



Thank you students and thank you Mrs Sally Herron for asking me to be here tonight to join the Blue Mountains Grammar School community in celebrating the achievements of your young artists and designers.

It is certainly a privilege to be back here on campus. My first time here was almost a decade ago when I worked with students facilitating a workshop and so it is indeed lovely to return back to your school to be part of this wonderful celebration – a culmination of all that has transpired in the art and design studios this year.

I wear a few hats in my professional world: on one hand I am an artist and designer and when not in the studio, I am a very passionate educator. These days I teach at university but I spent the first half of my teaching career in a high school art classroom – and these were some of the most fulfilling times of my life: working with young people in harnessing their creativity, in helping them channel their voices as young global citizens, in unveiling the multitude of possibilities the artworld had to offer them. So to the students here tonight, I come to look at your work not only as a teacher also but as a fellow artist and designer.

And I am sure the other members of the audience will agree, that the work you have produced this year is a testament not only to your creativity and technical skills but also to your work ethic and commitment to your studies. Across drawing and painting and sculpture to product and object design to more emerging technologies such as 3D printing – what a wonderful exhibition you have all contributed to, both in individual pursuits and in collective endeavours.

When we walk around any exhibition, we, as the viewer, as members of the audience, are entering into a dialogue of sorts between ourselves and the artwork. As students – as artists and designers, part of your job is to engage the audience, to draw the viewer closer – so your work can speak to them. And successful artworks and design works do just that. They are able to hold our attention as viewers: they invite us to wander through the layers of ideas and possible meanings and to investigate their materials, techniques and processes. Successful artworks can surprise, challenge and inspire us. And there are artworks and design works here tonight that do just that.

Developing a sophisticated making practice is indeed a complex intellectual activity. Making – on any level – whether this be a Year 7 student endeavouring to capture form and value (as seen in those delightful still life paintings on display across the way) - or a Year 12 student (such as Isabella's HSC body of work here to my left): making involves high-level practical and conceptual reasoning. These makers represent intentional points of view in the way they

have represented their world in their work and they have used multiple perspectives to do this – whether this be an expression of their personal experience or a response to wider global events. They have drawn sophisticated interpretations about these issues and provide powerful insights into what matters to them as young artists and designers in 2023.

And how wonderful that our NSW curriculum places great importance on subjects such as Visual Arts and Design & Technology – subjects that reward individual thinking, that endeavour to challenge students to maximize their own distinctive talents as artists and designers, giving them an opportunity to develop a critical and intensely personal view of themselves in relation to the complexities of the world around them.

I have just finished my own exhibition this week in Sydney – a mammoth experience from beginning to end. And as I worked through the trials and tribulations of making artworks, that at times were simply not working – causing many ‘crisis of confidence’ moments, it reminded me that despite the frustrations at times, despite the perceived failures – I actually don’t want to be anywhere else in the world – but my studio – doing just this – making this ‘thing’. And perhaps some of the students here tonight can relate to this feeling.

I’ve learnt that that there is no rule book on how to be an artist or a designer. It’s a mix of following your intuition and following your passion; thinking on your feet, being adaptable and flexible; moving through a network of procedures in order to problem-solve and negotiate roadblocks; collaborating and communicating with others; multi-tasking; thinking critically, laterally, creatively; it’s about life-long learning; seeking out mentors, surrounding yourself with people who inspire you; and at the end of all of this – sharing your work with others – and even perhaps giving back to others when you can, helping others along in their creative journey. And while this may sound like a long laundry list of skills – in actual fact, the young artists and designers here tonight already have these in place. Subject areas like TAS and Visual Arts are already preparing students for their future lives where these skills will be crucial to whatever career pathway they travel down. Whether that be a career in science or education or politics - their art and design teachers have prepared them well, so that the skills that they have learnt here will be transferrable to whatever they end up doing in life - and will assist them to be able to navigate the challenges of the future.

So to the artists and designers on show here tonight – well done in taking on the challenges your teachers have set for you this year. Whether you are in Year 7 at the beginning of your high school journey or Year 12 – about to start another chapter of your life, I encourage you to continue to be curious and caring members of the world, to share your vision with others, to take creative risks – and make the most of these wonderful opportunities that you have. And I am sure you will all thank your teachers for all their hard work in supporting you throughout this experience and commend them on putting together such a fabulous showcase for us all to enjoy. Thank you for having me and I wish you all well for the remainder of the school year.

**Sarah Fordham**  
**2023**