

Wearable Emotion: My Happiness and the Realisation

Lucy Blenkion

My final Practical Body of Work expresses emotion and the story of an individual through wearable art. I began to explore my identity and journey thus far in my life. Social acceptance is a human desire and when we choose to conceal our feelings, we act differently and can become overwhelmed. When the stage 2 textile course was withdrawn at my school, I was determined to incorporate textiles through my Art work.

In the initial stages of Mannequin One, My Happiness, I discovered the five basic emotions and realized that 'joy' is my strongest emotion. I looked beneath my superficial happiness to decipher what gives me inexhaustible happiness through the discovery of Martin Seligman's P.E.R.M.A model: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement. My passion for textiles, dress making and admiration of Sylvie Facon's work inspired me to explore wearable art. Giorgio de Chirico's, *The Painter's Family*, 1926, inspired me to incorporate a life size mannequin as my canvas. I was also inspired by Frida Kahlo's corsets and her bravery in sharing personal thoughts, feelings and emotions through art making.

Each element of the dress is a symbol from the acronym P.E.R.M.A. Positive emotions are represented through the swan which symbolizes the balance of the components in my life. The lights underneath the skirt symbolize my positive outlook on life and the butterflies symbolize my ability to accept change. Engagement is represented through the leaf shapes which symbolize my upbringing on our farming property. The aqua blue leaves and rhythmic arrangement symbolize my love of the water and water skiing. Relationships are represented through the lace up corset, which holds the dress together, similarly to the relationships and connections in my life which help hold me together. Meaning isn't represented in the dress as I am uncertain of my meaning thus far in my life's journey. Achievement is represented through the colours, green and gold which symbolize my life long goal of representing Australia in equestrian which I was able to fulfill multiple times through 2017 and 2018.

During the construction of my first mannequin, multiple obstacles arose which needed resolving. The Modroc corset broke away from the mannequin and was challenging to re-attach to the plastic. I sanded the plastic surface and used silicone to re-attach the Modroc corset. I continued to use silicone to attach all the elements of the dress to the mannequin. My biggest complication was the logistics of transport. The mannequin was extremely difficult to move, as the body parts would unscrew and detach. Additional silicone would have fixed the joints to stabilize the dress. Through trial and error with different media and techniques I constructed the dress to emulate my vision.

My focus for Mannequin Two shares the message of grief and loss. The realization represents my reaction to when I realized my horse, Roadie, had to be put down and expresses my grieving process after his passing. The loss was something I have always bottled up and through the creation of the practical, I have commenced accepting the passing and found positives throughout the journey. I have drawn inspiration from the costume designer, Jolien Rosanne and the presence of her wearable art. Franz Marc's, *Blue Horses*, 1911, stimulated a desire to explore horse artwork and discover the emotional meanings of colour. I took inspiration from Käthe Kollwitz, a German expressionist who used prints and drawings to evoke emotion and share messages of grief.

Concluding my charcoal drawing of my late horse, inspired by Kollwitz, I began to loosen up with my art making which transformed my perception of art.

I decided not to include direct references to horses in this mannequin and present my final artwork in an indirect manner, to allow viewers to make their own connections and interpretations. The focal point is the gas mask which represents being gassed by my own thoughts and emotions. I was choking myself with my feelings but as time passed, I was able to release the gas mask and breathe again. The mask was created from pipe fittings, Modroc and decorated in metal spikes. The corset was constructed to look like armour and represents the 'shield' I used to protect myself from people believing I was grieving. The corset was made from Modroc and painted black and dry brushed with blue and silver to create harmony between the skirt and sleeves. The blue veins were created from foil and Modroc to look like scars or battle wounds. The spiked sleeves were cut from Aluminium Shim and soft drink cans to represent the shock of the loss and my feelings throughout the journey. The handcuffs were created from my late horse's tail, which I had kept for a memory of him and used it to braid into a bracelet. The chains were attached to the hair and bolted into the ground to create a metaphor of 'chained by the memory'. The corset is laced up at the back and is an off-the-shoulder design to look like a formal dress and create uniformity between the two practicals. The mermaid skirt was sewn from blue fabric and is tight fitting around the waist to allow the corset to sit seamlessly over the skirt. The flounce represents myself opening up about how the loss affected me and the blue fabric represents the emotion of 'sadness' which I'm still experiencing every day. Repetition and pattern are created in the skirt fabric and the metal arms. The wearable art is symmetrical showing balance which creates presence. The monochromatic colour scheme brings the different elements of the dress together to work in cohesion and tell the story.

Through the creation of this body of work, I am more comfortable to share my emotions through art and everyday life. I hope viewers will respond and feel driven to share their true emotions, as art is a tool we can use to communicate emotion when we are incapable of using our voice.

#