on the Wattle*, I enlisted the help of Gabriella Bisetto, Head of the Glass Workshop at University of South Australia, who encouraged me to explore the technique glass casting.

After experimenting with other simpler mediums, I remained intent on taking advantage of the visual and practical fragility of glass, which seemed to perfectly reflect Plath's use of soft fruit, like figs, as a metaphor for the fragility of life's opportunities. I additionally explored Wendy Fairclough's work and was motivated by her use of glass casting to create still life consistent of soft fruit such as figs, pears, apples and oranges. I was also inspired by Tom Moore's installation *Bureau of comical Ecologies* in the Magic Object exhibition at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Specifically, the shape and texture of the glass and the unconventional displays which Moore created, in order to imply unusual narratives for each piece.

Inspired by the similarities between the decay of soft fruit and the decay of the human body after death, the delicate paper cups which the figs sit in are intended to serve as an alternative to typical burial customs such as coffins. Additionally, I incorporated visual and material similarities typical of westernised burials, such as soil and wood, to signify the death and decay of the fig and the opportunity it represents.

The glass dome that encases the fig represents the desperate attempt to preserve the opportunity whilst simultaneously making reference to Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* which the quote that inspired the piece originates from.

Together, all the elements of this piece physically and visually recreate the delicately depressive imagery created by Plath's quote, leaving the viewer uncomfortable and uncertain about their future and more time aware of arisen opportunities in their lives.