Self-Concept

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"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." Carl Rogers

During a psychology class, we studied Carl Rogers, a forerunner in humanistic psychology and helping individuals to achieve their 'full potential'. Rogers proposed a theory of personality that combined three components of the self: true-self (who you truly are), self-image (how you see yourself) and the ideal self (what you wish you were really like). To achieve 'self-actualisation', these three components must be in a state of congruence. I was inspired to create a body of works with three similar components, each representing a different, yet cohesive, element of my identity. This developed into two dramatised self-portraits and a 'floating' female body, made of stiffened chiffon and surrounded by painted personal objects. The three elements are exaggerated in colour, size and combine realism with abstraction to amplify the self as a multi-faceted being.

The primary inspiration for pursuing this style of portraiture stemmed from the contemporary Australian artist, Esther Erlich. Erlich is known for her provocative portraits and demonstrates a sense of intimacy through fashion and drama aesthetics. Her paintings depict partial imagery of figures with eyes that stare beyond the canvas; they are striking against an abstract explosion of colour and contrasts. She stated that in her artwork, she is fascinated by the 'facade' of 'audacious fashion' and 'psyche' of such 'society', attempting to 'expose something of [their] internal makeup' in her painted faces. The drama that she creates with her figurative works is something I wanted to explore.

I divulged that the best medium for my portraits would be acrylic paint and pastel pencil as these can be layered and also create a sense of immediacy when needed. The layered mediums allowed the portraits to retain a sense of realism in the texture, lines and colour of the face. The colours of this work are exaggerated, incorporating deep purple and blue undertones in the skin that complement the deep red, yellow and bright white of the abstractive elements - such as the headdresses. The 'floating' body was moulded around a female mannequin, using white chiffon fabric and sculptural medium to harden it and the 'found' objects that surround it were spray-painted using similar tones that matched the portraiture. The 'found objects' relate to me personally, and I collected them with the intention of exploring their relationship with my internal makeup through my body of work

My first self-portrait is composed in a confident manner, where I am facing forward, surrounded by a yellow cloud-like abstraction, while the neck flows into an array of red droplets. This image symbolises my 'ideal self', created from learned experiences and societal expectations. The 'cloud' is a bright representation of an expanded mind, depicting desirable knowledge and power. Below the face, the red droplets echo confidence alongside this power, physically drawing these traits into my being.

While these dramatised elements allude to an absence of such power within myself, the darkened undertones behind the pastel of the face remind us that though our ideal traits may come at a cost to our own humanity. Moreover, my second portrait turns away from the viewer, crowned by ironically white devil-like horns. This represents my 'self-image'. The simplicity in the colour and form of the piece was designed to reveal my perceived, uncomplicated nature, while the neutral white block of colour that extends from my head symbolises my innocence in youth.

 As a teenager, I am yet to make a true impact on the world beyond. I believe that I am yet to experience and become my 'true self', and this is represented in the colorlessness and more low-key headpiece. While also inspired by Esther Erlich, I was drawn to Anna Platten in her figurative portraits, where the outward, dramatised presentation of her subjects alludes to their inner selves.

Similarly to Platten, I explored the idea of realism in my face, but used exaggerated, abstract elements to mask my true self. The colour and lighting were manipulated to be bolder and the hairdressers acted as extensions of the self, all of which enhanced my actual identity. To complement this concept, I created a sculpted chiffon female figure to represent my (hidden) true self, the third component of self-concept. Chiffon is a fashion-forward, lightweight and decorative fabric associated with elegance. I loosely sculpted this fabric to a mannequin with a sculpting medium to depict my female form, while masking the curves and features of the body. Its sheer appearance and prominence in fashion design give the sculpture the allusion of fashion as a mask of identity. In a similar way to the portraits that sit behind, this work presents a depiction of the covert elements of self - the 'true' body is seemingly hidden under the fabric, just as the faces are unbalanced by the large abstraction. The illusion of self and body draws the eye, while representing the person's true identity underneath, hidden for all to see.

To further build the relationship of a cohesive self within my body of works, I decided to incorporate 'found objects' into the chiffon sculpture. The collected items all held personal significance for me, allowing me to include small, unmasked elements of my 'true self' that could represent the parts of my identity that I honestly present to others. Inspired by Anna Platten, the spray paint I used to exaggerate the colour and form of these objects only enhanced the outward appearance and presence as a symbol of my inner-most being.

Together, the portraits and the chiffon sculpture surrounded by 'found objects' are combined to create *Self-concept*. The body of works presents the most vulnerable parts of myself, concealed behind exaggerated abstraction and sculpture. The components of this self-concept leave the viewer wondering about their own transparency and how their outward presence and inner self combine in presenting themselves to others.