

Abuse of Power

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Abuse doesn't have to be physical to be valid, yet most survivors of verbal, emotional and narcissistic abuse often go unnoticed and have their experiences annulled. I drew inspiration from the idea of displaying what cannot be seen by the eye to create a body of work. My final piece has been heavily influenced by the artists Jakie Liu, abstraction, colour theory and Shaquille Keith's belief that an impactful piece of art is created with raw emotions and vulnerability.

Through brainstorming and experimentation, I knew I wanted to capture the everyday situations that trauma manifests in. I started out by experimenting how abuse of power looks, yet found myself drawn to representing the victim's experience. This had personal relevance to my own trauma, and influenced my decision to focus on communicating the agony that I experienced through my visual art.

My primary purpose was to expose the physical and long-term effects of emotional abuse. I started out aiming to display one trauma response, illustrating four stages of a flash back spanning over 4 canvases. However, I decided that this was limiting my message to one effect of emotional abuse, whereas I wanted to show the range of invisible effects. Through experimentation with a range of mediums, subject matter, atmospheric effects, and composition, I created a mixed media piece spanning over numerous canvases. The central canvas captures the subject at their most vulnerable form with a mosaic of smaller canvases reflecting my experiences displayed around the perimeter of the piece.

The main painting is a portrait conveying me huddled in a corner. This posture displays the subject's vulnerability and fearfulness to the audience. The central portrait aims to symbolise the core of the inner child that experienced abuse, branching out to their experiences.

I was inspired by Jakie Liu's use of abstraction to create a striking motif throughout her work. I incorporated her technique of swirling repeated lines into my piece to represent the movement, volume, and speed of mental and verbal abuse. This enabled me to capture the impact emotional abuse has on the victim and resolving my initial issue to successfully communicate the side effects a victim experiences that aren't physically visible.

The main figure is surrounded by a current of repeated lines that extends past the foreground: suggesting it continues past the audience's selected view. Implying that the end is not in sight for the subject. The lines also swirl down into the middle ground, directly interacting with the subject as it is visually tight around their limbs, giving a sense of restriction and forcefulness. I achieved this by creating circular green brush strokes around the figure to achieve an engaging composition whilst constructing a visual metaphor of a pit. The use of dark tonal lines and lighter tints of green created depth and show the pit endlessly receding down.

Jakie Liu also used vibrant colours to add another level of depth that symbolise her idea of erratic emotion as seen in her piece "control freak". Using a green colour palette for the abstract features, the lines are seen constricting the figure like a poisoned river. I made this decision based off my own associations with the colour that I believe are common in western society and have become metaphors for the pain we experience.

I wanted it to be seen as a thick, consuming toxic waste you cannot get rid of, suggesting that the subject has been contaminated with this toxicity and is trapped by the poison.

I targeted people in the western culture as that is all I have access to being a student. The subject is painted in desaturated, purple tones creating an engaging contrast between the colours in the painting as the different saturations create balance and the contrasting colours become emphasised.

Hand painting:

The use of oil paints allowed me to create an outreaching hand desperately trying to grasp the golden lines that elude the hand. The hand is positioned in the bottom left third of the canvas to create a pleasing composition. The hand is painted in a deep but desaturated blue implying it is lurking in the shadows with the light of the golden figure lighting up the parts of the hand that face it. This symbolises the love bombing that keeps victims going back to the toxic environment/relationship with their abuser.

Torso painting:

The oil paint laid onto the fine canvas created a rendition of a realistic soft skin texture. Painted with pastel pinks applied with light, blended brush strokes to represent the young, innocent body juxtaposed with the violent hands digging into the puppy fat of the stomach. I wanted to show the self-criticism developed at a young age and that how it is met with violence. It is the subjects' hands doing the violence to its own body, showing the internalisation of the message.

Eye painting:

Oil paints allowed me to obtain the deep, opaque reds. The eye's form captures the tired, hurt emotions of the subject. Further composed to be in the process of turning away, still taking its final glance at the abuser the audience presumes is in front of it. This represents the hard emotions that come with finally walking away.

Self-portrait:

White lines covering my eyes and reaching into the foreground symbolise the controlling guidance of an abuser. Visually it implies that the subject isn't allowed to see where they are getting led, implying to the audience that they have no control. The subject was painted with no movement or facial expression, giving a lifeless, obedient tone to the subject. This highlights the manipulative nature of the abuser-victim dynamic.

I believe my piece creates interest with its striking colour scheme and impactful subject matter, thus, attracting the audience to look closely and take time to observe the subtle messages within each piece of the painting. I want the viewers to understand the effects verbal/emotional abuse has on many people in our society. This is just one story and I have portrayed my body of work as a social statement.