

Submission to
The Royal Commission into
Family Violence
by Guler Altunbas



Title: Self Portrait (Homage to Sir Frederic Leighton, 'Flaming June' Artist: Guler Altunbas
This cover image is about believing and dreaming that there is hope for a better life
and world after family violence.



Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

2

I believe that the expression of the visual arts plays a pivotal role in Society. Art often portrays the truth about power, including, the artist's environment, which in turn, makes us think about ourselves, the world around us and values that we ascribe to.



This image is titled "Question Why?" The artist is inviting the viewer to question the world around them about family violence. This image - "Question Why" origins, date back to 1997, and has been evolving, since. It was the first image that started off the shrine and memorial for "Private Violence" (including family violence website in 1988 & 2015).

Permission to reproduce image is granted to The Royal Commission into Family Violence.

I endeavour to demonstrate mainly through images and words about my experiences. I attempt to write up a variety of viewpoints for each image that follows it has, an original title unique to that drawing with its outcomes stated as; issues, concerns, "gaps and problems in the response of our system, and our society, towards family violence" (RCFV) many notions are contained within the solutions sections.

Specifically, as a society, we need to respect and value members of our community that are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Due to community attitudes, family violence is not discussed openly or privately, even though it's prevalence has reached drastic consequences. It is general knowledge that one woman is murdered a week in Australia in 2015. They have no voice as they have died and become a statistic. There are mainly women, children and some men enduring these terrible life circumstances, as 'victims' / survivors of family violence in their homes, behind closed doors.

I would like to suggest an overall, recommendation for The Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV). That is, the construction of a physical shrine and memorial as one way of acknowledging, apologising and redressing the tragedies of deaths for those who were and are silenced and ignored by mainstream society.

I am a woman living with trauma due to experiences of family violence since the age of four years old till my early forties. These incidences have had a substantial impact on my life, which gives me a perspective and self-narrative of strength to articulate my journey thus far. In addition to these traumas, I also have a physical disability, am from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD) and as a result of have complex needs. I have had sexual, physical, and psychological violence as a child and adult within and outside of the family home by a family member, husband, other adult and a religious senior. These abuses caused the erosion of; my self worth, how I value myself and knowing my boundaries.

Due to such horrific experiences, I constructed a website, which is a 'virtual' shrine and memorial that is dedicated to; commemorate, honour, acknowledge and demonstrate respect to all people including, women, children, some men and the people that care for them, who have been affected by family violence (which I also call '*private violence*' full definition can be seen at <http://shrineandmemorial.blogspot.com.au/p/definition.html>).

The idea to commemorate began in 1998, so I developed a website back then. The virtual shrine was accepted into the then Victorian community portal called 'Vicnet' (www.vicnet.net.au/~violence). I dedicated the website as a shrine and memorial to 'private violence' (including, family violence) whereby, the idea that I was trying to portray was to: share, raise awareness, question and most importantly to commemorate those who have passed away, and survivors of family violence. I believe that society, its systems and structures needs to listen empathetically by, acknowledging, understanding and supporting the most vulnerable.

Currently, I am working on a body of artwork that are self-portraits, some paintings are complete and some at halfway point (some imagination is

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence by Guler Altunbas. 4

required to flesh them out as they are at the drawing stage). These images are included as a major part my submission to the RCFV. These artworks portray my understanding of the day-to-day struggles that I have to face owing to the family violence I endured. As the cliché states, “a picture tells a thousand words”.

There are twelve images all up in the series. Eleven are works on paper and the twelfth one is larger in size and on a canvas. The canvas painting is about dreaming for a better life and world (also on the front cover). Ten of the works depicted are, my genuine contribution to explain the real personal situations that I experienced of family violence. One artwork is of a nude, that is, shaped as a question mark also looking and questioning the world. This question image instigated the rest of the drawings in this submission.

I welcome the opportunity to further discuss this submission, through, images and statements regarding my life experience about family violence.

Thank you.

“Sshh...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

People such as, family and friends not talking about the abuse even if they witnessed the family violence against you during childhood and adulthood.

Keeping the abuse against you a secret, not to raise your voice or inform and share with others. The sayings: “Don’t air your dirty laundry” and keep “the skeletons in the closet” are the obligations and pleasantries expected to adhere to within society’s norms. The community in general keeping the lid on family violence as the unspoken issue – what remains behind close doors, stays behind closed doors.

