Eloquence Art Prize 2026
OUR FORESTS IN DANGER

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SELF-PRESENTATION

I am a final-year University of Western Australia Fine Art and Psychology student aspiring to become an art therapist. I am interested in the therapeutic potential of creative practice. Currently, I work at Mills Records in Fremantle and illustrated the recently published children's book *Laree the Tiger and the Missing Boat*.

<u>The Specular Void:</u>
Transmuting Landscape Devastation into Environmental Responsibility through the work of Arthur Streeton and Fabrice Hyber

Arthur Streeton, *The Vanishing Forrest (1934)*, oil on canvas, 122.5 x 122.5cm

Fabrice Hyber, *Clearing (2021)*, Oil on Canvas and Mixed Media, 149.86 x 248.92 cm

The Specular Void:
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Global deforestation, from Australia's tamed bushlands to the managed landscapes of France, represents a profound internal loss for humanity and our connection to the natural world. Arthur Streeton and Fabrice Hyber each confront ecological decline through depictions of forests under erasure. The absence of trees becomes a pivotal visual device where physical devastation is transmuted into the psychological birth of environmental responsibility. Through this, it becomes clear that protecting our forests in danger requires environmental awareness to shift from passive observation into an active realisation of our inherent unity with our ecosystems.

Streeton's *The Vanishing Forest (1934)* and Hyber's *Clearing (2010)* bridge a century of environmental concern through their shared portrayal of empty space as a catalyst for awareness. In Streeton's work, the void left by a bulldozed tree serves as a site of discomfort, forcing viewers into compulsory witnessing of the political and commercial entities responsible for landscape destruction.

Hyber reinterprets this "clearing" not just as a void of destruction, but as a conscious opening where light enters. This mirrors the ecological necessity of gaps for new growth, suggesting that acknowledging the damage (as Streeton does) is the first step toward the experimentation and change required for ecological survival.

The Heidelberg School, of which Streeton was a leading figure, drew significant inspiration from the École de Barbizon in France[1]. The artistic lineage of these schools establishes a foundational commitment to the forest as an endangered subject worthy of both aesthetic and protective regard. While the Barbizon artists sought to capture the forests enduring spirit[2], Streeton evolved this tradition into an urgent critique of environmental destruction.

Representing the contemporary French perspective, Hyber expands this tradition by shifting the focus from the external landscape to human awareness and environmental networks. Where Streeton's work functions as a protective archive of what is being lost, Hyber's *Clearing* operates as a mental landscape that explores the philosophical relationship between humanity and the environment.

Ultimately, the use of empty space acts as the connective tissue between the two artists' sensibilities. Streeton's urgent documentation of what is being lost and Hyber's mental landscape of what can be regained bridges a gap. Together, these works transform the discomfort of absence into a profound realisation of our interconnectedness, compelling us to protect and nurture the living earth.

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[1] Australian Art History | *Australian Impressionism* https://www.australianarthistory.com/australian-impressionism

[2] Encyclopedia Britannica, *Barbizon School* | *French Painting* https://www.britannica.com/art/Barbizon-school

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