

The Women Who Came Before Me

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"The Women Who Came Before Me" is a tribute to the women who paved the way for me to become the person I am today. I wanted this body of work to be a 'thank you' to my mother and grandmother who have granted me with every opportunity they could. I wanted to encapsulate in my drawings the power and strength they behold, in addition to their kind and nurturing manner. I created these portraits in a way that clearly depicts three generations and the connection we all share. Through my body of work, I set out to effectively showcase the impacts that they both have had on my life and development.

I knew from the start of this process that I wanted to create portraits for my major work as this is where my strengths and passions are. I have extensive prior experience working with charcoal and graphite pencil and because of this, I knew that creating drawings would best fit my strengths for my major work. However, although this was the case, I knew that I also wanted to challenge myself to try something new. I conducted some research into various artists who create artwork that inspires me, and by doing so discovered artists such as Thomas Readett and Josh Hernandez (more commonly known as Mad Charcoal). I discovered through my research that Readett is Adelaide based. I had the wonderful opportunity to meet with him and discuss the different ways that he creates his artwork and the meaning behind it. One of the methods that he frequently uses is white on a black background. It was from this that I had the idea to use a white pencil on black paper. I knew that this change would challenge me with my portraiture. This was because it would force me to invert the way that I thought about my drawing and focus on the highlights instead of the shadows. I also found inspiration in Hernandez' art as he works in a similar white on black style. Although his style of portraiture is more abstract than mine it was a good learning experience to watch how he created portraiture using white conte on black paper.

I had to take photos to use as my original images for these three portraits. I wanted the portraits to look as though they belonged together even if they were separated. To achieve this level of similarity and coherence I made sure that when taking the reference photos for each portrait that the positioning was the same. This meant making sure that each photo was taken with the same, angle, lighting, scale and facial expression. I decided that I would use bright front facing lighting so that the portraits had lots of luminosity and contrast against the black paper. I also made sure that the camera was straight onwards in each picture so that there was no warping of the facial features due to perspective.

I decided that I wanted my portraits to be big enough that the subjects of each portrait I created were life size or larger. I wanted it to feel as though the portraits were looking at you. I decided that the best size of paper to achieve this would be A1. Since I had never worked on this scale before it took lots of experimentation to decide exactly how I was going to transfer the outline of my sketch onto such a large piece of paper, so that the proportion remained correct. To do this I used a grid pattern overlaid on the top of my original images at a 1:2 scale which allowed me to transfer the outline without distorting the scale of the image. I then had to decide which white pencil to use and what would give the best effect. Through much experimentation I decided that this was a combination of Prismacolor white pencils and fine charcoal. The reason I decided that I would also use charcoal is I found that it worked similarly to how an eraser would on graphite. Since I was working on black paper, it was easy to use the darkness of the charcoal to deepen areas that I made too bright, or almost 'erase' areas that I drew incorrectly. The charcoal could also be smudged to give a smoother blended effect that the pencil was not able to provide.

I decided to place the portraits in the order Grandma, Mum, Me so that it could be viewed left to right, ending on me. Since these portraits are a body of work, I felt it important to consider how they are viewed, not only separately but together. Since our eyes naturally flow from left to right, I decided that the best placement for my grandmother's portrait was on the left-hand side. This meant that the viewer would see her, and then gradually work their way down the generations, finishing on the portrait of me. I felt that this was the most effective and coherent way to display my portraits.

The title "the women who came before me" comes from my inspiration to make a tribute to my mother and grandmother. I chose this title because I feel that it effectively alludes to the idea of the three separate generations included in this body of work. In addition to this it also expresses the connections I have with my mother and grandmother and the connection that they share with each other. I feel that these portraits give the viewer a glimpse into my life and tells the story of how I became the person I am today.