

## *Concept: Social anxiety various titles*

### **Wilfred Briones**

While I am a student leader, and outwardly present as a confident person, inside I struggle with social anxiety. As part of my journey in developing skills to overcome this disabling mental health issue, I decided to explore how to better communicate what this condition feels like, and in doing so begin a process of self-discovery. Social Anxiety Disorder (F40.10) is characterized by a significant experience of fear in one or more social situations. It can result in a fear of being judged, negatively evaluated, or rejected in a social or performance situation. <https://adaa.org> › understanding-anxiety › social-anxiety-disorder

Initially, I researched the science behind F40.10 and became fascinated by the MRI scans that show the parts of the brain activated when one is feeling socially anxious. This resulted in me researching how artists have represented the brain and anxiety. Fortunately, the Quilty and Kentridge exhibitions at AGSA provided opportunities to get up close and personal with artworks exploring mental health.

Quilty's work *After Afghanistan*, had a profound impact upon me. It is the first time I experienced viewing an artwork that explored mental health issues in an honest manner. Quilty's painting reflected how I feel as if I'm in a black cloud which is overwhelming and paralyzing. His courage to depict his personal angst persuaded me to feel confident to experiment with ways to communicate my feelings in visual form. His aesthetic choice to suspend the turbulent mass of thick impasto oil paint within a mauve void stayed with me. It was not until I looked back at my body of work that I recognized the similarity in my palette. Quilty's Rorschach portraits provided me with a technique that communicated the physical sensation I experience when highly anxious. My brain feels as if it is under intense pressure. The sculptural tactile paint surface created by the Rorschach method replicated the sensation of crushing pressure on my brain.

William Kentridge's torn paper collage technique, expressive mark making and restrained use of red within a monochromatic palette also influenced me greatly in my aesthetic decision making. His use of charcoal and text on stylised heads provided me with a way to integrate text and expressive mixed media techniques. I was intrigued by the energy and boldness of his mixed media works and the repetition of drawn images in *Second Hand Reading* to create animated movement and metamorphous. In my research, I was moved by the poetry of Scott Sims who explored the concept of mental health and well-being.

Some of key phrases that I connected and identified from his poems included:

*'When I need words most they seem to drift away'*

*'His brain can form a sentence and his lungs can push up a voice but all he coughs up is a noise'*

*'It's a crippled self confidence that tries to stand up but stumbles on syllables and consonants'*

These words guided my image development and became the scaffold for my body of work.

I came across a discarded music text and was excited that the surface of the paper lent itself perfectly as a working surface for charcoal. As a pianist, sheet music became a graphic I could use to

communicate my condition see My brain doesn't know the right words to say. The idea of frozen movement captured in an instant influenced the imagery of my digital print. I explored Kentridge's charcoal drawing technique in which the image is erased and altered by layering images in Folio works. In Though paralyzed from the mouth up he still feels the thought mutating inside his head, I erased parts of my self-portrait by manipulating light and using blur filters to create the illusion of a form; the palette influenced by MRI scans. My body of work aims to communicate the way the brain activates social anxiety and how I feel trapped within myself. Outwardly I try to maintain control while inwardly I struggle to make sense of who I am.

On reflection, I consider that exploring mixed and digital media has developed my personal aesthetic. The influence of Quilty's palette, Rorschach paint process and his representation of mental health have inspired me to use artistic expression to pursue my challenges. I have been influenced by Kentridge's collage and text techniques but have personalised the process by layering paint and using cell painting, tissue paper and text. I experimented with various paint application techniques. I also refined the brain icon through use of positive and negative stencils. Applying gold leaf and pearlescent paint introduced a subtle sense of preciousness to my work. I was excited by the effect bleaching the tissue paper can have. It resulted in creating a very delicate appearance of a decaying brain.

I consider that I have learned how to take a concept of personal significance, and through the study of artists work, extended my ideas into visually compelling end pieces. The body of work has consolidated my understanding of my condition and I hope evokes viewer engagement.

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