

## Beauty Is...

### Charlotte Kenning

My final artwork *Beauty is...* challenges the concept that beauty is solely reliant upon one's aesthetic value, according to mercurial subjective standards. My body of six realistic oil-paint portraits depicts individuals who do not fit these standards in an attempt to challenge the audience's perceptions of beauty. Each portrait is symbolic of various expressions of human nature. To develop my theme and ideas of beauty, I was originally inspired by how notions of beauty have historically evolved throughout Western society, primarily since the Renaissance, and how conceptions of beauty appear today. My portraits interact with the audience through symbolism and form, to convey the salience of societal harmony and overcoming adversity.

The aesthetic principles of my portrait *Strength* were primarily inspired by Johannes Vermeer's *Girl With a Pearl Earring*. Vermeer's chiaroscuro between the negative and positive space evokes depth to the girl's facial form, facilitating the audience's engagement with her fearful facial expression. This composition inspired my research into the oil painting techniques of Renaissance practitioners, such as sfumato, perspective and proportion, and their influence on the style of contemporary practitioners. My portrait *Strength* depicts Ilka Brühl, a German model with a rare genetic disorder, who aims to 'remind the world that everyone is beautiful' (Joy News, 2018), and change societal beauty standards. My use of chiaroscuro emphasises the focal point of Brühl's vibrant eyes to directly confront the audience with the beauty of an individual who is labelled as 'ugly'. Although I initially planned to paint Brühl hyperrealistically, I decided to warm her skin tone to signify the beauty of her soul in a dark environment, symbolic of societal standards. Vincent Fantauzzo is an Australian portrait artist known for his award-winning Archibald oil portraits. In 2014, he painted his four-year-old son, Luca, which was awarded people's choice due to its vibrant hues and his son's compelling eyes. Fantauzzo claims that he painted his son due to his ability to 'appreciate the little things in life' (Art Gallery of NSW, 2014).

Similarly, when developing my compositional ideas for *Joy*, I sought to portray the salience of gratitude for inner beauty. In my oil portrait, I depict the young girl's joyful expression by enhancing the contrast of her eyes and lips to evoke three-dimensional form and depth. The audience is enticed by the juxtaposition between vivid warm and cool hues between the skin and background to further reinforce joy. This efficaciously challenges the audience to seek joy in the little things in life as they did as a child following observation. When synthesising my visual ideas to create *Grief*, I sought inspiration from Anh Do's show *Brush with Fame*. In his television show, he aims to capture a likeness while portraying his sitter's story through their eyes and compositional texture. I later viewed *What Does Australia Really Think About ...*, an SBS documentary that inspired the conceptualisation of my visual ideas on age discrimination.

My portrait *Grief* addresses the social and political issue of ageism, where mature adults are discriminated against due to age prejudice rather than individual characteristics. The cyclic movement of the subject's hidden clothing portrays how ageism is unaddressed by the media, thus, its ramifications on mental health are secluded. The highlights of his skin magnify the elderly man's three-dimensional form to elicit depth and capture the audience's attention as they are confronted by his weepy eyes.

The texture of his rough skin conveys the adversities of his past, yielding the salience of resilience as this makes an individual beautiful. Conflict has gripped individuals for centuries on a global scale, solely causing destruction and societal division.

To paint *Fear*, I obtained inspiration from Ben Quilty, an award-winning Australian oil painter who explores the effect of societal issues such as conflict on individuals. Particularly, the concept of war behind Quilty's *Self-Portrait After Afghanistan* prompted the conceptualisation of my visual ideas of war's impact on society. Although my initial intention was to depict a grieving elderly man, I decided to paint a young boy to confront the audience with visual imagery of vulnerability in a harsh environment. The blurred chaotic movement of his clothing portrays his helplessness as he is inevitably consumed by the brutality of war. The focal point of frightened eyes engulfed by dark negative space grip the audience, positioning them to rebuke the brutal nature of war and strive for societal harmony. Vincent Namatjira is an award-winning Aboriginal Australian artist who explores the complex issues of Australia's colonial history and its implications on modern society.

The development of ideas within my portraits *Love* and *Awe* were influenced by his Archibald portrait *Stand Strong for Who You Are* which encourages resilience in hardship, particularly from racism. In my portrait *Love*, I portray beauty through the colour harmony of the child's skin tone and confront the audience with Australia's dark history of the stolen generation. The child's innocence positions the audience to empathise with those who experienced this trauma, conveying the impact of the stolen generation in Australian society. Despite adversity, the focal point of the child's bright smile yields optimism, and that hope is still present. I similarly explore this idea in *Awe*, however, through a close-up portrait of a child's face. His vibrant eyes become the focal point through balanced central alignment and circular movement around his face.

Each oil painting is displayed alongside a specific flower, symbolic of the attributes that make the subject beautiful. As a conceptual artist, the central ornate mirror enables the audience to become involved in *Beauty is...*, thus, challenging the audience to view themselves as beautiful despite a dissimilar self-perception. Personally, for me, art is a form of self-expression which exhibits one's worldview. Through my paintings, I aim to portray my ideas by attracting the audience with vivid colours and confronting the audience with the focal point of the subject's eyes.

Through my body of portraits, it can be seen that beauty is the capability to not fear being different. To rebuke conformity and embrace diversity. As claimed by Dr. Seuss, 'why fit in when you're born to stand out?' (Collaroy Centre, 2019)