



AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

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OUR HISTORY

The Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT) is a national charity that manages a range of tertiary education scholarships for the children and grandchildren of Australian ex-serving men and women.

AVCAT was established in 2003. Its history having originated with the former Australian Vietnam War Veterans' Trust (AVWVT), established in 1985. The purpose of AVWVT was to distribute the Australian share of the funds received from the Agent Orange legal settlement in the USA to Vietnam Veterans and their dependants.

The funds were distributed as cash payments to Vietnam Veterans in deserving circumstances. The AVWVT operated two funds, one was immediately available to Vietnam Veterans.

The other smaller fund which represented 10% of the total fund, was set aside for future use to provide longer term assistance to veterans. In particular, The AVWVT aimed to provide for any increase in assistance sought from widows for the care and education of their children.

The aim of AVWVT was to provide financial assistance to children of Vietnam War Veterans who would not, without a scholarship, have the financial means to complete a tertiary education degree.

AVCAT, has continued the legacy of AVWVT by assisting the children and grandchildren of Australian ex-service men and women to a better future through tertiary education. The scholarships are targeted at people who are assessed as being in financial need,

show academic potential and are deserving. All scholarships support full-time tertiary study at a University, a TAFE College or a Registered Training Organisation.

AVCAT manages the Long Tan Bursaries on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs and sponsored scholarships on behalf of a range of ex-service organisations and individual donors.

The Long Tan Bursaries are named to commemorate the Battle of Long Tan. The Battle of Long Tan was one of the most fierce actions seen by Australian soldiers during the Vietnam War.

The battle took place in the Long Tan rubber plantation on 18 August 1966. That day, 108 Australian and New Zealand soldiers fought a pitched battle against over 2,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops.

Vietnam Veterans' Day is commemorated each year on 18 August. The day was chosen to commemorate D Company, 6RAR who fought in the Battle of Long Tan. Therefore, each year applications for AVCAT managed scholarships are opened on 18 August.

The Long Tan Bursary, originally for the children of Vietnam Veterans has now been extended to include the grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans.

This year AVCAT manages more scholarships than ever. We assist approximately 240 young people each year to reach their potential through achieving a range of academic and personal goals.



Australian soldiers in Vietnam wait to be taken back to Nui Dat. Picture: Michael Coleridge

CHAIR'S REPORT

I am pleased to report on another busy but rewarding year in 2019 for AVCAT. AVCAT has had a long and distinguished period of service in support of the children of veterans. From our earliest beginnings in 1985, when we began as the Australian Vietnam War Veterans' Trust, we have consistently maintained our focus on providing financial support to the children of Australian Veterans. This was primarily to allow them to reach their academic potential. In all cases this may not have been possible without the additional support that we are able to provide. Our criteria for selection have remained broadly consistent; academic potential, being in necessitous circumstances, and deservedness.

We were established primarily to administer what became the Long Tan Bursaries for the children of veterans of the Vietnam Conflict. This is now done on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), and it remains our core responsibility. Our present Services of Agreement is due to conclude in June 2020 and we continue to work with DVA in both satisfying their requirements and ensuring continuity of support to Bursary recipients. I place on record our gratitude for the support offered to us by DVA - the provision of office accommodation in Sydney, use of meeting rooms, the hosting of presentation events at DVA offices around Australia, and periodic access to the Secretary and senior officers of DVA to discuss our operations, intentions and challenges.

For 2019, we were limited to presenting only 37 bursaries, while receiving 52 eligible applications. Later in 2019, we then

saw the first wave of applications from the grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans following approval in the 2018 Budget to open access to grandchildren while still offering priority to eligible children. This saw an increase in eligible applications for the 2020 academic year to 82, adding weight to the need to increase available bursaries back to 50 or even more; a matter on which representations continue to be made. In the academic year of 2019, there were a total of 111 Long Tan Bursary recipients undertaking courses.

