

## **Practitioner's Statement**

### ***South of the Void***

Raw, liberating and honest; 'South of the Void' is built upon the philosophies of Existentialism. It sought to question, and at times, violate the very constraints of the reality I found myself in. An intimate statement of self-identity, I sought to find something deeper within myself using the philosophy as a foundation, expressing intimate thoughts that transcend language and conversation within audience and artist.

The distinct contrast of life and death was a fundamental backbone of the piece that allowed me to further expand on concepts and themes that correlated with it. How can we value existence without an end to it? Drawing inspiration from sleepless nights throughout the year, these premonitions were intimately translated throughout the piece. Heavily inspired by the work of Wes Lang, his use of the skull as a symbolistic presence was an aspect that combined perfectly with this ideology. His approach of drawing skulls inspired me to emulate the same minimalistic awareness, often relying on structure and shading to create character and personality within my skulls. Natural yet uncomfortable, I wanted to really capture these initial thoughts and expand on them, allowing any emotion or notion to flourish by itself without judgements or premeditated thoughts. The floral in the form of roses that can often be seen alongside concepts of a darker stature such as the skulls were placed to juxtapose the conversation; to create a harmonious balance where neither dominate, but to coexist within each other which stays true to the existentialist philosophy.

Building upon this were religious undertones that enhanced the overall theme: through the praying skull with the wings, the golden halo covered skull inspired by William Adolphe-Bouguereau and the ode to Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, which, along with the tombstones, captured my aesthetic; which spoke of the relationship between man and a higher being and the ideology of resurrection that is constant in some many religions. These elements all weave in and out of each other in hopes to captivate the viewer to perceive death in a different light, to not look at it as a means to an inevitable end but a natural phase that promises the unknown.

Wordplay was a concept that caught my attention after viewing works from Jean-Michel Basquiat and Wes Lang. Their ability to incite pure vivid emotions through words was a powerful technique that inspired me to integrate it into my own aesthetics. These thoughts scattered across the canvas were often influenced by late night thoughts about a diversity of themes that touched on existentialistic ideals and personal memories. Influenced by autonomous movement, the font was something I wanted to constantly emphasise. I relied on instincts and present emotions to be the driving force in creating the peculiar structure within the letters.

Despite their static posture, the lines throughout the piece are in constant flux within one another. Ambiguity at its best, the lines that resonate throughout the piece are a means to juxtapose the narratives. Each line vibrates between each other, where the whole confusion is greater than the sum of its life. The purest form of expression, each line is impulsively created with no regards of any artistic restriction. Although a chaotic process, the ultimate goal was to seek an inner balance of my own reality and one only achievable in my surreal dreams.

Excluding the homage to Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, all the hand poses were referenced from my own. There is something about the form a hand that can provoke curiosity and emotion within the viewer, and with the abundance of chaos within my piece, I used the hands to showcase my progressing charcoal skills whilst breaking down the piece into malleable sections for the viewer.

Francis Bacon's distorted and manipulated portraits inspired me to do my very first self-portrait within this piece. Paying homage to his aesthetic, his ability to visually break down something as emotionally charged as a portrait and expose it to its bare minimal unleashes this hidden potential of how any portrait can unleash such complex and profound emotions towards it.

As a collective conscience, anything we have done or will ever do will have no meaning, as time consumes it like a never-ending black hole. How does this impenetrable barricade govern us in the choices we make? This existentialist thought inspired much of my piece, fueling its very essence. How do I find the courage to defy the very constraints of any art's inevitable ending of being forgotten? Like William Adolphe Bouguereau, his ability to break time and space itself and still find connection between his viewer through his striking pieces spoke volumes to me. This was something I wanted to truly emulate, where even though I may be long gone, this piece can still find connections and conversations with any viewer.

I often found myself as a means of inspiration in an attempt to break these very chains, the piece itself becoming my personal manifesto. However, with all this intimacy with myself spewing all over the canvas, what impact would it ultimately have on a viewer? A complete stranger? In an attempt to cover this, themes that connected the human consciousness began to expose themselves: identity, purpose, death, love, happiness, wealth and society. These themes all peculiarly translate themselves into a diversity of artistic elements throughout the surface of the canvas. These elements are constantly in contradiction to one another. From the abstractness of the lines to the realism in the anatomy; this constant conflict that argues which element desires to dominate the piece lay an intricate expression that inevitably hopes to captivate the viewer; to arouse their senses and vibrate the frequencies of their very consciousness. This sudden realization of how versatile my piece could potentially be perceived unleashes a much deeper appreciation of its limitless symbol as a work of art, where for me has been a sleepless confession that needs no absolution.