

Who am I?

Chrissie Mower

As a well-known member and performer in the Adelaide music scene, live performance and expression through music is prominent in my life. It is live music and this community where I found feelings of unity and a sense of family through like-minded people and a diverse culture that is accepting and respectful.

Although mosh-pits often create these family-like feelings, I also found that in different mindsets, feelings can drastically change. I often find myself in dissociative states, within an audience or looking over it. This is manifested through the loss of individual identity when a group of diverse people gather with similar intentions. From the perspective of a performer, I find it difficult to ground myself and become aware of the diversity when the sea of people below me are a mass. Depending on my state of mind this can cultivate other feelings such as detachment or sometimes distress/anger when I feel people cannot fathom the messages behind my songs. Alternatively, I sometimes feel euphoric and at one with my audience. It is this confusion and diversity of emotions that I wanted to represent, showing the ungraspable phantoms of live music in all its contradictions.

I began my folio by exploring several artists who specialised in depicting live music and movement such as Dan Witz. I learnt about the elements that could be used to portray emotive atmospheres including the choice of colour palettes and figure positions. I investigated figurative forms that portray stage presence at an event I performed at in Victor Harbour and colours that portrayed euphoria and how body language could create lively and energetic atmospheres. These two elements formed key elements of my final composition.

Stage lighting is a key compositional factor in a live music portrayal. The way the light falls is crucial in the determination of focal points and the journey that your eye takes through the piece. I learned about how Van-Gogh used directional brushstrokes to emulate the fall of light and experimented with this technique using several different styles of brush strokes that Van-Gogh used. I applied this technique to photos of me from gigs with atmospheric stage lighting deciding that this would be a key element in the final composition.

I was interested in incorporating elements of collage into the composition. I intended for this piece to be multi-media and have some diversity when it came to texture. I experimented with different types of paper and layering. Through creating silhouette cut-outs of figures in mosh pits I was able to remove personal identity. The content of these silhouettes could portray their personality's/thoughts or feelings. I was excited by this discovery as it enhanced the meaning of dissociation. Building on this I began to experiment with incorporating poetry text into these collage experimentations as a powerful way for me to create focal points and enhance meanings. By incorporating the phrase 'who am I?' I was able to build up feelings of confusion, contrasting with the high-energy atmosphere.

I worked from the background into the foreground, starting with the Van-Gogh style stage lights ensuring everything remained in perspective. The longest part of the process was painting the figures in the mosh pit. I blocked in values and hues, building up towards details. I took inspiration from artist Elly Smallwood for the hands of the figures in the mosh, using red tones on the knuckles and joints.

OFFICIAL

I created blocks of colour which enhanced the meaning of different groups of individuals coming together. These show the division through the crowd despite their collectiveness. On the far left of the piece the figures are divided by the green block of colour. This represents their ability to have a foot in each world, individual and group.

I used the rule of thirds when deciding the placement of my focal figure in the final composition. The reference photo created feelings of solemnity and intensity through closed eyes and a still, yet dramatic facial expression. The angle of my figure creates an intense suspended energy.

I used an airbrush with watered down acrylic paint to create the illusion of fog across the base of the piece. I first primed this area with black acrylic as the diluted in the airbrush would not stick to the oil paint.

I had investigated in my folio, the portrayal of the energy and emotions within mosh-pits with charcoal sketches. I decided to extend into a body of work by adding another piece. I chose a reference photo taken of me crowd surfing at a DZ Deathrays gig. This photo had a contagious, energetic energy and atmosphere. To tie into the final piece I used the hues from the right side of the central piece to bleed into the extension piece with conte and chalks linking the two pieces.

I found that the piece looked unbalanced with this extra drawing on one side so began working on a third piece to complete my body of work. I continued with the themes of the first extension piece, choosing to use charcoal with a cut out figure dancing in a mosh pit and draw in the bright and vivid hues from the left side of the painting, reinforcing the idea of motion and movement throughout the mosh pits. I used acrylic paint to create a background using blues and greens. This created an aesthetic and dynamic contrast between the first extension piece as it focussed on one figure rather than a crowd.

I have chosen to name this piece 'WHO AM I'. This title encourages my audience to look deep into themselves and ask who they are. In a crowd do they feel connected to those around or isolated? The energy of the piece encourages the audience to visit a live music performance to experience these connections and scenes. I feel that I portrayed my vision of myself successfully, inviting people to look deeper into my lyrical messages. This project has developed my compositional, planning/refinement and technical art skills, additionally improving my artistic motivation and portrayal of personal of themes. I feel confident in the future to start big pieces, especially when these pieces are so personal and reflect elements of myself.