

New Beginnings; a Journey of Hope

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New Beginnings and A Journey of Hope is a body of work that explores the essence of human migration. Why do we travel? What drives us to move? How has this phenomenon impacted our world today? These were the questions that weighed heavily on my mind when initially developing my concept. I was influenced to focus on the concept of human migration as I, myself, am a migrant. For the past four years I have lived in Australia, I have heard much news from both close and mutual friends about their own experiences in settling down in Australia and I soon began to realise that many of us had very similar experiences. Migrating to Australia was a huge turning point in my life and I wanted to express it all through my work visually. I remember the conflicting emotions when I first moved to Australia from South East Asia. When people hear the word "migration", oftentimes they link it to the countless refugees and asylum seekers crossing borders and seas. However, when I hear the word "migration", I think of being unbound.

My intention is, not to represent a minority group of migrants, nor portray an image of refugees being helpless to raise awareness of the prominent global issue of such a topic. Instead, I seek to connect with anyone and everyone, from those consumed by wanderlust to those who were forcibly moved from their homeland. People move for many different reasons but a common feature, that I discovered while developing my concept, was that we are all born with hope. It is an innate part of us that constantly fuels our desire to travel to a new land. Ultimately, I wish to convey a sense of hope to my audience. My art is a work of reassurance, to know that no one is truly alone in this world. I have created this work, not only for myself and coming to terms with my own experiences of migration, but for everyone, as we have all 'migrated' to a new environment before, albeit to a new school, workplace or a whole new land.

The idea of depicting a paper boat in New Beginnings was inspired by Elizabeth Lawrence's whimsical boat paintings and Shawn Kirby's tranquil installation in "Talking our way home". I was deeply inspired by the way they have likened their own perception of journey to a paper boat and expressed it through different mediums. Similarly, I use a paper boat to communicate my idea of journey. My drawing is vibrant and uses bold but controlled strokes to generate the strong intangible emotions one might face during their journeys and effectively captures such emotion visually. Although the boat may appear to be green from afar, on closer inspection there are many hidden shades of colour that creates the boat. I use cool shades of green, blue and violet to construct the main body of the boat in contrast to the warm colours that form the contours of the map, making the borders of countries more prominent. The bolded dark blue borderlines are not in line with the actual borders of countries, highlighting the idea that the borders separating land and people is artificial and one's freedom should not be limited to these imagined lines. I specifically chose these colours so that when it is viewed under a monochromatic filter, the countries glow brightly in contrast to the brooding borderlines and the darker shades of the boat's body. Alex Sexton has also inspired me to employ a boat made out of a fragile material such as paper to suggest the vulnerability one may feel in a foreign place. Like Lawrence and Kirby, Sexton utilises paper boats, life-sized rafts and life jackets carved out of non-buoyant marble to explore human migration. However, instead of retelling a personal journey, his works are more politically informed and echoes his concerns over the worldwide crisis of refugee. The clever use of constructing a buoyant subject with a heavy medium has influenced the choice of my medium of portraying a paper boat on paper.

I use a map to craft my boat as it is symbolic in the movement of people and travel. The boat radiates with many different colours as I wanted to convey a colourful sense of hope as one goes on their own journey.

Contrastingly, my series of watercolour paintings in A Journey of Hope is more expressive and free-flowing. The faded, washed aesthetic symbolises the passage of time in the history of human migration as each painting features real migration ships that came in and out of Australia. These date back to one of the First Fleet of ships in 1786 Charlotte, the notorious Second Fleet Neptune ship in 1780, Fortitude in 1842 (which bought free settlers to South Australia and Queensland), Castel Felice in 1930, and the recent ships used to rescue stranded migrants and refugees since 2016 to present: Sea-Watch 3 and Aquarius Dignitus. I have purposely curated the ships chronologically starting from the earliest migrants of Australia to current ones, as a way of showing a period of time to reinforce my narrative. It also adds historical context to my work and strengthens my message of human migration being present since the beginning of time.

I was influenced by the way Elizabeth Lawrence uses a sequence of boat paintings to bring her story to life. Alone, my individual ship paintings are benign, but when combined, the series tells a narrative. During the development of my concept, I came across a beautiful poem called "Hope Is the Thing with Feathers" by Emily Dickinson and was awestruck by it. Lines from that poem float across my watercolour paintings to pay homage to those who have journeyed or travelled bravely across high seas, full of hope, seeking the promise of a life unbound.

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