Building on our basic infrastructure support from DVA, primarily accommodation and staffing costs, and in an effort to satisfy the wider demand for scholarship support from the children and grandchildren of other conflicts, AVCAT has managed a complementary scholarship scheme. These scholarships are sponsored by ex-service organisations and individual donors. Efforts have continued to expand this program, and since 2017, the Queensland State Branch of the RSL has been the strongest supporter, presently offering scholarships to a total of 75 students. We greatly value the confidence which all of our scholarship sponsors place in us to manage the selection of suitable recipients and support them through their studies. We are now seeking to identify donors to ensure that there is an equitable access to these scholarships across Australia, noting that most scholarships are confined to the geographic area of the sponsor.

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Honourable Darren Chester MP, remains closely engaged with our work, and has been working to assist us in further

CHAIR'S REPORT

supporting the children of veterans whose opportunities have been adversely affected as a consequence of their parent's or grandparent's service. This reflects the increasing emphasis now being given on taking care of veteran's families, and we express our appreciation for the Minister's active interest and encouragement.

We are pleased to have welcomed His Excellency, General the Honourable David Hurley, AC, DSC (Retd) as our new Patron, following his acceptance of our invitation. His Excellency kindly received my call on him at Government House and he demonstrated a close interest in our endeavours and willingness to offer his support.

AVCAT will continue to pursue good governance under the guidance of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC), to promote the opportunities to apply for bursaries and scholarships within the wider veteran community, and to communicate effectively with our applicants, successful recipients, and sponsors. The Board Directors of AVCAT use the materials available to not-for-profit organisations on the ACNC website for continuing professional development. Our Auditor, James Winter of Grant Thornton, has been particularly helpful in ensuring that our accounting practices are up to date and we comply fully with ACNC requirements.

Our funding situation remains quite tenuous. For some time, we have been reliant on an annual draw-down from a fund established by a generous benefactor, but this will soon be exhausted. Considerable effort is being devoted by our CEO to seek

other benefactors and corporate donors, to date with moderate success.

I record my gratitude for the work of our Chief Executive Officer, Joan Hughes, together with her small, dedicated and highly competent staff team; my appreciation for the time and commitment of my fellow Board Directors; and sincerely thank our wider group of volunteers who serve on or support the work of the National Selection Committee and the Finance, Audit, and Risk Committee. Without these combined efforts, we could not deliver on our commitments to the Veteran Community, dependants, and those who provide all of the financial support on which we depend.

The greatest satisfaction for all of us in AVCAT is to witness the impressive achievements of our scholarship recipients, noting that their completion rates are well above the national average of their other tertiary education cohorts. We record and publish several of the testimonials and letters of appreciation we receive from students following completion of their courses, and we all reflect on the value they have placed on their award, and their gratitude for the support they have received. It is clear to us that without these scholarships, these wonderful young people would not be able to reach their full potential or satisfy their reasonable aspirations.



**Major General
W. J. Crews AO
(Retd)
Chair**



Education gives us an understanding of the world and opportunities to make it better!

Now in my fourth year at AVCAT, the academic progress and personal growth of the people receiving tertiary education scholarships are what inspires me every day. This year as we moved to online applications, it provided opportunity for richer and compelling stories of the applicants' issues and goals. Many applicants have dealt with lots of sadness, mental health issues and caring responsibilities beyond their years.

AVCAT's Purpose

AVCAT is a national independent charity. At AVCAT we support approximately 240 - 250 tertiary education students a year through awarded bursaries and scholarships. The recipients are children and grandchildren of ex-serving men and women. Awarding scholarships is a complex process and takes up to four months to reach a decision. This is due to the fact that every year AVCAT receives many more applications from very worthy people

compared to the number of available scholarships. The assessment processes are thorough and fair and done by independent assessors. The eligibility criteria and assessment processes guide the assessors to recommend applicants who have financial and other difficulties regarding their access to tertiary education. Applicants for a scholarship also need to show evidence of their academic results as well as their connections and links to the veterans in their families. The final recommendations for scholarships are made by the National Selection Committee whose members are educationalists, defence welfare experts and Board Directors of AVCAT.

