

Inner Beauty & Serenity

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I have always been fascinated with tonally realistic portrait painting and the practice of using visually decorative nature within artists' works. In many paintings, artists use natural themes to present emotion and ideas; I wanted to bring both my love for portraiture and nature together, but I wanted it to be something more, this is where I eventually came up with the concept of surrealism and feminine portraiture. Originally, I was going to move away from nature and explore surreal elements within portraiture, however my work always ended up circling back to what I loved, nature. I investigated and was influenced by artists like Aykut Aydogdu, Daria Callie and mainly Miho Hirano. Her oil painting work inspired me with the distinct soft feminine quality of her subjects. By studying her style, I constantly questioned how I could combine the elements of surrealism and feminine portraiture to meet my desired theme and concept.

I decided to create two portrait pieces, in different mediums, using firstly watercolour and then water-based oil paint, both allowing me to create fluid shapes, through different techniques, allowing my pieces to look more organic and realistic. The theme incorporated nature into both pieces in a surreal, slightly discordant manner. Watercolour is a medium I have previously explored and enjoyed working with, whereas oil paint was a medium which I was totally unfamiliar. The reason why I chose to use oil paint was that I wanted to push myself and my artistic abilities forward, to create something truly unique and different from any work I have ever done. For my first piece, Serenity, the use of watercolours was very apt as the very concept of the piece as it was underwater. One specific artist, Kelogsloop was researched for technique, which turned out to be a major inspiration for this piece, because I used his technique, exploring his refined use of watercolour and bright colours in my piece. Using watercolour as a medium allowed me to capture the fluidity and uncontrolled shapes of water, however, through further experimentation with watercolour, I came to understand the complexity of using watercolour and creating a seamless blend between the strokes. I found that over some sections of the face, when it comes to using watercolour, it can often have a mind of its own.

Upon doing further research I learnt different techniques to control the watercolour, like the wet or dry, and dry on dry techniques which allowed me to maintain control around the facial features and fish in the piece. The hair was kept dark, wavy, yet outlined to add contrast to the piece, acting as part of the background. My second piece, Inner Beauty, was the most challenging yet rewarding piece I have ever done. This was a risk as the oil paint is difficult to manipulate and hard to work because of the longer drying time. However, research conducted into oil painters and their techniques helped me understand that for my final I had to consider elements such as colour mixing, realism and application techniques. The oil paints used allowed me to easily apply large amounts of paint to general areas, whilst still maintaining blendability for a couple of days, allowing good coverage and the ability to perform more detailed work on the more intricate areas. This made it easier to work on and produce such a large-scale painting.

I focused on keeping the skin tones true to the subject matter, applying very little paint to the brush mixed with some water during the detailing process.

My decision to employ blue and purple hues associated with calmness, faith and confidence, in my artwork's background enhanced my desire to express the general theme of serenity relating back to my first final piece. My idea to utilise decorative leaves and flowers in a surreal manner was influenced by artist, Miho Hirano, and the addition of these leaves and flowers created a unique and aesthetically pleasing layer to my artwork. Although the oil paints were great to use, they also came with downsides, presenting issues to me along the way. The oils stayed wet which was good at first for blending, but then it became a time management issue as it meant I couldn't as easily and quickly layer paint or touch the canvas.

I overcame this though and persevered through the daunting task by spending all my spare time painting as soon as the oils dried. I wanted to include meaning and a personal message to this piece, highlighting feminine portraiture and surrealism, but I also wanted to get out of my comfort zone, and not just simply produce a meaningless piece, instead, I wanted it to mean something special to myself. My decision to choose a model who resembled an idealised version of myself was deliberate to explore inner beauty and what it meant to me.

The vines and flowers coming out from within the model communicate the idea of beauty within and outside. I feel that the final composition of both pieces accurately and beautifully reflects a surreal dreamlike aura, the girl under water is calm and tranquil while the girl with plants growing through her is unphased and at one with nature. In conclusion I learned to experiment with how people present their thoughts by using nature and symbolize emotion with realistic techniques.

The beautiful authenticity of the painting lies in its vulnerability, purity, and calmness, despite the situations, making it more precious.