

Dad's Hands

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Loss inspires a gateway between reminiscence and adversity, a bittersweet balance of grief and growth. The fidelity of oil painter Marco Grassi's hyper-realistic portraiture and therefore, depictions of individuals in their most accurate forms, appealed to me both compositionally and emotionally. Grassi's ability to replicate an image with captivating precision enthused consideration of the realm of realism. Simultaneously, the loss of my grandfather, a mere 18 months prior had invigorated a passion for old photos, particularly those captured on film. Examining my grandmother's worn photo albums overwhelmed me with a sense of reminiscence; sentiment. The images of my grandfather during his youth evoked pride and gratitude towards him for he would go on to work purposively for the safety and contentment of his family, to become the man that I knew. His selflessness was an embodiment of his upbringing, and by combining these subjective and aesthetic forms of portraiture respectively, art and photography, I could reflect on my grandfather's cultural upbringing and youth experiences whilst presenting his persona with absolute verity; realism.

The image I depicted stood out to me immediately. The composition of the photograph replicated that of Grassi and the early renaissance portraiture of Antonella da Messina, a simplistic background that accentuates a subject's profile. It became apparent that the essence of portraiture was a continuity within art, resonating with my desire to examine my grandfather's history. Ironically, the chosen photograph depicts my grandfather when he was 17, my current age. Exploration of pop culture, as a cohesion in both my grandfather and I's youth, felt natural to research. The progression of popular photography allowed me to consider the low-fidelity works of Thomas Brown and to experiment with a modern process of achieving the aesthetic of film photography. This would allow me to replicate the character of the film photography that was practiced during my grandfather's upbringing whilst consider the prevalence of technology in contemporary society that has disregarded the essence of photography, confirming the views of Dr. Jan Seewald, 'It is still struggling... for recognition as an art form.'

Exploring the elements of realism encouraged reflection of the manifestations of my grandfather whilst develop skills of appropriation in various mediums. Predominantly utilising coloured pencil overlay and rendering of oil paint, I could replicate the realism style of Jaimes Roy, whom captures still life moments of fruit. Photographing my grandfather's home would combine the elements of art and photography to symbolise his lifestyle throughout the entirety of my folio, elucidating a visual memoir of my grandfather and namely, his agricultural passion. Still life drawing would be further explored through attendance at a life drawing workshop at Art Gallery of South Australia, where I was advised on the way of composing shapes and tones exactly as they appear.

When reminiscing on my grandfather's upbringing, his migration from Italy to Australia was notable and encouraged analysis of Nigerian artist Toyin Oduola. Whilst depicting an enigmatic figure, Oduola's works are often inspired by both pop culture and one's journey of migration and cultural segregation. The texture created within the skin of the subjects symbolised the edifying contrasts of African culture amid a white populace. In relation, my grandfather's voyage to Australia would bring an element of Italian authenticity, as reciprocated in my intent to realistically capture his portrait and to convey the pride I feel towards my grandfather, mirroring the cultural fulfilment that arouses in one's ability to provide for their family. Additionally, exploration of Australian artist John Olsen would simultaneously incorporate my grandfather's love for the beach and embody his adjustment to Australian culture

through idealised beaches. However, these artists lacked the impact of hyperrealism that Grassi vividly represents.

Whilst the very aesthetic of the old photograph of my grandfather was my initial drive to depict his portrait, the low resolution of the image and its monochromatic opus would impact my ability to execute featural accuracy. With the decided medium of 'Prismacolor' coloured pencils, it was crucial to explore individual facial features to evolve my understanding of how to devise the form and structure of the human face. Unable to locate a meticulous image of my grandfather's eyes, capturing my father's orbs on a DSLR Pantex camera would allow me to integrate an element of photography, my father whom is equally impactful in my life, and subsume a detailed delineation of my grandfather's traits. Moreover, use of Photoshop would challenge my digital art abilities of colourisation. To mimic neutral skin tones, a more contemporary image of my grandfather was coloured picked and applied as a gradient, matching the value of the original image.

Amidst one's process of accepting loss is the ability to reflect on one's duration of life and concurringly, memories spent with them. Reminiscing on my grandfather's diligence would inspire me to regard a refreshing form of portraiture that maintained the striking facet of realism; hand portraiture. Hands, as a symbol of one's individuality and described by Tom Booth as a way of '[imagining] the whole life of the person, their completeness,' provided the opportunity to consider sedulousness and preserve the representation of my grandfather. Inspired by Booth's reticent and the symbolic use of objects to conceptualise one's profile, photographing my grandmother's hands would allude to the overarching concept of loss through her wedding ring. However, after experimenting with my father whom was seated on a crate, the image resonated with my grandfather whom would sit outside for hours on that very crate. This exemplified genetical similarities that would allegorise the continuity of family and fractions of the past within my contemporary influencers.

Both final resolved images had been projected on Canson 300 gsm watercolour paper to ensure that the texture of the canvas would not interfere with the impression of the Prismacolor pencils. The waxy pigment of the pencils created a creamy surface that would blend to create a smoothed impression in my grandfather's complexion whilst overlay permitted detail in the wrinkles and creases of my father's hands. Greif and growth, equally present in one's adaption to loss, would be portrayed in the portrait of my grandfather, reminiscent of his upbringing, and my father's hands, reflective of my grandfather's selflessness. Ultimately, allowing one to appreciate change, the inevitability of loss, whilst evince continuity, the boundlessness of pop culture.

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