AVCAT works closely with the sponsors and funders of bursaries and scholarships especially in regard to information about the academic progress of the scholars. Sponsors are informed about this progress twice a year through annual and mid-year reviews. This is an opportunity for the scholars to thank their sponsors and give them relevant updates. A recurring message in the thank you notes to sponsors is that a scholarship allows the scholar to balance study with paid work and manage personal issues. As well, the majority of scholars state that knowing someone else cares about their education and their future, keeps them motivated and focussed on their studies and future goals. Many of them feel very privileged to receive a scholarship especially knowing that so many people miss out on receiving one.

Strong and ongoing links with ex-service organisations are very important in promoting the work of AVCAT and signing up more sponsors. In 2019 we received

811 requests for information about the scholarship programs. Applications were received from 285 people and eighty-two (82) applicants were awarded a scholarship. An ongoing priority for AVCAT is to secure more sponsors as there were approximately 150 worthy people who missed out on a scholarship.

Long Tan Bursary Scheme

The bursaries and scholarships that AVCAT manages on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), various ex-service organisations and donors, provide three to four years' of financial support to students studying tertiary courses in universities, TAFE colleges and Registered Training Organisations across Australia. (see Page 14 for the 2019 scholarship recipients).

I acknowledge the support of the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) for funding the Long Tan Bursaries that AVCAT administers on its behalf. The Department of Veterans' Affairs also provides administration funding that contributes significantly to the operations of AVCAT. The presentation events for scholarship recipients, their families and sponsors are a major highlight for all involved. AVCAT has been working with DVA in preparation for next year's application process that will include the grandchildren of Vietnam veterans for a Long Tan Bursary. With this development work of the Long Tan Bursary, I would like to acknowledge the support of Minister Chester and his staff; Commissioner Don Spinks; the Secretary of DVA, Ms Liz Cosson and the other DVA staff.

In 2019 thirty-seven (37) Long Tan Bursaries were awarded.

Our Sponsors

My sincere thanks to the new and ongoing sponsors of scholarships. There were forty-five (45) new sponsored scholarships available for the 2019 eligible applicants. Our generous sponsors are listed with the recipients of their scholarships in this report.

In 2019, forty-five (46) Sponsored Scholarships were awarded, bringing the total number of new scholarship recipients to eighty-two (82).

Acknowledgements

The AVCAT team is small in number and all are part-time workers, but their combined skills, innovative ideas and hard work are highly valued. We have started work on connecting with recipients who have finished their studies and we look forward to launching AVCAT's Alumni group in 2020. To guide and lead them in the purpose and work of AVCAT is a privilege. I acknowledge the work of the independent assessors and sincerely thank the volunteer members of the National Selection Committee for their commitment, detailed and fair assessments.

Finally, I acknowledge and sincerely thank the Chair of AVCAT, Major General Bill Crews AO (Retd) for his support and thank the volunteer Board Directors for their time and service to AVCAT.

Joan Hughes
Chief Executive Officer



Left to right: Dominik Turner, Taylor Heslington, Madelaine Fern, Sebastian Moore, AVCAT CEO Joan Hughes, Hannah Howard-Gilchrist, Belinda Smith - Canberra 2019

The Board Directors will present an Annual Financial Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2019 at the May Annual General Meeting.

Long and Short-Term Objectives

The principal objective of the Company is to provide financial assistance through tertiary education scholarships to Australian Veterans' children and grandchildren who are in necessitous and deserving circumstances.

The organisation's strategies for achieving this objective include:

1. The provision of financial assistance for Veterans' children and grandchildren through the awarding of scholarships to appropriate applicants who are undertaking tertiary studies and the soliciting and acceptance of donations to:
 - a Trust established for the benefit of Veterans' children and grandchildren
 - funds established and maintained for the benefit of Veterans' children and grandchildren.

2. The promotion and development of the organisation's scholarship policy and procedures occurs with ex-service organisations, the relevant Australian Government's Departments and agencies and the broader business and education communities.
3. The retention of the administration of the Long Tan Bursary Scheme funded by the Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs.
4. The provision of a support and review service to improve the educational outcomes for the children and grandchildren of Australian Veterans undertaking tertiary studies.

Principal Activities

The Company manages and administers scholarships and bursaries, funded by the Australian Government, ex-service organisations and individual donors through bursaries and scholarships provided by the Company.

