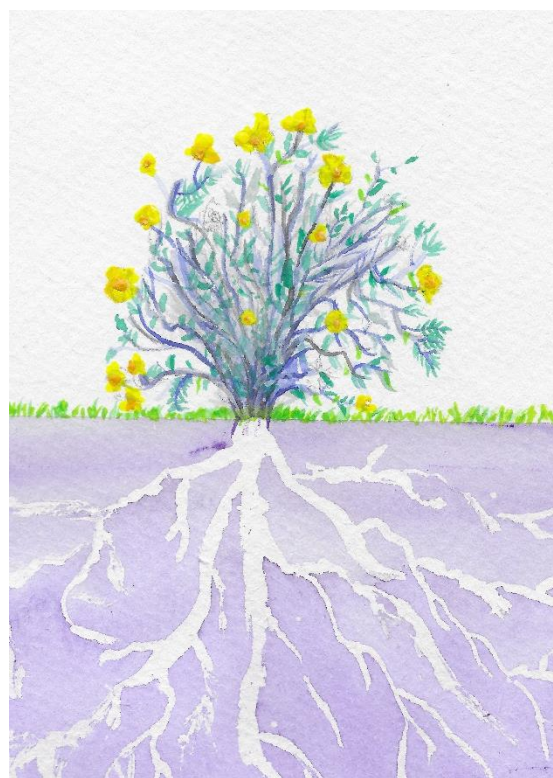


## Change is Coming; Change is Here

By Rebekah Lisciandro

I have a very complicated relationship with my art. I am, by nature or by trauma (or both) a competitive perfectionist type, with the added bonus of low self-esteem. So when I look at my art, I always think it's not good enough. In some ways, it's an accurate enough assessment. I never had good technical skills, even when I was practicing my art actively, and the appeal of my pieces have always been in their imagination. My art has typically been categorised as naïve art, sometimes even outsider art, depending on the piece, in ways that often make me feel self-conscious. So, below are the caveats I present these pieces with. I can't help it.

First, these pieces were created over an eleven-year span. *My mind does not make sense*, *Exposure to the elements*, and *Unraveling* were created somewhere between 2007 and 2010 when I was in my late-teens but before I dropped out of my art Diploma. A lot of my memories from this time are fuzzy which makes them hard to date; I was physically and mentally unwell, and this was during the period where I didn't think I would live to see twenty. A lot of my memories from this time are bad and it's difficult to talk about. I know I didn't put a lot of thought into these pieces at the time, with the potential exception of *Exposure*, which I think was a TAFE assessment



piece. You can tell, for example, that most were painted into my Moleskine which was not an art journal, and so they have yellowed with age. All of them have been named retrospectively.

The final piece, *With care, all things bloom again*, was created in 2020 after a nearly ten year gap between serious art pieces. It was, like most of the arts and crafts I create these days, a gift. My psychologist was moving on to a new practice and we weren't going to see each other again. The night before our final session, inspiration struck

and I painted this for her, as a thank you. If it ever had a name, I've forgotten it now, so I have re-titled it.

Second, my artwork has always been about embodiment. I did this even before I really knew anything about art, until an art teacher pointed out how much my work was like Frida Kahlo's, both in content and where our biographies overlapped—our artworks often reflected the illnesses we experienced and were often created from our beds. It is not difficult to see her

influence on my art. It makes my art interesting to me, but I suspect it's what makes reflecting on it so painful.

The earliest works were created when I believed wholeheartedly that I would become an artist for a living. I still remember very clearly the way my mother and uncle laughed when I told them that was my goal. To their credit, the reaction came more from knowing I was unlikely to make a living off of it, especially living in North Queensland, than actual disdain. I went to events



Above: "My mind does not make sense" (left) and "An interpretation of Judith beheading Holofernes, but for some reason Judith is depicted as my best friend" (right) (2007). Acrylic paint and pen.



that explained how to get into art degrees at universities, remember thinking about what pathways someone who didn't go to high school would need to do to get there. One of the clearest memories I have from that time is telling my art

teacher how I knew, no matter what I did, I was going to end up an artist. I suspect it's because I remember this with shame, mostly, both in my assumption that I could make it and in my misguided belief I was good enough.



Above: "Unraveling" (2007). Watered down acrylic paint.



Above: "Exposure to the elements" (2008) Watercolours and pen on watercolour paper.

I don't remember when and why my break up with art happened. Looking back now, I can see how it was probably trauma related—I had multiple very serious health events happen. But mostly I just think I assumed that I wasn't good enough, and instead of taking that as a challenge,

I was broken enough that I gave up on my art dreams. Instead, ashamed, I went to university for something else and ended up here. Life is strange like that.

*My mind does not make sense* and *Unravelling* are riffs on similar themes, and both are from a series





Above: "With care, all things bloom again" (2020) Watercolours and acrylic paint.

of pieces about my mental health and/or my migraines. A common theme in my artwork at the time was of disembodied, often hollowed out, heads with things escaping them or being tipped out while the person looked on blankly, sometimes annoyed, sometimes upset. I also very

frequently drew asymmetrical, rhythmless patterns around heads. I don't remember why I did the Judith-styled piece, so I have very little to add about it. *Exposure* riffs on another common theme of anatomical drawings, which came from a love of medical illustrations.

These early works are largely all . . . well, *sad*. They are rarely hopeful, and reflect a time in my life where I was isolated, unwell, and saw no future for myself except for what I had with my art.

So, its safe to say it was strange to see *With care* up against *Exposure*. I knew at the time that I painted *With care* I was using techniques and ideas from *Exposure*, but until I saw them up against each other I hadn't realised how much they act, however unintentionally, as a dyptich. *With care* came from an intention to explain to my psychologist how she had helped me grow during a very difficult time. It was a reflection of how I felt, for the first time in a very long time, hopeful. The purple is muted in comparison to *Exposure*, and the negative space leaves room to grow even further where the oppressive sky of *Exposure* makes everything dire and overwhelming.

When I fled to Townsville, however, many years ago now, I was hoping that things would, at least, be no worse than they were before. It is still surreal to see, even more so in these visual pieces, that life changes and changes for the better.