Why do courts allow the use of the victims / survivors past history as evidence of their culpability but not the perpetrators past charges and convictions?

Solutions

To create conversations and dialogue around violence and peace.

Perpetrators to be held to account by both community leaders, members and peers. Orders made by the court systems to be acted upon by authorities in all jurisdictions and if the offender has past convictions this should be considered whilst sentencing.



Title Sshh © Guler Altunbas

“Rifle with Teddy...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

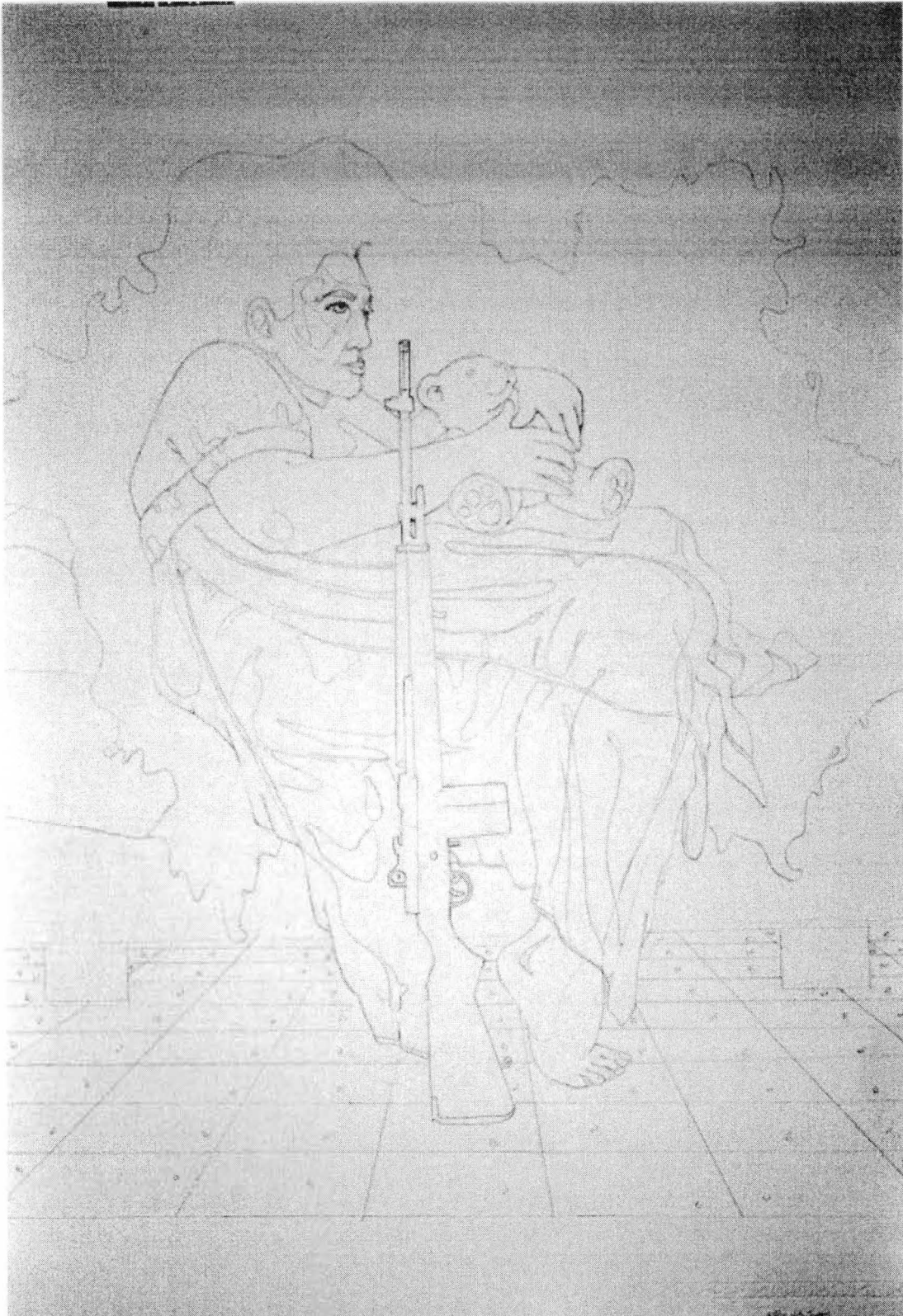
The innocence lost during childhood, with the physical threat of the use a rifle to be held against your will and to obey.