The Company's activities during the financial year are those prescribed in its Con-

stitution, namely the provision of financial assistance towards the costs of tertiary studies to the selected and deserving children and grandchildren of the Australian Veteran community.

Performance Measures

The Company measures performance through the establishment and monitoring of Key Performance Indicators including:

1. Monitoring the completion rates of recipients in their respective tertiary studies. The cohort of recipients who commenced their studies in 2017 and completed their scholarship period in 2019 achieved a completion rate of 85%. The national average completion rate is 64%. (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2018).
2. Measuring the ratios of expenses to assistance funds distributed to recipients. The ratio of administrative expenses to assistance funds is 22% (2018: 21%). This compares to the ratio of operating expenses to assistance funds of 69% (2018: 68%).

Members

The members of the Company are the six principal national ex-service organisations. They are the Australian Veterans' and Defence Services Council, Legacy Australia Incorporated, the Returned & Services League of Australia Limited, the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia Incorporated, the Vietnam Veterans' Federation of Australia Incorporated and War Widows' Guild of Australia. The other

member is the Chair who is appointed by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs. The Repatriation Commission has the right to appoint a person to be a member but has chosen not to do so at this time.

Directors of the Company

The Chair is a Director. Each of the member organisations appoints a Director and each Director may appoint an Alternate with the agreement of their appointing organisation. All the Directors of the Company have experience in matters associated with the support and welfare of veterans and their families in necessitous and deserving circumstances as well as governance experience. The Directors and Alternate Directors act in an honorary capacity and receive no compensation for their services.

Company Secretary

Ms Joan Hughes was reappointed company secretary at the AGM.

AVCAT's Annual Financial Report for year ended 31 December 2019 is available on our website www.avcat.org.au.

Major General Bill Crews AO (Retd) Chair



RSL National Long Saunders scholarship recipient 2019 Madison Hancock and Ken Foster Deputy Chair AVCAT

PATRON AND BOARD

Patron

His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC, DSC (Retd)

Board Directors

Chair Major General Bill Crews AO (Retd)
Chair of the Board since 2017

Deputy Chair Mr Ken H Foster OAM
Board Director since 2005
Appointed by Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Member of the Finance Audit & Risk Committee

Company Secretary Ms Joan Hughes
Reappointed 19 May 2019

Lieutenant Colonel Philip G Badcock OAM(Retd) AFAIM AFIPM
Board Director since 2005
Appointed by Legacy Australia
Member of the Finance Audit and Risk Committee

Mr Gordon S Blake
Board Director since 2012
Appointed by Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council, Member of the National Selection Committee

Mrs Meg Green AM, RN RM MN
Appointed by War Widows' Guild of Australia in 2018, Member of the Finance Audit and Risk Committee

Mr William (Bill) Roberts OAM
Board Director since 2005
Appointed by Vietnam Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association of Australia, Member of the National Selection Committee
Dr Robert Webster OAM FCPA FAPI FRICS

Board Director since 2017
Appointed by RSL National

Alternate Board Directors

Lieutenant Colonel Ian M Henderson (Retd) Board Director 2005—2017
Appointed by Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia in 2017 as an Alternate Board Director, Member of the Finance Audit and Risk Committee

Mrs Jenny Gregory
Alternate Board Director since 2018
Appointed by War Widows' Guild of Australia

Mr Peter Jones
Alternate Board Director since 2018
Appointed by Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council

Mr Peter Kainerder
Alternate Board Director since 2006
Appointed by Vietnam Veterans, Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Association of Australia, Member of the National Selection Committee

Mr Patrick Medway AM
Alternate Board Director since 2018
Appointed by RSL National

Mr David J Norton FCA
Alternate Board Director since 2011
Appointed by Legacy Australia, Chair of the Finance Audit and Risk Committee

