

Social Media Entanglement

Arantza Garcia

My final artwork was inspired by my wish to explore how social media influences a teenager's mental health and self-perception. The triptych oil painting was influenced by several artists researched throughout my folio. This topic was conceptually appealing to me for its emotive nature, and I hoped to communicate the consequences of a life online. I intended to only use primary photographs, capturing images of the people around me for artistic references. Beginning with an exploration of Adam Neate, I was interested in his saturated blurring technique used to display his subjects confused desperation. I developed a similar smudging technique through an oil self-portrait, appreciating the visual aesthetic of the distorted faces.

Following this, I explored Picasso's cubist style. Through sketching out a friend's portrait with oil pastels, I noted that I did not find the geometric shapes aesthetically engaging as they lacked emotional depth. They did, however, demonstrate technological disconnection, which I explored through Roy Lichtenstein's work and the Pop Art movement. Inspired by Lichtenstein's use of pattern and flat colours to imitate disconnection – I experimented with gouache, replacing Ben-Day dots with binary code in my artwork, to demonstrate how social media influences behaviour. Despite the engaging concept, I decided I did not want my final to feel detached. This led me to analyse works of photographer Bruno Merra, who captured how 'idealised beauty' promoted by the media affected people's self-image.

This inspired the idea of swappable features, which I explored through a collage – creating a charcoal selfportrait with a contrasting magazine cut-out to represent the need to cover insecurities. Furthering this, I painted three varying oil portraits – cutting them horizontally into strips that contained the facial features, allowing them to be interchanged. Plastic surgery was then explored through artist Arth Daniels, who – like Lichtenstein – uses saturated tones and clean lines to create plastic-like features in a clinical atmosphere. Using the Procreate app, I created a portrait of 'Mrs. Potatohead', a symbol for plastic surgery – the resultant image showing her being sucked into a phone, using a similar technique developed in Neate's work. Despite the interesting concepts, I felt like I had diverted from the original message, and so decided to use skills and themes explored to create a final artwork that encompassed all my ideas and yet fit the overall theme.

The final triptych displays three large oil paintings depicting several subjects (including myself) displaying a range of emotions. The deep tension of having to suppress emotional responses to present a perfect façade online is shown through the blurred faces, as the subjects forcefully hide their anguish. Female subjects were used to reflect my own experience with social media's influence. Throughout the process, I explored how my own self-image has been influenced by social media, developing my understanding of how false expectations could lead to emotional distress. I experimented with a wide variety of media and artistic processes, however found the combination of realism and visual distortion the most engaging and indicative of my personal visual aesthetic.