

*MA Contemporary Dialogues*  
Report

## ***Unchaining the Narrative***

*Isabelle Weaver-Jones 2025*

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## ***Introduction***

I believe I have been subconsciously illustrating the feeling of being watched since I was a young woman; however, it was only during this course that I became fully aware of it.

I cannot remember the last day I did not crave the validation from male eyes. Perhaps it was a day from childhood, when I was a young girl. A girl who wore her clothes for comfort, because they made her happy. A girl that loved that she was big and strong, before her body changed from something for her to “experience” life through, to something that was to be admired: “My body is a beautiful vessel that exists for me to experience life” So exquisitely captured by Feminist author Florence Given (Given 2024).

I miss that blissfully ignorant existence before being shaped by the world around me, and by the expectations that came with it.

My work is a statement that explores how the objectifying nature of the Male Gaze has prevented and still prevents women, including myself, from viewing their bodies as “an instrument, not an ornament” (Kite & Kite, 2020). Females of all ages have been denied this privilege for too long, and my work has been an exposure of this reality.

## ***A Burning Passion***



*Figure 1: Final Scene from Silenced No Longer, Short Film, 2024*

"An unspoken rule applied in the world of cinema: a woman should be seen, and not the one seeing" (Hirsch, 2024). This statement strongly resonated with me at the start and throughout the entirety of the course, shaping my practice. Although Hirsch's statement is specific to cinema, it can be seen evident in the whole of society.

While my practice, education, work, and daily life shape much of what I do, my deepest passion lies in feminism. This interest was sparked at a young age and has continued to develop throughout *Contemporary Dialogues*. While I have consciously identified as a feminist for around five years, feminist thinking has shaped my lived experience long before that.

As a young girl I never fully understood the different rules that applied to me but not for my older brothers growing up. Distinctions between boys and girls circulated constantly within my family, friends, across television and film. Both spoken and unspoken rules dictated a large amount of how I lived my life and, being an adolescent, I did not fully understand their purpose or origin. Nonetheless, I absorbed them quietly, accepting it simply as “the way life was.” Now I have matured into a woman, I recognise these rules subtly and persistently carved out the gendered roles and expectations of domestic life.

Maturing in a rural area old-fashioned values and inherited pressures continue to sit firmly at the centre of societal norms. Phrases such as “*Don’t sit like that, it’s not ladylike,*” and “*It’s not attractive for young girls to swear*” remain vividly etched in my memory, echoing long after they were first spoken. I believe these comments have played a significant role in shaping my beliefs, my self-perception, and the ways in which I learned to monitor my own behaviour. Such statements shaped daily expectations of what it meant to be “ladylike,” influencing posture, emotional expression, and the words I was allowed to use while growing up, specifically about sex and periods.

This kind of expectancy of female behaviour and manners, has been extensively examined by Judith Butler, whose work interrogates gender under the patriarchy through post-structural feminist theory (Butler, 1990). Butler argues that gender is not an inherent truth, but a performance constructed through the repetition of actions and behaviours that create the illusion of fixed identity (Butler, 1990). She asserts that “masculine and feminine roles are not biologically fixed but socially constructed” (Butler, 1990). Despite equality being a fundamental social principle, the presence of

gendered double standards within even the most ordinary moments of daily life was a common occurrence throughout my childhood, becoming increasingly evident as I entered young womanhood and adolescence.

Beyond everyday life, societal influences have long remained prevalent across television, media, and particularly film. Screen media culturally imposed norms that continue to shape expectations of women's behaviour, appearance, body size, and social roles. These constructions were brought into focus through Feminist Film Theory, which evolved alongside Second Wave Feminism. The theory highlights images of women in film that often embody patriarchal fantasy rather than an authentic reflection of women's lived realities; an argument critically examined by Claire Johnston (Johnston, 1973). I believe that such patriarchal structures and stereotypes had been quietly embedded within my subconscious for many years. Specifically, the female role in the domestic space, the femininity that is and has been expected of women, and the oppressive nature of it.

