

Stage 2 Visual Art
Practitioner's Statement
Body of Work

Uncovered

I have always had a deep love for stories. Reading factual and fictional stories, listening to my grandparents tell the stories of their youth and learning about the stories of others has always interested and delighted me. As I began to brainstorm ideas for my piece, I recognised that this love for stories was reflected in my deep fascination with portraiture – I am constantly enthralled by the way artists such as David Kassan and Vincent Fantauzzo are able to paint their sitters story into their portraits, captivating viewers through often the most minute of details. I took this passion and used it as inspiration for my piece, ultimately setting out with the goal to create a portrait which has the ability to depict an aspect of the sitter's story.

A visit to photographer Meg Hansen's exhibition "All you need is love" left me awestruck by the intensity captured in her portraits of the Pipalyatjara community. Inspired by her work, I began to explore Australia's Aboriginal culture with the notion to depict the story of an indigenous Australian. However, this concept changed drastically as I undertook research into artists Robert Hannaford and Pablo Picasso, who, despite their disparate styles, have both completed a series of self-portraits over the course of their lifetimes. Their ability to portray various aspects of themselves through their work largely influenced my decision to, instead, create a self-portrait.

I was primarily influenced by Robin Eley's piece "Bibliography", an intense self-portrait painted onto the covers of thirteen hardcover books, each significant to either his Australian or Chinese heritage. The idea of using literally books, the core form of storytelling, as a canvas to tell my story seemed logical and I subsequently conducted an investigation into artists such as Florian Nicolle and Ekaterina Pankanova who each utilise books in their work. It was through this that I was able to develop my concept further, establishing that I would paint my self-portrait onto books arranged in an interesting composition.

Artists Ruby Chew's and Tsering Hannaford's use of oil paint to create their exceptionally life like portraits which truly capture the essence of their subjects was a great influence on my choice of medium. The oil paint's slow drying time allows Chew and Hannaford to construct the carefully

rendered skin tones which make their portraits so effective. I desired a similar result, as my intention was to create a realistic self-portrait on the books exteriors, providing an accurate representation of how a stranger would perceive me. However, if the viewer takes the time to look beyond the exterior at the interior, the aspects of my story hidden inside the books, they will gain a better understanding of who I am. Therefore, despite having very little experience, oil paints became my chosen medium. I attended an 'Introduction to Oil Painting' course which gave me a basic understanding of the 'alla prima' or 'wet on wet' technique, a process which is also employed by Chew. This method of working was familiar to me as I had worked in a similar way using acrylics. After experimenting with the medium I was able to accurately build the flesh tones I required and capture the subtle aspects of expression that are difficult to capture using acrylics.

The decision to work in a realistic style meant the reference image was particularly significant in portraying the intended emotion. I was fascinated by the intensity captured in Vincent Fantauzzo's portraits and subsequently I desired to evoke a similar intimacy through my portrait. However, in keeping with an accurate depiction of myself, I wanted to retain a somewhat friendly and inviting expression, as this reconciles with my personality and how others perceive me. Taking inspiration from Fantauzzo's close-up, cropped and centred compositions, I combined these elements with a serious yet soft expression. In order to achieve this intensity, it was imperative that the eyes of the portrait remained the focus, as they are often referred to as 'the gateway to the soul' and hence the gateway to the stories hidden beneath the books surfaces.

For the books interiors, I sought to extend upon my self-exploration by depicting aspects of my medical history. I created individual compositions for four of the nine book interiors, with each book dedicated to a different aspect associated to my medical experiences; one for the heart, one for the skeleton, one dedicated to scars and the last to OCD. Underpinning this, is a comment on the fragility of the human body – the portrait on the front depicts a young, strong and healthy individual, however, this appearance is, in many cases, ultimately a façade. Despite a strong exterior, the body is incredibly fragile and susceptible to medical tribulations that are perhaps not always evident on an exterior level.

When approaching the heart composition, I was inspired by the work of artist Trisha Thompson Adams. Her unique, delicate and symbolic approach to anatomical illustration through the flawless integration of floral imagery was an element I desired to incorporate into my body of work. Consequently, I created a similar composition in which I depicted Gladiolus (representing strength), Protea (representing courage/bravery) and Anemone (representing fragility) blooming out of the

Aorta and Superior Vena Carva. The heart represents my cardiac medical history and is painted in a realistic style, reinforcing the reality of my heart conditions and their severe impact on my life. This realistic style contrasts against the flowers which unnaturally bloom out of the heart, symbolising the vitality of the situation as the medical treatment I underwent has provided me with a whole new way of life.

Taking inspiration from anatomical artists Leonardo da Vinci and Susan Duncan, I depicted the scar, skeleton and OCD compositions through a realistic medical approach, with the ultimate aim to evoke a sense of shock in the viewer as they open the covers to reveal the gruesome reality of the human body.

The final portrait of a strong young woman can be judged on the cover, the outward appearance, but as viewers look closer they begin to uncover the individuals true being, unveiling a whole new story.