

Practitioner's Statement

The Blame Game

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My installation, a linen doll that disturbingly hangs before a pencil-drawn triptych of tattooed self-portraits, confronts the viewer with an aura of subtle violence. Inspired by the Polish component of my heritage, the doll partially emulates my relationship with my grandmother and her lessons in stitching. However, I began perceiving the doll as a symbol of manipulation particularly through exploring Marina Bychkova, an artist who constructs sensual but vulnerable porcelain dolls, and also by the eerie style of Tim Burton's stop-motion animation *Coraline*, featuring a girl and her doll doppelgänger. Most significantly, my doll contains voodoo connotations, a form of gris-gris magic based on the concept of a person being influenced by an inanimate object that resembles them. The voodoo doll is essentially a human construct that I see as a means to evade responsibility for committing a transgression, with the central figure from the triptych pointing in accusation at the hanged doll, ambiguously representative of either a culprit or victim. Painter Jess Mara inspired my use of tattoos, and the cross-cultural religious and superstitious symbols on the subject's skin such as the crucifix or star sign allude to the higher powers that we blame for our destinies. Viewing the work, we question the integrity of these higher powers, perturbed by the isolating notion of being accountable for our own fate.

The artwork forms a disturbing narrative. The first portrait reveals the manufacturing of the doll, stitching it specifically to correlate with the portrait, giving it blue button eyes and brown woollen hair. The second portrait depicts the pointed accusation of the doll, hanged at the discretion of the accuser for crimes it did not – and could not – commit. The final portrait illustrates a turned back, completely evading blame and content to allow the innocent figure to suffer. Intrigued by the emotion captured by Margaret Keane in the luminous eyes of her painted doll-like children, the buttons were used to give the doll a transfixing gaze and sense of oddity, also emphasizing its artificial nature. To create a direct contrast between the 'human' portraits and the 'fake' doll, I rendered my triptych in hyperrealism, influenced primarily by Gottfried Heinlein, Alyssa Monks and Mike Dargas, succeeding in capturing the softness of skin and the vibrancy of hair. Further, I wanted the doll itself to be easily manipulated, and so I inserted a malleable aluminium wire skeleton to ensure its movement could be entirely directed in the installation.

Despite my multimedia artwork containing a plethora of elements and complex themes, its rectangular composition and unified narrative makes it powerful and stoic. Executed in an almost monochrome colour palette and accented by three flesh-coloured portraits, the artwork appeals to my controlled aesthetic. The doll is the immediate focal point, and despite it being visibly synthetic, its imitation of death creates a serious, pensive atmosphere, promoted by the sombre expressions in the portraits. Holistically, *The Blame Game* fundamentally comments on a core facet of humanity: our avoidance of responsibility.