

## *Hidden Affliction*

### **Natalie Bellardino**

Hidden Affliction illustrates the internal battle of inhibiting anxiety through symbolism, contradiction and surrealist imagery. Although this oil-on-canvas, hyper-realistic painting emotionally narrates an interpretation of my anxiety, the purpose however, intends to form a conceptual story, allowing audiences (mainly sufferers of anxiety of various ages) to connect, interpret and visualise my tangled character.

Initially analysing characteristics of dreams, nightmares and the state of unconsciousness developed an inspiration for my concept. I resonated with the quote "unconsciousness: the shadow of the mind", as it reminded me of my suppressed anxiety. Dissecting this quote, I generated the idea that my concept can revolve around this theme, whilst presenting the shadows through my later composition and background. Initially I was intrigued by the fantastical element of dreams. Finding abnormality within dreams, I wanted to create an image that morphed a peaceful slumber into a distressing nightmare. Finding isolation a prevalent theme within nightmares, emerged the notion of depicting my literal and figurative loneliness felt upon my burdened anxiety.

Covering the foundations of my concept, I found that combining surrealism and hyper-realism would advance and portray my intense view. Uncovering double-meanings as an extensive motif inside these applications heavily inspired the symbolism of every element shown within Hidden Affliction.

Background hues symbolising gentleness, mystery and tranquillity within dreams extend the idea of proposing contradicting elements within my final. In revealing a confronting image, the recessed hues intent is to contradict their meaning of relaxation as they surround the discomfiting aesthetic. Against this, the blushed skin reflects the rising warmth, whilst the contrasting blue symbolises the coldness felt during an attack.

The tightly wrapped bedsheet heavily contradicts its purpose of leisure and comfort, to personify the strangling and suffocating emotions and physical and mental immobilisation anxiety creates. The contrast of crisp shadowing and stark tints link my original inspiration "the shadow of the mind" whilst exaggerating the choking of the sheet.

Becoming a veiled, internal battle, the restrictive, masked sheet embodies the felt shame, disgust and embarrassment whilst mysteriously and indirectly compelling the viewer to study the pyramid composition of the nude further. Interpreting my stripped vulnerability, the naked muse conveys myself. Clouded visuals assist in a dreamlike element.

Henrik Aarestad Uldalen's contemporary narratives and Rene Magritte's emblematic, surreal artworks artistically inspired my work, however, Istvan Sandorfi firmly encouraged my creative process visually. His meticulous, somnolent, photo-realistic pieces, inclusive of draped fabric, foggy cool skin-tone impacted my explored styles and ultimate outcome.

Photoshoots, challenging yet essential, taught me to understand that to achieve the desired design, models must be of your suited configuration, artistically-minded and props must fit your fantasy opposed to a casual photoshoot. This was uncovered through my unsuccessful snapshots prior.

Painting upon a textured canvas presented its difficulties as the oils were unable to fill the dips of the canvas initially, resulting in additional layering, gradually building tone, forming a successful realistic image. Overall, it was interesting to see the evolution of my initial ideas to my final outcome. From a thorough conceptual and technical process, Hidden Affliction exceeds my expectations, becoming a powerful and captivating piece that I am overall proud of.

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