Keith, Max and Jacqui

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Throughout my folio I explored a range of artists, techniques, materials, and media applied in the portrait genre in order to develop my own aesthetic further. Whilst I prefer realism, I wanted to explore a variety of approaches by media and techniques of other artists to explore how materials and techniques impact representation and aesthetic qualities including mood, emotion, personality, symbolism, and context of the subject.

In developing my skills and techniques I explored skin tones and values, drawing techniques with pencil, charcoal e.g., hatching, shading, cross hatching and circulism whilst also exploring water colour, acrylic and oil paints, glazing techniques, brush techniques, different papers, and surfaces such as framed canvas.

When researching portraiture, I discovered that a good portrait helps to tell the story of the sitter and reveals the essence of the person in addition to the quality of the painting or visual representation. These features are particularly important in realism. The sitter's expression, setting, placement and gaze also create meaning adding to the mood, symbolism or rationale for the portrait. Eg. The Mona Lisa (DaVinci) is famous for the expression of the face and slight smile, creating mystery for the viewer. The expression is confusing as the sitter seems to demonstrate little to no emotion, but the artist has captured a mysterious quality in the face. Boris Chaliapin's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (1961) is painted against a background of The White House, is dressed in elegant, conservative clothing and pearls, a baby pram on the balcony, reflecting on her role as President's wife, mother and symbolising the "perfect" woman to aspire to be, but not much connection to her true personality.Similarly, Chaliapin's 'Liz Taylor' is more a symbol or iconic image rather than a reflection of the persons true self. This portrait is set during night-time with a starry background revealing her status as a beautiful Hollywood star. Her gaze is distant however the painting is accurate realism in portraiture conventions.

The gaze is a powerful tool in portraiture, for the sitter and the viewer. The gaze can confront the viewer, attract, or repel the viewer or invite the viewers gaze as in an averted gaze of a nude subject. Clothing, nudity, colour, posture, and objects all inform the viewers response to a portrait. Portraits can be formal, informal, political, regal, symbolic, socially manipulative e.g. Portrait of Queen Elizabeth the 1st making her more attractive, also demonstrating wealth through jewels and fabrics that may not have been real. Culture can also be expressed through clothing, backgrounds, and broader symbolism in Portraiture as can the gaze e.g. Vernon Akees Austracism series of family portraits with pircing confrontational direct gaze toward the viewer.

By analysing artists and artworks across media and materials I experimented with the style and technique of Cherry Hood, Ben Lustenhouwer, Ann Kullberg, Lui Ferreyra, Hashim Abib, Michael Wagner, Joongwon Jeon, Douglas McDougall, Emanuele Dascanio, Vernon Ah Kee, Rembrandt, Vincent Van Gogh, Chuck Lose and Cat Leonard.

Cherry Hood paints large realistic water colour portraits emphasising drips, bleed and glazing over brush strokes. Dark tonal values around eyes with blues and purples emphasise skin

pigments and focus the gaze of the subject on the viewer. She emphasises the subjects emotional state through the gaze. I explored these techniques with a focus on realism, however preferred other materials. When experimenting with Kullberg's techniques I applied natural colour and strong light to pencil drawings whilst developing skills with blending and shadow/tone. These experiments helped refine my skills in detailed highlights, colour theory and realism with depiction of features like eyes most important to the gaze in realistic portraiture.

My Lui Ferreyra pencil experiments also allowed for careful analysis of facial proportions and hair using a combination of geometric and organic contours supporting tonal range.

When exploring acrylic paint portraits Hashim Abib takes Ferreyra's technique further using square brush work/strokes in warm tones to develop highly realistic representations in a loose abstract technique or style where brush block strokes are visible intentionally. Michael Wagner paints photorealistic portraits of famous people with a focus on portraying the complexities and personality of individuals. I explored his detailed eye/gaze work in experiments focusing on building line work in wrinkles of skin, colour theory and tonal values in facial features linked to expression or mood of subject. Similarly, Joongwon Jeong produces hyper realistic acrylic paintings using delicate brushwork capturing every pore and wrinkle of the skin in re-inventing historic paintings such as Van Gogh's expressionist self-portrait into photorealistic contemporary portraits. I explored his hyperrealism techniques in developing noses to explore different methods for painting realistic portraits. Douglas McDougall creates charcoal portraits with intense composition, portraying the raw emotion of the subject, mostly 'unseen outsiders' giving viewers a glimpse into their lives. This resonated with me in developing my subject matter where I met three people I do not know well and decided to paint their portraits in a triptych attempting to depict their emotions, personalities, and shared interests the Murray River region, whilst also attempting realistic representation of their faces in painting.

Dascanio also uses charcoal, illuminating subjects to emphasise the character and intend to develop a minimalist background highlighting the person as focal point, whilst combining the images through shared link of green/plants as their common and combined shared interest. My interest in Ah Kee is in his approach to the gaze, where his portraits stare directly at the viewer challenging their comfort invoking empathy, shame, and social justice questions in the exchange. Whilst the gaze in my images intend to reflect the sitter, their personalities and interests and invite the view to see them, the gaze has a significant role in my representational approach. In exploring Rembrandt, I followed his work techniques from drawing or etching portraits through to final works in oils, my preferred medium. I explored his colour palette, composition and technique including impasto and glazing whilst also developing my skills in the medium.

Van Gogh's representation of gaze and mood or human essence in psychological renderings, combined with his composition and painting techniques and colour palette also informed my work.

Finally, Cat Leonard, an SA artist, who I know personally invited me to visit her studio, to learn from her directly about techniques for improving my skills in portraiture. Leonard uses expressive colour for the background, using flat brushes and thick strokes allowing colour layers to build. Her style implies a 'grunge' aesthetic, not completely blending strokes, allowing the strokes to be obvious in the painting. I learned her skin tone palette including combinations to create tonal values in shaded areas across a range of skin tones. I learned how to mix the palette prior to painting, and she guided me in developing a self-portrait in oils

applying her approach to practice. Leonard paints people she knows as she is able to represent their personalities and emotions more intimately and authentically.

This in person learning with the artist inspired my final artwork, although I chose to paint others, I don't know well to develop my skills in observation and representing people from the perspective of my own external experience of them, their personalities and life transcripts/interests shared with me whilst also attempting to represent their likeness through emerging oil painting skills, toward my own personal aesthetic.

My final practical attempts to tell a story. A story about older people, whose faces and skin are rich with emotion and expression. I have used symbolism to connect them all through plants from the river Murray region, their common ground, and their real-life connection with each other through this interest. Having interviewed the subjects, I also decided to connect each individual with the viewer through the direct gaze.

I deployed most artists techniques in resolving the work from composition, underdrawing colour palette, through to gaze. My final organisation of the three works as a narrative triptych was a careful consideration in combining and separating each individual into one story. Their shared interest in the local native species, land and plant regeneration became the linking factor and I am proud of the outcome and feel I have captured the people and the narrative I was seeking, and I have developed my technical expertise in realistic portraits immensely