Australia is a diverse and multi-cultural country. Each and every citizen comes from a different background and each background has contributed to what is internationally known as Australia. From the range of food, language, culture and religion, Australia is able to flourish into what is today, a free and unique nation. Australia with all its diversity is an artwork itself.

Teenagers worldwide have their own way of developing themselves and have become increasingly attracted to the idea of independence. This idea doesn’t discriminate. Since Australia is practically isolated from the rest of the world it’s harder for Australian teenagers to ‘keep up’ and so, thanks to social media and the internet, majority of Australia has become a run-off of everyone else.

I’ve noticed that many teenagers that surround me have forgotten how their lives have begun and do not realise the beauty that is life, surrounding them.

See teenage life from the perspective of a young, 15 year old female and step back to the days when you too were one of us. Youthful and curious spirits among few, whom like to destroy the box and think up a larger more allusive picture on life.

Think of it this way, from the day you are born, you own and become a part of, a pure, blank piece of rugged, un-framed canvas. Your parents look at you and are inspired to name their work of art, their masterpiece.

They place that label in the very centre of your canvas which stays with you forever and lets you and the world know who you are. Your parents now hold the paintbrush whilst your God - whoever He/She or They may be - provides the paint. You sit there and watch.

Your canvas is stapled onto the family wall while you grow, learn and develop your own various shades of personality which reflects as the colour of your canvas. Your home is where you originate and belong. The family wall is where your parents paint their values, culture, life lessons and discipline onto and into you. Once your personality has developed, it is up to you whether or not you let the paint dry or wipe it off immediately.

You could be the youngest, middle or eldest of the various siblings, or even an only child but through thick and thin, the canvasses that surround this family wall, become your personal gallery where you complement each other to form a family masterpiece.

You will soon learn that life is full of decisions. You will choose wrong ones and you will choose right ones. When you enter school and begin to develop a social life everything begins to change. You learn to listen and to speak, you learn what makes people smile and laugh or cry and cringe. You learn that people will always remember the bad things over the good and to watch your every move because everyone, regardless of social rank, is being watched.
Before you know it, you want to, need to, become a part of the largest ‘community’ universally known as ‘Society’. You need to fit in.

The word community has been put into quotation marks because of the irony of the word. By definition it is meant to be a shared space or organisation etc. etc. But is it not what one would define as their ‘home’ among strangers? The area you live in or the local shopping centre or your online blog, these are all communities that are meant to give you a sense of belonging.

It was once a positive thing.

‘She looks weird.’ ‘He is ugly.’ ‘That’s lame.’ Who decides these things? Rather, who has the right to decide these things? Hungry for answers, you ask your friends, you look around and the answer is the same. ‘Society is like a rock, it’s everywhere in different shapes, sizes and forms, just go with it and stop thinking about it!’

‘A rock?’, you ask.

‘Yeah, because it’s like stable and what we can depend on yanno?’, answers an obvious member of Society.

You spend enough years observing and obeying Society’s rules, until you realise that the rock you have picked up has become scratched into your canvas leaving visible marks that lets everyone that sees you know, that you are a part of Society.

One day you realise something. Something that makes you want to throw the rock that society is, completely out of sight and to forget everything it has introduced to you. But what?

Society ruined the teenager, is what. Society saw these blank canvasses that had only been painted on by families and tradition and tore it anew. Society coloured the teenager grey in confusion which in turn coloured all canvasses. This was expected since Society is inconsistent and flawed. Society is a contradiction in itself. But no one figures this out until it’s too late.

‘How does one become a part of Society in the first place?’, you muse.

‘Looking the part would be a good start. We want slim, tan, tone, fit, bodies to represent us. Remember to always look good’, answers Society.

You don’t know why but it seems to make sense to look good and presentable at your own cost and so you start to tear the rugged and torn canvas to fit the desired shape deemed by Society. You cut, slash, and split the canvas until it is ‘perfect’.

You begin to notice other people doing the same thing and learn that some achieve this almost effortlessly whilst others end up having to replace the abuse almost double or triple the original size. Rips occur here and there, signs of obvious struggle, become
taped up yet remain visible. Visible enough for people to question your well-being and for you to mask your pain with;

‘I’m fine.’

