

# Expressing our Experience

*An exhibit of the creative responses to the pandemic experience by Staff Members of THS-South*

Artworks and their associated statements give insight into the experiences of working in a pandemic

Opening K2 RHH 15 October 2020  
On display to 5 November 2020

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## **Acknowledgements**

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### **Research Team:**

Dr Karen Ford

Erin McLeod

Dr Claire Morley

Leigh Tesch

Laura Pyszkowski

Jenni Pyefinch

Dr Eliza Burke

Contact – [rhh@ths.tas.gov.au](mailto:rhh@ths.tas.gov.au)

**Ellen Burke**

'ICU'

Photograph

2020



'The spotlight has been shone on the ICU during the COVID-19 pandemic and there has also been a strong focus on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

As the equipment nurse in the ICU, it was an extremely stressful time for me, particularly regarding PPE. I felt suffocated by colleague's anxiety and I felt as though I was responsible for the health and safety of my colleagues and that I needed to source PPE in order to protect them. As a nurse, PPE is our protection. As a patient, nurses are their protection....

But what if they can't see their protection? I was privileged to meet a COVID-19 survivor, who spent some time in our ICU. He reflected on his stay, and one thing that really stood out to me was his comment... 'I could never see their faces, all I wanted was to see your faces'.

During COVID-19, ICU, but they can't see us!

## **Ashleigh Symons**

'My COVID Experience'

Poem

2020

'My poem was about my experience during the heightened state of the COVID-19 pandemic, here in Tasmania, whilst working within my department in the public health setting. It reflects the new norms that we were all required to adopt, the constantly changing health advice, how it affected our department and patients, as well as the impact it had on me being unable to see my family interstate.

I love language and thoroughly enjoyed creating this poem, as I haven't written anything in years. For me, it was quite emotional to construct this piece, as I reminisced about memories with my family and how much I miss them, particularly as I am unable to see them.

Additionally, I also felt a sense of relief and security, residing in Tasmania, which has managed COVID-19 extremely well with little to no cases.

I thought of my family and friends in Victoria, who were in a State of Emergency, doing it extremely tough in isolation, being unable to leave their homes and some of which were unemployed.

Conversely, it reminded me of how grateful and appreciative I was of my situation, as I had employment, have maintained a job throughout the pandemic and have also been able to go about life as normal, as restrictions eased.'

**Kylie Chilcott**

'Perspex Perspective'

Photo-collage

2020



'The Cluster - Perspex Perspective

2020 - COVID - 19 Pandemic -The Year of the Nurse

This is dedicated to all the incredible healthcare workers I am privileged to work alongside on 10KW, the current COVID-19 Unit.

This artwork is a personal response to my COVID -19 experience. The chosen materials also reflect this experience, perspex, images in shades of black to white with a select few coloured images of nature, my solace, taken during this time.

The images capture some of the incredible healthcare workers, the environment in which they work, along with some other images that are personally meaningful.

Black and white represents dark and light, good and bad, right or wrong, plus or minus, yes or no. We see the world in colour, removing it from an image can help us see the emotional state without distraction.

Perspex is now everywhere, utilised as a protective barrier which can also create barriers to communication and connection.

A cluster of images, with similar themes and people positioned closely together.

Even during such periods of uncertainty some things remain certain. Autumn comes, Winter, Spring and Summer follow. The Sun rises and falls. The moon will wax and wane, grace us with its presence. The birds will sing. The tides come and go. The snow falls, capping the mountains tops.

At a time when many things seem to be changing constantly, stillness is everywhere.'

