

Reflections

Tilda Byleveld

My work explores the feelings of childhood - a sleepy car ride home, a tattered paisley couch, a tiny bathroom, a fairy filled garden - and how these memories can become faded and entangled. Despite moving homes frequently throughout my childhood, my memories of familial warmth and domestic interiors remain unmoved. Our paisley couch, the anchor of my family's many dilapidated rentals, informs my practicals which each reflect on the comfort and fragility of memories. I designed a sepia toned hallway which follows childhood memories, the central painting entitled 'Wash', features loose brushwork as well as ethereal pinks and yellows to capture the playful nature of growing up.

My work is influenced by many of the illustrators who coloured my childhood-bedtimes and encouraged my love for art, *Lauren Child's 'Charlie and Lola'*, *Helen Oxenbury's 'Ten little fingers and ten little toes'* and *Quentin Blake's work with Roal Dahl*. Each artist inspired my use of colour and composition in my final works. I chose to use both oils and gouache as a homage to my love for painting in my childhood, as well as collage techniques to create a more intimate and 'crafty' aesthetic.

My central work, ('Wash', oil on canvas), plays on a traditional familial portrait with 3 figures at varied levels forming a triangular composition. Painting myself and my siblings in the bathroom, an intimate and unexpected background reimagines traditional portraiture – offering a contemporary lens. The title 'Wash' holds many connotations – a reflection on the bathroom or 'washroom' setting, a sudden 'wash' of nostalgia for the past, as well as a wash of paint and colour.

The small gouache works which frame 'Wash' are again moments in my childhood which evoke strong nostalgia of bedtime stories and my childhood garden. The paintings differ from 'Wash' as the figures avert their gaze from the viewer. This composition allows the moments in time to feel even more intimate – as though they are reconstructed memories. The larger gouache piece reflects on my memories of bedtime. I decided to reference a personal narrative told by my father during bedtime - when the fan was on, and the blankets were pulled tight, we were safe from the whistling wind and wolves of the night. In combination with gouache I used collaged paper, allowing the works to take on a whimsical and child-like aesthetic. The work of Hope Gangloff inspired my compositions of intimate interiors and portraits. In my gouache paintings I replicated Gangloff's use of bright contrasting colours and delicate linework.

My fourth piece entitled, 'Homesick', is an oil painting on stretched fabric. My choice of fabric refers to my family's paisley couch which was a fixture in all our homes. Overlayed on the sienna fabric I painted portraits of my siblings. I felt that my old couch, an intrinsic symbol of comfort, would tie perfectly into my exploration of nostalgia. The title, 'Homesick', offers an insight into my sentimental recollections of my first home, as well as the couch being a symbol of comfort on days I would stay home, sick. The fabric in this piece purposely ties back into the paisley pattern featured in 'Wash', allowing my body-of-work to complement and reflect one another.

I decided to frame and hang all my paintings in a 'hallway', representing my childhood home and complementing my themes of nostalgia. I chose to paint the hallway in cream sienna tones which both complement my paintings and lean into the idea of a vintage memory. The hallway features elements of my childhood home such as a second-hand hallway table, my grandmother's lamp, a family vase, a quintessential Persian floor rug, and vintage trim moulding.

Throughout the development of my work, I discovered the 'Zorn' colour palette, a specific palette consisting of yellow ochre, ivory black, vermilion, and white, developed by artist Anders Zorn (1860-1920). I adopted these warm toned colours in both the hallway design process as well as in my four paintings. Working through traditional colour theory, specifically the Zorn palette, allowed me to strengthen my understanding of colour theory and the characteristics of oil paint. Whilst developing my compositions I relied on the techniques of illustrative artists, Quentin Blake and Tim Burton, who both use unconventional scribble techniques when illustrating. Their loose and often unapologetic 'scribble' influenced the background elements of my final paintings – allowing for looser and almost 'childlike' elements to arise. I chose to use charcoal to create the wolf sketch in the style of Burton's 'Edward Scissor Hands' in the background of my gouache piece to add contrast to the soft painting style. As well as contemporary artists I studied historic artists Joy Hester and Francis Bacon. Both Bacon and Hester's works are intriguing for their elements of darkness and use of distortion. Their art styles aligned with my exploration of 'distorted' or 'faded' memory. Despite choosing not to manipulate perspective in my final works, throughout my folio I studied their use of black and distorted proportions – of which both practices consolidated my understanding of perspective and colour theory.

My final body of work reflects my entire exploration of nostalgia, allowing the audience to walk through my childhood in a literal sense. The installation allows my work to appear as though my paintings are re-constructed photographs, warped by memory, hung in a family home. I thoroughly considered each element of my installation, from the slightly wilted flowers in a green vase to the car-keys hanging on the wall. I maintained a consistent colour palette throughout the installation, primarily constructed using sienna creams and reds and well as a collection of blue and navy tones. My choice of dimmed lighting likens the installation to an old house, further impacting the viewing experience and holistic impact of the work. The entire creative process allowed me an insight into both traditional oil painting techniques as well as contemporary approaches to illustration and composition. I enjoyed finding a balance between realism and expressive illustration, and in doing so, cultivated my own personal artistic aesthetic.