

Practitioner's Statement

## ***Coronation of the Depressed***

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There is a transcendent beauty to religious iconography that has always captivated me. Having been brought up in a Christian household, I was closely familiar with the moral narrative of these paintings, commonly related to an experience of suffering and resilience. The presence of the halo, universally recognised as a symbol of sacredness, places an isolated emphasis on the subject which thereby demands reverence from the viewer. It signifies, in no vague manner, that the individual possesses qualities worthy of respect.

I found that religious art can be classified as any work whose theme supports the moral message of the thing it purports to illustrate. In this context, "any set of human beliefs relating to that which they regard as sacred, holy, spiritual or divine" can be interpreted through the traditional means of iconography.

The reason I have chosen to associate an image of myself with the golden halo is to convey the resilience and suffering I have endured since the beginning of my struggle with depression and anxiety. I am proud of the fact that I have survived through Year 12, and overcome the many downfalls along the way. The determination to continue has been demanded of me, again and again. It is, in a way, a proof of my character that I am where I am. The nature and outcome of this journey has helped me to recognise that, not unlike the saints of the past, I too am an individual entitled to reverence and respect.

A strong influence to my own work was Frida Kahlo, who so vividly documented the personal pain and suffering that was consequent of a severe accident, and the consequent physical disability and trauma. She illustrated significant tragedies in her life through intense and graphic self-portraits. I was inspired by how Kahlo did not shy away from expressing her vulnerability.

I have also admired the vibrant works of Gustav Klimt. His own source of inspiration was the use of gold in Byzantine art, and his works thus acted as a bridge between the aesthetical elements of religious iconography, and the portrayal of more accessible themes such as romance and beauty. Gold leaf immediately lends an ethereal quality to the portrait, and is a direct evocation of the golden halo's sacred characteristic.

I decided to use oil paints as my main medium to achieve the realism of what I was attempting to convey. By layering the medium, I created a depth of tone and richness of colour. I followed a similar strategy with the black background, the vastness of which represents the isolation that I have become familiar with. It also serves to contrast with the vivid gold of the halo, maximising the disparity between the light and dark of my emotional state.

This work is not exclusive. It is a representation of all those who have and are suffering from mental illness – a collective experience deserving of consideration. Through the work's creation, I have developed a sense of ownership over my mental health issues. I desire to give a similar sense of power to those who feel disempowered, without concealment or shame.