



5-02

THE END AND THE
BEGINNING

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1. Introduction

Concepts

Life - the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and **continual change preceding death**.

~~ "the origins of life"



Death - “**Death** is not the opposite of life but a **part of it**”

~~Haruki Murakami

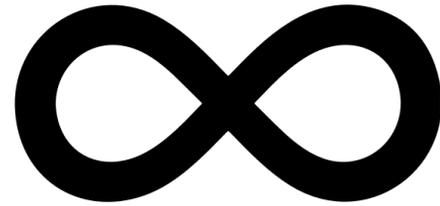


Themes



The Infinite Cycle Of Life

The cycle of life is never ending in the sense that a new life starts as another ends.



An Existential Musing On The Nature Of The Life-And-Death Cycle

Life and death is a natural and inevitable cycle where the start of life is merely the reverse process of death.



Apocalyptic Future

We wanted the end of something to be morbid and dark by depicting an apocalyptic and harsh environment after the end of a life or a major era.



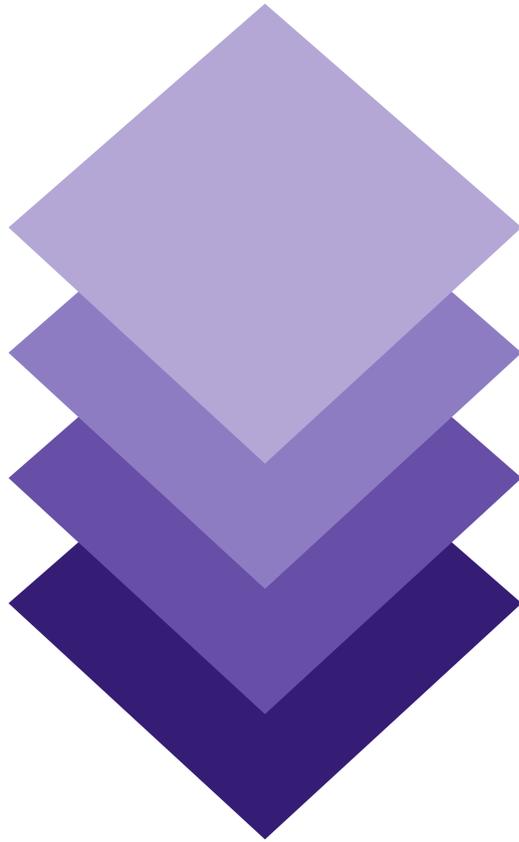
Climate Change

Climate change, which was accelerated by human activities, is a major issue in the human era that could possibly end the human era.



Rationale

- We wanted to explore



How an era replaces another era (e.g. Cambrian - Devonian - Permian - Jurassic - Paleogene - Quaternary (now) - future)

How actions from a previous era may affect the plight of the next era (Specifically how actions of humans would cause the end of the human era)

The relationship between the beginning and end (where a start of something is partly build upon the end of another)

We also wanted to urge people to protect the earth so that the earth can continue to sustain life.



Mediums

Initial chosen medium: Watercolour



Watercolour background^

We rejected watercolour as it was not concentrated, not easy to paint details due to it being watery and hence, could not aptly present our intentions.

