

An Australian Experience

Lara Kittel

'An Australian Experience' is based on one's senses and emotions when heading into the Australian outback and more specifically the Flinders Ranges. Gum trees shape the Australian landscape and my passion and fascination for expressing their beauty and grandiosity of scale, governed the inspiration behind my practical work. I was most heavily influenced through researching and visiting The Cedar's. Classic Australian Artist, Hans Heysen, taught me the power art has in expressing physical imperfections and the character of a simple tree. Heysen's use of placing Gums before any person, illustrates his passion for the grandness of nature compared to society. Additionally, this was a source of inspiration, encouraging me to explore this concept further on a similar scale, but instead focussing on the texture and overall experience one develops when heading into the Flinders.

Initially, the intentions associated with my artwork, aimed to convey the harshness of an Australian landscape and the struggle artists had to endure when painting in this environment, but rather, I discovered an unexpected love for the Gums alone and their majestic silhouette. This encouraged me to experiment with a new medium and unique, organic style of painting and hence oils became my medium of choice. Additionally, oils effortlessly exemplified the textures and layers of the bark of Gum trees and their ability to survive through the harsh summers. Rather than hiding the Gum trees in the back of the artwork, as accessories for the landscape, I decided to place them at the forefront exploring them in a beautiful and unique light.

My dream would have been to paint En plein air, like the Australian impressionists were able to do, but the travel distance was too far, especially as the artwork took a month to complete. The sheer memories and photographs of being in the Flinders' Ranges, when visiting my family in Hawker, sparked a sense of belonging and joy when it came to map out the general forms, shaping my artwork. Jeff Morgan inspired both my practical's, as his panorama of the Flinders Ranges and the three-dimensional exhibit surrounding, are engrossing for tourists and aspiring artists, like myself. This significantly altered the way I perceived my own artwork, as I was able to immerse myself in the experience, making direct connections from the warm hues to the specific forms of nature. Additionally, this prompted me to buy a canvas on a scale I had never painted before and create an unconventional wood sculpture to accompany it, achieving something similar to Morgan. A strong link between the bucolic scene and the signs of subtle human presence, is successfully made through my take on a cairn, using the remains of the Gums and rusted nails, to spotlight this organic arrangement.

The inclusion of the flowing river broke up the composition of my painting, exploring Gums in different perspectives, as they are positioned in pairs. Throughout the month that I was painting, breathing in the fumes from the turps, oils and mediums was unavoidable, allowing me to reflect on the importance of nature in our lives. I took a deeper appreciation for the Gums, where oxygen and shade are required for not only our survival, but even for the smallest of creatures. I also noticed personality in the bark and branches of familiar trees around my area, increasing my respect for them.

The textural surface on the tree, mimicking tree sap and flaky bark, was achieved through the leftover oil paint that had dried on my pallet. I scraped this paint off and used the No.2 medium mixed with Burnt Sienna to create a bleeding effect. Once this had dried, I added a wash of Turps and Burnt Sienna over the landscape to create the dry and dusty effect that you see. The river was exceptionally hard, I had

never created this effect before; creeks in the Flinders are usually murky, so I had to wait for each layer of paint to dry before adding the blue highlights from the sky and shadows from the trees. Due to the large scale of the canvas I had to frequently stand back, gaze at my subject and observe before continuing to paint, it became rhythmic and I developed greater confidence in each decision I made. Merging the Gums into the background using dark shadows, prevented a static pose and created visual movement, instead of removing the trees from the surrounding background.

The freedom of my wood sculpture allowed my tired and stressed body to take a break from school, where I journeyed out to the Adelaide Parklands and collected nuggets of gold... my organic materials. This highlight of my folio will not be taken for granted, as I have recognised my passion for the landscape and the natural materials that come along with it. The rusting process was a long a tedious one, where I attempted various methods. The hydrochloric acid and oxidising patina successfully created the rust you see and without this, the acknowledgement of society would not be present in either practical. Hinting that humans have disturbed the beauty and peace of nature within the sculpture, was important to address. Additionally, it supported the idea within my painting, that Gum trees are more important than we will ever believe, and how this should increase their significance within our lives.

I stayed true to my personal aesthetic and fascination for the Australian Landscape, which has only evolved and sparked interest and passion in how understated it's portrayed in Contemporary Art. This body of work represents my values towards our natural environment, where my admiration for the Gums, which has turned into an obsession and assisted my health when being in the midst of beauty. As a developing artist, I am inspired to continue to share my own opinions regarding nature and continue to develop my technical skills when painting Gums in particular. Overall, An Australian Experience effectively gives justice to the deserving Gum trees in the Flinders Ranges where the climate, textures and shadows are accurately depicted.

#