

Practitioners Statement

Artwork Title: 'The Hope Only of Empty Men' **Medium:**
Charcoal, Pencil, Acrylic Paint on Paper **Dimensions:** 3
(panels) x 57cm x 77cm Triptych
Word Count: 1022

The conceptual underpinning of *'The Hope Only of Empty Men'* is based on T.S. Elliot's poem 'The Hollow Men'.

Poet, Dante Alighieri inspired me with his nine layers of Hell and the notion that our choices define our fate. It was in fact his divine comedy, which inspired the conceptual underpinning of my work. The Hollow Men follows the perspective of a group of mindless 'hollows' who conformed to society and made no decisions for themselves, therefore earning themselves access to neither heaven nor hell to and instead condemning themselves to an eternity in Limbo. George Orwell's 1984 further explores this idea in a dystopian society where Big Brother reigns supreme and the members of society have been reduced to mere sheep following orders blindly and without question. This is a big issue in society, especially as social media continues to rise and humanity conforms to rules and impossible ideals.

'The Hope Only of Empty Men', depicts how conforming to societal expectations and restrictions erodes our individuality and our humanity. It shows the deterioration of a human conforming to societies' ideals of success. We are taught that to be 'successful' is to excel academically, go to university, get an 'important' job and wear appropriate clothes. We are told to contain ourselves and we are often shunned for expressing ourselves. We must conform to dress codes; no piercings, no tattoos, no excessive makeup, black pants only, hair must be above shoulders, no facial hair, no jewellery. We are not taught to be truly happy, only to seem it. By conforming to societal expectations and rules we appear to lead perfect lives, but in the process we become mere copies of each other, of an idea. With conformity comes the end of individuality. Without individuality there is no humanity. Without humanity we cannot perceive the world around us. 'This is the way the world ends'.

In my artwork this concept is implied through triptych showing essentially a 'before and after' of the effects of conformity, accompanied by a contextual quote from the poem The Hollow Men. The first panel artwork is still human however, at the beginnings of his conformity he is already clearly unhappy in his 'successful' life and his appropriate suit. The more distorted version of him (third panel) shows how over time his sense of humanity is eroded until he is hollow inside and all that remains of him is his well-kept suit and hence his façade of 'success'. The quote (centre panel) makes a powerful statement and strengthens my message.

Artists Christopher Orchard and Yanni Floros were big influences in regards to my subject wearing a suit. Their concepts expanded on my understanding of conformity from The Hollow Men. With Orchards men and mannequins with paper bags on their heads and Floros' authoritative figures holding threatening guns, I saw corruption in the symbol of success, the suit. It was Robert Hannaford and Jonathon Delafield Cook's techniques in their realism artworks which influenced my own realism technique. As one of my strengths, I used Hannaford and Cook's works to further develop my own skills. For example, I took from Cook the importance of value and texture. His 'Fan Tail' and 'Dove' series show intricate detailing and

texture which I incorporated into my works with very pleasing results. Cherry Hood and Peter Booth taught me about the impact of facial expressions. I used their ideas to create a sense of unhappiness and inhumanity. I also found inspiration in Booth's reflections of wild hallucinations about chaos and hopelessness. I used Nick Mourtzakis' work to learn about building facial structures and I used David Fairbairn and Mike Parr's works to learn about distortion of facial structures. Fairbairn inspired me greatly and by studying his works I developed the style of my acrylic work. More specifically, with his work being so different from my own, it was his skeletal figures with hidden or indistinct eyes which I based my third panel on. His use spontaneous use of line, contrast shape and texture influenced me to develop a whole new style to combine with my own to create a strong artwork.

I incorporated the techniques learned from my artist research. This included using the full range of tones to create depth and value, and using various mark making techniques to create different textures. For example, on the tie section in panel one, I employed what I learned from Hannaford and Cook when I used line and value to draw in the grain of the fabric and the very subtly shadowed edge. This improved the realistic effect of the artwork considerably. The basic method I used for the lumograph and charcoal rendering was a three- step blocking, blending and erasing process. This allowed me to achieve the desired values and textures to create my realistic style. I worked continuously with acrylics, as I needed to work the first few layers while wet to achieve my desired aesthetic. I used rough cross hatching movements to create the background and somewhat spontaneous movements to build the face. Once this dried, I dry brushed the texture for the hair and refined the face lightly where necessary. The acrylic work was challenging for me as it is not my native medium but the main issue I encountered was when painting the quote. This was built up I three layers, starting with the carbon block which was then blended roughly with water and then darkened while still wet with acrylic paint. I then flicked ink across it but this created unattractive and distinct lines of droplets which looked awful so I simply tried again making sure to let the ink drip off the brush on its own and this worked much better.

I believe my work was an overall success. I was able to utilize many of the techniques I learned by observing other artists and I feel I portrayed my message strongly. Although my acrylic work turned out differently to what I had planned I still feel it came out well and I am especially happy with the results of my lumograph work. I am very pleased with my overall results.