

## *Hold My Breath As We Perform For The Stars!*

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The exploration of the personal destructiveness of beauty became an interest for the creation of my works. My own experiences with prioritising outer appearances were explored as a path to possible obsessive fixation. This extended toward the anxiety behind perception and the human body and how in particular, a women's worth is measured by physical beauty, which eventually became my primary theme. I explored how this not only distorts one's perception of identity but also how it creates universal isolation.

Finding initial inspiration in artists Natsuko Sakamoto and Yayoi Kusama, triggered my interest in illusion and distortion as a form of self-reflection. Exploring the notion of fluid distortion by imitating artist's works like Guglielmo Castelli's, '*Self-portrait*', helped guide me toward Surrealism and the portrayal of alternate worlds as a way to express the boundlessness of the subconscious mind. Linking distortive realities toward obsession and its role in morphing one's identity to become based on a perception of superficial beauty guided me by testing the depiction of fluid distortion using acrylic paint. However, in experimenting with the fluidity of acrylic paints I struggled to develop a distinct style that would effectively communicate this, so after further experimentation, the harsher marks of dry-point etching became a significant element for my final artwork. I explored this form of mark-making on figurative images, using scrawled linework and scratched patterns to explore vulnerability and uneasiness with one's body, eventually developing an effective distorted visual. To create greater depth, I chose to mimic dry-point etching using acrylic paint in black, white and greys, aiming to achieve a depiction of a perpetual space.

Studies of figures and bodies were explored to understand proportion and form, as I aimed to use this in my works. Finding inspiration from figurative photos distorted by water helped me understand how to effectively portray distorted bodies, which was vital to be able to convey my concept. I merged this with images based on personal photos of my bathroom to portray vulnerability and emotional depth, as this is where we are often alone with our naked bodies. In doing so, the composition depicted these distorted figures in what seems to be a contradictory concept of *claustrophobic infinity* to showcase the obsessiveness of these destructive feelings.

A triptych composition created further distortion and after experimenting with canvas and paper supports, the aim to create a more precise definition led me to use the hard flat surface of wooden panels. Three panels, connected yet distant, further contributed to the distortion and enforced feelings of isolation and anxiety.

I continued this theme of multiple works to further convey stress and obsession in the second part of my body of work, which was inspired by Surrealist artist Man Ray's misogynistic themes of feminine beauty. This triggered a self-reflection of my own journey and the understanding of the societal norm of the sexual romanticization of women's suffering, which can be seen to ultimately devalue feminine emotion. Influenced by Man Ray's photographic depiction of women, I wanted to reflect the

destructiveness of society's value placed on physical beauty and devaluing of emotion. I explored the make-up of the silent film era, with its exaggerated feminine features, influenced by the pressure on women to conform to the stereotypical idea of beauty of the time. The exaggerated features and distorted characteristics of my portraits contributed to this ironic approach. The aesthetic visuals in silent films led to my experimentation with charcoal portraiture, further developing my style. The combination of charcoal with soft black water colour allowed for a gentle graduation of tone contrasting the harsher linework of the charcoal creating a jarring twist on semi-abstract portraiture.

While exploring artists' identities, I was reminded of the experiences of womanhood which shaped artist Frida Kahlo's works. Focusing on connections formed between women, I began studying girlhood and the innocence of these feminine relationships. Combined with my exploration of Man Ray, my themes were solidified in this juxtaposed combination of ironizing the romanticized pain from the male perspective and the joint suffered experiences within girlhood and womanhood from the female perspective.

Inviting audiences into the world of femininity, this body of work aimed to engulf viewers into an obsessive labyrinth. Repetitive and monochromatic, these works highlight the seemingly superficial simplicity of prioritising exterior appearance, yet detailed technique highlights the true intricacies of the labelling of worth within the female experience. An all-consuming visual perpetually draws audiences toward the terror of beauty where worthlessness and infatuation thrives. Merging figurative bodies and aesthetic symbolism, these artworks intertwine the isolating, yet universal feelings of hopelessness and despair by being only valued by society for the superficiality of physical beauty. The fear of perception is discussed as these artworks communicate how societal expectations in fact devalue suffering and force the search for true meaning to one's existence.

Audiences are involved in an alternate world through reflection and repetition of the works stylistic elements. Exuding emotive feelings, it forces connection and self-reflection from viewers from the reflective rooms and the distorted faces which reflect my own personal journey. By allowing audiences to follow this path they are encouraged to confront their own societal identities and society is challenged for its contribution to the prioritization of women's exterior and its role in devaluing feminine suffering.

I believe that I was successful in conveying my concept of the damaging nature of the perception of women's value being based on their bodies and physical appearance. Although some artworks are less obvious due to abstraction, I believe that this obscurity inherently encapsulates the feelings of worthlessness and anxiety, further highlighting my theme. My works successfully depict distortion in a way that feels both claustrophobic and never-ending with the contrasting forms and maze-like rooms and then the developing abstraction in my distorted portraits. I hope that these works cause people to consider their own self-worth that they place on their perception of women and our infatuation with superficial beauty.