**Kathryn Marsden**

'Pandemic Pulse'

Spotify playlist

2020



'The ranks are steadily falling

We have been frightened

We look over our shoulder at people

We know death is the roll of a dice

We fight isolation and separation

Emotions have been wild

We have gone without

Having no money means having no life

We have witnessed a lot of death

We naively yearn for before

We get angry we are not in control

We wait in eerie quiet for a cure

We are hopeful'

**Ria Gilham**

'Psilocybe'

Mixed markers and pigment on illustration paper

2020



'Psilocybin mushrooms drip their poisons as a community of terrified eyeballs is forced underground...It's impossible for most humans to isolate themselves completely; like the eyeballs in the picture, we now live and work in separate little enclaves, some of them suffocatingly close! When one enclave faces danger, there isn't a great deal the others can do to help. There are other elements of life in a global pandemic also pictured here: I live at the foot of kunanyi, and the dark, wet forest trails have helped to keep me sane. There have been so many strange and interesting mushrooms this winter, and it felt like the entire population of Hobart went to see the tarn in June. The process of finding meaning when I make art is similar to dreaming: I often understand the picture and therefore my own feelings after it is completed. So much of my work falls into the "magic realism" genre, and I think this is why. I have a love of colours and shapes with black outlines, which lends a storybook quality to it, and I think this works well for magic realism. Thank you for giving me the impetus to keep drawing: I was so busy coping I almost forgot how important the artistic process is!'

## Leanne Crosswell and Lesley Innes

'Scrabbleboard'

Mixed media

2020



'Hello! We are Lesley and Leanne; and we love crafts; words; and working as mental health nurses.

This is why we chose a Scrabble board to express our feelings about our experience working in a "cold" ward during the Corona virus pandemic.

We work as Registered Nurses on a sub-acute mental health ward – Mistral Place.

Mistral Place was a "cold" ward which means we would not have any patients with corona virus.

Many of the words we have used are now universal COVID-speak – ISO UBEREATS PPE.

Other words we used to express our experience were:

BINGO - after a game of "Bedroom Bingo" we invented to try to "rally the troops" during lockdown. Taking social distancing to the extreme we played Bingo from the patients' bedrooms.

DEBUG - the hand sanitiser!!

OBS – checking patients and visitors' temperature.

SIGN IN – having to sign everybody in with the corona screening form.

PAPERS – feeling overwhelmed by warnings, policies and forms about Covid-19.

TRIP – we took a virtual trip to KFC by totalling our steps on the treadmill.

HUG – we sent a virtual hug to our colleague working from home – we looked like loving zombies!!

We found this activity allowed us to reflect on our feelings during the lockdown and we enjoyed doing it! I enjoyed making this wall hanging as it helped to reflect on the experience of living and working through the COVID-19 pandemic.'



## **Leanne Crosswell and Lesley Innes**

'Scrabbleboard'

Mixed media

2020

'We were excited to be part of this project. We actually found an old, coffee stained scrabble board and mis-matched letter tiles between our ward and our homes and stuck it all together before we sent the photos. We felt this was quite pertinent, as we were in lockdown and therefore could not just go to a shop and buy a new game. For me, the mis-matched letter tiles are also representative of the chaos of rapidly changing guidelines and paperwork during this period.

Mistral Place is usually an open unit, with a stable staff population over many years, and a number of clients who have come and gone over the years, with whom we have developed some lasting rapport. We struggled most with Physical Distancing, which restricted our ability to engage in ward activities or even share a meal as a group. Some of us felt 'guilty' we were allowed out to lunch or to go home, when clients could not have visitors or day leave. Our manager acquired an iPad and iPhone to assist clients to stay in touch with family, but it was not used much.'

Lesley - Registered Nurse

**Bernice James**

'Old Friends'

Acrylic paint on plyboard

2020



'In this time of Covid-19, self-isolation is something important that I was able to do to help flatten the curve. I found that self-isolation can be restorative and empowering but also create a feeling of social disconnectedness and disempowerment.

As I had been spending so much time in my living room, I decided to paint a still life composition consisting of objects that have been sitting on my china cabinet for a long time. I realised that I look at these objects almost every day without knowing very much about them. I discovered the statue was collected by my grandfather in New Guinea in the 1940s during WW2. The books were also collected by my grandparents and date back to 1870. I have enjoyed studying these objects in more depth, including the historical significance of them over the past few months in isolation and have attempted to capture some of their essence in a still life painting. These 'old friends' kept me company during my isolation and developed my interest in not only the history of the objects themselves but in my family history. It was an enjoyable task getting lost in the making of this work during a strange and stressful time for my family, friends, colleagues and community.'

