

Collection of Comfort

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"Collection of Comfort" is a visually compelling installation comprising a series of intricately painted portraits arranged in a quincunx composition, sculptural works, and a string art piece that harmoniously unifies the entire collection. This body of work depicts myself partaking in activities that provide solace from worry. Consisting of five paintings, all of which are a blend of Oil, and Acrylic paints. Additionally, a pair of hands representing my own, can be observed grasping the edges of the middle painting. These hands are adorned with an ombre, green glaze, beginning from the fingertips, and blending out towards the palms core. The hands are an expression of holding onto things that bring me comfort, ensuring I won't let go and revert back to an anxious state. Lastly, a string art piece, resembling a cobweb, which not only connects all the paintings, but also symbolises the act of holding on, and the depths of the mind.

My brainstorming process began when I visited the Top Arts Exhibition 2023 in Melbourne. I was inspired by the concept of Celeste Yun Hang's "*The Last You*" which captures the uncertainty of 'rapid growth in artificial intelligence'. The imagery of the painted body being pulled at and destroyed by the birds resonated in my thoughts about my own growth constantly being swayed and navigated by the negative thoughts and stressors in my life. Celeste's work ignited my desire to experiment with an array of mediums, styles and aesthetics to depict a story about calming my anxious mind and blocking out the daily stressors of life.

The ethereal aesthetic has always been appealing to me. I am captivated by the dreamy and surreal imagery it encompasses, the pastel-toned colour palettes that evoke a sense of beauty and the soft flowing lines that offer a sense of fluidity. My inspiration stems from this aesthetic, it allowed me to convey a sense of calm and serenity in my art, which enabled me to explore the boundaries between reality and fantasy.

This collection explores the reality of dealing with mental health, and how engaging in comforting activities can empower individuals to feel in control of their environment and find psychological serenity, free from the constraints of anxiety. The four surrounding paintings serve as vivid recollections of the times when I have felt most at ease. I successfully captured this feeling by developing an almost otherworldly, dream-like aesthetic. The ethereal quality is evident in the blurred, hazy edges that gradually fade into a crisp white, as well as the subdued colour palette and natural lighting that work harmoniously to evoke a sense of calm. The central painting depicts myself, not in a dream-state, but capturing each element of my "*Collection of Comfort*". This choice accounts for the vibrant colours that distinguish it from the surrounding four. While memories are typically preserved mentally, I opted for a visual narrative, using a camera to create visual interest and symbolic meaning. To ensure this artwork stands out as the focal point against the other elements of the installation, I used a central composition. I also incorporated brighter shades from the subdued colour palette such as indigo, emerald green, and lavender. Instead of implementing the blurred edges, I created a background full of spirals and swirls to represent the connection between the subconscious mind and reality, thus emphasising the dream-like aesthetic.

Within each of the paintings encircling the central artwork, I've portrayed a special object or individual that symbolises personal comfort alongside me. In *"Euphoria"* I'm depicted alone captivated by the music flooding through my headphones. This object represents the serotonin that music ignites in our brains, a sentiment that can also be felt from observing the soothing lilac-coloured background.

Diagonally across, the painting: *"Tranquillity"* is seen, with the same serene ombre background created using the Sfumato technique. *"Tranquillity"* features an easel with my feature painting portraying the serene sensation I experience while creating art. The feature painting intentionally diverges from reality, symbolising the hazy nature of the dream-like aesthetic.

"Carefree" displays my sister and I in a close pose embracing one another creating a balanced composition and symbolising our sisterly relationship. This painting encapsulates the emotions I experience when surrounded by the people I love most, where I can truly be myself, not hiding, and therefore: carefree. To create further emphasis on this emotion I implemented a cool green background, using the same Sfumato technique to create a gradient.

The last of the smaller-scale paintings is *"Serenity"*. *"Serenity"* depicts my cat and me. Our figures are composed closely, creating a cozy atmosphere, allowing viewers to feel safe and sheltered. I included this to capture the constant companionship and unconditional love that pets provide.

When developing my paintings, I explored the artworks of many artists, but I was specifically inspired by Ah Xian, Sim Sim, and Vincent Van Gogh. Ah Xian's mastery in interplaying colours and texture with glazing, inspired me to experiment with glazes on my clay hands, ultimately transforming them into a unique element of my collection. Sim Sim's utilisation of soft pastels created this oneiric haziness, this is exactly the aesthetic I was attempting to portray. Sim Sim's application of texture and light profoundly influenced the creative direction of my work by being the inspiration behind incorporating a hazy blurred effect in the backgrounds of my artworks, helping to convey the surrealistic element reminiscent of dreams. The vibrant stylised swirl patterned background that I produced draws inspiration from the expressive abstract patterns seen in the backgrounds of many artworks created by Post-Impressionist artist Van Gogh. Van Gogh's art serves as both an aesthetic inspiration and communicates a similar emotional expression that aligns with my creative intentions.

In my collection, I've not only successfully conveyed my emotions but also created visually captivating artworks. Each element showcases the ethereal aesthetic, primarily inspired by artists: Celeste Yun Hang, Ah Xian, Sim Sim, and Van Gogh. A consistent soft pastel colour palette unites all my paintings, and the gestural brush strokes in the background of the central painting establishes a connection to each of the four outside paintings, forming a central focal point. This installation truly encapsulates my *"Collection of Comfort"*.