

Ebbs and Flows

Chelsea Higgins

The ocean has always been a part of my world, as I have spent the majority of my life connecting with the ocean. I have also travelled around the world and have been able to experience the ocean from many different perspectives. Throughout my life I have enjoyed every activity that the ocean provides including sailing, surfing, scuba diving, kayaking, snorkelling and swimming, hence I chose to focus one of my works on the ocean, hoping to express its importance and consequently, encourage the viewer to consider its preservation.

I always wanted to interpret and depict water, although I was never sure how. As I developed my ideas, I was influenced by my exploration of contemporary artists, most notably, Scott Denholm, Erik Abel and John Martin, but it was Raymond Pettibon who inspired me the most. After seeing artist and surfer, Pettibon's stylised depiction of waves in watercolour, I was immediately drawn to his work and the way he presented the movement of water. His loose linear watercolour mark-making shows the direction and movement of the surf and it is clear from the works that he understands how water moves intimately. His use of a limited palette of cool blues and turquoises add to his stripped back version of water movement. His intent, to simply pay homage to the ocean and surf is powerful, especially considering the large scale of some of his key works. As I too am familiar with surf and how it moves and flows, I was instantly connected and influenced to create a similar sort of feel to my own works.

Painting on different surfaces was something I was keen to do for this body of work and although initially I wanted to do this on a surfboard, I decided that a wooden skateboard deck would complement the wooden boards that I experimented with early in my concept development. The raw organic quality of this surface also further linked my work to nature. The skateboard represents surf and skate culture, inspired by iconic 2005 autobiographical film "Lords of Dogtown" (set in California in the 1970's) I wanted to refer to the laid back surf and skate culture of that era, with a sense of looseness evident in my final pieces.

Using my own photography was important also as I was inspired by my photos of surfers and waves. After traveling to Hawaii in 2018, I was encouraged to base some of my art from the photos I took documenting some of the fantastic waves and surf conditions I experienced. Some are included in this body of work with a series of key photographs supporting the painted works.

I wanted to use my body of work to visually present the oceans beauty and explore the idea that we need to conserve and protect it. Unfortunately, our human impact is putting the ocean at risk, due to pollution, oil spills and over-fishing. Keeping the marine biodiversity thriving in South Australia and across the globe is so important to me. My intention for these ideas to be a subtle undercurrent through my artwork will hopefully allow the viewers to consider how important and beautiful our ocean is. Using a range of cool greens and blues, I added hints of contrasting warmth with orange glazes to create a visual contrast and refer obliquely to the global warming that affects our oceans. I chose to depict the healthy, clean ocean that I am lucky enough to experience. I do not show the contrasting polluted ocean that may become even more prevalent in the future; I believe my work depicting a clean, powerful, unpolluted ocean is presented in a way that will catch the audience's attention. I was most inspired by Pettibon, his stylised waves full of movement and fluidity, influenced me to interpret my photos in a similar way. By exploring his technique and style, I have begun to develop my own individual style.