

## *The Scatterling*

### **Rebecca Alderson**

The Scatterlings is a body of work that depicts my family. It seeks to share my family's story, by making a connection between the artwork and the viewer to encourage them to wonder and question my family's story. The theme was developed through the love of my family and our cultural roots. My family and I were born in Durban, South Africa; we are immigrants and strangers in this country. 'And we are scatterlings of Africa, On a journey to the stars, Far below we leave forever, Dreams of what we were' These are the lyrics from a 1982 song, The Scatterlings Of Africa by Johnny Clegg and Juluka. These lyrics represent my family's journey to Australia leaving behind our family and safety. As the artist the foundation was making my artwork convey my happy family through bright colours and careless brushstroke techniques while making it interchangeable between any race, age or religion and to showcase my family's story and journey.

I began researching various art styles and painting techniques that would convey the right story. I settled on doing an abstract style of painting. The works of Ben Quilty and Andrew Salgado both used broad brushstroke techniques with bold colours. These artists inspired me with my own work so much I practiced and incorporated their styles to develop my own style. The reason for choosing this style is because of the rough yet playful look with lots of texture. Doing abstract techniques meant that I could use vibrant and vivid colours, while light direction and intense brushstrokes assisted in conveying a playful attitude and composition. This led me to look at my family's favourite places in Australia and use photos as colour references. The colours in each painting have profound meanings. I was really impressed by Ben Quilty and Brad Robson, so I incorporated techniques and composition from their paintings into my own work. The most of my portrait's subjects were in the centre of each painting. This strategically showcased my belief of how family is central to my life. My father's portrait is off centre because of his love to take half-face selfies, I thought this would convey his personality through my digital art. The self-portrait composition was based off of Ben Quilty's portrait of Margaret Olley. I decided to do this because I wanted to pay homage to my inspiration.

Australian abstract artists Ben Quilty and Brad Robson use brushstrokes and close up composition to create a point of intrigue in their works, as people have different facial features and expressions that are not seen in conventional portraits. Both artists are able to exaggerate such emotions. I channelled these techniques by exaggerating lines and facial expressions to recreate the same effect. Both artists use traditional mean to paint their works. I pushed myself to expand through different mediums and create the same style of 'painting'. My chosen media was airbrushing, acrylic and digital art on an iPad. Experimentation was key to be successful in my body of work. I had to experiment with texture and layering between different mediums. Texture become the hardest to replicate in airbrushing and on the iPad. Both those mediums are usually soft and smooth in execution. This became my challenge throughout the process of painting these portraits. In order to make the airbrushing more textured, I decided to put acrylic with the black and white airbrushing. This helped connect the other portraits to one another.

By having the people close and central in their composition I could incorporate the background more into the person. The most important aspect of any piece of art for me is the eyes. There is a saying, 'Eyes are the windows to the soul.' It means people can see through someone else by eye contact. I have a habit that if I meet someone I don't know, I like to look at her or his eyes on purpose. That is why whenever I start a painting I focus on the eyes first and the rest of the painting falls around them.

However with my final family portrait I experimented with them wearing glasses, however not including the eyes in the portrait made the family portrait seem less likely than the other portraits, it did not have the same impact on me. My intent with this body of work, was to have the audience not only see the people but recognise it is a family and ask who are they? How are they connected? This piece reflects my belief in how family is important in shaping their children's lives.

Furthermore, the addition of acrylic on top of my airbrushing allowed the piece to become more cohesive with the resolved body of work. This brought texture to an otherwise soft and flat art medium, along with texture colour was added to connect back with the original idea of my family being bright and positive people. A challenge that I had to solve was still creating a similar style of painting within the airbrushing. This was done by stencilling the brushstrokes to make them harsh and bold. The body of work is hung with the members of the family scattered around the family portrait to encourage the viewer to see each individual that makes up my family of Scatterlings and then to look at the body of work as a whole. The size and portion of each painting reflects the different personalities within my family. I believe that I have successfully produced a cohesive body of work that expresses how different families are and how important family is. My intention is to make the audience reflect on how important their family is and to remember how different their family may be but they will always be loved by their own family.

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