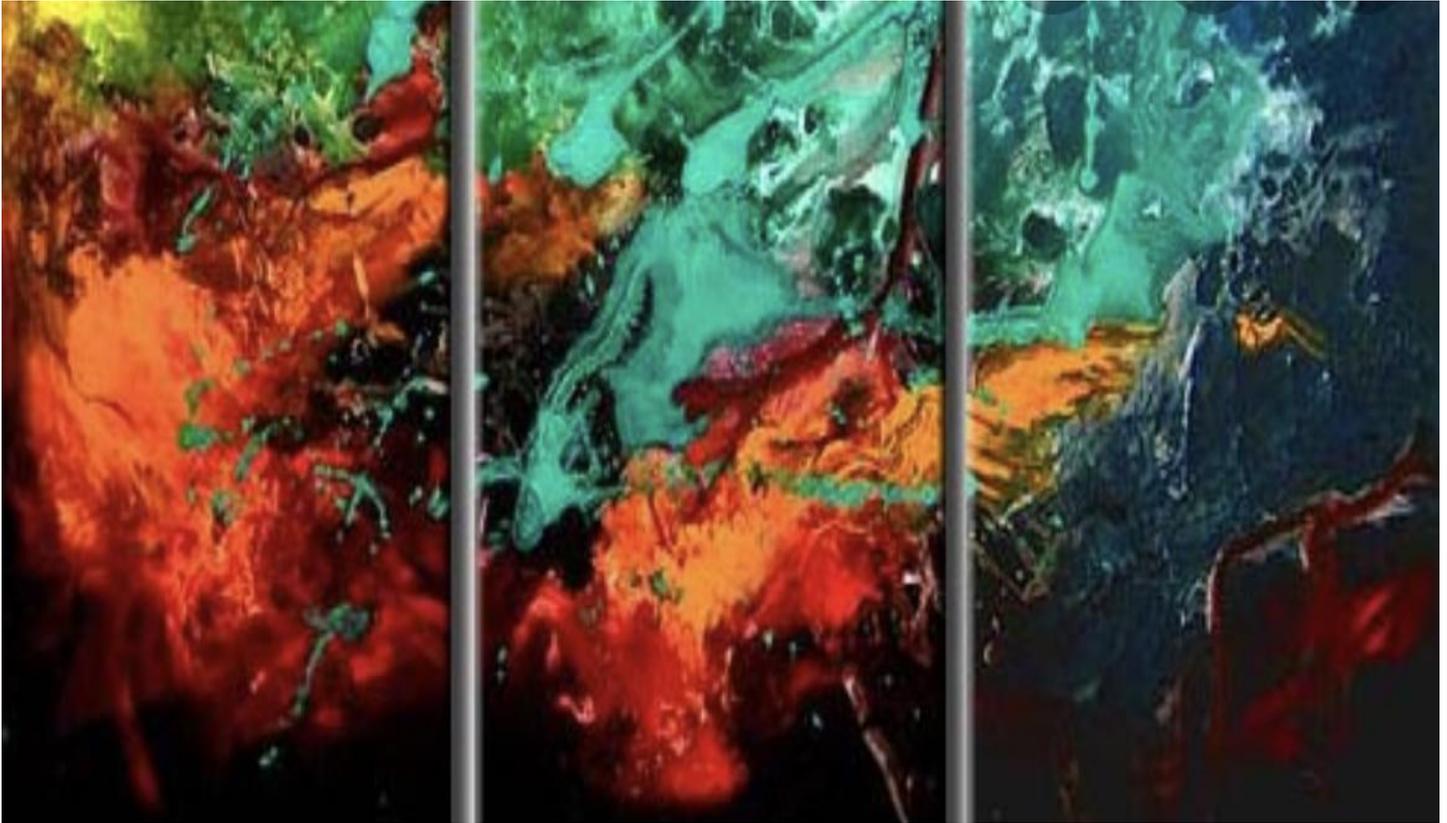


We chose gouache as it is more concentrated than watercolour and we are able to apply more intricate details to our painting. (As seen from the picture on the left)

Final medium: Gouache



Mode of presentation



An example of a triptych^

We decided to use triptych format to present our artwork. The three canvases would show the process of the start of an era to the end of the era and start of a new generation. At the first canvas from the left, it would depict the start of the era. At the second canvas from the left, it would depict the advancement of the era and its climax. At the last canvas from the left, it would depict the end of the era and the start of a new era.

Each canvas would be of size 40cm x 60cm



2. Research

a. First-hand Research



Birth of St John The Baptist^

This represents the idea that the birth of a life must replace that of another. However, we did not want to depict the start of something new such as birth as a replacement of the end of something old.



Symbols of death/end

Yew tree



The tree has qualities of longevity and regeneration, and came to symbolise death and resurrection in Celtic culture due to the toxicity of the tree's needles in particular, which can prove fatal. This may have further contributed to its connections with death.

Crows



Many view the appearance of crows as an omen of death because crows are scavengers and are generally associated with dead bodies, battlefields, and cemeteries. They are thought to circle in large numbers above sites where animals or people are expected to soon die.



Flag at half mast

- *A sketch we did of a flag at half mast*



In many countries, a flag at half mast is seen as a symbol of respect, mourning, distress, or, in some cases, a salute.

We chose to incorporate in the yew tree only as we felt that we could infuse this into our painting to foreshadow the impending end of the human era. Yew trees were also easy to integrate into our artwork and gave our artwork more depth on the idea of death and regeneration.

Symbols of start/birth

Rising sun

- *Image of a sunrise*



A rising sun is often seen as a symbol of a hopeful start and brings light in times of darkness. Sunrise is a symbol of birth and rebirth, of awakening. The coming of light, resurrection.

Small seedling

- *Image of a seedling*



A small seedling often signifies the rebirth or birth, the beginning of a new life.

Yellow/White light

- *Image of a lit light bulb*



Yellow/white light brings hope to people and is most commonly used in media to show the beginning of something new.

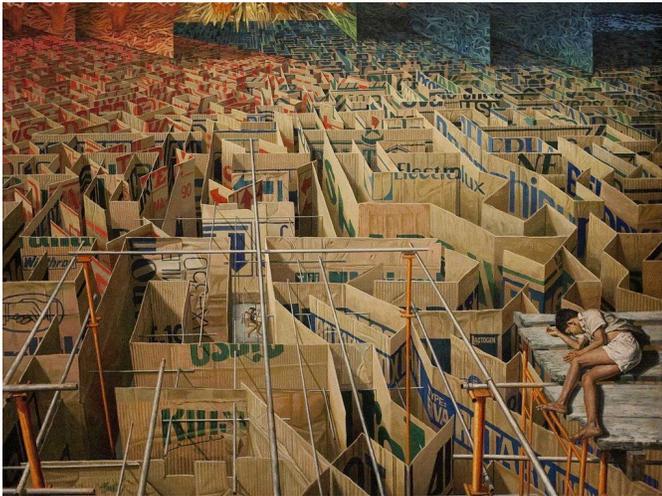
We ended up choosing to incorporate the rising sun into our artwork as it represents youth and a hopeful start in which we want to show in the start of the human era in our artwork. A rising sun also incorporates yellow and white light, hence is more effective. Incorporating the rising sun was also the easiest as it complements other elements of our artwork, making our artwork more visually appealing and impactful.



