

Composite Of The Soul

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Composite Of The Soul evolved from exploring my own perception of human beauty.

Truthfully, I was unsure what direction to take when I started. I visited The Art Gallery of South Australia in my process of researching human form in art. The realisation I left with was that while I knew I didn't appreciate the superficiality of modern beauty standards, I have realised that I see body-inclusive activist art in a similarly superficial light. I like the human form functionally and spiritually, social criteria just makes me angry.

I found that I am drawn to old European art, such as the works of Michealangelo or Pierre-Narcisse Guérin and Classical or Hellenistic Greek sculptures. What inspires me about them is the naturalistic image of beauty they project. I like artwork that shows the body as it is or finds beauty in a state of being. Idealising external beauty without context is meaningless to me. Understanding this, I narrowed my theme to explore figurative artwork that has emotional, conceptual, or narrative roots.

I discovered a digital artist who I am overwhelmingly inspired by, known online as 'Bani-chan'. The figures she draws are angelic yet thin and often wounded or rotting. Her dark fantasy artwork evokes a sense of fragility, and a perspective of death that is morbid yet inextricably beautiful. Analysing Bani-chan's perspective pushed my thinking towards exploring fleeting beauty in states of change or impermanence. Inspired by this, I connected the topic of human beauty to my personal intrigue in constructs of the mind and human nature.

Composite of The Soul separates my interpretation of human nature into three components: the ego, emotional reactivity and mortality.

I believe that humans are very egocentric, most species are – it is only natural to act and think in self-interest, however our perceptions of ourselves both individually and collectively are highly romanticised. The ego is the collective of notions such as purpose, passion, dignity, ambition and projected self. When I was looking at renaissance/romantic art I realised that religions everywhere depict gods and angels in our own likeness, using wings to glorify the human form. Hence, this is the symbolism I chose to represent the ego.

My next goal was to convey the turbulence and reactive nature of emotion, which lies beneath the wings. Associating this aspect of the mind with complex processing and emotional distortion, I created a sequence of distorted versions of the wings. I distorted the original imagery using various settings, and illustrated its silhouette composed of red eyes. The eyes represent judgement, introspection, internal navigation and come together as the other half to the wings. I also experimented with chromatic aberration, overlaying multiple images and irregular pacing through this sequence to appear chaotic in an abstract likeness to the feeling of emotional processing.

I was conscious of my use of colour – red is energetic and powerful, so best ties to emotional strength and reactivity. Next, the growing cloud of colours acknowledges variation of emotion in the various colours, and serves as my transition to the next segment.

The component of mortality is the closest to the physical body. This section is an explicit reminder of ourselves as living organisms and our cyclic connection to nature. It completes the souls' composition by defining our limitations and place within a natural system. Meadow flowers grow and die, as we do. I chose to animate this as a notion of fleeting beauty, but also to portray death as an implicit part of nature. I decided on meadow flowers because their wild occurrence eliminates human control and avoids convoluting my theme by associating specific flower meanings.

It was a challenge to mediate a background that contrasts both the bright skeleton, and dark flower stems. Blue is the darkest fully saturated colour and therefore contrasts both elements well. Additionally, as the painting is warmly toned, it is completely lost in the blue light, effectively isolating the skeleton.

I've been experimenting with digital art through personal projects for a few years and have been interested in challenging my abilities to try animation for some time. However, I also wanted to undertake a painting. I had the idea to juxtapose both styles by producing an animation that is projected over, and interacts with, a painting. This idea was exciting as I realised the symbolic significance it could hold to my theme. Combining my ambitions with digital art and my love of painting allowed me the opportunity to physically demonstrate the material difference between components of the human experience.

I originally attempted to paint with oils for the smooth transparent effect through the body, but realised that the glossy finish would interfere with the projection's quality. Through research I found that some projector paints are water based and with similar properties to acrylic. I used acrylic paint for my final, producing a matte finish that worked very well with the projection.

The painting is inspired by my personal take on human beauty. Looking at the exposed torso through to its skeleton by itself brings light to the body's vulnerability and structural intricacy. It's not trying to be aesthetically beautiful - the concept is beautiful. Though, the painting is something of an empty vessel by itself. It is the material constant to the incorporeal components of the human identity explored by the animation. The immaterial state of these aspects is maintained in that they are conveyed through the projection of light and are not materially present.

The digital projection allowed me to explore a further layer of symbolism – we are innately consumed by our own feelings and experiences that far exceeds the confines of the physical space we take up. This idea is represented by the projection exceeding the confines of the canvas. A visual representation that our perceptions and feeling take up more space, or are rather more prominent than our physical selves.

Composite Of The Soul is intended to captivate the viewer with its boldness, and through its sequence, bring light to the beauty of human metaphysical complexity.