

Imagination

Mia Guzej

I explored the theme of identity throughout my folio via artworks of myself, representations of me and my interests. I was inspired to do this by multiple things in my life – my therapist and everything I've learned from her, neurodivergent creators online who have helped me feel understood and seen, and my own interest in psychology and the concept of self. I chose to complete multiple finals, as I believe the concept of identity cannot be summarised within only one medium or work. During this folio I worked on my skills in digital art and editing, photography, painting, colour theory, sculpture, animation, and sketching. My tendency to jump between topics of interest was useful when developing multidisciplinary skills, as I needed to cover multiple different types of art creation over my 40 pages. I used the app Procreate for the majority of my digital art. I learned to use layers effectively in conjunction with blend modes to create harmonious colour palettes and textures.

As Procreate is on my iPad, I took all my photographs with my iPad for ease of access. I also enjoyed how using Procreate reduced the amount of physical resources I used and in turn reduced my carbon footprint. Through sketching both digitally and traditionally, I learned how to use leading lines and fluid strokes to create visually interesting and balanced forms. I also learned how to push composition of proportions in a natural way to create mood or emotion in a character design. The disciplines of painting and sculpture are ones that I do not practise as often as digital art, but they are incredibly rewarding for the physical aspects they provide. I find acrylic painting a relaxing experience due to the freedom of the brushstrokes, and physically touching and working with the clay was very therapeutic. Considering I would like to pursue art therapy as a career, this evidence of art positively affecting mental health is exciting to me. I sought feedback from my online community as well as my peers and teacher. I have my own page on Instagram where I post my art, and a few artist friend groups on Discord where we encourage and give feedback on each other's work.

In my art I am inspired mostly by contemporary online practitioners. Often these practitioners are inspired by nature or the human psyche and this feeds into my own art. My online friends and I create characters and make stories for them together. Sharing my folio and character designs with them has greatly increased not only my confidence but my critical thinking skills surrounding my own work. Final 1 is a short animation of my 'sona' (animal representation of me) laughing. I created this to bring my art to life and movement. From this I gained a greater understanding of my art style and how it can work even more effectively once brought to life. Final 2 is a photo of a small clay figure I created of a personification of my brain. I had a lot of fun creating a 3-dimensional version of my character design. Sculpting requires significant spatial awareness, which is something I lack as an autistic person. It helps me exercise that skill in order to understand how large or small clay pieces should be, etc.

Final 3 is a story piece depicting my chimera plushie character Kore. It is shown using hot glue to attach a googly eye to itself. Kore represents a child who is, for whatever reason, considered 'atypical' in society. As a child with a not yet formed personality, you reach for pieces of other people's behaviour to build yourself. To this child who doesn't 'fit in', it can feel like you've built yourself wrong. Like no matter what pieces you take, they never quite match – two heads, wonky 804336L wings and messy stitching.

I made Kore and that final piece to remind myself that it's okay to feel different. You can be messy and still be whole. Final 4 is a time-lapse of a self-portrait I created from an older photo. This process increased my confidence in the process of art tenfold. It was a turning point in which I realised the ugly stage of art is something to be embraced and worked through until completion, whether or not you are satisfied by the end. It's okay to give up on an artwork, but not due to self-doubt, and at the cost of potential improvement and learning. Final 5, to tie the folio together, is a self-portrait depicting myself with a hole in my head and cartoon drawings spilling out to symbolise my imagination.

I ended up drawing two versions of this artwork before I was happy with it, strengthening my problem-solving skills by forcing me to analyse and criticise my artwork to understand what needed to change. During the creation of this folio, I struggled greatly with mental health issues. There were weeks where I was so fatigued and dysregulated that I simply could not work. This meant I had to go full speed on the days when I was feeling okay and push for maximum productivity. I learned important techniques for reducing anxiety through breaking down tasks, how to ask for help, and how to receive and apply my teacher's feedback efficiently. I learned a lot about myself through expressing my emotions and studying my interests, and completing multiple finals really made me think about each part of my identity in a constructive and analytical way.

Working through the struggles I faced creating this folio gave me a huge confidence boost in my own abilities. The mental health benefits of creating the art itself are priceless, and I will carry this experience with me into the future. I hope to become an illustrator and art therapist and share what I have learned with other people who have struggled with what I have. Creating this folio has given me the resolve to use my skills to help people in my future professional life.