

Adaptive Radiation

Artwork by Angela Hughes

Adaptive Radiation is a term used in evolutionary biology to describe a situation in which organisms rapidly evolve in an environment which makes new resources available, creates new challenges, or opens new environmental niches. This latest project is a series of over 500 collages created during Victoria's various lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. It uses the term as an analogy for the extreme changes being experienced by the art community during the COVID-19 pandemic. As artists we have been forced to rapidly evolve the way we make and display our work, and it is uncertain how our community will look on the other side of the virus. My work addresses social and environmental themes from a very personal perspective, using illustration, found media, text, anecdotes, and humour. I work using a process called "seriality" which involves the production of a series of artworks that share one common aesthetic element, in this case the collages are all of a similar size and created using a similar process. This approach enables me to develop a relationship with my viewers through the creation of a relatable and frequently vulnerable narrative. Showing such a vast amount of information at once is intended to be somewhat overwhelming and enveloping and, I believe, can help keep



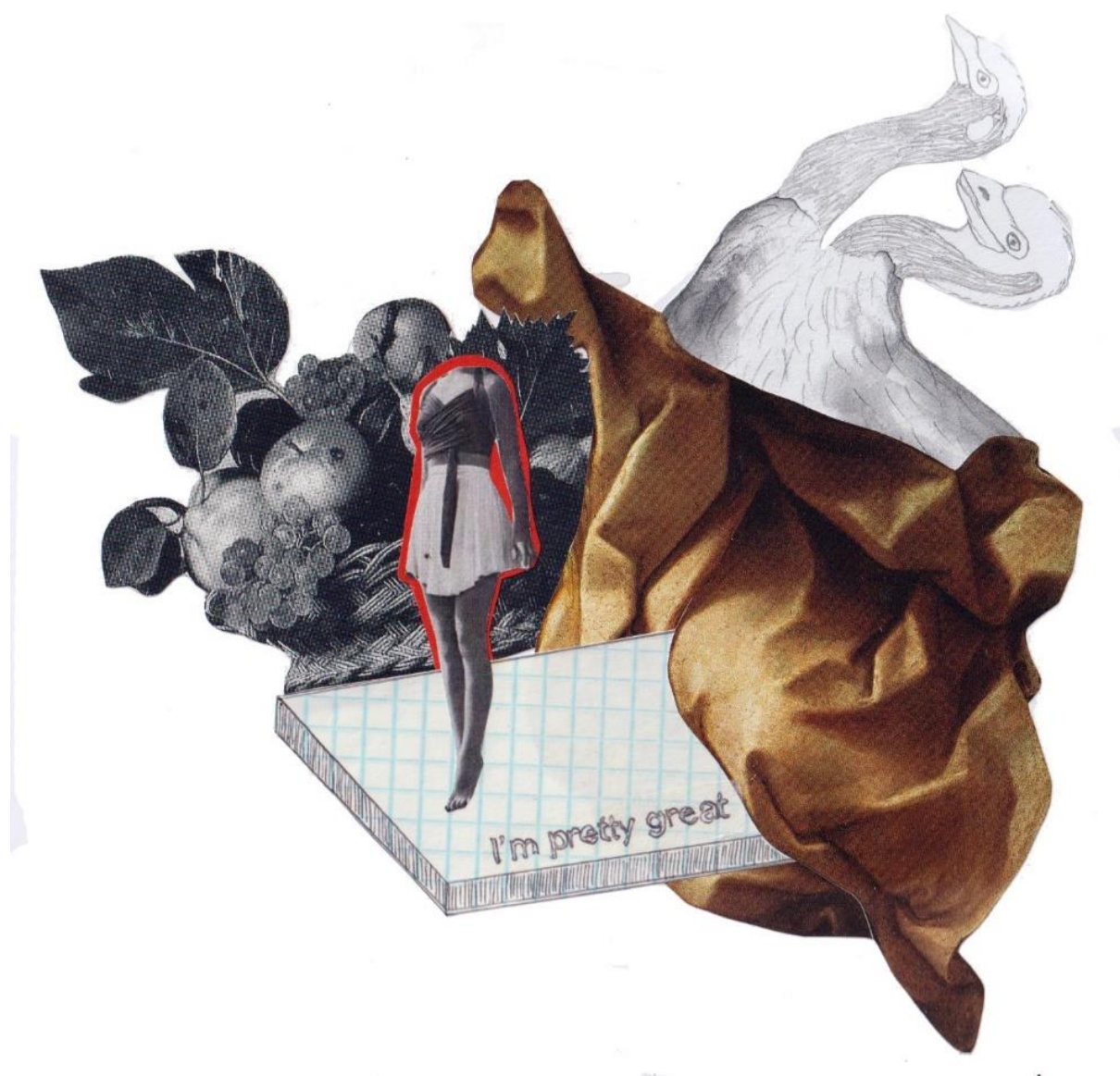
viewers engaged with the work for an extended period.

