

Breaking The Barriers, Joe Monteleone, Artist Statement

I am a Deafblind artist, specialising in printmaking, soon to complete my Diploma of Visual Arts at CAE.

My initial inspiration for studying printmaking was the work of M.C. Escher. Lino cutting specifically is a medium that connects to my Deafblind identity, involving a hands on, tactile process, and use of strong contrast between black and white, which is clearer to process with low vision.

My Deafblind identity is central to the work I create, which is an avenue both to expression my inner emotional world, and encourage the audience to interrogate their assumptions and see the world from my unique perspective. Among these assumptions is the limiting perspective that Deafblind individuals aren't capable. My work is a demonstration of what Deafblind people are capable of when ableist attitudes and societal barriers are removed.

I am excited and grateful to be showcasing my art in this exhibition, my first ever, through the support of the Thrive Arts Grant.

I hope this exhibition inspires others within the Deafblind, Deaf and Disability community, demonstrating what can be achieved with dedication, hard work, and the right support. I also hope it shows wider society the importance of investing in access to ensure equal participation and opportunity for people with Disability.

The Thrive Arts grant opened up opportunities for me that I previously didn't have access to, and ability to develop new skills and knowledge. This includes knowledge regarding budgeting with the support and mentorship of Arts Access Victoria, and everything entailed in organising an exhibition, with wonderful support and mentorship from Gasworks. Importantly, the grant provided me full access in the process of making these artworks, while also ensuring the exhibition itself provides full access to a diverse audience to attend and enjoy.

I am also appreciative that this grant encouraged me to explore new subject matter, challenge myself as an artist and develop new skills and techniques in the process. Over the course of several months, I researched, visited and photographed all around South Melbourne, whilst also looking within to find and express a personal connection in my works. Along the way, the creative process of developing ideas was both exciting and challenging, with a surge of creative ideas, as well as some self doubt. Many initial ideas and images I discarded, brainstormed and reworked, in the endeavour to develop works that represented both the area, as well as who I am as a person and artist. Through this, I developed a deeper understanding of the area and myself. Significantly, many of the areas and landmarks I eventually selected are those that evoked childhood memories of my family and culture.

Creating Lino cuttings with the depth of detail and complexity of these landmarks was a new, daunting challenge. Thankfully, this inspired me to find new creative avenues to bring my ideas to fruition - including developing digital editing skills, and having my Lino tiles professionally screen printed – which I am excited to continue to use in my practice going forward. I will also carry on with me a new confidence. Looking at the images, I initially felt unsure how to approach carving them, and questioned if I was capable. I sat in front of the printed tiles for hours, thinking through which techniques to use to capture depth, contrast, shade, texture and all the other details. Once I began, I was immersed in the work, often spending 70-80 hours on each piece. This is the most ambitious undertaking I have ever completed as an artist, and what I have created inspires me to continue pushing myself to explore new creative opportunities.

The theme of the series is a journey throughout South Melbourne, through my eyes. The grant provided an opportunity to explore, celebrate and showcase this area through my unique perspective. All the artworks are images taken from multiple visits to the area, showing iconic landmarks in a new light, through my Deafblind visual frame.