

Body of Work

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My body of work explored the theme of perception. This was developed through researching portraiture and was later refined to self-portraiture. The depiction of one's self is considered to be deeply personal and highly subjective. Analysing the technique, style, and compositional elements of a self-portrait often reveals a person's perception of themselves and it is usually a stark contrast to how others do view them. Due to the rise in social media addiction and the resulting self-esteem issues among my generation, I was interested in how teenagers believe their peers perceive themselves compared with how their peers actually observe them. I believe that teenagers' increasingly maniacal obsession with manipulating strangers to "like" them or hold a positive perception of them often results in downward spiralling and damaged self-esteem, and is a currently underdeveloped contemporary issue in both psychology and art.

Through researching a variety of renowned portrait artists, their style and their influence, I deepened my understanding regarding portraiture and the reasons why artists have become famous due to their approach and purpose. Frida Kahlo's surrealist self-portraits inspired me. The depiction of her Mexican culture, use of symbolism and intense expressions define her portraits and this encouraged me to explore self-portraiture further. Vincent Van Gogh's use of expressive, gestural brushstrokes, colour symbolism and incorporation of intense emotion in his subjects provided a stylistic contrast to Kahlo while the central element of the portrait – expressing one's innermost thought, emotions, and feelings – remained similar. Furthermore, Cassandra Jean's flower portraits and Henrietta Harris's masked portraits encouraged me to develop my own mask. Jean used flower symbolism as a tool to exaggerate particular aspects of subject, particularly hidden desires or character traits.

Comparatively, while Jean's portraits deepen the viewer's understanding of the subject, Harris's portraits do the opposite, blotting out their face in order to render them anonymous, thus deepening my understanding of symbolism and the impact that a face carries. However, Bill Hensen's dramatic photographic portraiture was my greatest inspiration. Through his use of chiaroscuro, nudity, and utilising negative space to frame the subject, his large scale photographs radiate both vulnerability and confidence; this is exaggerated further through the use of body posture and facial expression. These concepts had a major influence on my concept development, in addition to my compositional refinement and choice of artistic technique.

My research lead me to developing my own masked compositions by utilising chiaroscuro. By working with medium and dramatic lighting I found that the image, if cleverly positioned and highlighted can create a mask that is implied rather than painted. Working with the theme of

perception I focused on the direction of my gaze and chiaroscuro to express two contrasting perceptions I believe people have of me. Through chiaroscuro I expressed what people see as strong-willed, opinionated and confident; additionally, I was able to express how I believe my close friends may view me by emphasising particular positive and loving traits through expression.

I decided that my subject would be self-portrait using oil paints as it enabled me to learn the finer techniques of tonal realism. Artist's Annette Bezor and Sheree Wright gave me an insight into the technique of glazing, utilizing a layering technique to develop undertones, allowing me to develop my mask ideas through subtle layers of coloured tone. I selected a photograph of my head tilted to the side as I saw the body language to be confident and challenging, yet concurrently mellow and thoughtful. Additionally, selecting an image where my eyes were in shadow allowed me to retain a sense of mystery, power, and anonymity.

While planning my second composition, Francis Bacon's exploration of self-esteem through his warped surrealist self-portraits inspired me to explore my own self-esteem and how it can be observed through the metaphor of my own bad eyesight. Developing the concept of a double image allowed me to take an objective view of myself in order to develop my final composition. Particularly, I was inspired by Shaina Craft's use of double images and particularly her use of digitally creating a double image with two similar images, compared to using a singular image. Through this, her portraits juxtaposed two contrasting expressions. Returning to the use of chiaroscuro to create a dramatic yet vulnerable subject, I selected images that were lighter and less dramatic to create a lighter and gentler expression from that of my first portrait. I feel the final image successfully conveys a double image of myself simultaneously, creating a sense of imbalance that communicates my ideas with resonance.

My body of work inspires the viewer to analyse their perception of others and their own self-worth, as it challenges people to analyse how they believe others view them, how this is often expressed through two extremes of positive and negative, and how this may be warped through a person's own self-esteem. As a practitioner, I have extended my knowledge and skills of both portraiture and self-portraiture, particularly technically, through the art of tonal realist and Impressionist styles, and research on how self-portraiture has developed historically in the Western Tradition. Through exploring painting styles, techniques and composition devices, my skills and knowledge of artistic aesthetics has strengthened and my own personal aesthetic has developed. I feel I have communicated successfully through the medium of oil paint more than just a likeness of myself, I have created artworks that speak on many levels through the use of chiaroscuro, facial expression and finally double imagery.