

BECOMING A WOMAN IN 2020

Kate Hendry

My final work, *Becoming a Woman in 2020*, is multi-media sculpture representative of a year long journey of exploration and discovery. It was prompted by a desire to push the boundaries of contemporary portraiture, whilst defining the transition period occurring throughout this age group, as we move from schooling to life beyond. The sculpture is composed of two distinct 2D renderings of the model, Kate, which were completed primarily with oil paint on wooden boards (120cm x 130cm), before being combined. As the viewer travels around the sculpture, they are presented with two distinct sides of the model, or alternatively the art world; abstract and realism. Furthermore, these two forces can be reflective of the different states of mind an artist works from- the rational side in which knowledge is applied and judgments are made and perhaps more importantly from an intuitive state, in which creativity thrives. Whilst these two sides do interact extensively throughout the overall process, I aimed to emphasise one of these states primarily on each side.

In the context of my work, realism represents the external aspects of a person, specifically the side they show to the world. This side heavily emphasises physical likeness, through utilising realistic colours, tones and proportions. The composition of the image aims to exhibit the internal conflict experienced by young women. Half of the face is cast in shadow, representing the uncertainty, which drives the concept. The other half is illuminated and bright, portraying strength, courage and confidence. Furthermore, the left side of the face tucked a way due to the 3/4 angle, which represents her attempts to conceal parts of her identity. Perhaps, her uncertainty of her place in the world and insecurity stemming from the pressures placed upon young women. In contrast, the abstract side explores inner likeness, intuition and what you discover about a person when you delve beyond the surface. This painting is highly intuitive and breaks down the conventional notions of portraiture, through using bold mark-making to convey a psychological profile of the model. She is fundamentally "unfinished", as she is encountering the next phase of a life long journey of self discovery, evident by the use of charcoal in the body. Additionally, there is a gap between the figures, which represents the often disassociation between the inner aspects of a person and the persona they present to the world. At its very core, this work is reflective of the human experience and the nature of self expression in the 21st century. It was primarily motivated by a desire to create something immersive, thought-provoking and relatable. I intend for the viewer to 'meet' Kate as they interact with the sculpture and perhaps even see aspects of themselves in the portraits.

Several portrait painters inspired me during this process, including Kim Hyunji, Anh Do, Robert Hannaford and Ben Quilty. I applied different elements of their style to my work. For example, Anh Do uses a palette knife in his portraits, which contrasts the way Robert Hannaford portrays people, through using short brush strokes emphasising traditional realism, however both evoke emotions in their portraiture. Comparably, Kim Hyunji juxtaposes realism with expressive brush work to create in-depth rendering of the model. Lastly, Quilty's ability to capture the essence of a person, through colour and masterful abstraction, heavily informed my final work. I was first inspired to create the multi-sided cutout when viewing Vincent Namatjira's 'Close Contact' at the Ramsey Art Prize, as I found it to be a powerful way to tell a story with portraiture. Additionally, working alongside Marilyn McCarthy during her process of creating her exhibition "Kindred Spirits" inspired me to create a work that defined the human experience through sculpture. Although my realism painting style is fairly unique, as I have been developing it for several years, this year I encountered a major turning point when attending Megan Roodenrys' palette knife portrait workshop. This ultimately enhanced my work in realism, as it allowed me to portray emotion by adding kinaesthetic value to the work. The palette knife has become my go-to

tool when painting skin and I tend to use brushes exclusively to render detail. Each of these artists, in correlation, contributed to the essence of my work, which sort to harness realism and intuitive painting methods.

There were numerous difficulties throughout the painting process which required me to critically analyse my work and come up with innovative solutions. Initially, I was going to complete a four part series exploring the experience of attending a restaurant, which posed as a metaphor for a changing society. However, after completing my first painting, I felt that I wanted to create something which engaged the viewer with a narrative that possessed a stronger emotional resonance. Despite the challenges of starting afresh, painting a complex restaurant scene pushed me out of my comfort zone and gave me the confidence to create something bolder. Prior to painting 'Becoming a Woman in 2020' I worked almost exclusively with portraits, meaning I encounter a range of new challenges when attempting a life size figure. The perspective in the realistic painting was particularly challenging. This was partly due to painting the facial features too large and throwing the rest of the perspective out. To develop the correct perspective I continually repainted sections and adjusted the work, over the period of 2 months. I struggled to create an abstract portrayal, which possessed enough likeness to be recognisable without appearing over laboured. I underestimated the amount of rational judgement required in an abstract portrait, which caused me to work entirely on intuition. Through doing this, I lost the message and the essence of the work. To rectify this I made more deliberate decision, after restarting the face.

Overall, I believe I have created an engaging work, which invites the viewer to immerse themselves in the experiences of this age group, as they travel around it. Whilst the two portraits vary significantly, they both possess an undeniable likeness true to the adaptable nature of portraiture.

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