

*Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners*

## **Chloe Crispin**

*"Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners"* (*Othello* Act 1, Scene 3). Shakespeare often used metaphors to express deeper thought and emotion, like how symbolism is used as a tool for surrealists. After reflecting on this garden analogy, I realised that although we have 'free will' over our actions, societal values easily influence us, affecting our actions, thoughts, and identity. Personally, as a young woman in modern society, I understand how it feels to be constantly told the value of femininity as an individual which fluctuates between how desired our physical appearances are determined by external factors, which has altered the way I have lived throughout my life.

I was heavily inspired by Frida Kahlo's surrealist self-portraits where she depicted herself vulnerably, representing a broken identity through unconventional imagery, therefore I depicted myself within my work in the same way. Kahlo was involved in a serious accident, she was unable to have children and often used flora to symbolise fertility. Like Kahlo, I used a pomegranate human heart hybrid to symbolise a personal parallel. Pomegranates are associated with the Greek goddess Persephone, who was involuntarily dragged to the underworld by Hades. Persephone was taken unwillingly toward the darkness; metaphorically, I feel the same has happened to me. The pomegranate primarily symbolises my debilitating struggle with an eating disorder that has compromised how I see myself, hurting me physically and mentally. The heart pumps blood and oxygen around the body, the definitive symbol of life, representing the fragility of being human.

I chose to paint on a round "canvas", inspired by one of the artists I researched, Fernando Vicente. This gives the work an elegant feel and it echoes a common form many Greek antiquity works took. As it is not a conventional canvas, I had to construct it myself out of masonite, which allowed me to make it the desired size. I used gouache paint as my media after comparing it with other paints including acrylic and watercolour. I found the gouache smoother and easier to manipulate, it also looked softer and created the dreamy feel I envisioned for my artwork.

The figure is positioned toward the centre of the canvas, slightly to the left. Although there is an absence of imagery on the right, the negative space provided adds a point of interest and creates balance as the figure faces that direction. Eyes facing downward evade the viewer, creating a sense of mystery. It is the hypnotic, metallic spiral in the background that draws the viewers' attention to the focal point, the figure. Initially, I intended to use a black spiral, however, I decided the contrast between the two colours would dilute the figure's beauty, so I settled on a more subtle silvery grey acrylic paint that compliments the tones of the dress. The warm colours used within the figure are comforting, encouraging further observation of details. The muted palette of greys, pinks, and purples enhances the skin and dress, conveying femininity. Warm tones dominate; however, darker undertones appear upon closer inspection. The artwork was a success as I effectively portrayed themes of femininity and fragility, exploring it on a deeper, personal level, figuratively and literally, while learning to utilise a new medium.