**Bernice James**

'I Want To Break Free'

Acrylic and oil paint on plyboard

2020



'In an attempt to stay positive and optimistic during isolation, I painted a landscape of one of my favourite places to be on Bruny Island near the lighthouse. I was craving the freedom to travel again and to be able to immerse myself in this type of vista and I was hoping to create a mood of calm, peace and serenity in this painting as that is how this scene made me feel the day I photographed it a few years ago. By immersing myself in the painting process I was able to imagine myself in this wonderful landscape and forget that I was in isolation and not able to venture outdoors except for essentials. This place gave me a strong sense of freedom, calmness, physical and mental restoration and happiness. By painting this landscape during isolation, I was instantly taken back to this beautiful location and these positive feelings also returned as part of the painting process.'

**Leanne Crosswell**

'Flourbag'

Mixed media textile

2020



'Flour bag - sometimes felt "trapped" and anxious at work – at times like this I like to be as positive as possible.

I enjoyed making this wall hanging as it helped to reflect on the experience of living and working through the COVID-19 pandemic.

I tried to stitch a positive message by cutting out the words from a Tasmanian brand flour bag. When we first went into lockdown I was worried we wouldn't be able to buy the things we took for granted. This reminded me of the Great Depression when people used pretty flour sacks to make clothes and scraps of material to make Suffolk puffs. I used the 70s pillow cases because they are so cheerful! I am so proud and thankful Tasmania is getting through this.'

## Pip Rice

'Aurora Australis'

Photo-Poem

2020



'Although working multiple jobs in THS-SOUTH throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to acquire the *RSV Aurora Australis* and keep her in Tasmania as an Antarctic Museum also became tangible. Thus, the Aurora Australis Foundation (AAF) was formed in May 2020 following 6 years of preparation. Despite the timing, four Directors on the Board worked day and night around our jobs to make this reality, two in Victoria, and two in Hobart, meeting via Zoom.

Dr Mel and I met at the Royal Hobart Hospital whilst training Lay Surgical Assistants in emergency surgery skills for the Australian Antarctic Division. We saw the chance to provide a gap in public knowledge of this remarkable ship, plentiful stories and science to educate our future, preserve our past and reflect the national cultural heritage this ship brings to Tasmania, the Gateway to Antarctica.

Ironically, in the end it was the pandemic that sealed her fate with health and economic collapse and the Australian government not forthcoming with necessary funds to secure purchase. The ship was sold in August, although we still know not whether for scrap or overseas. Another casualty of this Coronavirus.

Expecting the ship to disappear without fanfare quietly one night, which would not be a fitting conclusion for a ship of this significance, I escaped at dawn on my way to another shift to say my goodbyes. The sun was just rising, the cloud band stretched across the sky, a rather suitable moment symbolising a long line of achievements and lives touched during the 30 years of service to our nation.'

## Andrea Chelkowski

'We will meet again'

Oil paint and mixed media on board

2020



'During the lock down period of COVID-19 in 2020 I was working as a Clinical Nurse Educator at the Royal Hobart Hospital. It was possible that we may have needed to be redeployed to work in COVID-19 hotspot areas if Hobart had an outbreak. I considered what it would mean for my family if I were to be exposed to COVID-19 and brought it home to them. My mother and husband were considered high risk if they caught the illness and were in self isolation. My family and I thought it would be best for me to move away from home if I were to work in a COVID-19 area, to keep them safe. The idea of not seeing my children or husband for potentially a few months devastated me. My children were also home learning, couldn't see their friends or grandparents and we found the whole period in general very stressful.