Screen media has always been a significant part of my life. The *Thought Experiment* at the start of *Contemporary Dialogues* allowed me to explore the filming side of the camera. During this experimental phase I was able to confront and articulate my internalised experiences and emotions of female oppression. Engaging with the concept of creating work through the feminist lens awoke a new passion. Although I am a traditional illustrator with a strong surrealist approach, I was compelled to experiment and make a film. Importantly I let myself. In retrospect, I believe the original prompt for the *Thought Experiment* was almost irrelevant; Feminism had so deeply affected my

personal life at the time that I believe any creative journey would have inevitably led back to a feminist path.

The films *Don't Worry Darling* and *The Stepford Wives*, played a vital part in inspiring me to create an artistically shot short film for the *Pecha Kucha* (4-minute-long performance), as they explicitly expose the societal rules and patriarchal structures imposed on women during the mid-twentieth century. Guided by intuition and emotional response, my film then focuses on themes of surveillance, repetition, and psychological disintegration, exposing the structures of institutional misogyny embedded within the film industry. I titled this work *Silenced No Longer* (figure 2).

Despite having no prior knowledge of *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), directed by Chantal Akerman. Whether by coincidence or through its long-lasting influence in cinema, I unintentionally mirrored the structure, static compositions, and thematic themes. *Silenced No Longer* conveys the deafening silence of an oppressed domestic life, depicting a housewife trapped in monotonous routines until she reaches a breaking point, expressed through moments of aggression and rebellion (figures 1,3).



Figure 2: Pecha Kucha Presentation

The atmospheric silence in my film conveys the subtle feminist aesthetic of the internalised suffocation of feeling silenced as a woman (Artt, 2024). Through mise-en-scène and symbolic objects, the film externalises the female psyche and lived experience, where silence and objects carry this meaning. The knife and burning apron mark a breaking point and act of rebellion, symbolising both escape from confinement and the dismantling of patriarchal structures (figure 4).

Sherry Turkle's *Evocative Objects* explores the power of objects to provoke thought and emotion, and to act as a stimulus for reflection and memory (Turkle, 2011). Her

philosophy has influenced my use of objects as a form of quiet protest, communicating feminist ideas through emotional resonance rather than loud expression. *Silenced No Longer* marked a significant moment within my practice, initiating a phase of practice focused on subverting traditional narratives surrounding women's roles shaped by patriarchal structures. This work sought empowerment and relatability for women and ultimately led to the exploration, exposure, and challenging of the Male Gaze in the *Confirmative Praxis*. This film would become central to the development and conceptual grounding of my final exhibition piece.



Figure 3: *Silenced No Longer*, Short film, 2024



Figure 4: *Silenced No Longer*, Short film, 2024

My film alongside the reality in which I live, made me want to explore how contemporary women continue to feel silenced. This injustice fuelled my desire to show further aspects of life beyond the domestic space, including power dynamics and gender inequality within work, social, and sexual contexts. This led to engaging in deeper research and critical analysis of *Jeanne Dielman* for the *Coexistent Perspectives* module. This film further sparked my enthusiasm to continue creating feminist work. *Jeanne Dielman* stands as an exquisite example of slow cinema that subverts both traditional societal roles imposed upon women and the conventions of the Male Gaze (Tobin Power, 2023).

This moment also proved pivotal in my journey, guiding me toward a focused exploration of other areas of oppression women suffer, including the *Male Gaze*; the theory describing the sexual and cultural objectification of women through a predominantly

heterosexual, masculine, worldview. The term pioneered by Laura Mulvey, in her writings of *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* played a crucial role in feminist film theory by critically exposing patriarchal structures, gender roles, and systems of objectification embedded within Hollywood cinema (Mulvey, 1975). The *Thought Experiment*, and engagement with *Jeanne Dielman*, left me compelled to investigate the voyeuristic mechanisms of the Male Gaze through the combined mediums of film and illustration. The invasive nature of the male gaze “has sexualised and objectified our bodies so much that they have been shamed of their inherent functions,” (Given, 2021)

### Fuel to the Fire

In 2008 Alabama Attorney, Troy King, single-handedly attempted to enforce the ban of the sex toy in the state (Hseih & Burton, 2020.) Feminist and legal scholars have argued that sex toy bans are indicative of a broader cultural and legal tendency to police women’s sexual autonomy and private lives (Waldo, 2009). This poured petrol on my already burning fire. Although his attempt failed, I had to make a statement of this inequality and oppression.

