

Practitioner's statement

Lost in the mind of depression

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I looked at the Human Condition in my Visual Study and decided to incorporate the subject into the Practical. Many of my friends suffer with depression and it has affected my family for many years also. The heartache and struggles of living with depression was the starting point of depicting the effects depression can have on life. To show the physicality of depression I wanted to use a live model.

Artists Liu Bolin and Emma Hack use body paint installation and photography to explore their ideas. I found it easier to articulate my story using a live model which then became the main focus of the piece. Kwang-Ho Shin helped me realise that I didn't have to paint perfectly. He uses smudging and his hands to create and destroy images often partly obscuring the image but allowing enough outline to inform the viewer.

Shin's work taught me that art could be crazy and smudged and created from the artist's emotions and story. It was acceptable to create an image that the audience doesn't initially fully understand.

Artist Nick Cave's interesting and unusual "sound suits" encouraged me to explore identity and how people are disturbed and uncomfortable when they can't define what is underneath a surface. When people can't pigeon hole a person they are reluctant to try to understand or accept them. Unlike Shin's paintings I understood Cave's message. That the outside is not necessarily what is on the inside.

The figure I painted wasn't intended to perfectly merge into the background because no matter how hard one tries to fit, it will never be perfect. The blotches on the body symbolise the feeling of falling apart under stress. The leaf mask hides the eyes and represents physically, the barrier put up by a depressed person. They often don't want to connect as "the eyes are the gateway to the soul".

The use of 'layering' mixed media in this piece represents the many levels of depression. As my work developed it seemed the skull was emerging from a bottomless pit; showing the ability to return from the darkness. The inclusion of the two mirrors facing each other was a conceptual idea to create a never ending stream of repetition. The other important symbol I used was the flowers, the idea taken from Mexican Sugar Skulls. The vibrant living flowers on the left represent a state of wellness and the dull 'dead' flowers on the right are the feelings and emotions of deep depression.

Body painting has always interested me and I felt I needed to use a real person to express my idea. By exploring depression using layers, I could 'build' the image with symbols of myself and my own experiences. Creating this piece was very satisfying, it needed a lot of self-searching and I learnt as much about myself as I did about how other artists portray their ideas in their work.