Private violence is not the same as what I call ‘public violence’. In my opinion, the definition of ‘public violence’ is (often sanctioned by society) war, where it is in a combat situation, country versus country therefore, soldier against soldier. Albeit, in some cases soldiers violate children and women from the country they are at war with this is an issue in itself.

Solutions

Perhaps, there is no immediate solution to this until countries decide to peacefully communicate, work collaboratively and have their issues mediated.

Shooting gun / rifle licence holders need to be psychologically assessed and reviewed yearly.



Rifle with Teddy © Guler Altunbas

“Hands Tied...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

Sense of powerlessness. Being held and captured against your will. Can the systems, society, community, leaders, peers and individuals create change rather than to do nothing and be held to ransom.

Solutions

Due to society's systems failing to support the most vulnerable / victims and not knowing where to turn to and or no safe solution at the time. Survivors should not be blamed and shamed for their behaviour to not act and stay in the violent relationship for example, 'learned helplessness'.

Society and communities to be a part of the unravelling and untying the hands.



Hands Tied © Guler Altunbas

“Thinking...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

The thinking position is about how survivors and society are trying to find solutions to the problem of family violence.

One cannot speak out or involve other people as there are threats of physical violence of a knife to the throat. Due to such trauma of events and the ongoing nature of the situation you can't keep fighting as you are exhausted and there is no break from family violence.

Family abuse and violence encompasses not just physical but also emotional, psychological, financial and spiritual. Your sense of self gets eroded.

Solutions

To write up a road map similar to the Royal Commission into Family Violence from submissions like this and look at the big picture scenarios and implement the recommendations with funding attached to it.



Thinking © Guler Altunbas

“Speak No Evil...”

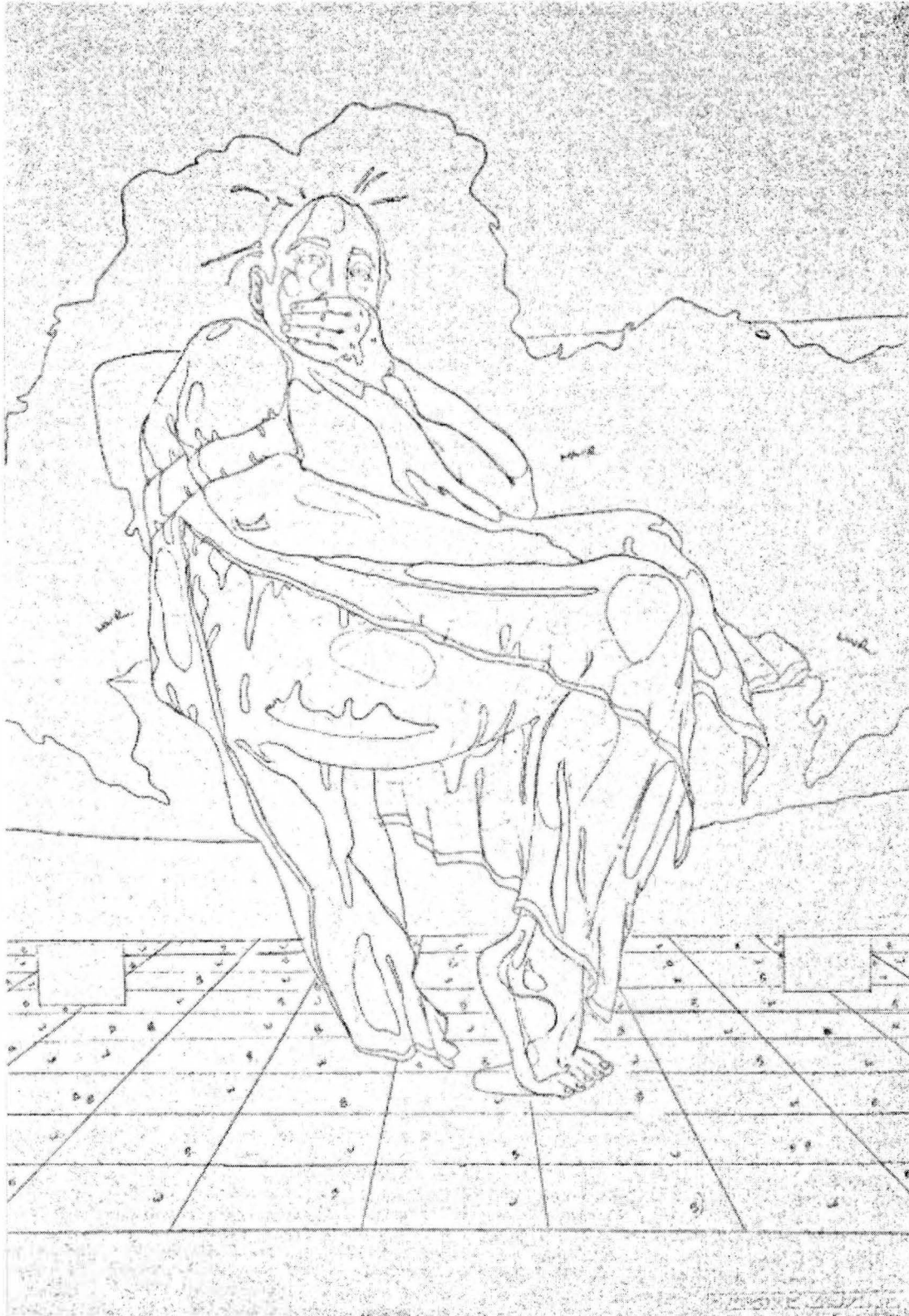
Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