Company Auditor—Mr James Winter Grant Thornton

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

AVCAT Staff

Chief Executive Officer

Ms Joan Hughes

Finance Manager

Mr Chris Wicks

IT and Finance Contractor

Mr Raji Fernando

Scholarships Manager

Acting Scholarships Manager

Ms Tania Hayes
February 2019 – September 2019

Ms Georgina Nash
September 2019 – December 2019

Scholarships Communications Officer

Ms Emma Dallas

Scholarships Administration Officer

Ms Lilia Anderson

Volunteers

National Selection Committee Chair

Ms Karen Blackwell

National Selection Committee Members

Mr Gordon Blake
Mrs Eileen Henderson
Mr Peter Kainerder
Mr William (Bill) Roberts OAM

Company Pro-Bono Solicitor

Mr Luke Owens, Ronayne Owens Lawyers

Other Volunteers

Mr Jack Hayes



AVCAT Chair Major General Bill Crews AO (Retd), Brigadier Patrick T F Gowans OAM (Retd) and AVCAT CEO Joan Hughes



AVCAT Board Director Bill Roberts and TPI NSW Scholarship Recipient Madelaine Fern



Veterans Centre Sydney Northern Beaches/AVCAT Alumni Gemma Lawton at her recital at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music with AVCAT CEO Joan Hughes

2019 SCHOLARS AND SPONSORS



Australian Government

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Long Tan Bursary

Brearna Anderson

Chloe Balym

Ailish Beahan

Brendan Cameron

Ella Cattnach

Bettina Chapple

Julia Clugston

Claire Comben

Joel Donnelly

Joel Farrell

Evan Fazey

Bronwen Galpin

Savannah-Belle Gibson

Chaz Gillespie

Georgia Harrison

Glynis Heard

Eden Hunter

William Johnston

Robert Jones

Joel Keep

Erica Kelly

Olivia Kerr

Corey Laughton

Erica Moffat

Bruce Paul

Harold Phillips

Steven Sheely

Lilea Sward

Claudia Thatcher

Peter Thurgar

Keryn Tuck

Sierra Usher

Samara Welbourne

Leah Whitmore

Thomas Woodman

Ann-lea Wykes

Kevin Young



RSL
Queensland

RSL Queensland

Tia Breakell

Chelsea Brown

Nathan Collins

Wenona Cramp-

Church

Amberley Edwards

Aaron Grant

Rowan Groves

Britney Hennessy

Jessica Howman

Jazmyn Johansen

Matthew Jones

Emmerson Lee

Elizabeth McDonnell

Jade Melville

Sarah Mortensen

Isaac Pacey

Kobi Parker

Emma Parsons

Karla Price

Kayla Warren



AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST

AVCAT RAAF

Sarah-Anne Elliott

Cynthia Wall

AVCAT Tasmania

Tara Norris

AVCAT TLC

Curtis Rayment

Emily Thompson-Young



Australian Veteran
and Defence Services
Council

Taylor Heslington



Brisbane Water Legacy

Holly Darge

Jayanna Gibson

Tanisha Palmer



CARRY ON
(VICTORIA)

