

Bruny Island Artists: Critical Response

Ecocriticism can be defined as the study of 'the relationship between literature and the physical environment'. The movement questions the role of the environment in our society, and how literary treatment and representation of nature impacts our actions on nature itself. While in Tasmania, my group (the art group) stayed on Bruny Island for four days, a beautiful island off the south eastern coast. There we explored the natural environment around us, and made artworks often in response to our surroundings.

We made larger scale group artworks, as well as individual paintings and drawings. The larger scale works were sculptures constructed in nature, using natural materials. These were inspired by Andy Goldsworthy, a sculptor and photographer who creates natural or ephemeral sculptures in nature itself.

While hiking the fluted cape track, we stopped at a small pebbly beach (pictured left). We split off and began making sculptures, and eventually ended up with most of the group collaborating on one. The idea was to gather driftwood and hold it all up vertically supported by rocks in a line. We then gathered seaweed and draped it between and around the driftwood to link the columns all together. To accent and add more colour we used green moss covered rocks from the shoreline and placed them at the base of the sculpture.

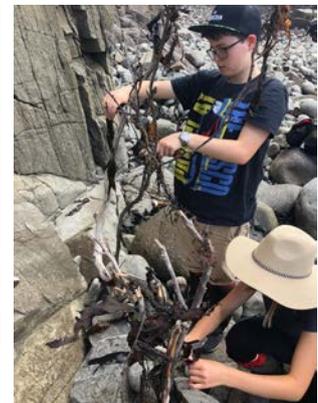
While when making this artwork there was no meaning in mind aside from the theme, looking back the work can be interpreted through an environmental lens. The seaweed links the branches together, like all life forms on earth are linked. It could also represent how humans are hanging the environment out to dry, like how the seaweed and the moss on the rocks will dry out in the sun.



Left: the location



Middle: the first sculpture (untitled i)



Right: building the sculpture

The other two group sculptures were constructed at another beach. After a day of exploring the island, including a trip to a berry farm and an oyster farm, we drove down to Cloudy Bay; a long, private stretch of sand, surrounded by dense, green scrubland and bush. The wind was blowing and there was an icy chill.

There was an enormous amount of seaweed and algae on the shoreline and leading into the water. On the beach it was a pale pink, grey, or white, but in the water close to the tide it was an orangey red. The texture was like nothing we had ever felt before; it peeled off in fibrous layers, or in long strips like skin. We used the pale algae to make two shapes on the sand. First a circle with a slight colour gradient, surrounded by the red algae. We then used driftwood and shells to create a border. The final result looked somewhat like a mandala (pictured left). In the second sculpture we used the rest of the pale algae we had gathered to create a large organic shape. We then placed small rocks all the way around the outside of it, and then bordered the rocks with a small layer of red algae on the outside (pictured right).

Both of these artworks can be interpreted in a similar way. The texture of the algae is remarkably like skin, highlighting the fact that it is a living organism. The shapes used are organic and free flowing, like many things in nature, and also resemble cells, which make up all living things. The circle in the second artwork represents the circle of life, and how eventually the algae, the rocks and the driftwood will return to the earth. The cycle will begin again, perhaps when the tide makes its way up the beach. The artworks also use common patterns in nature which we take for granted, making a statement about how we need to treasure the earth as it is.



Left: the 2nd sculpture (untitled ii)
Middle: photographing the sculpture
Right: the 3rd sculpture



Left: gathering the algae
Right: gathering seaweed and driftwood

Since these three works were based in nature, made of natural materials, the only proof we have that they ever existed is through photographs. Successful photographs were surprisingly hard to achieve. The first of the sculptures while vertical and easy to capture, blended into the background and was significantly less striking on camera. The other two were flat on the ground, and were both quite large. This meant we had to come up with creative ways to get height from which to photograph from. We experimented with sitting on each others shoulders, and creating a chain to support someone leaning forward with the camera. Nature is spectacular, but is always more spectacular when viewed through natural eyes, and my memories of the artworks and the experience do more justice than the photos that were taken.

Aside from the earth sculptures the group constructed, we also made a lot of individual artworks using mediums of our choice. I did some pencil and line drawings, and also a few watercolour paintings. These were inspired by the stunning landscapes around us. I painted a small jar of jam and some plants from the berry farm we visited, and some animals skulls and specimens from a historical area called the quarantine. The group also made a trip up to the Bruny Island lighthouse, and from there we used watercolours to paint the fantastic scenery as the sun set.

The artworks we produced on Bruny Island were our attempt to reflect and represent the landscape around us. We used materials from nature, and placed the sculptures in natural environments. They are ephemeral, and will have returned to the same earth from which they were produced.