

Ephemerality of life

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My body of work *Ephemerality of life* is heavily influenced by the twin phrases 'memento mori' and 'memento vivere', which translate to 'remember that you must die' and 'remember that you must live'. I have interpreted these as a gentle reminder of the presence of death, to be aware and acceptant its inevitability, but taking this as motivation to appreciate life rather than letting it weigh you down. The Latin phrases stem from ancient Rome, where they served as a reminder of one's morality, which has been a reoccurring theme throughout history. Similarly, the 17th century art period vanitas explores the idea of a fleeting life, where symbolism is used to represent various contrasting aspects of life and death. Vanitas was a strong influence for the first piece in my body of work, titled *memento mori – a circle of life* where lively florals and a macabre skull were utilised to symbolically portray a strong juxtaposition between themes.

Following this is a skeletal lino print *memento mori – at the hands of death*, exploring similar themes. Historical vanitas artist Harmen Steenwijck compositionally arranges his delicate paintings such that the eye naturally flows around the works, which is something I have aimed to achieve in my own works. I have adapted a detailed style of painting and been able to apply this with sensitivity in my own works. Contemporary artist Meagan Meli aims to share an acceptance of death in all its forms through her works, sharing complimentary themes to my own. Contrastingly, the series E.A.R.T.H. created by Brian Kirhagis delves into a deep appreciation of and connection to life, influencing the creation of the second aspect of my body of work, *memento vivere*.

Through the creation of *Ephemerality of life* I intend to share with my audience a sense of awe and wonder toward life, and a peaceful acceptance of the inevitability of death. I wish to encompass the transient fleeting nature of our existence, and from this be reminded to appreciate life. The theme of death within art does not have to be solemn, rather an acceptance of what is bound to come and using this to instil a connection to life. The inclusion of the universe highlights the scale of our lifespan in perspective to the existence of our universe and all it encompasses, inspired by a quote from the book *The Diabolic*, where S.J. Kincaid says "We are all of us but stardust shaped into conscious being." The first aspect of my body of work is *memento mori – a circle of life*, which portrays a skull surrounded by the growth of vines, flowers and butterflies, representative of the connection between life and death and this continuous cycle; the decay of one nourishes the growth of another.

Linking to this is my second practical, *memento vivre*, where a woman is seen to connect to the world around her and the universe above, appreciative of life. The inclusion of the moon is representative of the vastness of the world and relating to something larger than yourself. The third aspect is a lino print depicting a skeletal hand delicately holding several butterflies, titled *memento mori – at the hands of death*. This connects strongly to *memento mori – a circle of life*, which both aim to exploring the certainty of death in a peaceful manner.

The design of each aspect of this body of work has been inspired by the works of several historical and contemporary artists, from whom I have taken a variety of techniques, symbols, materials and themes to create unique artworks of my own. Particularly, a strong influence of *memento mori – a circle of life* is the 18th century vanitas art period, where I have adapted the realism, delicate brushwork, and strong compositional planning of artworks from this period. The careful brushwork in my work mimics that of the art of Harmen Steenwijck, while Notan theory was utilised to ensure a strong composition, allowing the viewers eye to flow naturally across the piece without cluttering the work. The detailed skeletal drawings of Andreas Vesalius are used as an influencing source for anatomic accuracy for *memento mori – at the hands of death*, which depicts a skeletal hand and a number of butterflies. Both Alphonse Mucha's feministic artworks and BK's surreally and spiritually portrayed women influenced the creation of *memento vivre*, where detailed brushwork and harmonious tones explore spiritual connections to life itself similarly to the themes present in BK's works.

Additionally, several locally practicing artists displaying their works in the Barossa Regional Gallery have inspired my work. Through my observation of their paintings and mixed media art, I was able to take inspiration the local artists' works, observing the texture and details in the art in first person.

With this body of work I wanted to develop my own personal aesthetic and portray my connections felt toward the themes I have explored. Initially, I wished to focus on the acceptance of an inevitable death, which later grew toward an appreciation for life. Each element of the body of work displays a different perspective of the same beginning theme, which has grown and adapted as my work progressed. What began as depicting symbolic elements of death changed to sharing feelings of awe, appreciation, and a connection to existence. While both paintings are created with delicate and purposely placed brushstrokes, *memento vivre* specifically begins to explore texture as my brushwork techniques expand, while *memento mori – at the hands of death* pushed my comfort zone to experiment with mixed media.

Creating this body of work allowed me to express and communicate the feelings I wished to share with my audience, exploring my own values as a person and an artist before then connecting with others who view my work.