Not having the option and opportunity to say what is happening. Being a nice person and saying nothing that is, out of line or to betray the perpetrator.

Bystanders saying nothing, can be seen as the same as committing the actual violence.

Solutions

That family, friends, peers and community to have the authority and courage to speak out about how family violence is not acceptable behaviour zero tolerance.



Speak No Evil © Guler Altunbas

“See No Evil...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

People not acknowledging and looking the other way. People tend to metaphorically keep their “blinds down “ or eyes shut.

Solutions

To exclude perpetrators of family violence from taking part in community activities and leadership roles.



See No Evil © Guler Altunbas

“Hear No Evil...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

People pretend that they didn't hear the abuse/violence and in general don't want to get involved unless it concerns them. The individual survivor may ignore or deny and not be able to accept assistance and solutions that are offered to them (by community members, family and friends as they may not be ready to hear or take action) due to fear.

Solutions

Mandatory reporting as a 'Duty of Care' for adults' too similar to children. Financial assistance including, housing options that is affordable & safe housing to leave the situation.



Hear No Evil © Guler Altunbas

“Scared of Getting Hit...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

Fear of the possible ramifications and retaliation of the abuser by the victim/survivor. Again, fleeing from the situation might cause more abuse or even death to themselves or loved ones.

Solutions

To support the child and individual adult to break out from the 'learned helplessness' of the ongoing abuse through education campaigns in the school and or workplace. Security both physical and financial (independence) is important so that they are in a safe environment.



Scared of Getting Hit © Guler Altunbas

“Bruised Eye...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

Assessing the physical evidence of violence is visible, conversely; no one in the victim's community can see the bruised emotions and psychological damage.

Solutions

Funding needs to be available for the survivors to get help from; services such as emergency housing, phone support, accommodation the police etc.

Equipping and training community leaders and peers to know how to support the survivors and children in their environment.



Bruised Eye © Guler Altunbas

“Someone’s Coming...”

Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems

The expectation and fear of punishment to come by the perpetrator / family member.

Protecting the perpetrator and not explaining the lived experience of family violence to others due to many repercussions.

Acting as if, that nothing bad is happening or going on and pretending that all is good.

Often, girls and women need to be educated about the signs to look out for as sometimes maltreatment and abuse creeps up on them and they can't get out of the domestic violence situation.

Solutions

Society, the individual and children to expect 'zero tolerance' towards family violence. This can be learnt through education at a young age similar to crossing the road rules; look to your right and left and then right again.

Therefore, if someone does something bad check in, believe in and trust yourself go to your teacher, police officer, peer or a trusted community leader.



Someone's Coming © Guler Altunbas

“Question Why...”**Issues, Concerns, Gaps & Problems**

Already mentioned in this paper on page 2.

Solutions

A shrine and memorial dedicated those who have survived or died due to family violence.



Question Why? © Guler Altunbas