There are several recurrent themes in my work, the main ones being that each piece involves the visual representation of an animal, some kind of written element and, of course, the use of seriality itself. My conceptual interests ebb and flow, but I continually return to the subjects of *confession* and *animals*. I feel like most art is self-referential, and that it's a great feat to be able to relate to people emotionally through art. From its

earliest examples art has been preoccupied with the representation of animals, emphasising the integral roles animals have played in human civilisation as labourers, food, entertainment, spiritual influences, metaphors, and companions.

Seriality is traditionally used to describe a group of items that are related to each other by the fact that each, or most, of the items bear a

collective title that applies to the group as a whole. My use of this word is applied in a visual and conceptual sense and is implemented throughout all my artworks. In this context, the difference between seriality and repetition is that in the former, each component is crucially different in some way, while also sharing a number of similar components. For example, a



Above: "I'm Pretty Great" (2020) Mixed media.



Above: "I Need a lot of Naps" (2020) Mixed media.

series of twenty different drawings may be made on identical pieces of paper, or similar images may be drawn onto different found objects. These works sit alongside each other in order to engage the viewer for an extended period; to tell a coherent story. It's like binge watching a tv show as opposed to watching a movie. There are more opportunities for you to engage with and

care about what you're seeing.

A lot of my work has required many, many hours of delicate work. I have come to view this as a process of ridding myself of guilt; of paying homage to the animals that have lost their lives for human endeavours. This feeling can also be applied to the seriality of making the works. If I draw 100 cows, I am 100 cows closer to feeling

absolved.

I am particularly interested in experimenting with photocopy technology within my studio work. One of the photocopier's traditional uses has been to create cost-effective multiples in order to spread a message, which is congruent with what I am attempting to achieve in my artwork. The process of photocopying undermines the "fine art" aspect of my work and reduces the status of the image as a work of art. My intention is that the issues regarding our

relationship with animals are seen as more critical than the way in which these issues are visually communicated. My use of photocopy also provides a consistent link between images within each artwork to reinforce the collection's seriality.

In 2007 I completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts Honours. My research looked at the confession in contemporary art; the act of making the personal life public. In 2014 I completed a Doctorate of Visual Arts. My research was then directed towards animal rights in contemporary



Above: "Vultures Don't Hunt" (2020) Mixed media.

art; how they effected each other within society, either positively or negatively, and how art might be used as a cause for change. Since graduating and becoming free to pursue my art interests without academic restraint, these two areas of practice have become intrinsically and inextricably linked. Through my work I hope to develop an intimacy with my viewers that relates to both the animals depicted in the work and the issues surrounding their treatment by humans. I believe it is an exciting time to be making artwork about animal rights, as society is very quickly coming to realise that there are serious problems

with the way animals are treated. As art has always reflected life, a trend can already be seen emerging, with many artists investigating social, political and environmental issues from an emotional perspective.

In 2021, five years after moving from Queensland to Melbourne, I have had a lot of time—particularly during lockdowns—to think about what I would like to say with my work. Is it about me? Is it about animals? About people? About art? Hopefully I won't be given *too* much extra time to work this out, but, at this stage, I think it is about something and nothing.



Above: "Lying was her Favourite way of Talking" (2020) Mixed media.



Above: "Drunk" (2020) Mixed media.