

Body of Work (4 artworks)

Surveillance Noir

Greyhouse Gas

I do what my people would, Because my people would, But only if my people could, I would if my people would.

Smoke Signals

Charlie Wright

My body of work explores ideas such as mass surveillance, identity, and loss, through the mediums of painting and digital projection. I was inspired by noir photographers like Daido Moriyama, particularly his morphed figures and the way that he conveyed movement. I was also interested in the dark themes in his photography, and how looking at his work was akin to peering into the underbelly of society. I wanted to explore how emotion could be conveyed through two-dimensional figurative work, and how this linked to identity and being observed.

Trent Parke's series of photographs *The Camera is God* (2013) paved a path for me to explore different ways of painting people. I was interested in portraiture being ambiguous, where the subject isn't immediately recognisable. Parke's work, with his use of monochrome and heavy grain, linked back to my interest in noir photography. My series of paintings, *Surveillance Noir*, began with me using some of Parke's subjects (shot candidly on an Adelaide street corner) as a starting point, though I later combined them with other found subjects as source imagery. In this series of 15 acrylic painted canvas panels, I was exploring different aspects of surveillance, positive, negative, and neutral. What started as three detailed works became a larger collection as I decided less detailed multiples would be a more effective way of conveying my concept of constant surveillance. Visually, I utilised black and white in the paintings to link to my interests in Parke's work, noir photography, and covert surveillance footage, and I simulated grain by pushing paint through fishnet panels. The lack of colour keeps the image emotionally neutral. I leant into ambiguity to fragment my subject's identities further, pushing the idea of blurring the subject beyond easy recognition. I was interested in the idea of being able to capture people's dark moments without their awareness, and what it meant to make portraits of strangers. Presented in a grid, the subjects of my painting are dehumanised, categorised and captured in a collection. Reducing them to indistinct thumbnails is a way of both representing and misrepresenting their identity, reproduced at this one point in time, and boxed into how the viewer is picturing them.

My interest in ambiguity continues in the painting *Smoke Signals* which explores the theme of addiction. This work depicts my take on an opera mask, with the dual emotions of happiness and sorrow echoing the thought processes of an addict. While the blur suggests movement through the process from craving to caving, the figure also remains stagnant, moving but nothing happening. The choice to use only shades of grey to black echoes the idea that the whole cycle is miserable. This painting was conceptualised using the feeling that I had looking at the photographs of Nobuyoshi Araki. The suggestion of movement or struggle of the figures in his voyeuristic work

express something ominous, a feeling I have tried to convey in my own work. The areas of ink I have used on the hands and second face retain the appearance of wetness against the surface of the canvas, flowing, dripping, and conveying that it's a cycle that gets worse.

My diptych of smaller painted works, *Greyhouse Gas* and *I do what my people would, Because my people would, But only if my people could, I would if my people would* respond to the isolation felt by my ex-girlfriend, extradited by her friend groups. Both images are based on the work of Daido Moriyama; I have reimagined blurry reference images into gesturally painterly scenes that slip between figuration and abstraction. In *Greyhouse Gas* I have intentionally manipulated the perspective, applying a Dutch tilt, to convey that the girl is settling but the room around her feels unstable. In the second work, the men are literally blended into one block, no longer readable as individual figures. The thick line above their heads is the truth they are ignoring. The chaotic environment reflects the negative situation harming both parties depicted.

Throughout my body of work, the depiction of the figure as vague and indistinct was important in terms of what I was using to convey emotion; it was important to me that everything had this consistent level of detail or ambiguity to leave the viewer unsure of what they were seeing.