

## Margaret Olley Art Trust Collection Study Room

### Artist-in-Residence Written Reflection

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2022

*This project was made possible by the Australian Government's Regional Arts Fund, an Australian Government program designed to benefit regional and remote arts practitioners, arts workers, audiences, and communities. The fund is provided through Regional Arts Australia and is administered in Queensland by Flying Arts Alliance.*

When beginning my residency at Rockhampton Museum of Art, colour, expression and experimentation were at the forefront of my artworks when responding to the collection. However, as the weeks, and my works, developed, another guiding principle became apparent too: discovery.

Surrounded by a rich body of works created by artists such as Ken Done, Carmen Beezley-Drake, Dusan Marek and Elizabeth Gould, as well as a library with excellent resources, there was an opportunity like no other for inspiration, research and discovery. My artworks during the residency were inspired by the ones I chose to have displayed in the Margaret Olley Art Trust Collection Study Room. Furthermore, each of my works also inspired new starting points, with fresh thoughts and ideas in which direction to go and how I could implement techniques of the artists' works surrounding me. This was an important aspect as I wanted to discover more about my own direction as an artist, growing as well as developing my skills.

My first response to the works around me reflected on the abundance of nature within them. I created a triptych of faces intertwined with nature on canvas that sought to question humanity's connection to nature. These works were heavily influenced by Done's vibrant use of colour, Beezely-Drake's expressive representations of nature and Gould's bird illustrations. Focusing heavily on Australian native flora and birds, these paintings allow audiences to reflect on their connection to nature. The expressionless faces are intertwined with vibrant, dynamic and organic backgrounds depicting either a sense of

unawareness or a deep interconnectedness, depending on perspective. Painting on canvas is not something I normally do as a digital artist but I wanted to experiment with having the paint drip down the canvas, moving naturally and serendipitously, emphasising experimentation and expression with vibrant colour to create movement and life on the canvas.

My second work directly built upon the first, furthering the inquiry of how people interact with nature. This made me question, “what is natural to people in a contemporary context?” Living in a digital age, technology can be more predominant than plant or animal life, but does that make it natural? To explore this train of thought I created a 3D digital sculpture of patterned, textured, and intertwined trees surrounded by triangular, chromatic prisms. This sculpture was able to be viewed and interacted with via artificial reality (AR). Audiences could see themselves on a screen sharing the space with a sculpture that never physically existed. Beezley-Drake’s representation of patterns on trees was dominant in the work. These patterns gave the organic, sculptural forms a contrasting, synthetic overlay symbolising the digital influence of this work in response to nature. The colours and suggestions of materials in the sculpture also felt artificial and metallic emphasising the synthetic themes. Audience interaction with the sculpture was also significant as it provided insight into what people found natural. Some adults found it strange and uncanny, while children often danced and had fun watching themselves go behind the sculpture, which I think expresses how much more natural technology may become over time.

My final works during the residency evolved as I digitally painted each one. In the beginning, they leaned more heavily into technology, and built upon the sculpture’s themes of a more digital future. These first works, while placing nature as subtle expressions in the background also brought the notion of culture and symbolism into the foreground. I’ve had an interest in Japanese culture since taking classes in school and wanted to research more into the symbols and significance of them through crafts like *sometsuke* (white and blue pottery with origins from China). I wanted to explore how, even as technology develops and nature may become less prominent, things like culture stand as testaments to the people and world that create and continue cultural traditions. Culture is, in a way, a representation of the world and the people who live in it. This led to my final works which were inspired by

these thoughts of representations of the world as well as Marek's *Expressions of France*. Although all the artists in the selection of works I chose represented aspects of the world in unique ways, Marek's expressions were still sometimes subtle despite his bold use of colours and abstraction. In my final works I focused on representing elements like water and air in ways that combined what I'd observed. Using figures almost like a sculpture, creating pattern and movement in the skin similar to Beezley-Drake's trees but more subtle in expression like Marek. These digital paintings had brought together my discoveries from my other works during the residency to create digital paintings that expressed the mystery and life that I see in the world.

This residency has provided the opportunity to research works and artists that have allowed me to push my artworks, and practice, further than I have before through:

- using the vibrancy of colours to create a sense of life that springs from the canvas,
- manipulating expression in ways both bold and subtle to harness meanings,
- experimentation to spark new ideas and direction for my works, and
- discovery, through having an open mind when exploring my interests and the methods of other artists to push my creative boundaries further.

Having access to the works from RMOA's collection and a space to create freely also gave me the time to reflect deeply and engage more with my motivations as an artist. This residency has been a phenomenal experience that has driven me forward, giving me direction as a young artist and is an opportunity I am incredibly grateful to have been granted.