

## *4 Dimensional Friend*

### **Ashton Lodge**

This main inspiration for 4-Dimensional Friend is from my chocolate Labrador Alfie and his positive impact with my mental health over the past two years. Alfie was purchased as a therapy dog to help me through my depression. I named this sculpture 4-Dimensional Friend because I can feel, touch, see and smell Alfie. These senses are what help bring me back into the moment. I also drew insight from Pixel Artist Shawn Smith (Smith, "Weight of Woes"), he investigates the intersection between the digital world and reality, he is interested how we experience nature through technology. This connects with my intention as I can express my emotions in a physical object. I chose the pixel genre because it is viewed as simple yet is complex and I feel is similar with controlling emotion. The intended message in the artwork was to show Alfie's positive impact on my mental health. This is represented by the 'happy → sad' continuum of emotion emoticons inspired by Shawn Smith and his chain embellishments.

The Anubis collar communicates companionship and how Alfie guides me from being sad and distraught to calm and content. The faux fur base symbolises Alfie as a puppy and how he loved laying on a similar rug. This inclusion also gives me a sense of comfort because of how the rug feels soft, gentle and calming. The seated position with one paw reaching out in a comforting way represents being grounded and protected. Alfie resembles a guardian but also my annoying best friend and this supports my intention. The colour of brown and body proportions accurately replicate Alfie to create a physical reminder of how Alfie helps me.

During the building process I encountered several technical challenges. Blocks not lined up caused stress as I was after perfection. I resolved this by taking some time to breath and realise that nothing is perfect. Painting blocks before gluing was also explored to potentially save time, but it was tedious and actually hindered the building process. The glue could also potentially remove the paint from the blocks, when glue leaked it would make them glossy, and a matt look was preferred. Matt finish was desirable as it better represented Alfie's fur. Painting to make the blocks opaque after the build was still tedious, this became frustrating and stressful. Having a scaled visual reference in Minecraft significantly helped to guide the building process. I was able to use the distillation process to transfer technology into life – to support my wellbeing.

Even though the colour palette is simple a gradient is caused by shadows, emoji's add a visual contrast and take it from being a dog to supporting my intention. If I had an opportunity, I would use spray paint rather than acrylic paints. I have been able to produce a body of work that symbolises Alfie's role with my mental health, his ability to ground me and keep me happy with his goofy and protective language. I believe that this practical has been a way for me to positively express my emotions and create a constant reminder of how important Alfie is in my life but also how happy he makes me. The pixels concept of simplification is something that I will be able to use in the future with my mental health as I commonly make situations harder than they need to be.

Art has always been a way for me to express my emotions almost like therapy, Alfie is a big part of my life and I love that I have been able to create something that holds a part of his soul and personality in that I will have even after he is gone.