

## *Celebrating Hybrid Femininity, like a Girl*

### **Naomi Bache**

The title of my acrylic on canvas self-portrait, 'Celebrating Hybrid Femininity, Like a Girl' (100x150cm), relates to the painting's implication; that is my reclamation of my femininity and identity as a woman. My past perceptions were to regard femininity as a weakness rather than strength, which was rooted in my internalised sexism. I now not only accept my femininity but embrace it and bask confidently in the freedom of muliebrity.

Fascinated by tonally realistic portraits and the incorporation of flora into artistic works, I was inspired by artists Courtney Brims and Belinda Eaton due to their ethereal incorporation of nature in their portraits of women. Additionally, the Art Nouveau movement majorly motivated my investigations into femininity, particularly Alphonse Mucha's works due to the flowing organic line used to accentuate perceived "beauty". Although there is little sense of the Art Nouveau aesthetic in my piece, the movement played a large part in the development of my conceptual idea.

My incorporation of cultural flowers was particularly inspired by Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Art Nouveau 'Glasgow style' works and incorporation of the cultural 'Mackintosh Rose'. The mixture of florals over my face from both Scottish and Australian backgrounds is reflective of my heritage of hybrid culture and feminine identity. This concept, as well as the close-up composition, was further expanded by my explorations of Belinda Eatons' works featuring patterning and florals painted onto the subject. The transparency of the flowers was particularly inspired by photographer, Steven Markham's photograph titled 'Flower' in which floral patterns are painted on a model's face with delicacy. Courtney Brims' works incorporating flowers, (which are societally affiliated with women and femininity), birds, insects and flowing hair influenced my idea of including butterflies to give a sense of simulated movement.

Incorporating blushing pink hues into my artwork, through the addition of pink makeup highlights, embraces societal archetypes of womanhood. Additionally, the colour pink connotes themes of love, symbolic of my abandonment of internalised misogyny and the self love I have struggled to find as a woman. The close-up composition of the portrait aims to confront the viewer and their personal perception of femininity. Additionally, the large configuration draws the viewer's eye to mine, in an attempt to create a sense of direct eye contact. Strong red lipstick is worn defiantly to confidently defend my newfound position.

My decision to incorporate Scottish Thistles, Heather and Australian Bottlebrush also hold significant symbolic value. The Bottlebrush is representative of my current Australian identity, it is a hardy flower that thrives after harsh weather. The Scottish thistle connotes themes of bravery and courage and the Heather is symbolic of confidence, as it grows in harsh Scottish habitats. Women's liberation and freedom of rights isn't about having masculine traits to be perceived as needed for strength, it is about liberating women to truly embrace and be strong in who they actually are, regardless of how they choose to present.