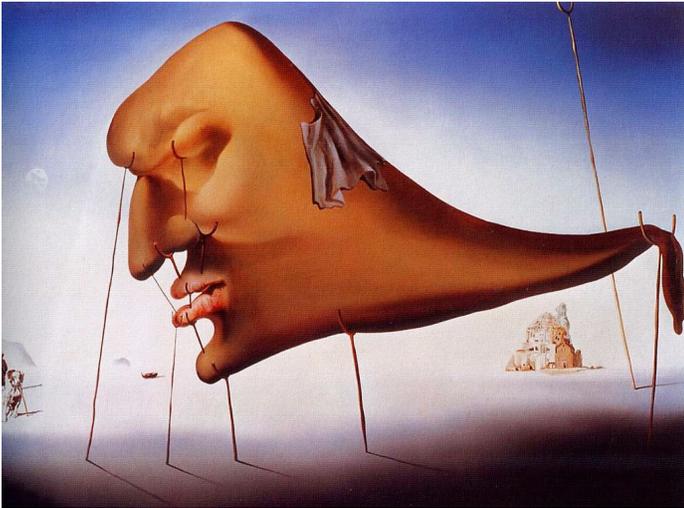
b. Artistic References



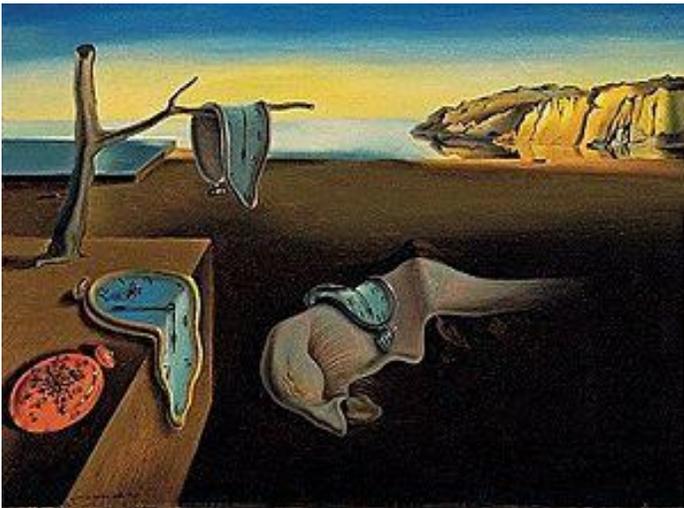
We initially referenced to the Marilyn Monroe Diptych by Andy Warhol as it presented the idea of fading into death in which we wanted to include in our depiction of the end of the human era. However, we later decided not to as we wanted to depict the transition of an end of the human era to the next era as a linked process, not fading out.



We initially referenced to Labyrinth by Dede Eri Supria as it depicted problems faced by the human era: poverty. However, we later decided not to reference this idea as we wanted to depict humans harming the environment in our artwork, not societal problems.



We initially referenced the surrealistic background in Sleep by Salvador Dalí as we thought we could use a similar background to depict an apocalyptic environment after the end of the human era. However, we decided not to as this type of background is too dreamy and does not create the apocalyptic atmosphere and uncertainty that we want when depicting the end of the human generation.



We referenced the background in Persistence of Memory by Salvador Dalí as we felt we could apply a similar background to depict an apocalyptic environment in our artwork to represent the end of the human era. Specifically, we referenced the barren land and the mountain in Dalí's painting.





We referenced the juxtaposed buildings in Frida Kahlo's artwork, My Dress Hangs There, as we felt we could juxtapose buildings together in our artwork to depict the climax of the human era.



We referenced Vincent Van Gogh's Wheatfield with Cypresses, as it contains three layers in the painting where the grass is the bottom layer, the trees are the middle layer and the sky and mountains are the top layer. We felt we could use such an arrangement to depict the subject matter and background in our artwork.



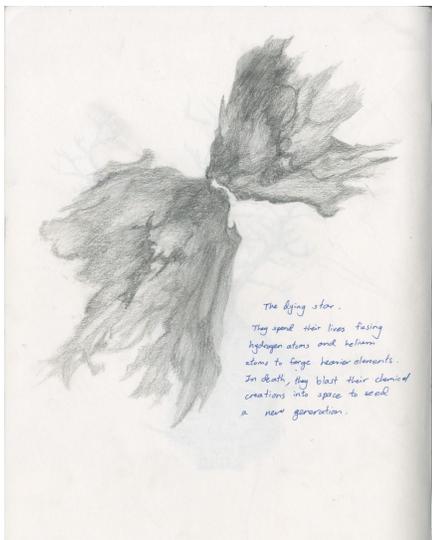
3. Ideation Process

a. Initial experimentation

There are 4 main notions that we are depicting in our project:

1. Beginning of life in an era
2. Advancement of an era
3. Fall of an era
4. Beginning of another new era

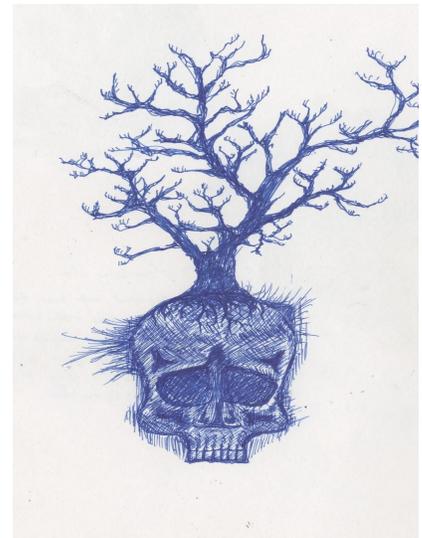
1. Beginning of life in an era



Spectacular dying star which seed new stars, but we did not use this idea as we wanted the artwork to be focused on the human era.

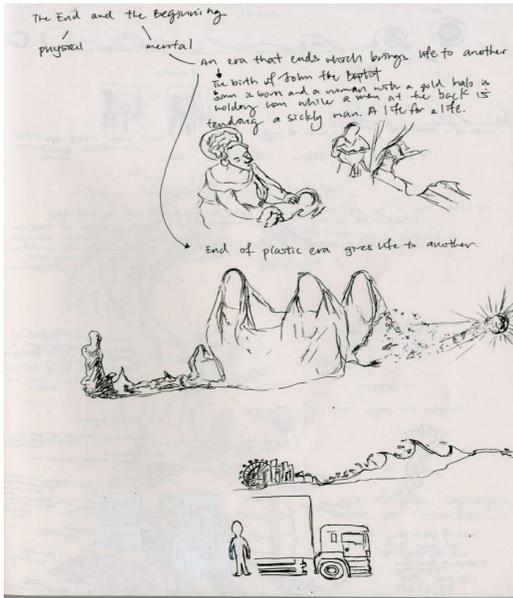


Chick breaking out of its shell on the palm of the hand of a dead person, symbolising the birth of a new life that was due to the end of another life. We rejected this idea as we wanted to depict birth as something that is built upon death, not as a replacement of death.



