

Beauty Within: Fragments of the Self

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My body of work is an exploration of what it truly means to be beautiful and explores the intersectionality of feminism, womanhood and identity. Each painting is viewed as an extension of myself, and the emotions and experiences that I feel have made me who I am today – a reflection of my inner self and mind.

The first practical in the body of work, *Blossoming*, is a portrait of a female figure who appears to be covered in an entanglement of vines and flowers. Inspired by Korean photographer Cho Gi Seok, I incorporated the motif of flora – a universally recognised symbol of beauty – as well as vines to represent the restrictivity of beauty standards for women that are everchanging with the passage of time. The unwavering and direct gaze of the subject acts as a subversion to societal expectations connoted by artist Kaye Donachie's works, in which women are expected to simply exist in a submissive manner, only meriting value from their appearance. The "head on" composition of the figure expresses the resilience of women under societal pressures to be beautiful according to Eurocentric and conventional beauty standards. I adopted a wide colour scheme mainly comprised of oranges, blues, pinks and greens to further reiterate how beauty is a multi-faceted social construct and that our beauty is defined by who we are as people, our vibrance emanating from the various aspects of our personalities and character that make us who we are. The idea of beauty radiating from within is reinforced by the addition of light and reflective glints painted around the figure. I aimed to exaggerate facial features such as the eyes, cheeks and lips of the subject as a notion to makeup and the idea of feeling the need to conform to beauty standards placed upon us – also inspired by Donachie's gesture to the makeup style of the 1940's throughout her works. This piece aims to highlight the endurance of women through acknowledging their emotional hardships posed on many by the burden of expectations regarding appearance within the patriarchal society we live in today.

Hidden Beauty, the second practical in the body of work is a continuation of this sub-idea revolving around the concept of beauty, specifically how beauty comes from within. This painting illustrates a figure of a woman who is being enveloped by a mass of flowers growing around her. Once more, symbolism of flora is used to connote the constraints of beauty standards that grow more restrictive through the transition of girlhood to womanhood. Light is a main feature of this piece, the sun illuminating the profile of the figure used to express how beauty comes from within our souls and existence, not our physical appearance. The use of fine detail, a bright colour scheme and the motif of the sun is inspired by artist Inju Park, relating to their concepts of breaking free from the expectations of others and relinquishing in the freedom of expression. I drew inspiration from Mitani Takuya's drawings to incorporate fantasy elements and adopt a similar delicate style to highlight the femininity of the subject – expressing the beauty in embracing femininity.

'*I see who you truly are*' is the third practical in the body of work that is based upon the concepts of reflection, self-perception and self-esteem. This painting depicts a woman staring into her reflection, with smudged makeup and teary eyes. The use of a complimentary colour scheme inspired by Amanda Ba's works comprised of deep reds

and greens connotes the inner conflict of always wanting to change your appearance, despite being unable to change your own perception of yourself. I feel that this piece expresses the desire to be beautiful that is deeply rooted within society today, and the pressure to conform to other's expectations. The animated style of painting and use of high contrast is employed as a notion to Junji Ito, the reference to Ito's work *Tomie* relating to the concept of desire and how it brings the worst out of humanity and ourselves – festering deep within. The motif of vines further represents this deterioration of self-esteem, representative of a growing desire to be loved and to love oneself. I drew further inspiration from literature, specifically a quote from author Louise Gluck, that states how "A woman will return, looking for the girl she once was". This excerpt from her novel influenced the overall composition of this piece to illustrate how womanhood and the pressures of society causes one to lose touch with their inner child, urging them to reflect on who they truly are and to question their identity.

The fourth and final practical of this body of work titled '*Alone*' is illustrates a girl surrounded by a field of flowers, with the view of a lake behind her. Employment of impressionism was used to create a detailed and serene yet barren depiction of a field of flowers – relating to the notion of escapism from the bleak reality of loneliness through the imagination. The averted gaze of the subject further reiterates the idea of avoidance, with the use of negative space surrounding the subject expressing a sense of loneliness and melancholy that manifests within. Inspired by John Morris' works based upon light and reflectivity, I incorporated a glimmering lake in the background to create ambient lighting to reinforce the idea of self-reflection and nostalgia.

Through adopting the aforementioned ideas and techniques throughout each piece in the body of work, I aim to convey the complexities of identity and human existence. Every aspect of ourselves: our character, our personality traits both good and bad, the things that we wish we could change and our favourite parts of ourselves. They all make us who we are; and that itself is simply a beautiful thing. Beauty is not something to be taken at face value – it comes from our individuality and from all facets of our lives that make our existence here on earth unique.