

Self Portrait

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Through the form of a large-scale self-portrait, my first practical major explores a personal understanding of myself in relation to the emotional struggle contextualised by the pressures of a Year 12 student simultaneously seeking to excel in elite sport. At the beginning of the course, I was faced with a simple question – what is a self-portrait? Through self-portraiture, an artist seeks to create a personally perceptual representation of oneself.

Both internal and external inspiration helped to generate my work. To visually represent myself, I needed to dissect my human character; truly understand the conflicting emotions I possessed this year. I considered my situational factors as a source of my angst. As a competitive swimmer, for the past 13 years, training and competing is a significant commitment. Having the ability to balance this with schooling is one thing, but training 6 times a week in conjunction with completing Year 12 is a completely different, and difficult concept. Being subjected to extreme pressure from outside sources, I found myself becoming completely absorbed in the pursuit of educational success. In doing so, it became apparent that I was becoming impartial to other, equally important parts of my life. I found myself losing grip of my swimming; the passion had been repressed, due to this dominating pressure to succeed in what was constantly described as the “most important year of [my] life.” As a result, I was left with a feeling of lacking; I found myself emotionally drowning, which considering the situation, was ironic. Within my self-portrait, I wanted to capture this emotion to serve as a visual representation of my experience, to leave behind and move on from at the end of the year.

Artist, Del Kathryn Barton uses a decorative expressionist style to explore the theme of sexuality, the human figure, and its relationship within the natural world. Her work was a primary source of inspiration for me. Barton possesses a technical style that is aesthetically appealing; I love the lack of restraint in her work, the over-embellishment, and the sheer eroticism of her subject matter. I felt compelled to explore the aesthetics of her art rather than the theme itself. I therefore applied her technique to my work, focussing on the basic elements of art to achieve a sense of emotional angst; reflective of the emotions I experienced.

My final piece is technically complex, and combines a range of procedures. The elaborate, highly decorative style serves as symbol of my eventful lifestyle. I have defied the laws of photorealism, and rather, evoked a strong sense of self-perception through an expressionist approach. Working in this style allowed me to convey a subjective impression of my self-image, defined by my thoughts, perceptions, and aspects that make up the quality of my personality.

Retrospectively, I believe I have successfully achieved my intention in capturing the emotional conflict I have faced throughout Year 12. The techniques I employed were out of sheer aesthetic appeal, however, theme, expression, and colour were specifically intended to evoke a reaction from the audience. I feel as though the large scale of my canvas allows my subject to transcend the boundaries of the canvas, accentuating its receptiveness among viewers.