

Simplistic Beauty

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Simplistic Beauty is a body of work based upon different perspectives of beauty, drawing elements from various cultures and portraiture, working concurrently to demonstrate individuality. My work features two of my friends- one of Vietnamese background, and the other of Chinese heritage- thus I was careful in my approach, to respect their culture and not appropriate it. While conceptualising, I aspired to portray how people's opinions of someone can alter as we learn more about them.

To achieve this, I approached ideas from a minimalistic perspective to attain ambiguity and invite the audience to consider what the message was themselves. The display of Simplistic Beauty might be mistaken as a triptych, however, whilst each artwork's theme connects, each piece should be viewed independently as this work focuses on the individuals. Throughout Simplistic Beauty I maintained a realistic approach through artistic techniques. However, while developing my style within my folio, I also experimented with a range of expressive techniques to present a variety of skills.

During development, I was particularly drawn to artists Jenny Saville and Frida Kahlo, who have both created artwork on self-expression. Saville greatly influenced my acrylic painting, in which her harsh and imperfect blending of vibrant colours has been claimed as classical standard figure painting, with a contemporary approach. Kahlo on the other hand, explores realistic portraits with an element of surrealism, inspired by reflections of the inner self. Each artist has also exhibited this through a feminist perspective, which greatly inspired my choice of work. My central piece, '#1: Thi Kim Nhi Do' is a large watercolour painting of a Vietnamese student wearing a traditional dress, that hangs from the ceiling to the floor. She overlooks the viewer, bearing a range of unique features. One point of interest is the intricacy of the dress details. Though supposedly white, the dress has been painted with a metallic silver to outline various patterns and subvert from the otherwise plain dress.

The face is another focal point, though slightly above viewing point, it has been intricately painted, with the facial features providing complexity on the simplicity of the white backdrop. The vibrancy of the face and hair provide relief from the absence of colour, and was painted using a variety of watercolour techniques, particularly 'wet-on-dry' and 'wet-on-wet' in order to convey realism. The colour layering was inspired by Kahlo's works, in which she employed many base layers on portraits- such as cool tones on white fabrics to establish depth. Similarly, I utilised warm undertones for the face, and a soft lilac and blue on the dress, to avoid a monochromatic appearance.

This piece is inspired by my friendship with the international students- their strength and perseverance as the central message conveyed through the pose and asymmetrical composition. Often encouraged by the girl in this artwork, I aspired to display an insight to her character and demonstrate that ethnicity has no impact on this. Though the audience could identify her nationality via her dress, I explore ambiguity through the emptiness of the background, for people to consider what her personality may be. To further this, I contrasted simplicity with a realistic style. The empty background focuses attention on the subject, simultaneously serving as a rhetorical device for the audience to consider what might fill the space.

This piece was challenging, given the size and complexity, however, was relatively successful. Though some improvements to proportions could have been made, I believe the desired message was expressed, and the paint manipulated effectively enough. However, I have come to understand the significance of ambiguity and absence of colour, which became an essential element in my following pieces, where I emphasise the significance of less being more. The surrounding two artworks are portraits of my friend on brown paper, wearing a traditional Chinese dress. '#2: Yixuan Liang' is created from charcoal, and '#3: Yixuan Liang', acrylic paint. Firstly, the charcoal piece, represents beauty of the exterior- the portrait is adorned by butterflies and a wreath- two elements inspired by her hair pin (not visible in the piece).

These elegant, cultural features accompany her natural beauty, created through precise blending of charcoal, with occasional white charcoal highlights. The brown surface shines through, as the charcoal merely depicts shadows from light, so to some degree, it is "transparent". This provides similar ambiguity to my previous work, where the viewer can once again determine my friend's nationality, from their clothes and accessories, but cannot ascertain insights to their personality- hence the black and white appearance. However, this is where acrylic painting '#3: Yixuan Liang' takes place. As the viewer gazes from the monochromatic piece to the full colour portrait, there is a boldness to the colour and brush strokes. Each stroke was confidently made to exhibit a more expressive style. The opaque colour on this less "refined" portrait demonstrates that as one's understanding of someone develops, their newfound personality brings colour to their life. These pieces are intentionally contrasting to highlight the differences that arise when first meeting someone, to then becoming closer.

This revolves around the concept of knowledge and perspective being dependent on the other. Ultimately, Simplistic Beauty was relatively successful. Through a range of mediums, I aspired to present the concept of natural beauty and perspectives. Through this process, I have learned that when portraying this idea, less is always more- as highlighted by the negative space and minimalistic nature of my pieces. Simplistic Beauty has enabled me to develop as an artist, not only through experimentation with new media but also themes. Perspective is significantly important in art- a piece can entirely change based upon how different people view it. However, this provides the audience the opportunity to interpret a piece in their own way, provoking self-reflection more effectively.

Moreover, via the incorporation of culture, Simplistic Beauty concurrently shows that regardless of background, one cannot completely understand another until their perspective is based purely on who someone is and not what they are