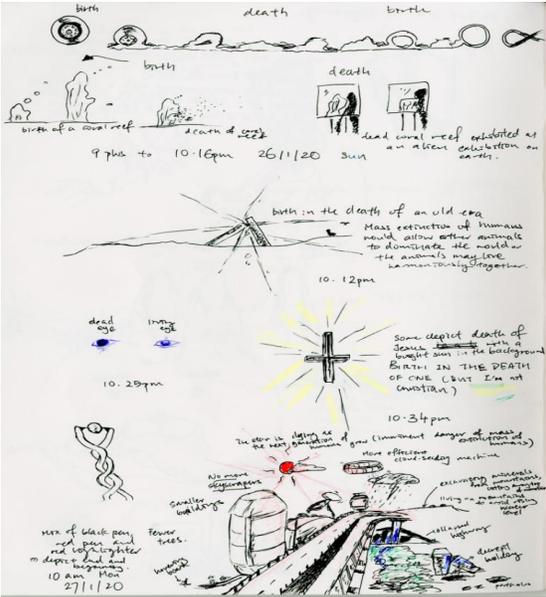
a tree growing on a skull which symbolises how life grows out of death, but we rejected this idea because it is rather unrealistic.



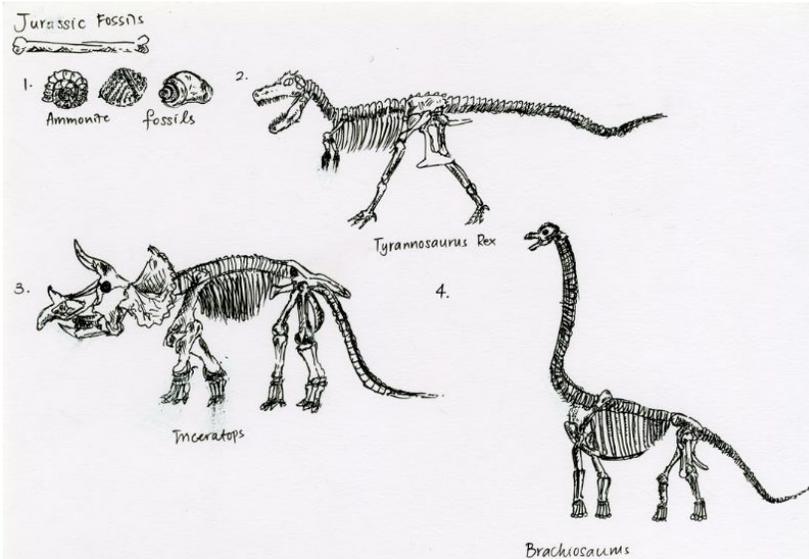


We explored the idea of how the birth of a new life only happens when someone dies, by referencing the artwork "The Birth of St John The Baptist". Plastic bags can be seen disintegrating to form new objects, symbolizing the start of something new based on the end of another object. There is also a sketch of the extinction of humans as a gigantic tsunami washes away everything in its path, clearing the land for the new generation that would rise during post-human era.

We also explored ideas of birth in the death of an old era. The sketch above the eye sketch depicts remnants of human generation, ruined buildings, that can be seen with rays of light shining through the gap between the buildings and around the buildings. This symbolises the hopeful start to a new generation in post-human era. The sketch at the top depicts an old tyre slowly melting and molding itself into a new object. This represents that the birth of a new object is built upon the old object.



In depth drawing of fossils of ancient animals and plants, which we planned to use to depict the remnants of the Cambrian era. We did not use this idea as the colour contrast between the fossils and the soil was rather stark and hence unnatural.



An in depth drawing of dinosaur bones, which we planned to use as fossils to depict the remnants of the Jurassic era. We wanted to incorporate this idea into the soil of our artwork at first, but decided not to as the colour contrast between the fossils and the soil was rather stark and hence unnatural.

Phoenix rising from the ashes symbolises rebirth out of death, however, we wanted our work to be realistic while phoenix is a mythological bird and hence we rejected it.

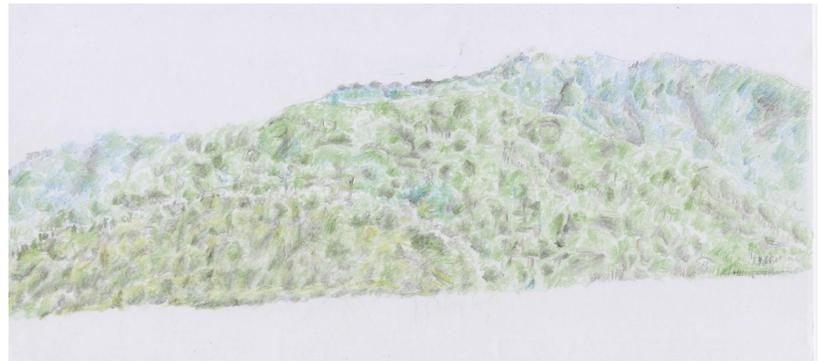


This is the portrayal of the start of the human generation which is the cavemen, the earliest known humans. We decided to use this idea as it matches our subject matter - the human era.



We incorporated this idea of a sunrise, as it is the sign of a new day. Thus, the sunrise depicts the start of a new human era, filled with hope and optimism.

