

Within my Skin

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'*Within my Skin*,' is a conceptually expressive work that has been extensively influenced by a range of artists, works, movements and personal life experiences. The composition features three acrylic realist style self-portraits on raw cut leather, sewn together using nylon thread, leather and wire. The leather is distorted, being pulled as it is presented on a black MDF board. The leather surface I created my work on was heavily influenced by my apprenticeship at Sunshine Barossa Australia, a business specialising in leather goods. The raw depiction of the relationships between emotions within myself has a connection with the signature self-portraits of Mexican Modernist Frida Kahlo, of which I had the opportunity to see as part of *Frida & Diego: Love and Revolution* exhibition in Adelaide. The Expressionist art movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s also influenced how I portrayed emotion in the portraits, subjectively exploring my subconscious feelings regarding self-identity and how I perceive myself.

The surface being leather allows the portraits to appear more realistically as human skin and has a deep connection through my own work with leather, reflecting how it has helped me grow as a person. My apprenticeship in leatherwork has had a large impact on me as finding my creative passion for leatherwork has helped me both regulate my emotions and given me a sense of purpose and belonging. After struggling with identity and gaining control of my emotions, the three self-portraits express three key emotions and the internal conflict they have caused within me. The varied stitching symbolises my attempt to make amends with these emotions and repair the relationships I have with them through personal growth and healing. *Within my Skin* reflects my journey of emotional healing and depicts, in a real and raw sense, the beautiful mess of emotions and the self. It does not shy away from the disordered and chaotic allusion of relationships between emotions, portraying the self-deprecation it creates through exaggerated emotion on each portrait and the fraying of the leather. The bold stitching using both wire and leather between each piece reflects the mending of a previous fight with emotional instability, displaying my pride in how far I have come in finding who I am and restoring the relationship I have with myself.

Although looking at a range of expressionist artists who exaggerate features prominently, my body of work took a more realist approach, however various elements still aim to evoke a connection between the viewer and their own emotions. This is expressed through various elements including the exaggeration of colour within the portraits, the unique leather surface that paint has been applied on, the symbolic stitching between the pieces of leather and the distorted and stretched installation of the piece on board.

Portrait one displays the emotion of shock caused by feelings of envy and jealousy, depicted as more of a micro-expression than the other two portraits as jealousy is expressed more through action and behaviour rather than through a facial expression. However, the wide glassy eyes and slightly opened mouth objectively display a feeling induced by shock. Utilising the secondary colour of a green shirt further symbolises a jealous nature, contrasted by the dark and wearisome, purple-toned shadowing surrounding the eyes, nose and chin. Swedish Figurative artist Benjamin Bjorklund

portrays similar intense emotion whilst keeping a realist style. He had a large influence over the tonal contour of facial features, particularly from his use of deep, exaggerated skin tones utilised to create character and symbolise the emotions and feelings of the subject.

Portrait two depicts feelings of anger and resentment through an irate self-portrait that appears to be past breaking point. This portrayal is highly objective, displaying the emotion clearly for what it is with glazed over blood-shot eyes, flushed cheeks and a wide-open mouth. Messy, unkept hair reflects a state of disarray and ire and the intense secondary colour of orange for the shirt symbolises pessimism and annoyance.

Portrait three portrays feelings of happiness and joy through an exultant grin and rosy cheeks. In comparison the other two portraits that display negative emotions, this portrait depicts an inner peace through a slightly brighter colour palette and better kept and tidy hair. The secondary colour of purple for the shirt further symbolises feelings of peace, balance and power that come with happiness. The bold colour contrasts of the shirt in each portrait was inspired by the bright, contrasting acrylic portraits by Contemporary American painter Sheila Nicolin. Although she predominately uses primary colours, I was captivated by the use of secondary orange in her work '*Paradiscal*,' which I comparatively incorporated all three secondary colours into my three self-portraits.

The leather surface was porous, making it challenging to achieve a smooth layer of paint. My first portrait displaying emotions of shock and jealousy has roughly textured skin as I was unfamiliar with how to achieve a smooth paint application. Although giving the piece character, it made it challenging to layer paint and resulted in a less detailed, clean looking portrait. My second and third portraits were less affected as I problem solved by slowly building layers by waiting for each to completely dry, helping create a smoother surface to paint on.

Using leather as a surface has taught me how significant the role of installation is in telling a story and creating a deeper meaning to a work of art. The distorted installation of the leather was influenced greatly by animal installations by British Contemporary artist Damien Hirst. His work '*In the Name of the Father*' which grotesquely shows a skinned lamb hanging from its two-front leg, connects to the distortion of animal skin in my work which was comparatively utilised for its flexibility.

This body of work saw my skills grow significantly, particularly in realist style painting, of which I had minimally explored. Having the opportunity to explore leather away from my apprenticeship has helped deepen my connection with it, using it as a means of reflecting on my own personal growth.