“I love taboos, and love to see how I can push them around and make them interesting and visible” (Demetrakas, 2018) Laurie Anderson Avante-Garde artist so resonantly states. Taking to the camera I filmed two more experimental films that addressed the taboos of menstruation, masturbation, and body hair. Confronting, abolishing and subverting these taboos through realistic and graphic scenes, allowed me to expose the inequalities women continue to face, because of the Male Gaze (figure 5).

In *Everything Is Fcked: A Book About Hope*\*Mark Manson describes emotional response through what he refers to as Newton's laws of emotion, suggesting that "*for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction*" (Manson, 2019). From this point on, my work became an emotionally driven response to everything I was watching and reading. This idea can be mirrored in feminist history, where inequality has consistently led to resistance.

Although film making was a liberating form of illustration that allowed me to create work through the feminist lens, I started to develop an itch to return to my original practice. My feminist films were vital for influencing the direction of my illustrations going forward into the *Confirmative Praxis* module, helping me to develop a sustained relationship and engagement with my surrealist visual language again. I returned to drawing, in the strong surrealist approach that comes so naturally to me, enabling me to move beyond literal representation of film, and delve into a surrealist feminist expression. A significant conceptual shift, of realistic to surrealist expression of female oppression caused by the Male Gaze. The illustrations could not exist without the films coming first.



*Figure 5: Scenes from Taboos No Longer: Short Film, 2024, Isabelle Weaver-Jones*

## ***A Gazing Eye***

Eyes have always appeared within my illustrations, even prior to this course.

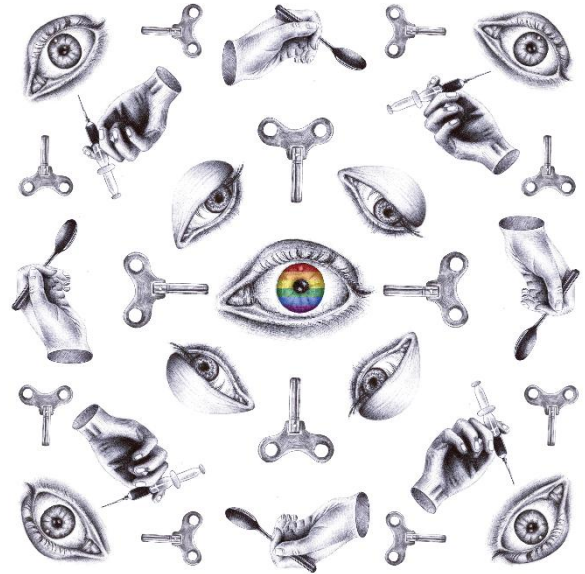
Regardless of subject matter, an eye emerges. A knowing, gazing, and watchful presence often appears intuitively rather than consciously. Although I sensed there was meaning behind repeatedly sketching the eyes, I never paused to fully analyse its conceptual significance. However, I believe my natural attraction to drawing eyes in my surrealist illustrations stems from a love of portraiture. The eyes are often the most expressive and emotionally communicative part of a face, and when captured convincingly they create an immediate connection between subject and viewer.

Whereas, without, a portrait can feel incomplete or disconnected (RHH Agency, n.d.).

Album cover commissions prior to the course, and during the *Exploratory Module*, designing an album cover for the *Secret 7* competition allowed me to explore this in my work, using eyes to convey the emotion and essence of the music (figure 6). Following encouragement to reflect more deeply, I came to understand that these eyes represent a subconscious response to the persistent feeling of being watched as a woman, a feeling I have felt for a long time.



