

A Troubled Self Reflection

Anoushka Toh

A Troubled Self-Reflection is a self-portrait, based on the theme 'appearance versus reality'. Inspiration grew from experiences with my final year of schooling, reflecting on the development of self. Known as 'the end of an era', means leaving a routine and institution that has been familiar since childhood. This prompts consideration into past achievements, failures, experiences, and changes. 2021 lead me to realise that I've struggled with the concept of self-identity. Currently, there is an emphasis to 'know yourself'; how you'd like to present and what you like or dislike. I've never felt like I belonged with one demographic, with even my earliest experiences being half German and half Chinese. This led me to feel disconnected from both. The effect of my parent's divorce has become noticeable to me this year, with conflicting opinions from two contrastingly, charactered parents influencing my decisions since childhood, co-existing in a way which has caused constant, though subtle, discomfort; A Troubled Self-Reflection was designed to reflect, literally, the way it feels to ruminate on contrasting versions of myself. The title is inspired by the literal self-reflection portrayed, while drawing but also draws on what it means to reflect on oneself, especially in times of self-doubt or worry, hence the inclusion of the word 'troubled'.

Inspiration from artists Salvador Dali and Rembrandt, enabled the portrayal of intimate detail to enhance viewer experience, as though the content is aimed to highlight an intangible experience, I wanted my work to be easily comprehended. Dali's works in oil paint, epitomise smooth blending and a heightened sense of realism. He achieved visual complexity and emotional value through symbolism and the manipulation of perspective, portraying what he calls a 'dreamscape' in the tangible reality of a painting. These are the two points of influence which I took from Dali, which influenced my decision to work in oils. The painting's composition plays a role in developing its meaning, split into two distinct sides: the mirrored side and the natural side.

I find myself mirroring others' behaviours, moulding myself into a version of myself that I feel would appease others. However, I recognise this as a flaw, and thus the mirrored side was painted with darker, cooler tones to create an imminent sense of eeriness or dread. The arms outstretching between the two contrasting sides represent the connection between these versions of myself, framed in the centre to draw a focal point as an almost inverse bridge. The reaching was designed to appear as a vulnerable, questioning gesture, either side asking the other for a compromise, an understanding where they can coexist peacefully. One problem faced was portraying the mirrored wall – the shadows were coloured with green, blue and purple tinges. I found it difficult to recreate these tones accurately and had to repaint the section to darken the tones as they appeared pastel and contradicted the meaning which I wished to convey with the mirrored side. Ultimately, the issue was resolved by adding thinned oil paint with darker tones of the shades I selected over the top and blending them into the base shades to create suitable mid-tones.

I feel that my painting was effective in portraying 'appearance versus reality'.

I have been successful in conveying the realism that I desired. I was able to achieve skin and hair details to a realistic, though not hyper realistic, level. My colour shape analysis enhanced this, the shapes of shadows, blushes and highlights establish depth in all aspects of the work.