

Fires can't destroy love & community spirit!

Whitney Cheffirs

My starting point was to make art that connects with my love of nature in particular trees. The strongest idea that came into my mind was to represent how much the 2020 bushfires on Kangaroo Island affected my community. In my practical I used actual burnt timbers taken with permission from one of the 80 properties burnt.

It was interesting and serendipitous that my friend's fragile red timber 3D 'heart' keepsake (see photo in final practical) remained unharmed while everything else in her room was destroyed by the bushfire. Through this symbol, painted red, it was my intention to project friendliness, love and hope. Red is the colour of my symbolic drawing of fire and as a background colour in the photo I took of bushfire relics saved by my fire affected Art teacher.

The story I want to convey through my artwork is about the community of KI who were the ones who performed bravely on the day, from farmers and the CFS risking their lives to stop the fire and locals saving hurt and lost wildlife, farm animals and pets. K.I residents also helped people evacuate by offering up their spare rooms or camp trailers as a refuge. These are all regular people, with their own lives who did great deeds by saving more than physical things.

Johnny Bulunbulun is a contemporary indigenous artist who was my biggest inspiration. He stitched bark from trees together to represent his community and culture to create a canoe. I also created an artwork to represent my community. I also used ideas from artists Earl Martz, Gertrude Hermese and Thomas Bewick to create wood burning designs which I have always wanted to test.

My goal was to convey a sense of the sorry aftermath of a bush fire. To symbolise the burnt trees, I did wood burning, burnt bark and charcoal and I positioned the fire symbol in red between the trees. Burnt branches were incorporated into the final grid-like layout. I decided to place photos of objects and homes that were destroyed in the fires to represent things that can be rebuilt.

The process of making my artwork went very well as my artwork slowly but perfectly evolved. It just meant a lot of work and staying flexible. The problems I faced were trying to do wood burning on hard wood. It took a lot of time, and each line would be of a different thickness. I decided to try different surfaces and found that cork burnt perfectly. I tested lots of different media from painting wood and printing leaves, sketches in graphite, photoshoots, water-based pastels, pencil, charcoal, wood burning and weaving sticks to try different ways I could represent bush fires. I was also going to show the farmers fighting the fires but sometimes less is more.

The toughest thing was thinning out the many different photos. Sometimes too much makes people get lost in thoughts. I needed my artwork simple but still full of hidden meaning. I think my second practical really did achieve what I wanted, and I was very happy with it.