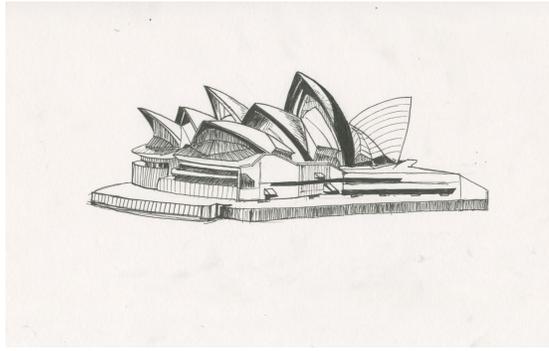
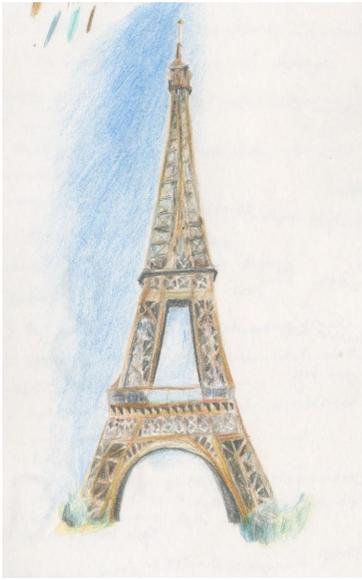
We painted this lush greenery to show how beautiful the world was at the start of the human era, before human industrialisation.



2. Advancement of the human era



This is a sketch of early human developments, which includes kampongs and shophouses. This would be depicted at the start of the second shophouses to show the gradual rise of the human era.



These are the peak development of human civilization, which includes landmarks such as Sydney Opera House and the Eiffel Tower.



We juxtaposed some of the modern architectures, such as Taipei 101 and the Gherkin in the United Kingdom, that we are incorporating into the final artwork. We also included factories emitting thick smokes to depict how much harm the humans are causing to the environment. However, we found this arrangement too messy.



We referred to this image of buildings before we started on our second draft of juxtaposing buildings together.



This is our second draft of juxtaposing buildings. We found this arrangement more appealing and neater while still appearing random.



At the foreground of the canvas, we painted trees that were healthy and slowly faded to wilted and burning trees, showing how human development negatively impacted the environment.



3. Fall of an era



We sketched a graveyard, however we did not use this idea as this was too place-specific.

This shows a flag at half mast, which is seen as a symbol of respect, mourning, distress. But we rejected this idea as it is unrealistic to have an undestroyed flag pole while everything else is destroyed and turned to dust.



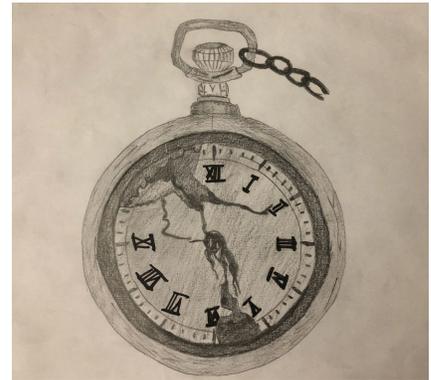
crow, which for centuries have been closely connected with death. However, this idea was not applicable as we wanted to depict large-scale destruction of the human era.





This skeleton sketch was intended to represent the end of the human generation, but we did not incorporate this idea as it was too minute as compared to the depiction of large scale destruction.

The clock shows that the damage caused by humans is irreversible at the point where everything turns to dust, but we did not use it due to the same reason as the skeleton.



These burning and destroyed buildings show the remnants of the human generation. We felt that this is effective in depicting the end of the human era.



4. Beginning of another new era



This shows a human walking towards a tunnel of light and a new life, signifying reincarnation. However, we felt that this does not fit our theme as we want to introduce a new era that does not include the human race.

This depicts a new creature from the era after the humans. We are incorporating this idea into our work as it is inline with our theme - the end and the beginning.



This depicts a barren land to show the uncertainty and harsh environment in the new generation in the post-human era.