I found comfort in Queen Elizabeth's address to the Nations, her COVID-19 speech on the 5th of April 2020. Her words resonated with me, "we should take comfort that while we may have more to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again". I used a variety of mediums; oil on board, charcoal and oil pastels to capture my connection with and admiration for Queen Elizabeth. Her message gave me strength to be able to tackle whatever challenges lay ahead.'

**Claire Warren**

'Epeius'

Poem and watercolour and oil pastel on paper

2020



'The Greek Myth of the Trojan Horse sparked an idea for an artwork, a flowy, abstracted horse standing strong in greens and blues. I wanted it to represent the ocean and the steadiness of the health workforce during an unexpected time. The poem captures the quiet eeriness of not knowing when things could change, the tension of waiting... and waiting, as well as the ball of feelings for our colleagues in the North West and limbo in our home state.

I had so many sparks of creativity during this time but not the energy to follow them up. I envied my friends and husband who were working from home and finding solace in creation and cooking. I would leave work and drive through a near empty city feeling busy and frazzled and it took great self-control to not allow work to stretch over my down time. I wrote this poem over a number of weeks, returning to it to adjust and play with it. It was a therapeutic way of being 'ok' that I hadn't managed the creative things I desperately wanted to do during 'lockdown'. I submitted the poem and realised that I needed to make some time to paint. I am glad I did, the image is exactly what I envisaged months ago.

Interesting: The Trojan Horse was built by Master Carpenter and Professional Boxer, Epeius.'

**Sam Hernan**

'Untitled 2020'

Watercolour paint on paper

2020



'This artwork is water colour on paper, I painted this with thoughts of how many people were experiencing sadness. Sadness that COVID was causing isolation from family, friends, many plans being cancelled with no idea when they could be made again, changes to the way of life and wondering how our children would be impacted by this. I find it saddening to think that the way of life we had may be changed forever.'

I work as a Registered Nurse in NPICU, for many years I've painted on the glass wall to brighten up the unit, I have also done murals at Ronald McDonald house to bring colour and life to the families needing to stay there.'



## **Anonymous**

'Untitled'

Text

2020

'I found this experience of trying to express myself creatively quite (read - really) difficult to do – at first I didn't want to even think about anything to do with COVID and to be honest thought it was too soon to consider researching our experiences of what had happened as I felt / feel we are still in the middle of it and possibly not even at the start of What Might Happen. However, I did see the possible benefits of trying to express my feelings in new ways and wanted to support the researchers so thought I'd give it a go. I wish I could have written a poem or drawn a picture or submitted some beautiful photographs but haven't been able to either spend enough time on it or 'let myself' be that creative. I think I feared opening myself up to everyone and showing my vulnerability but also knew that I should try and do just that as I thought it would be therapeutic – in the long run! So I have used words, there is much more I could say but have tried to keep it concise and 'controlled'! I think this has been a 'process' of being able to express myself, it has taken me quite a few weeks to even write the short amount I have written. Some days I feel/felt I could say more than others and when I feel less stressed I can be more objective and rational, other days I am reminded of the feeling of wondering when and if the tsunami will hit and it is harder to stay focused and calm. I also realised after writing that it expresses my whole experience of the last few months not just work-related experiences. When I see the words which I have highlighted I do note the positive benefits of the relationships I have with family, friends and work colleagues both here and overseas and I am truly thankful for them and for the reminder that because of God's great love for us we will not be consumed 😊'

**Andrea Ward**  
'Whirlwind'  
Pastel on paper  
2020



'My experience of working as a chaplain at the RHH during the pandemic was/is like being in a whirlwind.

All these various things were happening and still are:

the actual pandemic ... with the hospital being rearranged to accommodate that ... the atmosphere of anxiety and stress ... the constantly changing restrictions, regulations etc. ... the loss of 2/3 of my colleagues during the time > I was 1 of the 3 chaplains left to cover for the whole hospital ... visiting patients who were particularly distressed by it all - around Easter the chaplains were pretty much the only ones who could actually visit patients ... learning new technology ... being a COSI key person ... the move to K block ... the effect this situation had/has on staff (primary, secondary, tertiary...) ... and other factors...  
... a colourful whirlwind.

