

Connections

Gemma Murdock

I painted these hands with the initial intention of exploring the disconnect that individuals experience, despite being surrounded by others. I portrayed this theme through hands reaching out for each other, yet not quite connecting. There is a certain desperation and distress in the way the hands search for each other, yet still feel so distant. This message has evolved to become relevant to the experience of life with Covid-19 and the disconnect and isolation that many in society are experiencing. The hands are so close to touching yet are still separate, symbolising how the increasing use of digital connection is synonymous with increasing feelings of isolation. The reaching hands depict the human desire for connection, especially that of face-to-face interactions.

I was influenced by Michelangelo's paintings of hands, in their delicateness and attention to detail. I also was intrigued by Auguste Rodin's study of hands in sculpture, and the way he portrayed them in different interconnecting positions. Rodin was able to portray such depth of feeling and emotion simply in the way he arranged the hands in his sculptures, and I wanted to replicate this expressiveness in my own rendition of hands.

I wanted to further develop my skills in both oil painting and realism for my major work. I chose to challenge myself by painting multiple hands with oil paint, a medium I was unfamiliar with. Focusing on developing my practical skills, I painted a variety of hands in different positions to prepare myself for my final artwork. I explored both impressionist and realist techniques to help me determine colour, tones, movement, and composition. When designing the composition of my final work, I positioned the hands to bring attention to the centre of the canvas, creating a unison between the individual hands, and a central focal point. I took many reference photos with slight variations in the hands' positioning, and once I determined my final one, I adjusted the contrast, light and saturation in photoshop, before beginning the process of painting multiple layers to create depth in the artwork. Through the painting of my major work, I was able to develop my skills in determining tones, colour variations, and refine my skills in realism.

The human hand has been at the centre of art throughout history, often overlooked for its expressive, communicative power. Not only the tool of creation, but the hand has also been a representation of development and growth. One of the most frequently symbolised parts of the human body, Aristotle called the hand "tool of tools" "the instrument of creation". The expressive possibilities of hands are limitless. Hands have the ability to provoke a unique and subjective response from the viewer, who can find meaning, and form their own connection with this artwork.