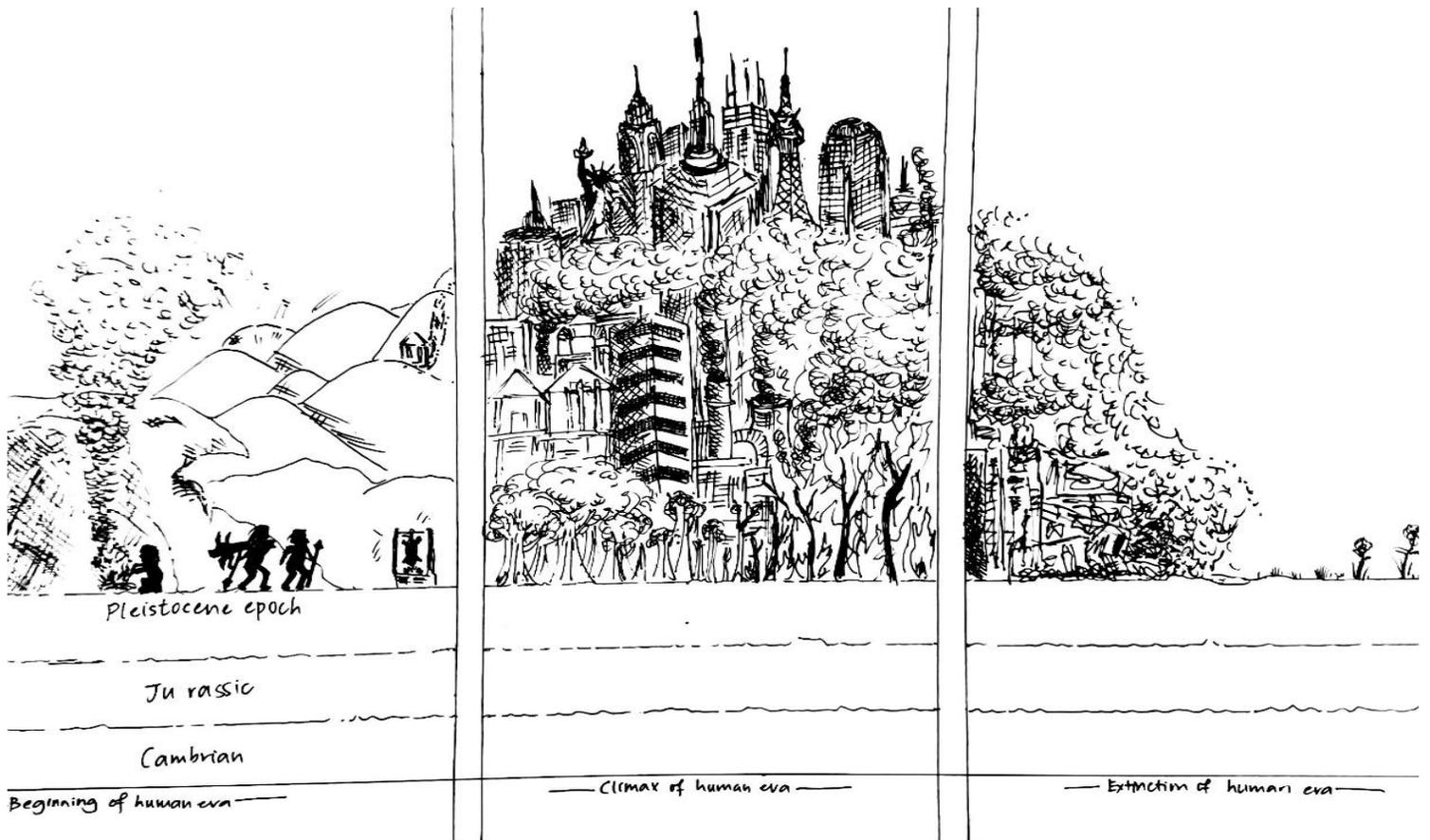


b. Finalised Ideas

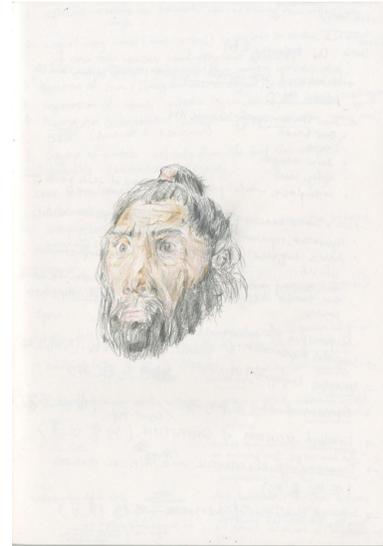
These are the finalised ideas and sketches that we are incorporating into our canvas.

Layout:

This is a detailed layout of our artwork.



1st Canvas:



These cavemen and cave depict the beginning of the human era.



Green forest and mountains are painted in the background to show the unpolluted environment before human industrialisation.

The sunrise is used for the background to signify hope of a new era.



2nd canvas:



Infrastructures, from simple to state-of-the-art architectures, are all painted to show the advancement of humankind.



At the foreground, we painted from healthy to burning trees to show how much harm humans inflict on the environment.

3rd canvas:



The first vertical half of the canvas shows destroyed buildings, to highlight the end of the human era.



The second half of the canvas depicts a new creature, which shows the start of the next era.



The background of the canvas would be the barren land with mountains in the distance.

4. Challenges faced

- We were unable to have many physical meetings due to the Covid-19 situation.
 - Hosted regular zoom meetings to discuss and took turns to bring back the canvas
- We were also unable to gauge how well we were doing due to the lack of mid-term evaluation.
 - We regularly updated and asked for comments from our mentor to ensure our project is on track
- Gouache was a challenge for us as it was a new medium and we had trouble at first trying to get used to it.
 - We watched many online tutorials and did many trial and error to come up with the correct colours and tones
- We also realised that the fossils were unrealistic in the painting only when we started painting.
 - We decided not to paint the fossils and covered them with soil



5. Final Works

- a. 1st Canvas
- b. 2nd Canvas
- c. 3rd Canvas
- d. Overview

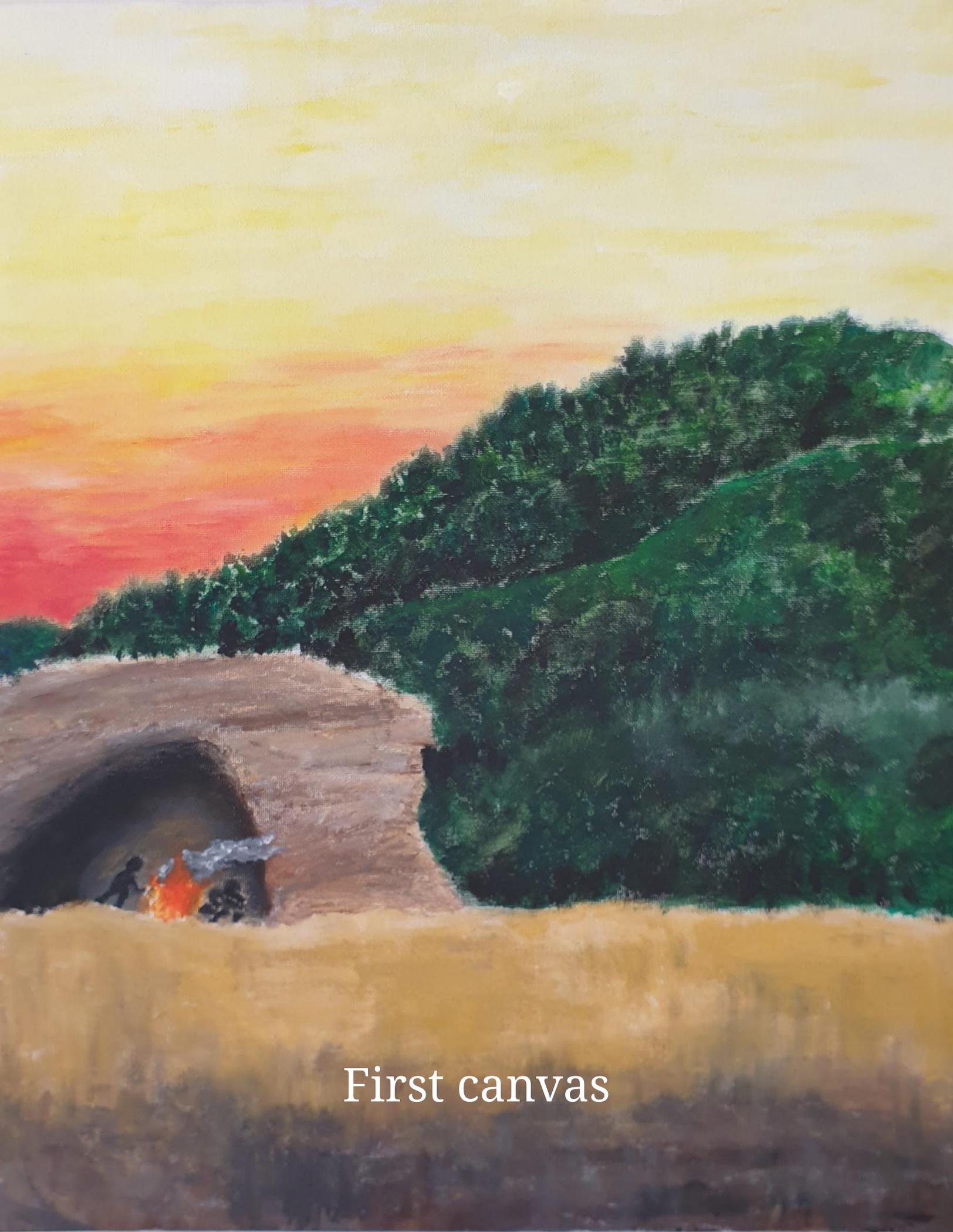
a.

