

So tonight, we are not just here to witness an exhibition—we are here to witness a story. A story of survival, resilience, and courage. A story that has been transformed into art.

Before I speak about this deeply personal body of work, I want to introduce you to the artist behind it—Raeleen Pfeiffer.

My name is Vickie Burkinshaw, I am the owner of The Curious Rabbit art gallery cafe where Raeleen has exhibited, I am President of the Friends of the Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, President of Wagga Women's Health Centre and a friend and neighbour of Raeleen's - all of which intersect with my role here today to introduce you to the artist and this body of work.

Raeleen has a background in printmaking, particularly linoprinting, a technique she has mastered to convey powerful and intricate narratives. Raeleen has studied at Wagga TAFE and worked under the tutelage of master printmaker Andrew Totman who has worked as a visiting artist in Venice, Paris, Beijing and all corners of the globe; with exhibitions all over the world including China and the United States.

Raeleen's award winning pieces have exhibited locally and Nationally, comprising 20 years of solo exhibitions, collaborative projects, Arts shows, public art works, and Gallery exhibits.

'Strayleaves Art Studio', her Regional NSW space, allows her to develop her works, printmaking, mixed media, visual art and sculpture. She also runs art lessons and workshops and is constantly striving to learn more and improve her techniques.

Just this week Raeleen was awarded a mentorship with a master printmaker in the King Valley that she will attend next month.

Raeleen's work has been exhibited in multiple galleries, and she has used her artistic practice to not only express her own experiences but also to connect with and empower others.

Her underpinning drive is to harness art to emphasize the benefit of healing, bringing beauty to light what others do not see. Sometimes confronting. Always with empathy and integrity.

Beyond her work as an artist, Raeleen has been actively engaged in advocacy and community-driven projects, using her voice to raise awareness about the complexities of

trauma, justice, and survival. Through her creative journey, she has demonstrated an unyielding commitment to truth-telling, resilience, and the importance of storytelling through visual art.

Which brings us to the exhibition we see here today—*He Took My Beautiful*.

This body of work is the result of years of personal reflection, emotional processing, and artistic expression. The entire suite consists of 65 linoprints that translate Raeleen's lived experience of childhood sexual abuse into a powerful visual language. Tonight we see 17 of them with each piece carrying the weight of memory, the complexity of trauma, and the strength of survival.

In creating this body of work Raeleen was trying to remember herself as a teenager and how she may have expressed her experience back then. It reflects the naivety of childhood as well as the pain of keeping a secret. The trauma attached to human response of denial - shutting down and being eaten up internally.

The title, *He Took My Beautiful*, speaks to innocence stolen. Raeleen was a child when the abuse occurred. For over 30 years, she carried this burden in silence. Then, in 2016, she made the courageous decision to come forward, reporting what had happened to her to the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. The Commission recognized the severity of the case and urged her to go to the police—because her perpetrator was still working with young people.

There was another perpetrator as well, when Raeleen was just 16. Both were in positions of power. Both abused that power. And yet, when she sought justice, she faced the harsh reality of a system that so often fails survivors.

The legal battle was grueling. It took four years of making statements, reliving trauma, collecting evidence, and enduring setbacks. And in the end, despite overwhelming courage and determination, the case resulted in a *not guilty* verdict. The Crown prosecutor had warned her that only 3% of cases result in a conviction.

For Raeleen art became a way of reclaiming her voice after years of not being understood, of not being believed.

Linoprinting became her way of processing memories, reclaiming a sense of control, and giving form to emotions that words could not fully capture. Every cut into the lino, every stroke of ink, is part of a healing process. This work is deeply personal, but it is also universal—it speaks to all survivors who have felt silenced, unheard, or dismissed.

Beyond the court system, Raeleen has lived with the ongoing impact of her trauma. She suffers from PTSD and bipolar disorder, conditions exacerbated by both the abuse and

the pursuit of justice. But amidst the pain, she found a way to express the inexpressible—through art.

Her art is a way of describing her journey she has been on as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. This exhibition express her traumatic memories, her feelings during the different states of her bipolar and PTSD. Her work shares the pain of not being believed and being taken advantage of by people who should have been there to protect her. By being let down bt a flawed legal system that works in favour of the perpetrators.

Her art is both beautiful and traumatic. The anguish and pain is raw, there is fear and yearning while at the same time there is love and hope.

When she shared her story with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The support service Knowmore called her Brave to share her story and you can see that in her work Braver than Brave. Raeleen acknowledges she was totally drained at the time she created this and you can see that in her face - the words are like war paint across her face.

In the work Purge Raeleen expresses how difficult it was to tell her story to the police - her words were stuck and couldn't come out in the way she wanted.

The process of gathering evidence proved confronting and stressful however she got through it and felt vindicated and on a high before being gutted when she found out vital information was destroyed due to technical difficulties - that's conveyed in her work WTF

The whole time the police reminded her how it was their word against hers - this can be seen in the Title work He Took My Beautiful.

In Hugging my anguish Raeleen looks to make physical the inner anguish of years in and out of a court system that favours the perpetrators. You can see Raeleen trying to embrace theses emotions in order to deal with them. Coming face to face with the consequences of her experience

On the eve of Marchs across the country tomorrow to protest against violence against women the works I Matter and I've Got My Eye on You speak to the truth of lived experience. All of the works combine to create a truly remarkable experience for the viewing and reminds us of the courage of the artist to risk the retraumatizing by showing the works.

In 2022, when *He Took My Beautiful* was exhibited at Gallery Lane Cove and Creative Studios, Raeleen met a mother and daughter who had endured the same system, who

had also received a *not guilty* verdict. They told her that every single artwork spoke to them.

And that is the true power of this exhibition.

The more Raeleen shares her story, the more she hears others say: *It happened to me too*. Many survivors cannot speak up, whether out of fear, shame, or the weight of the legal system that so often fails them. She recognizes this—and she chooses to speak for those who cannot. She chooses to be a voice for the unheard and she actively encourages people to speak out and to be heard and to seek professional help and advice.

This exhibition is not just about personal healing. It is about collective recognition. It is about shining a light on the injustices survivors face and creating a space where their stories are acknowledged and believed.

To all of you who are here tonight, bearing witness to this work, thank you. Your presence matters. Your willingness to listen matters. Because by listening, by seeing, and by acknowledging, we take one step closer to a world where survivors are not just heard, but truly supported.

Before concluding, if this exhibition has raised concerns for you please come and see me - there are numbers we can share.

This is not an easy subject to deal with but the more we are able to talk about it the stronger we become as a community.

Thank you.

I Matter

A creep

Upon Reflection

Impact

Release

I've got my eye on you

You are not my equal

Marked

Pedophile

Lock Him Up

The Plea

I'll be the Judge