Carry On Victoria

Tomas Murphy

Megan Willians



Chatswood RSL Club

Elizabeth McMahon



Global Defence
Solutions

Global Defence
Solutions

Larissa Whelan

2019 SCHOLARS AND SPONSORS



Legacy Australia

John Gough

Daisy Borbely

Jack Campbell

Alex Shatzman

Shannon Tetley



NSW Nurses &
Midwives Association
Ashleigh Simmons



RSL National

Jack Burns

Nicholas Manser

RSL National

Reg Saunders

Madison Hancock

Sebastian Moore



RSL Victorian Branch

Alice Beale

Amber Brookes

Yasmin Poole



TPI NSW

Tessa Lucas

Madellyn Urquhart



TPI SA

Hannah Burns

Samuel Sutton



Vietnam Veterans'
Peacekeepers &
Peacemakers
Association

Australia Graham
Walker

Emily Hespe

OTHER SPONSORS



AUSTRALIAN
WAR WIDOWS NSW LTD

**Australian War Widows NSW PTY
LTD**



Newtown RSL Sub-Branch



**Port Macquarie RSL
Sub-Branch**



Tasmania Navy Network Hobart



**The Partners of Veterans Australia
Tasmanian Branch**



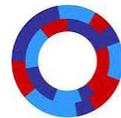
**TPI Queensland
TPI Tasmania**



**Vietnam Veterans Association of
Australia South Australia**



**Vietnam Veterans Association of
Australia Western Australia**



Veterans Centre
Sydney Northern Beaches

**Veterans Centre Sydney Northern
Beaches**

**Individual Donor
Dr Peter Helson**

2019 STATE PRESENTATIONS

Queensland



Western Australia



2019 STATE PRESENTATIONS

Queensland



South Australia



2019 STATE PRESENTATIONS

NSW/ACT



NSW/ACT



Victoria



Tasmania



his service helped me reach my dreams of attending university. Pa passed away last year and AVCAT's recognition of his contribution as a Vietnam Veteran has become even more important to me since then.

With the support of AVCAT and its sponsors, I have become the first person in my family to pursue tertiary studies. I'm now in my fourth year of a Bachelor of Law (Honours)/International Security Studies at the Australian National University, and I'm loving every minute of it.

The AVCAT Scholarship has allowed me to have a university experience free of financial pressure, and enabled me to engage in opportunities that would not have been open to me without this help. I've participated in extracurricular law competitions, run a student committee, and become a student leader at my residence. Opportunities like these are helping me figure out my future aspirations. In 2018 I was lucky enough to work as a paralegal for the ANU Legal Office, an experience vital in clarifying my career goals.

Looking back on my first year I know that my university experience would have been completely different, and a lot more difficult without the support of AVCAT. Having financial support has given me the freedom to study and participate in the ANU community. I will forever be thankful to AVCAT's sponsors for giving me this opportunity. When I finish my degree next year I'm hoping to use my qualifications to give back to the community I live in.

I remember the exact moment I found out I was lucky enough to receive a scholarship from AVCAT. I was leaving a lecture in first year, feeling overwhelmed about the five years of study ahead of me, when I checked my voicemail to discover that I was a recipient of the 2016 AVCAT Commemorative Bursary.

Immediately it felt like a giant weight had been lifted off my shoulders. Moving interstate for university was always going to be financially challenging, and realising that I would not have to worry about how to pay for my textbooks or groceries made the next five years seem a lot more manageable.

I'm still so amazed and grateful to have received an AVCAT scholarship, which to me is an important recognition of my Pa's service in Vietnam. He was so proud that

OUR SCHOLAR - RHIANNAON WHITAKER



Rhiannaon Whitaker

I was lucky enough to be awarded an AVCAT RSL Queensland scholarship in 2017, and it's safe to say I wouldn't be where I am today without it. I'm now in my final year of a Bachelor of Photography at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

For as long as I can remember, I've been a creative soul pursuing my passions in dance, music and art. Growing up I always loved looking at my father's film photos from when he was in the Army and in East Timor. Photography is now my favourite outlet to express my creativity.

In my first year of study I received an Honourable Mention in the 24-hour Challenge Portrait by Canon Australia. This was a real turning point for me. I realised I really could pursue my dream career if I worked hard enough.

In 2018, my second year at university, I received a Griffith Award for Academic Excellence from Griffith University, and

achieved my goal of having a GPA of over 6. The same year I had my work installed in my first ever exhibition at the Machinery Street Gallery. My work 'Study of Hands' experimented with light, colour and the perceptions of our form. The exhibition, titled Luz, explored interpretations of light by using the zine.

At the start of March 2019, I was invited to an event for OzShot Magazine and the launch of Canon Australia's new app called Kyoyu. I am beyond thrilled to have been given such great opportunities, and I wouldn't have been able to work this hard without having AVCAT and RSL Queensland behind me.

This is my last year at university and I aim to grasp every opportunity I can, and extend myself and my work, further than before. Next year I hope to work full-time as a photographer, and grow my own business. I am very interested in current global and environmental issues and I trust that through my photos I can spread awareness of these prevailing concerns. I am considering completing a degree in marine biology so I can document the oceans and help its animals through my photography.



OUR SCHOLAR - BEAU WHARTON



Beau Wharton

This year I commenced a Bachelor of Musical Theatre at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, Griffith University (the Con). To say that this first semester has been life changing would be an understatement.