You become one of the majority. The majority that struggle with their physical appearance. You try everything you can think of and it’s not enough as Society’s standards start rising and the desired size 10 becomes a size 6. You are careful not to go to drastic lengths because you have learnt and know that there really are people out there who have to battle with depression, anorexia and bulimia. Which makes you think, is it worth it?

‘Yes’, answers Society.

Looking around, you want to fit in and so you ignore this transgression. ‘If I can’t be skinny I bet I could look good and develop nice style right?’ This becomes your new mindset.

You remember the days when you’d ask your parents for spare change for some candy and realise that times have changed drastically. You begin to ask your parents for higher amounts of money and start to go out more to supply your endless need to follow the ever-changing trends. Until one day your parents get sick of it and tell you to get a job.

At first it seemed like a good idea to be able to make your own ‘endless supply’ of money for once without feeling that pang of guilt, watching your parents empty their pockets. But as shifts and training sessions grow longer and more tedious alongside the workload from school, you begin to feel overwhelmed with responsibility and confused as to what your priorities are.

You start to abandon your canvas, your well-being, and become an empty physical presence drifting about in the cruel, working and academic world. Little do you know - yet you feel- your canvas starts to droop down in abandonment and becomes a mess for it wants to be free to feel life again. Your inner soul wants to live. But your ‘priorities’ get the better of you and you become trapped within this labyrinth Society has put you in.

Society’s cohort is none other than Love, the one thing that can kill a person whilst giving them life. Love is a tricky thing, from watching your friends ‘crush’ on a person to becoming ‘crushed’ tenfold by the same person you begin to wonder,

‘What’s so hard about loving another person?’

‘Let’s give you someone to love shall we?’, answers Society in a suspiciously mocking tone.

And just like that you end up finding someone who you wish you mentally call your ‘significant other’, ‘your other half’, ‘the love of your life’. You develop a crush on
someone. Your infatuation with this person takes over your life and you write their
name a million times on your canvas in permanent marker. Over the names of the family
you already love and even your own. Until the big day happens, that one person reveals
their mutual feelings.

The thing about Love is that it can bring someone from ‘rock bottom’ to ‘sky high’ within
a few beats of the heart. All is well until you realise that everyone is the same. Everyone
is a member of Society whether they want to be or not. How do you realise this?
Because that one person who you would die for, that one person you loved more than
yourself (if love for yourself existed), that one person whom you would give the world
to, left you for another person.

Just like that, Love reveals to you ‘rock bottom’. Your family and friends don’t know
what to do as they watch you sulk and wither away.

‘It’s just a break-up’, your friends would remind you but both physically and mentally,
you can’t take it anymore. Your canvas sits there on the wall, ripped and torn as you
realise writing their name in permanent marker wasn’t your best idea. You sit and look
into the mirror.

‘I followed all the steps Society, I tore myself up trying to look good, I bent over
backwards to get money and achieve academically, I loved who I thought was ‘the one’
with all of me. I thought I had been accepted’, you sulk.

‘You should learn to love yourself before you love another’, ‘comforts’ Society.

It is then that you begin to realise that all of a sudden Society has ‘changed for the
better’. It is then that you learn the flawed thoughts and theories of Society. The
contradiction of it all.

‘You don’t have to be a size 6 to be beautiful. You don’t have to be stylish to catch
attention. You should study hard and learn as much as you can, you should’

You pick up the ‘stable’ rock that Society is and throw it with all your disbelief, anger,
pain and knowledge of this lie, into the mirror in front of you and remember from those
few classes you payed attention to, something about rocks. Something that makes your
friend’s analogy to the ‘stable’ rock that Society is, make more sense.

Rocks can be melted, cooled and crystalised. Rocks can be weathered and eroded. Rocks
can be compacted and have tonnes of pressure on them but whatever happens the
ending result is a rock. Whether it be of different shape, size, colour or form, like rocks,
Society will always exist.

You look at your physically and mentally exhausted form in the fractured mirror and
see in the few remaining shards your canvas reflecting all that is left of you.
Large, torn, split, pieces of canvas all over the floor. Your own name has been lost as during your time as a pawn of Society your very identity had been taken over and ‘stolen’.

You look outside your window and into the sky and hope and pray that one day you may be able to grow from all this, learn from this to never repeat any mistakes. No one in your generation truly knows what to do or what we can do but we all know that one day we hope to be able to stand in front of a beautiful work of art that will one day be our life, painted all over our canvas to be framed for all to see.

To be able to own, your very own masterpiece.