

Success in Struggle

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Beginning my concept development with an exploration into Catholicism, I was inspired by the portrayal of Mary Madonna in both historical and contemporary religious artworks. Her depiction as a figure representing fertility, motherhood and femininity reminded me of Quan Am, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, in the Buddhist faith that I grew up learning about from my grandma. Artworks depicting Quan Am influenced me to study the styles of traditional Chinese and Japanese painting, where I carried out watercolour exploration, concluding that I would not continue to pursue this medium. I then investigated how shrines and altars can portray the ideas of worship and honour. Analysing Christine Offutt's use of mixed media including pencil, collage, paint and beads in her textured tin shrines, I was inspired to look into the use of thread and embroidery. Chiharu Shiota's red thread installations encompassing themes like interconnectedness and relationships, along with Rossana Taormina and Maurizio Anzeri's geometric embroidering over vintage photographs, led me to pursue embroidery as a potential medium. Additionally, I was inspired to explore the use of photographs in death and remembrance as I previously incorporated my grandma's old photographs in some of my thread responses. I was ultimately influenced by Robert Frank's photography to include vintage photographs of my family in my final artwork to capture memories of people.

My final practical is ultimately an homage to the powerful women in my family, particularly my grandma. I selected an old monotone photograph of her, and my relatives posed together, as it highlights how my grandma ensured that her children were well-fed and clothed despite being widowed and of a lower-class. To successfully paint this photograph, I had to explore different monotone mediums and canvas materials such as painting with acrylic and graphite on surfaces like cotton board. I ultimately decided to use ink on canvas covered in gesso to complete my artwork as it best replicated the look of a photograph and is a fabric material, allowing it to be embroidered. A challenge I encountered during the painting process was that I did not know how to accurately paint hands. To overcome this, I decided to do an anatomy study of the shapes of the hands, recognising the joints and knuckles that can be seen under skin and therefore need to be shaded. Towards the completion of my artwork, I had a change of mind, ultimately deciding against the idea of embroidery as it would take away from the realism of depicting a photograph. The symbolism behind making holes through the canvas communicates a sense of fragility and fault in my grandma's efforts and family, contradicting what my work was truly presenting. Moreover, I believe that my final practical is successful in portraying my grandma as an independent and capable woman, relaying the struggles of her past and success in overcoming these adversities, in a photorealistic manner.