

# SMART EXPRESSION

OPENING NIGHT SPEECH BY RUTH JU-SHIH LI

THURSDAY 24 APRIL 2022

Thank you, Deborah.

Hello, I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, the Cammeraygal people, and pay respect to Elders past and present and emerging, and acknowledge their transgenerational connections to earth, water and culture.

My name is Ruth and I'm a ceramic, installation and ephemeral artist. I was one of the artists who exhibited in *Parallel Wanderings*, the lunar new year exhibition before this one. And like Deborah said, I grew up here in Chatswood and went to both Chatswood public and Chatswood high, before going on to study at the National Art School.

I want to give a big congratulations to all the students here for your beautiful body of works and for pulling through the HSC during a pandemic. You all bravely faced the many challenges of navigating online classes and balancing self-study, exams and building a body of work, all while under the pressure of making life defining decisions for your future. And this is all evident in these emotionally and conceptually charged works that explore a range of contemporary ideas relevant to our community. The life skills you've acquired during this difficult period, like time management skills, perseverance and proactiveness, will become great assets, especially if you want to pursue a future in the arts.

Smart Expression is a great way for students to experience what a professional exhibition is like and gain a better understanding of what to expect as they prepare to further their studies. It was also my first public exhibition out of high school before attending the National Art School. I still remember there were only around 8 of us with all our works in glass cabinets in the foyer of the old council building. So, it's amazing to see such a large number of students showing in this beautiful art space here on the concourse.

It's also wonderful to see an array of different mediums and techniques being explored; from photography, mix media, textiles and ceramics, to painting, drawing, video and digital manipulation. This diversity doesn't just speak to the bravery and creativity of the students, it also points to the schools and teacher's commitment in providing the much-needed support, freedom and facilities to enable the students to do so.

And of course, Willoughby City Council, for recognising and acknowledging the importance of the arts in our community. Now more than ever, we are seeing and appreciating the power of expression in art and its ability to connect us and build a sense of community. So, thank you for supporting these students and giving them the platform to exhibit their works.

I hear that 6 out of the 30 students here will continue pursuing further studies in the arts. As an emerging artist, I want to encourage you with 3 things I wish I knew when I was in art school.

- Firstly, though it is tempting to run full speed ahead and go at it alone, you should surround yourself with people who support you but are not afraid to tell you the truth. They will be there not only to encourage you but also to keep you accountable.
- Self-doubt will be ever-present, it's not something that you can outgrow, but you'll learn to channel it into motivation for self-improvement.
- And lastly – learn to embrace criticism, at times it may put you down but it can also build you up and push your practice beyond anything you could've imagined.

I want to finish by saying a big thank you to everyone for coming tonight. Especially the friends and families of the students, your support will become essential in their lives as they continue to build their practice. Thank you everyone for your continuing support of the arts and for coming to celebrate the wonderful achievements of these students.