

It's Cold but Not Freezing. It's Dark but Not Black.

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My body of work '*It's Cold but Not Freezing. It's Dark but Not Black.*' is a series of multi-media self-portraits based on my experiences throughout this year. Previously I had struggled with many different ideas for my art major, and I had placed enough mental importance on it that my struggle with it bred its own emotional state. Throughout the year I have been constructing paper cranes as a method to battle anxiety, and that is where my idea sparked.

Whilst not religious myself, I find myself inspired by spiritual, biblical, and all religious art. For my pieces I took inspiration from principles of Japanese Buddhism, Greek Mythology, and Christianity. This eclectic blend of influences formed the foundation of my artistic exploration. One of the central concepts underpinning my work is drawn from the Japanese practice of Kintsugi (金継ぎ), where broken ceramics are mended with gold—a metaphor for the idea that, after being broken, one can be made whole again. The theme of resilience and restoration is a recurring motif throughout my work.

One *Kintsugi* by Seiko Oomori. Technique-wise I was inspired by Western practitioners known for their portraiture and capturing of expression – John Singer-Sargent, Rembrandt, and Gail Potocki – all artists who also incorporated religious artworks into their practise. My technical skills improved over time by studying these practitioners, composition, depth, proportion all aided by studying and replicating their religious works, and I feel proud of the result in how I applied the techniques of Sargent and Rembrandt into my own portraiture. The sculpted forms juxtapose against the harsher elements of the pieces to stand out. I intentionally veered away from a pursuit of perfection, opting instead to infuse my pieces with a sense of rawness. The incorporation of multimedia elements, such as textured wood and the use of unconventional brushes, contributed to the overall grungy aesthetic of the artwork. This experimentation with texture and a lack of final varnish added to the realism and emotional depth of the pieces. As someone with much practise in digital media, my personal design philosophy is typically fast and consistent of bright colours, against the practitioners I was inspired by. To achieve this feeling in the less familiar medium of acrylic paint, I cultivated a technique by using my multi-media elements with paper collaging and oil pastel to achieve brighter hues. The printed ink on the dull wood really helped me warm to the medium, modifying the practices learnt from my inspirations into my own philosophy of art. It emphasised the depth of the pieces by expanding the range of values and vibrancy in the piece, capturing the vivid hues I envisioned in both pieces.

On the topic of philosophy, both individual pieces are imbued with their own philosophical inspirations. Again, whilst I am not religious, I find myself interested in spirituality and attuned to my own dreams. The title of the body of work – '*It's Cold but Not Freezing. It's Dark but Not Black.*' – comes from a line from my dad in a dream I had while making the pieces. In the first piece I am dying. The cranes – black to represent crows, a typical omen of death – point downwards towards me at the bottom of the piece, spectators to my sacrifice, benefactors as they pick at my stomach for food like the Greek Prometheus. The focal points are made with the choices in light – first to the moon that washes the entire piece in grey, gloomy light – and then to my face,

contrasted with bright and dark values to draw the eye. The colours applied and roughness are intended to replicate the dissolution of my vision in my dying moments, placing the viewer in my shoes. Most of the crows sit far away at the opposite end of the piece, representing the Japanese Buddhist belief of the Sanzu-no-Kawa (三途の川) – the Sanzu River. They sit in the realm of life – the ‘near shore’ – whilst I, on the forest floor, am wading to the realm of death – the ‘far shore’. This discrepancy is emphasised with the almost fish-eye-lens depth-of-field, and the highly distorted perspective creates the effect of someone under the scrutiny of a spotlight. Some crows I made with conscious intention to who they are – the two in the middle representing my parents, and the one eating at me conversely myself, as I am also subject to my own self-critique – but all of them represent the expectant ‘spectator’. I am particularly proud of my application of texture and layering in the near crow, the 3D elements in both pieces emphasising the sheer scale of them. My particular inspirations for this piece came from the album ‘SHUNKA RYOUGEN’ by rock artist Haru Nemuri, whose loud wails of female rage and themes of suffering and family brought the emotional value to piece, and from the work of Junji Ito, whose famous horror works gave me the boldness to incorporate elements of body horror into the piece – my proportions are exaggerated by the perspective, and the texture of the paper elements bring a sense of uncanniness inspired by Ito. The entire first piece is meant as an allegory for how I feel I am sacrificing my entire body for the validation for others, and I feel this is succinctly achieved through my inspirations and the symbolism tied into the piece.

There was an intent for a third piece in the body of work, made to represent a transition and rebirth between the first and third piece, but it never resolved. The second piece is therefore a much more abstract ‘after’ image, with much more open interpretation left to it than I initially intended. The cranes in this work, representing real life cranes, point upwards and away from me. They sprout from my hands in a bright light, and my wonderstruck expression intends to communicate a point of resolution. The light focal point is also where the eye is drawn to, before reaching the second focal point of the face with much more life given to it by the rim lighting and three-fourths angle of the face. My broken pieces have been mended with gold; previous roughness gone in the second piece. A lot of the cranes are pieces important to me – gifts I have been given or have given to others, ones with personal notes written on them from as meaningless as shopping lists to as meaningful as birthday messages. The cranes symbolise another part of Japanese folklore – the myth of Senbazuru (千羽鶴) or one thousand paper cranes. Cranes are considered mystical in Japanese folklore, and that after making a thousand paper cranes one is granted a wish for their efforts. Whilst I never intended to make a thousand cranes, and only ended up slightly short of 150 in total, the altar with me at the centre has turned into a shrine surrounded by many cranes in new-found colour. The two pieces are intentionally of the same scale to represent the equal weight of both life and death in the cycle. Whilst maybe without the second intermediary piece, it is not communicated properly whether I end up in the afterlife or if I’m reborn, I embrace this vagueness. Like the story of Sadako and the thousand cranes, perhaps the peace in death and joy in heaven is greater than the suffering of the real world.