

A Testimony

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My whole life I have suffered from the mental illness called Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D), a type of depression that corresponds with seasonal patterns. At the start of the year, I aimed to explore this mental disorder through photorealism portraiture and stop motion animation to depict its effect on my life to others. I was unaware at the time that it would not only help me to portray it, but to help me to overcome it.

I have always appreciated the high technicality of photo realism portraiture. The capacity of a painting to create the illusion of a photo initially daunted me with the technicality, but gave me the opportunity to convey my vulnerability. My first practical was almost a complete focus on technique. From specific brush strokes, to intricate colour combinations, allowing me to recreate the authenticity of a human face on a canvas. In order to explore this, I researched an artist who inspired me called Michael Sydney Moore. Witnessing his process of building up slowly drying oil paints encouraged me to create a photorealist portrait. Then, I established cool tones of skin with primary colours dominated by blue, to warm tones of skin dominated by red and yellow, dulling the colour with white and black. Stippling techniques were then developed to recreate the rough texture of skin.

I knew from the beginning that I would create a self-portrait, as I wanted to genuinely demonstrate my completely personal mental illness experience. At first, I wished to compose my face into an expression of sadness, the most obvious way to convey the depressive feelings associated with the disorder. Then I considered a happy expression, a symbolic mask that hid my true emotions. Deeper reflection led to the quest to express the middle ground between giddy joyfulness to hopelessness. Not knowing how I felt, and therefore how to portray how I felt, I was led to the choice of a neutral expression.

Utilizing negative space was a purposeful choice, as I wanted to incorporate rain into the portrait. At first, I wanted the rain to pour down my face as a symbolic expression of how depressive weather could drain me of optimism. Then, I considered light rain sitting delicately on my face, to show how S.A.D would sit with me at all times. As mirrored in my second major, a surprising development in my mental health lead to the final decision of locating the water behind me.

For my second major of this body of work, I explored the theme of faith through stop motion animation. After visiting The Art Gallery of South Australia, William Kentridge's *Second Hand Reading* left me inspired to attempt a stop motion piece. Initially, I planned on completing two major pieces, not a body of work. This is due to the fact that I believed that I would forever be a slave to the illness of my mind, and was not motivated to overcome it, therefore only needing to create one artwork. However, throughout the year I started to realise that my self-portrait was not an accurate depiction of my mind, as something had changed. I am a Christian, so prayer becomes my place of surrendering to peace. In desperation, I started to accept prayer from those around me. After seeing Kentridge's piece where he journeys the pages of an encyclopaedia, I gained the idea of portraying my journey of faith and mental health through a walking figure.

The piece begins with drawing the first figure that represents me. Near the end of this clip, a steadily repeated note of a piano rings out, the start of a song I composed, played and recorded to enhance the ultimate message. As the piano begins its main theme, the figure begins its journey. As the lower register of the piano is employed, smudged charcoal builds on the surroundings of the figure to represent depressive weather. This weather used to be a filter that diluted the image of my life of its literal and figurative vibrancy, hence the use of black charcoal. The figure spins in confusion, only to eventually stop and hide its face. After being diagnosed with S.A.D, I became overwhelmed by my awareness of my surroundings. The figure hiding its face is a representation of my attempts to distract myself and close myself off from others. I purposely minimised the reality of the figure to singular lines once the face was hidden to demonstrate how my distractions made me lose touch with reality. The figure tries to walk but stumbles and is unable to go on as dissonant piano chords interrupt the initial sound of resolution.

The second half of the piece symbolises my faith journey with God. Photos of hands are placed on me as I accept prayer from fellow Christians. Then, a bigger hand reaches out to me, God's hand. He comes from outside the frame as I have realised that He is bigger than anything that I could ever go through. Real photos are used to symbolise how prayer and God's love brought me back to reality. He lightly eases my hands away from my face, and the charcoal (the negativity) immediately returns. But this time, my eyes are on Him. We walk together and I do not stumble as a final chord of resolution fades from the piano. I may still experience S.A.D, but a weight has been lifted.

My self-portrait and stop motion piece are a depiction of an emotional rollercoaster. The final touches of my portrait at the end of the year encouraged my decision to position the rain behind me. I went from struggling from mental health, to turning my eyes to a greater life ahead. I allowed a highly technical oil painting and symbolic stop motion artwork to be a representation of an experience; from a portrayal of suffering, to a testimony.