The rising sun behind the hills signifies the start of a new generation and symbolises the hopes and promises of the new generation. The hills are densely forested to depict the untouched and unspoiled nature thousands of years ago.



There are also Cavemen walking out of the cave as they were the earliest type of human and they signify the start of the human generation, which ties back to our theme of the “beginning”.





First canvas

b.

This canvas depicts the climax of the human generation. In the mid ground to background of the painting, skyscrapers and buildings are depicted with hills behind the buildings.



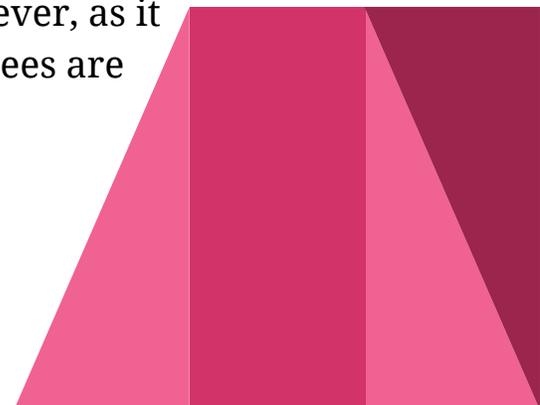
The cramped positioning of the skyscrapers and buildings are inspired by Frida Kahlo's "My dress hangs there" where the buildings are placed in a similar way.



The sky at the start of the canvas follows the colour of the sky of the first canvas to show the unpolluted sky while at the end of the canvas, it is polluted with smoke produced from harmful human activities. Industrial pipes and factories are depicted in the upper foreground to midground where they are producing smoke that cover some parts of the buildings and the sky from view.



Initially, the trees in the foreground are untouched. However, as it progresses from the left to the right of the painting, the trees are gradually burnt to show deforestation.





Second canvas

C.

This canvas shows the end of the human generation and the start of the new generation.



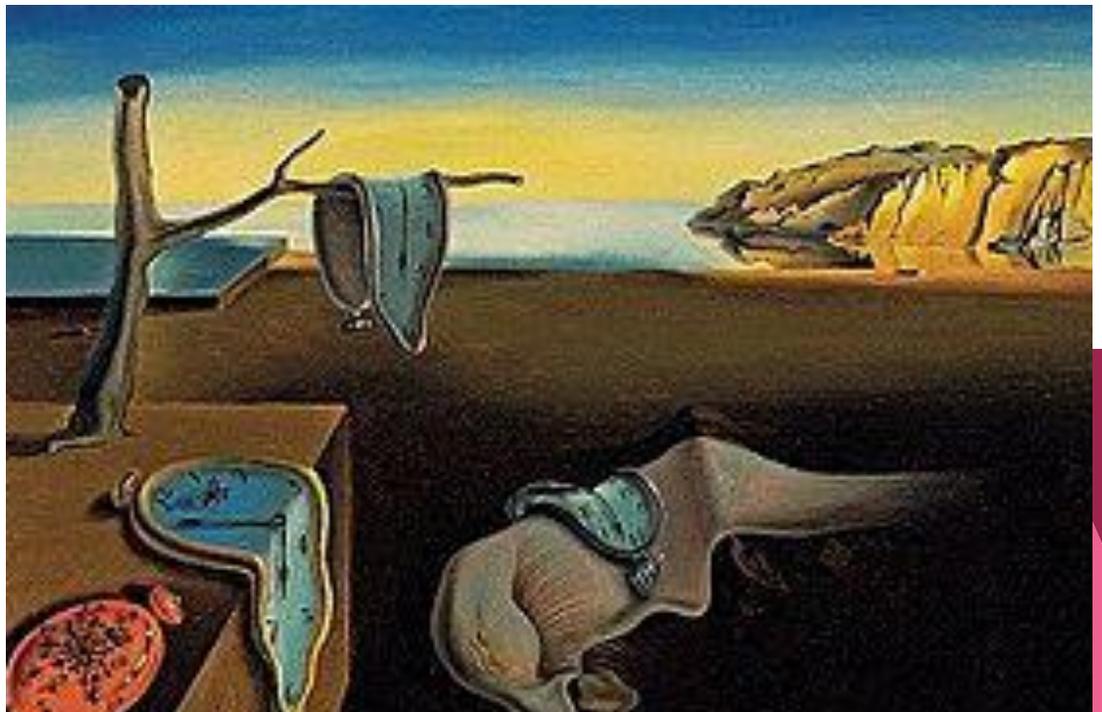
At the left side of the canvas, there are ruined buildings and ashes with smoke to depict remnants of humans.