There is a calm centre in the middle of the whirlwind, which is my heart, and which is also the portal to beyond.

I took this time to be about creative learning and healing, so a lot was coming out of it too. The heart being at the centre also expresses, "Love is the only way".

Creating the artwork was my thing. I process things by writing journal or sometimes drawing/painting journal.

And drawing for a research study is my thing as well, because often when I share my artwork with others it helps them, too.

So "The Whirlwind" is like a journal page, and drawing it was therapeutic.'

**Lee Cheong**

'That's Leaf!'

Ink on paper

2020



'Working as a nurse during COVID-19 it has been important to find relief and escape, not only from increased workloads, but also the endless media coverage, discussions and feeling of uncertainty this produces. Like many people being out in nature gave me moments of peace, relaxation and normality. We are so lucky in Tasmania to have access to beautiful wild areas. I wanted to try and capture some of this beauty, as well as to convey that peace and wonder still exists during these trying times, we just need to go out and seek it.'

Making the artwork extended this feeling of relaxation and escapism found in nature. When I am painting/drawing my mind can switch off, it becomes a kind of meditation. At the same time, it's exciting to try and recreate and capture what is so wondrous and beautiful.'

**Aimee Butler**

'Snow'

Photograph

2020



'The photo is of snow falling in Aimee's front yard. During COVID-19, she found herself snowed in at home and unable to travel to the Royal Hobart Hospital, as many roads across Tasmania were closed, including her route to work along the Highland Lakes Rd and Midland Highway, to Hobart. Thus, being at home gave Aimee the opportunity to experience COVID-19, from a different perspective. That is, in an intimate home environment and not as one the Nurses wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) and caring for a COVID-19 patient, in an isolated room. Moreover, she had the unexpected opportunity, to experience and photograph beauty, during this 'unprecedented' time.'

## Jay Krishnan

'Vennilave//Violin by Jithin'

Duration: 3:35 mins

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/yEv-iOWmLn8>

2020



'My name is Jithin Krishnan, working as a Registered Nurse in Renal unit, RHH. Even though my profession is nursing, my passion is playing Violin and I love both. My style of playing Violin is Indian classical style (carnatic) and I would like to explore Western style as well. Here I performed a south Indian movie song, hope you guys will enjoy it.'

We welcomed 2020 with lots of expectations and planning but it's all messed up with unexpected outbreak of COVID-19, that is what we called "Man proposes God disposes".

Unfortunately our world is still struggling to overcome this difficult situation and awaiting for a successful vaccination. Literally this is the time we need to hold our hands together but remember we need to keep a safe distance of 1.5 meters (just joking) and to fight against this little Monster.

Here comes the importance of Art and Music to get rid of this boredom during lockdown period and to convey the message of preventing spread of virus.

Out of my working hours I spent my free time to upload music videos in my YouTube Channel, so that I can entertain people and share their experiences through social media. The impact or lesson I have learned from this situation is enjoy each and every moment of our life, be kind and friendly to our fellow members because you never know what will happen tomorrow.

Thank you so much for inviting me to participate in this Research.'

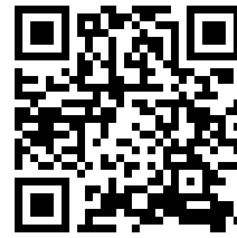
## **Pulse Youth Health South**

'Virus Oddity Flight 19'

Duration: 4 minutes

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/JKAWFFKs8ec>

2020



'Working during COVID-19 was for us a time of change and uncertainty. While we still came to work, we did not see our clients face-to-face. Things changed very rapidly in that first week. We were not sure if we would stay open. Increasing numbers of cases so close to home (North West) coupled with traumatic world news was upsetting for everyone. We have all been left feeling much more uncertain about our world.

