

Visual Literacy: *My Strange Shrinking Parents*

My Strange Shrinking Parents is a fairytale grounded in some of my own experiences and memories growing up. To reflect the personal nature of the story, it was hand drawn with graphite pencil and powder. Watercolour paintings were made separately and then digitally composited over the pencil drawings.

Conceptually, the story is grounded in ideas of time, transience and imperfection. Traditional materials were used so that the overall aesthetic could describe these notions as much as the written narrative. Each line was drawn by hand with no ruler. I valued the organic, natural characteristics of the materials and processes including stains, smears and off register colour placement. There is a tradition in Eastern art that believes flaws can heighten beauty by lending the piece individuality, humanity and warmth. This was a guiding philosophy for the artwork.

Over the two year process of drawing this story a central motif became the natural world and changing seasons, which enhanced the themes of cycles and impermanence. I hoped to express the changes in the parents' lives through nature; a new son is represented by a sapling in a jar, their initial shrinking is depicted through a green summer transitioning to a yellow autumn. These ideas also came together in the illustration of two almond blossoms falling from a tree. This can be read as the turning of seasons, the passage of time, and the diminishment of the parents all at once.



Particular care was taken to be sensitive to the characters' emotions and imaginations so as to provide more depth and expression to the art. An early example of this is 'the far-off lands' the boy imagines his parents have come from. His only reference point is the porcelain painting on their teapot so he imagines them travelling through that otherworldly landscape.



The story I set out to write was about the growing awareness of a child to the ways in which they may be different or their family may be different and how understandings of love and belonging change over time. To communicate the circular nature of the story, many compositions are echoes of each other and certain symbols repeat throughout the story (such as the teapot). Colour palettes were also used to connect emotional moments. It was important to me that these recurring compositions and colour palettes were not explicit or draw attention to themselves. My aim was for them to work at a deeper level, connecting readers to the different emotional threads of the family's journey.

