Practitioner's Statement

An Internal Journey
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An Internal Journey consists of two films symbolically representing one's path to achieving contentment. The films depict a young girl accepting herself to achieve her own contentment. Stripped is the first act. The girl's exaggerated make up is stripped to reveal her natural appearance. Symbolically, the make-up hides the girl from facing judgement of others. In the second act, Freedom, the girl is brought out of the darkness, watching a string of fairy lights wrap itself around a lantern. Once the lantern explodes, the girl is free, ignoring society's expectations of her appearance. Film serves as important medium to aid this message as we see closure to the girl's internal journey. Through the use of editing, both films achieve a surreal appearance, metaphorically illustrating the transformation of her emotions.

I wanted to create a body of work that tackled the concept of aesthetics; Is it something that has been culturally and historically shaped by society? Or is it rather a scientific explanation, like the Golden Ratio, that makes something aesthetically appealing? I wanted to explore the effects of the perception of human beauty on adolescents' psyches. It became evident that today's society is plagued with low self-esteem about their appearance due to the media's reinforcement of the importance on what lies on the surface, not beneath it. After experimenting with different media, I felt film was an appropriate medium for me to express myself because it is a continuing story that allows us to immerse ourselves with the protagonist's interaction with their own world.

I researched extensively on the representation of aesthetics in film and how films employ cinematic techniques to explore the impact of achieving beauty and perfection on the protagonists. By researching a range of different films, I was able to see society's evolving perception on what they find aesthetically appealing in a person. I also researched different culture's perceptions of aesthetics. Intriguingly, the Japanese found everyday actions and observations appealing in contrast to western culture's emphasis on a person's commercialised appearance.

For Freedom, I delved into stop motion to elevate the idea of magical realism. From looking at different stop motions each film had a prominent symbol that was easily movable between frames, using the background as it's space to evolve. In Shynola's Strawberry Swing, we see a colour explosion. I interpreted this motion through the lantern, acting as a barrier than can be broken, and when released, the protagonist would feel an overwhelming amount of excitement and wonderment for what the future holds.

A prominent influence in my work was Emmanuel Lubezki's cinematography in Birdman. Lubezki, known for emphasising light, positioned fairy lights for the protagonist the navigate through. Despite the protagonist facing emotional turmoil, he admired the beauty of the lights, indicating that a 'spark' still remains. Birdman also employs magical realism, which influenced me to blend reality's effect on the subject in a fantastical setting. I used colourful fairy lights to create a vibrant atmosphere for Freedom. Despite remaining adamant to use coloured lights, I tested warm and cold fairy lights as I wanted to if I could use these lights to complement the coloured light's luminosity.

Overtime, the initial idea was condensed down. I illustrated these ideas through storyboards.

These storyboards improved as I practised drawing with considering body proportions. Originally, there was only one long film with a storyline and dialogue employed to express the transition of self-realisation through a series of hallucinations in carnival tent. The film was split into three parts to identify different stages of the transformation; the downfall, realisation and freedom. Due to time constraints, I chose to shoot the last two films as the make-up represents a coping mechanism from this downfall.

I struggled to manipulate light to my advantage during both film's filming despite trialling contrast and professional lighting with different angles, especially for Freedom. I shot images closer to the subject than originally intended to convey the room as being empty for the setting and minimise the shadowing. I familiarised myself with the exposure triangle and manual options on my camera to create any illusions that could minimise these issues. Stripped's opening scenes were condensed due to the breakage of the globe strings. The tripod was visible in the front mirror shots. Post production solved these issues by saturating, darkening the scenes and condensing the beginning of the film.

The most time consuming stage was the editing process, especially for Stripped. Unlike Freedom's quick post- production process of speeding up all the photos to construct a stop motion, Stripped required overlaying and re-formatting each time a scene was moved. The overlaying acts as the mirror's magical ability to allow the protagonist to confront perception of herself by stripping away the make-up. The film was heavily condensed to fit within the time limit. An issue that was immediately solved during Freedom's post production was the visibility of furniture seen in certain frames. Using the stamp tool, the furniture was removed, however this resulted in bubbling effect with slight discolouration. Fortunately, this is unnoticeable due to the speed of the film.

I am satisfied with the final outcome of both films as they communicated the message I wanted to express. I was proud that I had achieved a challenging task and was able to persevere through many issues that surfaced, to which I would find a resolution. A further improvement to Stripped would be to slow down the film to make the transitions subtler. An improvement to Freedom would to increase the number of frames in particular areas to reduce the jumpiness between frames.

On a personal level, this was also an internal journey for me as I have faced extremely difficult self-esteem issues due to the way I have perceived my appearance since the beginning of high school. I do believe that people should find the personalities of others beautiful rather than judging their appearance.