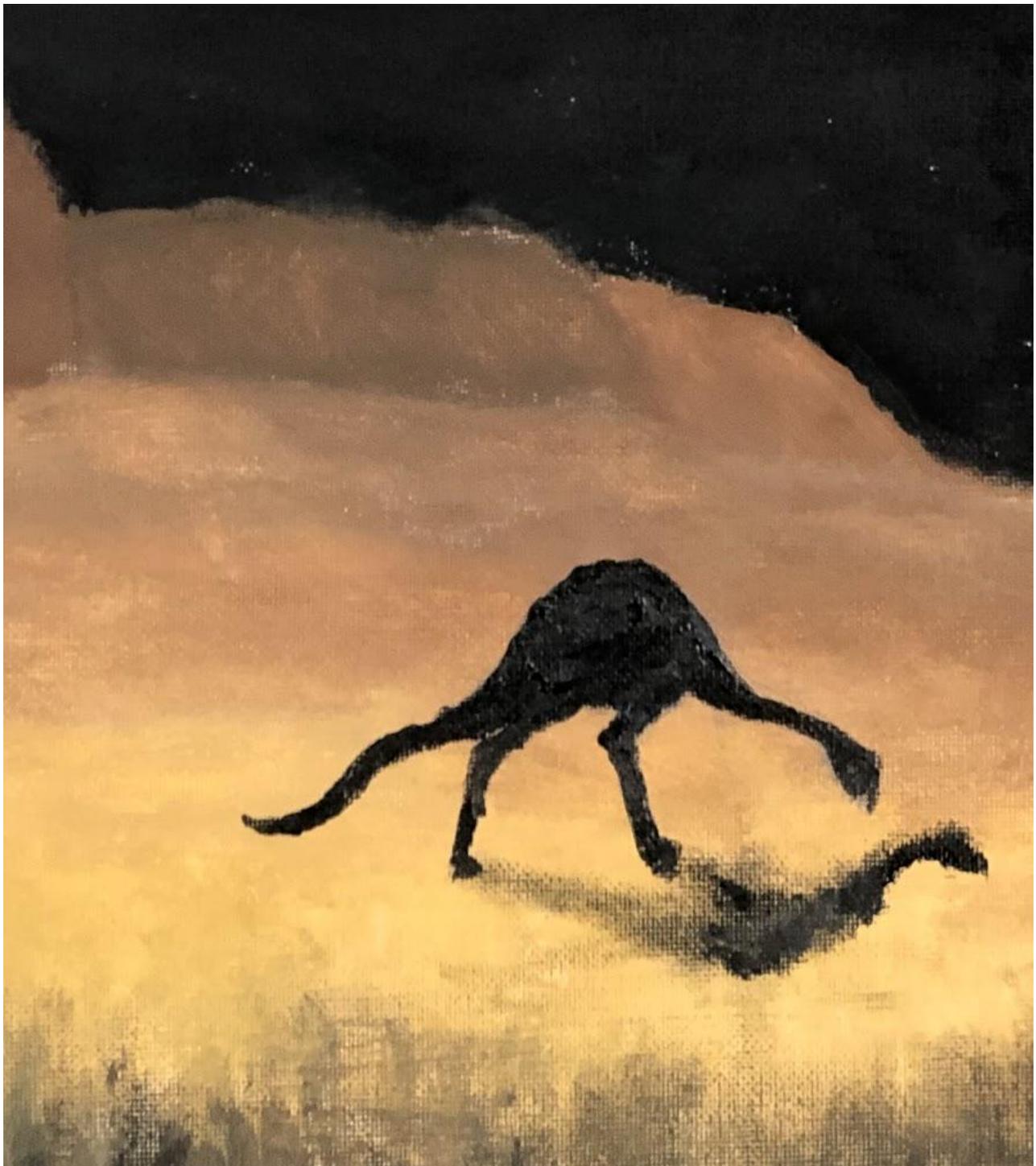
In the background, the sky is painted black to depict a possible new environment. Barren land with mountains afar are depicted as a new and harsh environment during the post-human era where almost no living things exist.

At the left side of the canvas, there are ruined buildings and ashes with smoke to depict remnants of humans.

In the background, the sky is painted black to depict a possible new environment.

Barren land with mountains afar are depicted as a new and harsh environment during the post-human era where almost no living things exist. The barren landscape is a reference to the background of Salvador Dali's "Persistence of Memory".





Silhouettes of new creatures are depicted at the foreground of the canvas to depict new life, a new generation without humans.



Third canvas

d.



Throughout the painting, an invisible line is created where the top of the hills at the start of the painting and the barren land at the end of the painting are the lower points of the painting where it signifies the beginning and end of the human generation while the top of the buildings in the middle of the painting are the higher point of the painting, signifying the climax of the human generation. All canvases are connected by a common element such as hills or buildings.





Reflections

We are proud of our final product and how well our team worked together. Everyone was allocated tasks, and we all completed them with equal efficiency.

Furthermore, this project has taught us the importance of drafting and planning. We brainstormed many ideas and narrow down on the one in which we think is the most suitable

Gouache was also a new medium that we have never tried and we felt that this is a good learning experience to be exposed to these new mediums.

During the Covid-19 situation, we faced several challenges such as not being able to meet face to face to discuss our project, but we still figured out methods to overcome them.



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