

# Was It Worth It?

Acrylic, gouache and domestic paint, texta, paper clay, cardboard, paper, wood and found objects.

## Practitioner's Statement

My body of work shows a skeleton in a coffin surrounded by pill bottles, alcohol bottles and poisonous mushrooms and cigarettes referring to types of addiction. It is a disturbing representation of a life submerged in the depths of despair. The result is the crippled body lying in the coffin helpless and detached from reality and ultimately absorbed only by their addictions. The artwork acts as a warning against the destruction and deterioration caused by addiction.

I chose this theme because of my concerns about teenagers who turn to drugs and alcohol to slowly detach themselves from the realities that trouble them, such as, experiencing parental problems, childhood trauma, high expectations, experiencing failure, poor body image and low self-esteem etc. They are often not aware or careful about what drugs or alcohol can do to them and how it damages the brain and the body. Rather than seek help they choose to escape themselves in dangerous ways. They end up in a self-destructive downward spiral, getting lost and forming negative habits. If they continue this way, they will lose those that care for them and become isolated with no one being able to understand why they chose to give up their life and potential to let a substance consume them, hence the question, 'was it worth it?'

Vincent Van Gogh's studies of skulls, like, '*Head of a Skeleton with a Burning Cigarette*' and application of impasto with visible brushstrokes influenced me to capture skeletons in an expressive and tangible way when trying to symbolise human loss through addiction. I wanted to portray the skeleton as alive and zombie like in character to represent 'the addict'.

Jean-Michel Basquiat's use of squiggles, icons and doodles were unique to his street art style, its raw and imperfect aesthetic interested me as I have a similar aesthetic in my artwork that can be seen in my skeleton. Its loosely applied watercolour, random outlining and incorrect proportions express the decay and carelessness of 'the addict'. I applied Jackson Pollock's drip technique which gave a spontaneous and free form effect yet took some time to produce paint that pours at the right consistency to pour to give a rich and layered texture. Combining house paint with acrylic, PVA and water was the best way I could achieve the 'gloop' I wanted to make to

symbolise the dark side of a person's consciousness. I wanted to create a paint technique to mimic a sludge or murkiness which I imagine is like an emotional 'quicksand' people get trapped in when they become addicted, and the messiness created by escaping from one's problems.



Vincent Van Gogh,  
*Head of a Skeleton  
with a Burning  
Cigarette*, 1885



Jean-Michel  
Basquiat,  
*With Strings  
Two*, 1983



Jackson Pollock, *Number 13A: Arabesque*, 1948

## OFFICIAL

Brett Whiteley was addicted to drugs, and this led me to research his art to try to understand how his aesthetic and subject matter was influenced by his drug use. His Abstract Expressionist style combines collage, undulating lines and shapes, pure colours and textures in a blurred sequence of symbols relating to historical references, his personal life and political commentary of the 60s era. My research then continued to the psychedelic 1960s aesthetic, its brightly clashing colours and patterns depicting the hallucinatory effects of drug addiction. This influence is seen in the background of the skeleton in the coffin. I painted this



Brett Whiteley, *Alchemy*, 1984



Psychedelic Op Art, 1960s

pattern successfully using tonal gradation from a bright to dark red palette contrasting with blue organic lines and fluorescent yellow outlines. This pattern really emphasises the distortion of 'the addict's' world and adds a striking impact to my artwork.

I wanted to add collage in the style of Lee Krasner American collage artist and late wife of Pollock, who cut up, layered and rearranged collage compositions which lead me to add elements of collage to my final Practical of black 'gloop' spilling out of the pattern and flowing out of the coffin, adding, text from songs about addiction such as *Broken* by Lund and *Let you Down* by NF.



Lee Krasner, *Imperative*, 1955

The way all these ideas have come together in the final two and three-dimensional composition are bold and strong incorporating a lot of different elements. The patterns, overflowing 'gloop' spills that float around the coffin convey meaning and structurally hold the combination of hand modelled clay pills, mushrooms and found objects like bottles. The paper clay was used to make the hands, feet and the skull so they would stand out and add dimension to complement the 3D quality of the coffin frame. I am pleased with this result and found the clay easy to use and dry as well as paint and draw on. In retrospect I could've made the whole skeleton out of clay, to make it more convincing. It could have been made from a different material like clear resin to look like ice to signify that the whole body is gone, frozen from reality as if the whole substance has taken over.

The Practical could be improved by researching and understanding addiction on a deeper level and how the experience feels and affects one's life by watching interviews, documentaries and reading articles by addict survivors. This could have offered my artwork a more serious perspective with a clearer preventative message to young people, who are the audience I am communicating and concerned about.

What I have achieved is important because it shows the affect drugs and alcohol ultimately have on the body and its fearful and ugly outcome of death. It is important to teach younger generations about the effects of drug and alcohol abuse as well as self-care to prevent them from happening.

I have learnt that the body can be fragile, we are not invincible, and we can be shattered through many negative experiences or dangerous risks. People do not always recover.

While making art, I learned how stressful it can be if something does not go according to plan when exploring a medium or trying to achieve what you envision. The folio process assisted me in practicing ideas until I felt confident enough to create them on a larger scale. It also helped to develop my practical ideas by allowing me to explore various artists, techniques, and approaches to the themes I was interested in. I have valued the experience of learning from other artists and I have gained an insight into the works of those addicts under the influence of substances while creating their art and how this affected their dark, spontaneous, and unusual aesthetic allowing me to strengthen my relationship with my artwork and make it something unique.