

The Erosion Within

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Based on personal experiences, I decided to explore the theme of dysmorphia, as it's an illness I've grappled with since my early high school years. This disorder entails an intense fixation on a perceived flaw in appearance, which is the reason for my personal involvement as the subject matter. My struggle began when I observed that girls conforming more to societal beauty norms received more attention from boys, leaving others, myself included, feeling overlooked. This, combined with the constant pressures of social media and society's unrealistic beauty standards for young women, sparked an ongoing battle between my self-image and my insecurities.

Initially, my ideas involved examining both dysmorphia and dysphoria, a disorder where one experiences dissatisfaction with their assigned gender from birth, through various artistic techniques and media. However, further experimentation and discussions with my teacher made me realise that the dysphoria theme didn't reflect my personal experience like dysmorphia did.

The artists who greatly influenced my final work were Heather Horton, Pran Chanloha, Kathe Kollowitz, Daniel Martin and Stephen J. Shanabrook. Heather Horton's exploration of dysmorphia and human emotions, depicted through detailed shapes and colours in her oil paintings, inspired me. In my final, I mirrored her technique by using various shades of blue oil paint on a mirrored surface and manipulated the portrait in Photoshop, applying the posturize filter and adjusting the blue hue saturation. Kathe Kollowitz and Pran Chanloha greatly influenced me, enhancing my skills in creating realistic pen portraits with tone and depth. Their techniques using cross-hatching and fine details helped me convey the emotional depth of my illness in my first piece within my collection. Daniel Martin's method distorts proportions and blurs features to evoke chaos. Inspired by this technique, I aimed to depict the turmoil of dysmorphia, showing how one can still feel judged as ugly by the eye(s) despite internal struggles. Stephen J. Shanabrook's photo series distorts popular media portraits, manipulating faces to appear hideous. I used this concept on a large poster of my face for my final piece to symbolise how my illness warps my self-perception. Intentionally deforming the proportions of my face through folding, scrunching and ripping, I created a frightening representation of my dysmorphic struggles.

My work delves into the intricate connection between self-perception, identity and societal expectations, aiming to capture my personal struggles with dysmorphia in a society applying unattainable beauty standards. It communicates my insecurities, mental health struggles and the persistent desire to alter my physical appearance. Through diverse artistic elements and mixed media, I've conveyed the message of the ever-changing nature of self-perception, mirroring the tumultuous landscape of my mind in my portfolio.

Comprising of six pieces, my final body of work uses the same image of myself in a vulnerable state, portraying the progression and deterioration of my self-image and self-worth due to dysmorphia. The linear arrangement of these artworks serves as a deliberate narrative device, guiding viewers through a transformation of my image. Each piece, featuring my distressed and vulnerable face, reflects my ongoing struggle

with illness and insecurities, addressing an aspect of my life that I confront daily but have never openly discussed.

The first piece, done in blue pen, portrays a seemingly normal face with messy strokes at the bottom to signify underlying struggles hidden within. I used this medium to showcase my newly gained confidence in drawing realistic faces with depth and tone. The blue colour scheme, representing emotions like sadness and sensitivity, is continued throughout my body of work to heighten viewer emotions.

I utilised Greg Sand's technique in my second piece, using the same image of myself in colour and in blue, intricately woven to distort my face and create shape. This contemporary and vibrant work symbolises the initial stages of the deterioration of my image due to dysmorphia.

The third piece, inspired by Heather Horton's techniques, is an oil painting on a large acrylic mirror, intentionally leaving the eyes unpainted for viewer interaction. This piece confronts self-image struggles and directly involves the viewer by reflecting their own image.

Inspired by Shanabrook's technique, the fourth work involves scrunching, tearing and folding a large, coloured image of myself to represent a hideous and distorted self-perception. A watercolour wash around the edges continues the blue theme.

The fifth piece is a charcoal drawing portraying a deathly image with stark white highlights, capturing emptiness in myself. This work reflects Denning's style, expressing haunting emotions, though I wish I had used brown paper for better visibility of the white highlights.

The last piece, inspired by Martin's abstract brushstrokes, uses thick oil paint to distort the image, leaving only the eye visible, symbolising how even if my face is distorted, my self-perception remains unchanged.

At the start of planning my final body of work, I felt uncertain about my ideas, initially intending to use five large, overlaid canvases to illustrate my body insecurities caused by dysmorphia. However, I'm pleased with how well it conveys my theme and message. To express my complex emotions I used various media and techniques in my pieces. My work not only reflects my personal struggles and emotions but also encourages viewers to engage with their own challenges. The mirror painting, particularly, allows viewers to see themselves in my painted self's reflective eyes, aiming to evoke emotions and connections.

Collaborating closely with my subject teacher greatly boosted my confidence, uncovering new strengths and interests. Throughout the folio and completion of my final body of work, I ventured into various techniques and skills that I hadn't dared to try before, including oil painting, Photoshop manipulation, pen drawing and experimenting with different media like paper weaving and mirror painting. This Process taught me patience and the value of hard work leading to rewarding results. My favoured art style appears to be mixed media, as it allowed me to employ a wide range of techniques across my six works, involving diverse materials such as mirrors, pen drawing and portrait distortion while using the same facial features to create different art pieces.