This activity was a chance to look more deeply at how we felt. Sometimes work is just one foot in front of the other and the crisis passes and there is no real reflection. One of the things we noticed was the difference in COVID experiences within the team. Some felt isolated, some felt very connected through social media. Some carried on with little change. Some lost hugely important parts of their usual lives. It is important not to make assumptions. One young team member stated the process highlighted for her just how much she missed live music. Another was quick to identify the 'numbers' used significantly during the period. Numbers were important.

Pulse Youth Health has a history of working creatively with young people. Two team members, Matthew Fargher and Jane Palfreyman, have used music in their work with young people and pursue musical interests out of work time. They came up with the idea of re-wording a known song to reflect our experience. They brainstormed with the team regarding key words, statements and feelings. The song was chosen for the 'feel' it already had and words were substituted more relevant to the team. The recording process itself was fun and uplifting.

The recording process was filmed, and edited, so we have a visual record as well.'

## Aimee Butler

'Mack the Knife - K10 West' Song

Duration: 2:50 mins

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/e8zArtT1HVI>

2020



'Aimee Butler has been completing her Graduate Nurse Year on K10 West. She is surrounded by beautiful Nurses and receives tailored support, specific to her learning needs. However, just as "Mack the Knife", in Bertolt Brecht's The Threepenny Opera (1928), wreaks havoc on people's lives, COVID-19, sneaking 'round the corner', has irrevocably changed lives too. Thus, when you substitute, Quincy Jones' Big Band player's names, from Sinatra's 1984 recording, with the names of Nurse's from K10 West, you get a song called "Mack The Knife - K10 West". Creating this work, has given Aimee the opportunity to express herself in an artistic manner. Specifically, forming lyrics based upon personal observation, verbally experimenting with words and rhythm, as well as, a cappella voice, based upon Quincy Jones' melodic arrangement.'

## Kathryn Marsden and K9 nursing graduates

'Untitled'

Photo collage series

2020



'This series is intended to act as a reminder of the very start of the first-wave of COVID-19 at the Royal Hobart Hospital, when all eyes were closely watching the international scene, when the ABC New Story Lab was airing daily P.M. addresses and the local scene was becoming very real.

It's at times like this you look back and ask, what were you doing when...?

What were we doing? We were opening the new K Block tower, we were increasing the size of our clinical areas, we were all orientating to the new work space, we were devising new models of care, we were packing up and preparing to physically move patients and we were inducting 18 new nursing graduates across just 2 clinical areas, triple usual numbers. As clinical nurse educators we formulated a Plan A and a B and a C and even a plan D, trying to anticipate what the world would look like tomorrow.

Plan D was rolled out and we saw the graduates muster courage, strength, leadership and resilience. These pictures are merely how their nursing career unfolded during the COVID-19 pandemic.'



## Sam Leishman

'Beethoven Hats'

Crochet with mixed natural yarns

2020



'In December this year, concert halls around the world would have been celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven. Instead, they have fallen silent.

Ironically, Beethoven spent most of his adult life unable to hear. As a young man Beethoven's hearing began to fail, and by age 40 he was profoundly deaf. In 1802, aged 32, he wrote his Heiligenstadt Testament, a letter to his brothers in which he chooses a life of isolation over suicide.

From an English translation:

*Though born with a fiery, active temperament, even susceptible to the diversions of society, I have been compelled to isolate myself, to live life alone...*

*...for me there can be no relaxation with my fellow men, no refined conversations, no mutual exchange of ideas. I must live almost alone, like one who has been banished.*

Beethoven found solace in isolation through long walks in the countryside. His 6th Symphony, the Pastorale, is an intimate reflection of the peace he felt during his time spent alone. The work is written in 5 movements, each with a descriptive title.

- 1) Arrival in the countryside
- 2) Scene by a brook
- 3) Merry gathering
- 4) Storm
- 5) Shepherd's song

I've been making hats and other woolly items to raise funds for Beyond Blue for the past year or so, and lockdown saw production go into overdrive. To make the 5 hats on display, I've used Beethoven's descriptive titles as a cue. I most humbly pay tribute to a man whose enduring gift reminds me I can be alone yet need not be lonely.'