

Practitioner's Statement

Underneath her Mask

Shaina Blackburn

Masks. We've become so dependent on them, that we often use them to hide our true colours even when we don't need to. And it was with this in mind, that I became inspired to create a portrait entitled "**Underneath Her Mask**". This major work focuses on the multifaceted personalities and traits we carry under our personal masks, it is a work which focuses on one's true self, rather than the one we portray to the world.

Portraiture has seen an explosion of diverse approaches arise in the post-modernist era, from paint to mixed media, from photomontages to multimedia installations. It was from these approaches that I found my research exposing me to the works of Alana dee Haynes, Amber Isabel and Bernard Handick.

Dee Haynes transforms photos with delicate pen strokes through a sequence of intricate gestures. Her symbols and patterns, integrated with photography really appealed to me and I felt an immediate connection to her work.

Amber Isabel, a Dutch photographer, also inspired me with her mixed media portraits which shows beautiful women who seem both calm and trapped at the same time in their lives. Her works are quite minimalist which is in tune with how many photographs work these days. Handick's works were quite enigmatic which was an element which was interesting to consider including in my final piece.

Through the journey of experimentation with patterns, textures, prints and concepts, I refined my ideas to intricate patterns which portray the '*underneath*' of ones mask. Initially, I began creating the mask by drawing ink patterns on photographs taken from the internet. As my concepts developed I began to realise the patterns symbolised not what we (the world) see, but rather what is hidden below.

The bold black directional line through the middle of the work leads the viewer's eyes to the woman's 'mask' – her eyes. Her bright, green, sparkling eyes are what the world sees, how she portrays herself to us. It is not the mask, but rather the true self underneath the mask that really matters. The black mandala style intricate patterns each represents a different aspect of the woman's creative, complex, true self. When designing this work I was careful not to overdo the portrait with decorative patterns but included them in a gentle way, wrapping themselves around her form to subtly reveal her true personality.

I explored the idea of printing the image on canvas, and drawing the patterns with thick textas and pens, however I found that thick matte paper gave a much nicer, smoother finish to the photograph and allowed me to easily apply a range of different sized ink pens.

We all too often assume we know our loved one's thoughts, feelings and personality traits, and we too often forget that underneath their outer appearance, is a whole maze of creativity, love, passion and talents. This work is designed to remind those who forget, that behind our 'front covers' remains a whole book of chapters.