

The Nature of Sleep

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Sleep Succumbs and *Father and I* explores the thematic ideas of sleep in association with growth and relationships. Sleep is a necessary practice for every human being, however, personally, the simple practice of sleep represents changes within one's life. For most of my life, I've lived within an apartment block where rooms were close together, and I was personally sharing a bedroom with my sister. Moving to Australia and growing up, the opportunity of being able to have my own single-person room led me to gain a sense of privacy that was unfounded during my childhood. However, since my dad has had to stay back in my home country, I started to realise the isolation and loneliness that comes with growing up. This can be represented as a journey; as a baby laying with one's parents to moving into a single-person bed.

The warmth of childhood and of familial love is captured within the work, *Father and I*, depicting the two subjects of a father and his baby child, sleeping peacefully in a sea of blankets and linen; expressions relaxed and unguarded as the father protectively curls around his child. This painting serves as a dedication to my own father, who has been living separately overseas from the rest of my family. Within the conceptualisation of this work, I reflected a lot on childhood moments in which I would be able to comfortably crawl into my parents' bed during a restless night or to be reassured of comfort and love. This painting serves as a remembrance of such nostalgic feelings of childhood where sleep was surrounded by the familial presence of love and safety.

I have been largely inspired by Nguyen Thanh Binh's work, connecting the concept of motherhood and familial intimacy through depictions of sleep, emphasised through warm tones. I immediately connected with the warmth of Nguyen's paintings, with slightly minimalistic influences and a lack of details creating a dream-like atmosphere of the past. Likewise, I deliberately chose warm colours without any influences from cooler colours to build up an atmospheric warmth within the artwork, and to keep my rendering painterly and spatial to create a soft textural sense of the painting. However, where Nguyen chooses to use mostly only red and brown tones, I decided to use a pink undertone as a base, drawing on the idea of pink traditionally being associated with love and motherhood except to subvert it to create a connection with fatherhood instead. Furthermore, I was inspired by the works of Joaquin Sorolla and his aesthetic, partially from his artwork *'Mother'* (1895), which explores a similar concept to my work and of Nguyen's. The white of the bed linen and gentle lighting encapsulates the intimate quietness that sleep brings between people, the lack of background details and drawing focus on the sleeping expressions of the subjects touched me greatly and further influenced my aesthetic style for my work. The blending of soft, opaque white with textured pink undertones and minimal shades of shadows create a dreamy sensation, reflecting on childhood nostalgia that has become a mere memory in the form of a dream.

The continuation of my concept with *Sleep Succumbs* represents the isolative nature of sleep in association with growing out of childhood memories and into adulthood. The title is derived from the phrase 'succumbing to sleep', in which to succumb means to yield to the nature of sleep instead of fighting against it.

In contrast to *Father and I*, the reassurance of comfort and company is gone, with only the subject's sole presence taking up the centre and forefront of the composition. The subject, in comparison to the father in the first work, sleeps in a curled up position except, unlike the father, the figure closes up within herself as a protection from the vulnerabilities of life which sleep allows her to escape from. The colour choices are inspired by American artist, Scott Hutchinson's use of colour in harmoniously blending both warm and cool to create a whimsical, abstracted dreamscape. To construct the sleeping figure, I used mainly blues and purples, casting cooler lighting upon the skin and the clothes to further convey the idea of sleep as escapism with the lack of realistic tones of colour. The red blanket surrounds the figure, trapping her in and being in stark contrast to the cooler tones used, reminding the viewer of reality which everyone wakes up to.

In the beginning of my concept development, I came across a quote by German poet, Charles Bukowski who states, "Too often, the only escape is sleep". Reflecting on my own life, I realised the commonality of sleep as a form of escapism from the pressures and stress of life, is made more aware as children grow into adulthood. This concept was further influenced by Iranian artist, Hooshang Hatefi's works, which perfectly captures the sense of escapism and quiet peace which sleep brings even while in public spaces. Artists such as Nicolas Bruno and Francisco de Goya further inspired me to explore momentary solitude brought by sleep, albeit unlike Bruno and de Goya, I did not delve into the thematic ideas of sleep-induced nightmares and instead choosing to relate their concepts of total solitude as a result of fear of the unknown towards my major concept.

Where *Father and I* does not focus on realistic detailing, *Sleep Succumbs* contains intricate and realistic details of the figure including clothes folds, blanket wrinkles, and facial details. The difference in realism links and compares the concept between both works, where peaceful childhood dreams grow into an isolative dream state that promises escapism from the pressures of reality.

Sleep allows one to enter a state of vulnerability for some time. Memories of resting with my parents are melancholic and nostalgic of days that have passed, while the dark unknown of the future impends upon us. Yet sleep is a cycle of rest, allowing us to escape into our dreamscapes separate from reality.