Figure 6: Surreal Album cover “Superpowers”, 2023



Secret 7 Competition album cover, 2025

Therefore, I explored my illustrative practice again as a form of feminist expression, intertwining eyes within my surrealist illustrations. Situating my recurring eye within a larger surrealist and feminist visual lineage, I drew on the work of artists such as Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, and Frida Kahlo. Specifically, Carrington’s work resonates with me, as their symbolic and mythological imagery conveys transformation, self-discovery, and psychological states rather than presenting women as passive objects (Fiveable, 2024.) Like these artists, I aimed to challenge traditional gender norms and explore interiority, using symbolic imagery to express female subjectivity beyond literal representation. This sense of surveillance and scrutiny has embedded itself within my thoughts and has manifested naturally throughout my work.

One of the first things I noticed during my three months stay in the Netherlands over the summer was the outward-facing chairs at every café, bar, and restaurant. It is common in the Netherlands to sit and gaze out at the street, watching people whilst drinking and eating. This simple cultural habit stayed with me and further stimulated my thoughts on the concept of gazing, prompting reflection on the acts of watching and being watched in everyday life as well as in film and television consumption.

Leaning into the concept of gazing and voyeuristic tendencies, I spent hours watching films, studying cinema, attending a Dutch Film Club at the local cinema and immersing myself in classic 90s movies. Films like *American Pie* and *Time and Again* drew me in, but I could not ignore how women were presented: often dressed revealingly, their bodies accentuated for the camera, and relegated to side roles supporting the male protagonist. Additionally, paying attention to the James Bond franchise narratives: “Bond girls are represented in ways that posit their narrative value as secondary to Bond and as such they are likely to be seduced, raped, or killed” (Hackett, Coghlan, & Nolan, 2023). Watching these representations left me frustrated, highlighting the narrow expectations of women portrayed by cinema and television. As I began to think more critically about these patterns, I again turned to Laura Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. I learned how women are positioned as symbols of castration due to their perceived lack of a penis, her critique of Lacanian and Freudian castration theory (Mulvey, 1975). This framing positions women as a threat within film, managed through practices such as voyeurism. By controlling the way women are looked at on screen, cinema neutralises this threat and reinforces male power and authority (Mulvey, 1975).

As I reflected on the influence of television and film, I began questioning whether absorbing the expectations constructed by the Male Gaze shapes and effects relationships, encouraging male desire elsewhere. Emily Nagoski's *Come As You Are* can be situated within feminist theory as she provides an insight here: "*The problem isn't the desire itself, it's the context.*" In a context dominated by the Male Gaze, women's bodies are constantly monitored, objectified, and sexualised in both social environments and visual culture. Enforcing how patriarchal structures can shape men's influence over sexual desires (Nagoski, 2015). Frameworks like this position women as objects for consumption rather than autonomous subjects (Mulvey, 1975).

In contrast, I sought out more feminist films that, like *Jeanne Dielman*, that actively subvert the traditional Male Gaze. At Film Club, we watched *Little Women* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Pride and Prejudice*, all of which centre female characters as autonomous individuals, portraying their lives, relationships, and ambitions without reducing them to the sexualisation of their bodies. My feelings of liberation for the female gaze in these films were reinforced by fellow females in the film club and sparked interest to continue to pursue this direction in my work.

Over the summer, I immersed myself in a range of different arts: Cinema, documentaries, literary research, and most importantly naked figure studies through which I began to find my voice. Studying the female form prompted reflection on how women's bodies are viewed and controlled through the Male Gaze, and how this scrutiny shapes women's relationships with their own bodies, including my own. Through the process of sketching alongside all the contextual research, I began to develop a surrealist illustrative style centred on recurring eyes and the female figure,

used to communicate the restrictions of the Male Gaze and its lasting psychological impact (figure 7). As these ideas continued to grow, I found I had more to articulate than the module could contain, which led me to carry this work forward into the *Confirmative Praxis*.



