

What, Was, I, Made, For?

Alannah Roxas

What, Was, I, Made, For? is a series of charcoal self-portrait drawings.

Creating my body of work has been a deeply personal and reflective journey into the theme of identity. From the beginning, I struggled with the decision of whether to explore my Filipino culture or to delve into the complexities of mental well-being, both of which are highly significant aspects of my life. After much investigation, I chose to centre my artistic expression around my mental health journey, specifically how it impacted my self-identity and sense of purpose while at school. Influenced by contemporary artists Gio Swaby and Alex Beckinsale, I incorporated Swaby's use of thread to enhance the concepts of self-worth and value. I drew inspiration and knowledge from Beckinsale, who, through a portraiture workshop, introduced me to charcoal, a medium that provided "comfort" due to its ability to provide both distinct and indistinct qualities when purposefully applied. I was thus able to discard the notion of using colour, which I feared would detract from the meaning behind my work.

The theme of identity in my last year of schooling was highly relevant. Through my work, I wanted to explore how the school environment prompted me to define myself. While school exposes us to the nuances of education, we, as students, learn about who we are and who we want to become. For me, this led to self-doubt and questioning both my imminent and long-term future. I referenced this state of mind by naming each drawing using a single word. Each word, *What, Was, I, Made, For?* was intentionally assigned to a specific work. The solid black work is *What*, the work emerging from the blackness is *Was*, followed by a more distinct portrayal of myself called *I*. *Made* displays my highly realistic self-portrait, and *For?* depicts my departure from school and entrance into adulthood.

My drawings capture my existence; the series gradually hones the focus on myself and my mental state. Collectively, they symbolize the moment of self-realization, whereupon finding oneself, one embarks on a journey into the world, encapsulating the overarching question: "What was I made for?" The inclusion of the gold thread in *I* and *Made* plays homage to a strand of hair that symbolizes the idea that things will fall into place, offering a sense of hope and direction into the future. This addition forces viewers to take a deeper look into my work. The detail captured in *Made*, where I am distinctly defined, portrays sadness, enhanced by the use of charcoal. This medium allowed for significant tonal contrast, which I carefully manipulated by using brushes, erasers, and pencils of varying thickness.

The creation of these self-portraits allowed me to pictorially navigate the periodic struggles I faced in my school journey by offering a means to reflect on my mental well-being and identity. I hope *What, Was, I, Made, For?* will allow viewers to reflect on their own journey while acknowledging that life is full of questions waiting for answers.