Aspiring to a life of performance I knew I needed to work hard, and I have. Being offered a spot at the Con has validated all my work so far, but now that I'm studying there, I'm beginning to understand my hard work has only just begun. At the Con I have classes five days a week, with more than 20 contact hours. My endurance and ability are being tested. This is a fraction of the work I will need to do to as I build myself a successful career. Challenges will only get harder from here, but I know the staff and students will be there to support me.

The teaching staff at the Con are second to none. They are instrumental

to the development of my skills. The opportunity to work with industry professionals daily is almost unbelievable, their passion for passing on their knowledge inspires me to work harder and improve, every single week. The faculty is absolutely committed to producing top quality performers, and with their wisdom my peers and I will be well equipped with the right skills to thrive in the performing arts.

I am fortunate to share this journey with a group of 22 insanely talented people, all of whom share the same aspiration and ambition as me. We have quickly built ourselves a supportive and encouraging environment where everyone can showcase themselves, and know that they are free from judgement if they (very rarely) make a mistake. It is so important to be surrounded by people who are looking out for me. I'm very grateful that we can all lift each other up to our absolute best.

The beginning of this course brought about a massive shift in my life, and I was terrified of how I would adjust to everything, but taking the chance and pursuing my dreams has given me the best six months of my life so far. It fills me with gratitude to think about what the future holds, and I'm so grateful to AVCAT for backing me in the pursuit of a professional career. Chase your dreams with determination, hard work is always rewarded.



Above: Detail of *Plaques of The Day* by Kelly Manning

Kelly Manning

Twenty years ago, I was awarded a Vietnam Veterans’ Trust scholarship for children of Vietnam Veterans while completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in drawing at RMIT University in Melbourne.

The scholarship provided art supplies and books, enabling the production of a substantial body of work that was both self-exploratory and investigative. As a result of this self-exploration, I regularly visited Melbourne University’s anatomy museum. Drawing internal anatomy became a pathway toward investigating the effects of the spraying of Agent Orange (AO) in Vietnam. The body as

a ‘toxic and mutilated vessel’ became my focus, as I was keen to explore the tumour I had on my spine as a child and how it connected to my father’s war experience.

In 2000, I travelled to Vietnam, seeking a connection with the country and its people. My artwork before Vietnam had been predominantly achromatic: upon my return it exploded with colour. The colours I use are very symbolic – orange for Agent Orange, red for blood, pink for the skin that absorbs it, and teal, the colour used extensively in institutions like army barracks and hospitals, places I frequented as a child.

After my scholarship ended in 2002, I undertook an honours year while being artist in residence at St Vincent’s Hospital in Melbourne. Here I immersed myself in my father’s war slides, reading about the effects the Vietnam War had on the people and the environment, and investigating war machines and the paraphernalia that goes with war and army life.

The study of war took its toll on me psychologically – it’s not a light subject. Eager to both clear my conscience and pursue my connection with Vietnam and its people, I returned to Hanoi at the end of my residency. While in Hanoi, I created a series of paintings ‘The Quiet’ and ‘Standing Room Only’ where I employed a new technique utilising latex to create a liquid stencil. These paintings reflected the daily and domestic life in Hanoi at the time.

In 2009, I took part in the Nam Bang exhibition at the Casula Powerhouse

Arts Centre in NSW. Nam Bang explored multiple perspectives of the Vietnamese–American war. I produced a large multi-panelled mixed-media painting called ‘Plaques of the Day’, depicting an ‘army brat’ hiding from her father’s PTSD.

Today, the key focus of my work is portraiture. It is the progression of the work related to the Vietnam War: focussing on a broader context of war, survival and post-apocalyptic imaginings. I am also fascinated with brutalist architecture and strength in structure, especially that of the bunker as a tool for self-preservation and a gesture to the complexities of the individual within an industrial world. For me, the bunker proposes a new ideal, a utopian squat, creating luxury in survival where traditional ideas of luxury do not exist. It’s going to be a new and exciting chapter ahead as I follow this thread.

Below: *Tony Briggs* by Kelly Manning





**AUSTRALIAN VETERANS'
CHILDREN ASSISTANCE TRUST**

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