

56.40 Seconds (short course)

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My second major depicts my 14-year-old brother, Lucas. It explores themes of self-improvement and pressure, as I identified similarities between our respective experiences of year 12 and competitive swimming.

56.40 Seconds is Lucas' current personal best time for his favourite event; 100m Freestyle, emphasising the high-pressure environment endured by swimmers who are determined to improve at every opportunity. In my work, this event is also a metaphor for my stressful year 12. In both cases, participants feel overwhelmed by the notion that small mistakes could have much larger consequences – whether that be a slower time or a lower grade band. Overall, the work is significant to me because it represents our similar journeys of striving for success.

After viewing Lorraine Shemesh's series exploring water and distortion, I was inspired to consider it in my own work. Further, as Lucas and I share a mutual love for water sports, I identified with Ann Wagner's connection to the ocean – communicated through her textured landscapes of Australia's coastline, featured in this year's Saint Ignatius' Art Show.

I was also influenced and inspired by Chuck Close's woodcut portraits, including his *Self-Portraits* (2007, 2015), which were constructed by layering small, abstract shapes in a grid to create tone. I wanted to achieve a similar illusion of realism, despite my work (upon closer inspection), being made from numerous shapes of repetitive pattern.

To capture the intricate details of water, I used a Canon 5d camera with a sport-specific lens. This also allowed me to capture high-definition photographs of Lucas' movement, providing reference for extremely detailed areas of shape and tone. The image chosen was particularly beautiful, as the position of Lucas' face made him identifiable and the splashes featured organic shapes and a good variety of tone.

My work lays emphasis on the surface structure, which is flat rather than fully modelled in the traditional realist style. Gouache allowed solid coverage of colour, whilst also having an interesting matte finish. I found it challenging to find an appropriate support board, as the medium's qualities make it susceptible to flaking and cracking on some surfaces if layered too thickly. My process included applying areas of the darkest tone, then filling positive spaces with a mid-tone and finally adding highlights. I also employed modulated line to emphasise some shapes to distinguish between sections of water.

The style of my work was partially inspired by Roy Lichtenstein's Pop Art, particularly comic-style works like *Crying Girl* (1963). His use of bright coloured modulated line, dots and solid tones informed my work's strong presence of primary colour and abstract shape. The colour palette and technique, was also influenced by English painter David Hockney's 1960's, LA swimming pool series, which featured stylised forms in bold, vibrant hues – particularly blue.

I am especially pleased with the painting's composition, as it highlights Lucas' athleticism through his elongated arms. Additionally, his position and body shape creates balance. The lane ropes appearing in the background were important in depicting accurate perspective, enhancing balance and emphasising visual movement. Movement is also evident in strong linear qualities created in Lucas' swimming action. The central position of the vibrant red swimming cap immediately establishes the focal point, whilst his surname highlights his identity. Similarly, warm flesh tones starkly contrast the cool, receding blue water and allow the figure to advance in the composition.

I also employed artistic licence to alter the chosen image by depicting mirrored goggles. I found this decision extremely successful, as I believe it disconnects Lucas and the viewer, emphasising his focus on swimming. Aesthetically, unity was achieved by applying the same blue tones in the reflection and the body of water highlighting visual texture in the multitude of small shapes.

If I created the work again, I would explore cropped close-up views and more abstract compositions of Lucas' face. However, I do like the dramatic, high splashes captured in my composition. I am pleased with my painting, especially given the challenges presented by this time-consuming technique. I believe I have expressed my intention well; reflecting my passionate belief that, as NFL footballer Steve Young states, "The principle is competing against yourself. It's about self-improvement, being better than you were the day before".