

'I too, like you, had a face'

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There is a strong tradition of Artists who tell stories of the horrors of war in a broad range of styles. I desired to explore the atrocities of war; such as genocide and war crimes via abstract painting. Abstraction allows for an open reading of people and events through the exaggeration and distortion of human forms to heighten the horrors of war, to evoke empathy and to promote understanding towards peace-building.

My figures are either faceless or have abstracted faces to remove individual identity. Many Holocaust and contemporary war artists focus on the individual, e.g. Garry Ramage states that, "In wars, when nothing seems to matter I can take pictures in which every person counts" (2016). My figures, however, disregard the notion of a particular person, place or time to represent everyone, from any conflict, who suffers from the devastating effects of war.

My research focus is, therefore towards abstraction in which the distortion or fragmentation of figures heightens human pain and drama. Picasso's abstract figures (e.g. Guernica (1937)) demonstrate the cruelty of the Spanish Civil War. Picasso's greyscale colour pallet is reminiscent of the photographic documentation of war, while also conveying sorrow. Willem De Kooning's abstract figures and expressive brushstrokes convey violence and chaos; moods, I wish to inflict on my audience. Francisco Goya's and Eugène Delacroix's depiction of tortured human bodies informed my live drawing classes, which I undertook to understand the human form better. Although I distort the figure, it still needs to feel 'right', where the proportions need to be believable as a human form. Henri Matisse's cut-outs allow for the exaggeration of forms to heighten emotion and to provide 'clipped' disturbing shapes and compositions. The work of Australian war artist George Gittoes captures amplified reactions through a highly textured surface, intense colour, rhythmic lines and forms. I developed a synthesis of these techniques toward a personal aesthetic.

I am interested in telling the stories of victims of war. War crimes and genocide interest me because of the everlasting effects on society. These impacts include loss of community, destruction of family and friends, and persistent pain and sorrow for the survivors, e.g. post-war trauma. Further to this, I am captivated by modern history; in particular, the history of recent wars and atrocities.

The large scale of my final work was intended to be immersive to overwhelm the viewer and create empathy. The colour scheme in the lower two-thirds emulates Picasso's greyscale to suggest documentary photographs. The top third is composed of earth tones symbolising fire, smoke and dirt. Red depicts danger and blood. Forms were reversed and repeated to create rhythm and balance across the many figures in this large work.

My aim towards peace-building via my artwork is driven by personal concern that war may impact those individuals close to me; friends of my age who I engage with every day. A grievous feature of our age is that young men and women go to war. For this reason, my models were my school friends. I feel that via my artistic expression, I was successful in encouraging the viewer to reflect on how war might impact the relationships in their lives. #