

Practitioner's Statement

Self Exploration

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The purpose of the first piece of my body of work was to undertake a self-exploration that symbolised the various complexities of myself. I essentially set out to convey the concept of self-conflict, feeling as if I am influenced by two conflicting mental forces. While I experience positive, creative and open-minded thoughts, I am simultaneously weighed down by self-criticism, perfectionism, overthinking, and overanalyzing, which often depletes my energy and enthusiasm.

Artist Kate Powell's smooth, rendered, realistic approach, and incorporation of surreal elements inspired me to focus on portraiture, enabling me to present an image of myself. The exploration of collage assisted in portraying the various layers of myself, through the incorporation of symbolic imagery. Within this, I was primarily influenced by the work of Igor Skaletsky. I connected with his portrait compositions of contrasting textures and patterns created through integrating collage with oil paint. It was through this that I was able to develop my personal aesthetic, and establish that the subject of my portrait would be myself, and I would utilise mixed media of pencil and collage.

The reference image I selected for my final piece was particularly significant in conveying the intended mood of the portrait. An intense stare and look of displeasure portrays my physical presence, and the discomfort on my face hints at the accompanying mental conflict. In regards to the technicalities, my final piece evolved into a pencil portrait on smooth Arches paper, with the aim of achieving a realistic depiction of myself. It was therefore imperative that the proportions, structures, and tonal qualities of the facial features were accurate. The smoothness of the surface enabled effective blending using shading sticks, which created subtle tonal variations. The softness and density of the lumograph pencils enabled control, creating refinement and definition.

Inspired by the work of Powell and Skaletsky, I incorporated contrasting elements into the head of the portrait, both to present my idea, and enhance the aesthetic of the portrait. Initially, I was inspired by the bold and arbitrary nature of Gareth Sampson's work, and aimed to have a contrasting element of texture, exploring materials such as cloth, string, impasto, and wool. However, I found this lacked balance and unity. Referring to the work of designer Martin O'Neill provided me with the inspiration to incorporate floral collage as alternative imagery for the head, in which I utilised photos of roses from the school garden. This creates a bold and effective contrast between the monochrome of the lead pencil, whilst representing the side of me that seeks to be a free, optimistic and creative individual. The incorporation of butterflies creates movement and reiterates the idea of freedom. The utilisation of newspaper as a contrasting element was a simple approach to representing the more oppressive side, symbolising an overflow of words, analysis, and criticisms. By integrating the two elements, I was able to comment on the constant battle between the two opposing mental forces.

For the second part of my body of work I created four still-life compositions, in which I sought to extend on my self-exploration, but from a different perspective.

Essentially, this part was to highlight and appreciate the small everyday routines and objects that make up my everyday life, but are often overlooked and viewed as insignificant and mundane. I chose the setting of the home due to it being a place of familiarity and comfort, enabling me to convey elements of my personality through different rooms and activities; the bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and outdoors. I purposely captured personal moments of intimacy and reflection, to explore the vulnerability of these moments, and display the sides of myself that I don't convey to the outside world. Underpinning this was cultural observations I had made about the routines and products common to the collective Australian society.

Artist Lee Price was a large source of inspiration for my subject matter, and approach to my snapshots. I was inspired by her capturing of females in their honest and uncensored states, depicted through the incorporation of setting and objects. Her utilisation of oil paints creates photo-realistic portrayals, enabling her to portray this idea so effectively. The aerial perspective of her work inspired me to explore different viewpoints for my still-life compositions.

For the final pieces I utilised oil paint which I applied to four canvases. This was an effective medium due to its viscosity which enabled the building of layers, and the subtle blending of colours. The construction of composition involved taking reference photos of various settings of my house, and experimenting with different layouts, and colours. Ensuring the forms and proportions were accurate was integral in realistically depicting the objects, as well as being aware of the light source to effectively create tonal variations within the compositions. I also had to ensure the colours were balanced, and that there was contrast between objects. Artist Mick McGinty's work enabled me to better understand the technicalities involved; the colours used to create the effect of light, and the brushwork techniques in the creation of toast. I also utilised his work as inspiration for effective compositions, such as the subtle incorporation of objects that are outside of the frame.

The perspective is an important part of my four snapshots. Two are from an aerial perspective, displaying my viewpoint. In order to effectively convey this, I was required to foreshorten objects to make them appear shorter, and create three-dimensional illusions. The other two are from an outwards perspective, displaying my physical presence. This involved being aware of the foreground, mid-ground and background, layering the objects within the composition and varying their sizes to create the illusion of space.

My body of work is essentially integrated in that each piece represents a prominent aspect of my life, to create an overview of my relationship with myself, and my environment. While the pencil portrait embodies the mental complexities and bittersweet chaos, the four snapshots are juxtaposed to contrastingly represent my physical presence, and to appreciate the simplicities and familiarities in my life.