

VISUAL ARTS

James Wilson

Glory be to God for Dappled Things: Series of My Grandmother

(ARTEXPRESS nomination 2021)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

I drew the title of my work from the gratitude poem of Gerard Manly Hopkins, “Pied Beauty”, which describes the beauty of how God painted nature with different colours and textures. I adopted this approach in my series of my Grandmother to depict my Grandmother’s beauty, the pied colours of her world as a result of memory loss from dementia. To represent this loss, I have dappled colour in the background, around and within the figure of my Grandmother. I was influenced by the expressive figurative works of Judy Cassab, Christian Hook and Kevin Connor in creating my backgrounds; representing my Grandmother’s fragmenting, dissolving memories through a wash-like application of paint. The painterly quality of artist Ben Quilty’s work Margaret Olley (2011) with a focus on her face also shaped my attention on the face in my figurative work to reveal the colour of her character.

The colour palette of magenta, mauves, blues and greens represents my Grandmother’s favourite colours. I have mostly rendered her ageing skin with softness reflective of her nature and through swift brush strokes and jabs of colour captured her exuberance and energy.

Each painting in the series represents different aspects of my Grandmother; times when her personality is larger than the dementia, times when the dementia leaves her bewildered or glum. The larger canvases attest to the power of her personality to outshine the dementia. I have reinforced this through mixed media of charcoal and pastel over paint to portray her will to defy dementia in the larger face image and employed this in the smaller painting of her hands on her face, to depict solemnity and contemplation. Similarly, the varied compositions reveal insights into my Grandmother’s character and disposition.

This series is a celebration of my Grandmother who gives much joy and love to those around her; providing a glimpse of her abundance of warmth that continues despite her struggles with dementia. My broader intent is to invite audiences to revisit their own views on dementia and to invest always in uncovering the person within and to be forever grateful for those we hold dear to our heart.



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