

Critically Endangered

Brooke Woodbridge

Within my family, elephants are seen as a symbol of protection. That if the tusks of an elephant statue point towards the door of the house, it will bring safety to my home. It struck me how ironic this was, that these elephants were my symbol of protection despite being critically endangered due to human interference. Critically endangered, the title of my artwork, is a label given to a species that are at an extremely high risk of facing extinction in the wild. Species like the African Forest Elephants, whose population is dwindling primarily due to poaching. My symbol of protection has inadequate safety policies that protect it from humanity.

The initial inspiration for my artwork was the issues of climate change and the impact humanity has on the planet. I also enjoyed the idea of Street or Public Art which led me to Laurence Vallieres, who uses recycled cardboard to create oversized public artworks of venerable species. Inspired by this, I created art from surgical masks, a widely used resource utilised during the global pandemic to protect against COVID-19. Despite the necessity of these masks and the growing education of climate change, particularly among young people, I often saw masks littering school courtyards or public settings. Because of this, I was inspired to create an artwork purely from these masks as a representation of the estimated 3 million masks being used and disposed of each minute. It also related to my theme of safety and protection as we as a global society became so fixated on protecting ourselves during the pandemic while endangered species were left unprotected, the work on conservation organisations being threatened due to the decrease in support and an increase in poverty and economic instability which caused a rise in poaching.

Throughout the process of making this artwork, I learnt how to manage my time effectively as the sculptures were very time consuming. Although it doesn't feature in my final artwork, I also learnt how to create and use stencils and spray paint. My original idea was to stencil over an image of the sculptures however decided against this concept due to time constraints as well as concerns about how clearly the artwork could be perceived by the audience.

Taking a photo of my sculptures, I then enlarged and printed it to create a mural spanning a wall within my school. I also created a smaller version of the photo to be displayed in a gallery. Because of the large-scale artwork, the audience is overwhelmed—almost suffocated within the space by the rolling blue wave of elephants. As it was my aim to create an artwork that conveyed the urgency of the threat to elephants, I believe this was successful as the image is unavoidable to the audience from any position in the room.

I hope that through my artwork I can spread awareness about the vulnerability of these elephants, making people question humanity's influences on the planet and make steps to improve it.