

Untreated Mental Illness

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Surrealism is a literary, philosophical, and artistic 1920s movement that explored the workings of the mind by embracing the illogical, poetic, and revolutionary. The driving vision behind my folio and artwork is exploring the reality of living with an untreated Mental Illness and how this can be represented in art. I'm interested in expressing thoughts, dreams, and sensations because I like transforming realistic objects and subjects into abnormal concepts. I chose this topic because, for me, surrealism is the creative method of delving deep into my subconscious mind and drawing out my true creative ability.

I studied mental illness through the stereotypes of each condition, where I used common social perspectives to drive context in my images. I used a Canon 1500D, plus Adobe functions to explore different surrealistic forms, in particular neo-realism, expressionism and abstraction. I chose photography as my medium as I wanted to develop my photographic skills acquired from a course I did at the Centre of Creative Photography.

My vision was to create a series of six large-scaled photographs each focused on a different illness; anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar, derealisation and body dysmorphia. Channelling deep emotion into my art was interesting to experiment with, but it was vital to maintain a high level of respect in the way I showcase them. Inspiration arose from Tommy Ingberg, Arthur Demeure, Hiroshi Sugimoto and David Hockney. I also acknowledge my vision has been inspired by the visual brainstorm I created from Pinterest which includes a range of contemporary photographers, designers and artists.

Anxiety is the ongoing or frequent distress which hinders the ability to function daily. I created a joiner of a face inspired by Hockney because it displays overwhelming thoughts expressed by multiple expressions. I purposely kept the unrefined edges to emphasise disconnection and restlessness. In the depression image my aim was to reflect the diminished interest in everyday activities. I also wanted to show time repeating itself interpreted through a ghost figure and inspired by Sugimoto's concept of time. The schizophrenia photograph intertwines reality with hallucinations is symbolic of Ingberg's style. The image depicts shadows in order to represent the presence of other spirits, internal battles, a feeling of not being alone and confusion with what is real.

The bipolar image encompasses the digital technique similar to Demeure and Sugimoto where they use offset colours to translate the conflicting swings of 'highs' and 'lows'. The red symbolises emotions of anger and tranquillity in blue. The overlapping arrangement seeks to reproduce an unsettling effect as viewers instinctively outline them separately. The image based on derealisation is the notion of everything disconnected from the environment and where objects appear unreal. The model reaches out to the mysterious hands luring her into another world. This was inspired by the Alice in Wonderland idea of falling down the hole into a surreal world.

Lastly, the body dysmorphia image depicts a condition that provokes the inability to stop thinking about perceived flaws in appearance. The condition causes a range of emotional impacts such as isolation and embarrassment. Concealing the model in sheets mimics traditional mummies and draws attention to the raw vulnerability of the highlighted subject.

My topic is personal and entirely relies on subjective interpretation. As an artist, my vision was to create compositions reflecting different illnesses yet, harmoniously coordinate with each other to convey similar emotions. Completing my folio advanced my understanding of the deeply embedded bidirectional relationship between emotion and surrealism.