

Toi, Wo, Saya, Me

Violet Pye

My painting titled '*Toi, Wo, Saya, Me*' is an acrylic on canvas (100cm x 100cm) showcasing a stencilled depiction of my childhood self against a background adorned with symbols reflecting my experiences of living in Malaysia, China and Vietnam. This work draws from my fascination with Pop Art, particularly the techniques of layering and symbolism employed by various artists. Throughout its development and planning, I drew inspiration and insight from German painter, Gerhard Richter, Chinese artist, Ye Hong Xing and American artist, Emily Wood.

Richter's exploration of blurred imagery and portraits served as a catalyst for my theme centred around the portrayal of memories and self-representation. By drawing from Ye Hong Xing's study of identity and her vibrant interpretations of cultural symbols, I initiated my exploration of identity through vivid symbolism within a colourful aesthetic. Furthermore, Emily Wood's bold use of colours and her distinct pop art style strongly influenced my choice of aesthetics and the utilisation of stencil outlines.

To create this painting, I used acrylic paint and spray paint. Influenced by the artistic styles of Emily Wood and Ye Hong Xing, I chose a highly layered approach to convey the theme of memories. The layers symbolise the passage of time and the accumulation of experiences, mirroring the complexity of personal identity.

The first layer was painted in shades of pink featuring darker-hued palm trees to symbolise my childhood in tropical environments, thus conveying a sense of place. This layer specifically represents Malaysia as the pink symbolises the sunsets and the view from my bedroom window which was framed by towering palm trees. The layers in my work chronologically map my life, with the first layer reflecting my most recent years and the final layer, symbolising my early childhood.

In the next layer, I painted a thin white glaze, achieved by mixing acrylic paint with gloss medium. This layer deliberately creates a sense of distance, symbolising the passage of time and fading of memories. Over the glaze I painted cultural symbols from different locations representing my time overseas in acrylic paint, the symbols include a motorbike, supermarket brands, mangos, a Hong bao, local products and Vietnamese fans. Symbols often transcend language barriers and can resonate with viewers on a universal level. I chose to use red and yellow to portray the national colours of China and Vietnam, highlighting the countries which were most influential in shaping me. The reappearance of the glaze layer over the top of the symbols aims to minimise the chaos of the work by unifying the symbols and providing cohesion in the composition. The glaze is peaceful, symbolising the tranquil haven of my home, a stark contrast to the bustling, vibrant landscapes of Vietnam and Malaysia. The glaze unifies the symbols, thus creating consistency and coherency, mirroring how my home, with its unchanging objects and familiar faces, remained a constant amid cultural shifts across different countries.

The subsequent layer features a stencil outline of my young face, painted in acrylic, which serves as a nostalgic focal point. The stencil style is simplistic, thus unifying the symbols. This element underscores that the images within the artwork are reflections of my personal memories and identity. This childlike representation evokes innocence and highlights the idea of the past being an integral part of one's identity.

Finally, the last layer incorporates 3 spray-painted symbols, each one representing an icon that connects to stories I have from each of international countries I lived in. This medium creates a more layered and textured effect. Additionally, the fluid nature of spray-paint contrasts the precision of acrylic, creating an engaging tension of techniques within the piece.

I am very happy with the outcome of my artwork. I feel I have achieved my desired effect of showcasing my identity and the memories of my time overseas in a style primarily inspired by artists; Ye Hong Xing, Emily Wood and Gerhard Richter.