Figure 7: Initial surrealist sketch in response to cinematic viewing, size A2, 420 x 594 mm

## ***Battling with the Gaze***

“You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.”

(Atwood, 1993) This quote by author *Margaret Atwood*, is a perfect analogy to assist the journey to the message and meaning of my exhibition piece.

The gazing eye compelled me. Consequently, I felt a strong pull and desire to illustrate it, and once I had done so, I knew that the presence of this giant eye was essential.

Positioned to look downward at the vast A2 sheet of white paper, this was where the final exhibition piece began. The eye embodied acts of scrutiny and surveillance, serving as a powerful representation of the Male Gaze, initially conceived as a man’s eye (figure 8). I knew I wanted to incorporate this in the final piece.

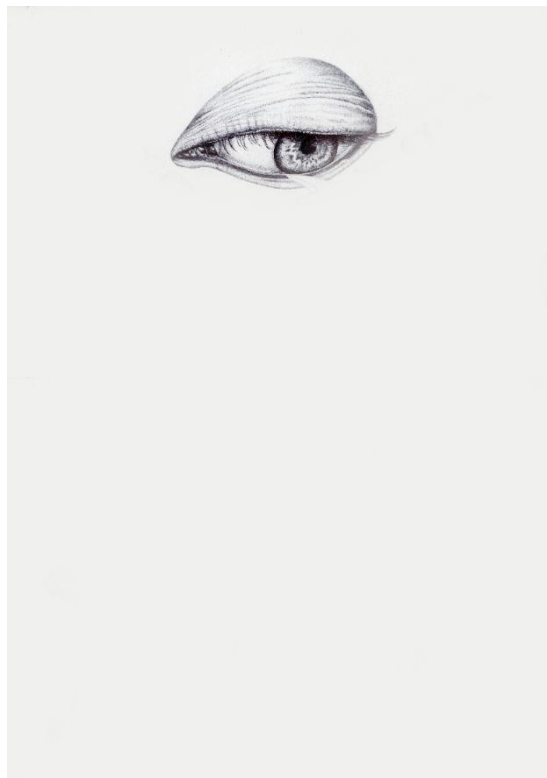


*Figure 8: The Gazing Eye, ball-point pen, size A2, 420 x 594 mm*

What did I want the eye to gaze at, to observe? Drawing on a summer of feminist research, experience, and exploration, I allowed the composition to take shape intuitively and organically. The piece was repeatedly sketched, erased, and reworked through an ongoing process of drawing and revision until the final imagery emerged.

I initially envisioned a triptych (a three panelled piece) in my surrealist style to trace the history of the Male Gaze. This idea was sparked by a small concertina version of the Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts the Battle of Hastings in 1066. What drew me most to this was that the tapestry was created by women (Conroy, 2025). They have no names or voice, to this work, only the telling of history. To me this was a feminist statement. Adopting this historical format allowed me to visualise the Male Gaze as something women have continually lived with and resisted. Illustrating the “battle” of the Male Gaze (figure 9). The triptych was intended to depict two pivotal moments: its invention through Edward Bernays’ marketing strategies and its later critique via Laura Mulvey’s feminist theory. At this stage, I considered producing either a single large-scale piece or a triptych.

My research revealed that the “battle” of the Male Gaze began long before Laura Mulvey coined the term. Edward Bernays’ *Torches of Freedom* campaign illustrates early intersections of marketing, gender, and social influence. Regarded as “father of public relations” (Mostegal, 2019), Bernays appealed to women’s emotions rather than facts, organising the 1929 New York parade encouraging women to smoke publicly as a symbol of liberation. By selling cigarettes as an ideal of freedom, he marketed desire, laying the groundwork for what would later be conceptualised as the Male Gaze. The use of women’s bodies to sell freedom and cigarettes foreshadowed Mulvey’s theory, in

which women become objects of visual consumption in a patriarchal society (Balistreri, 2022; Mulvey, 1975).

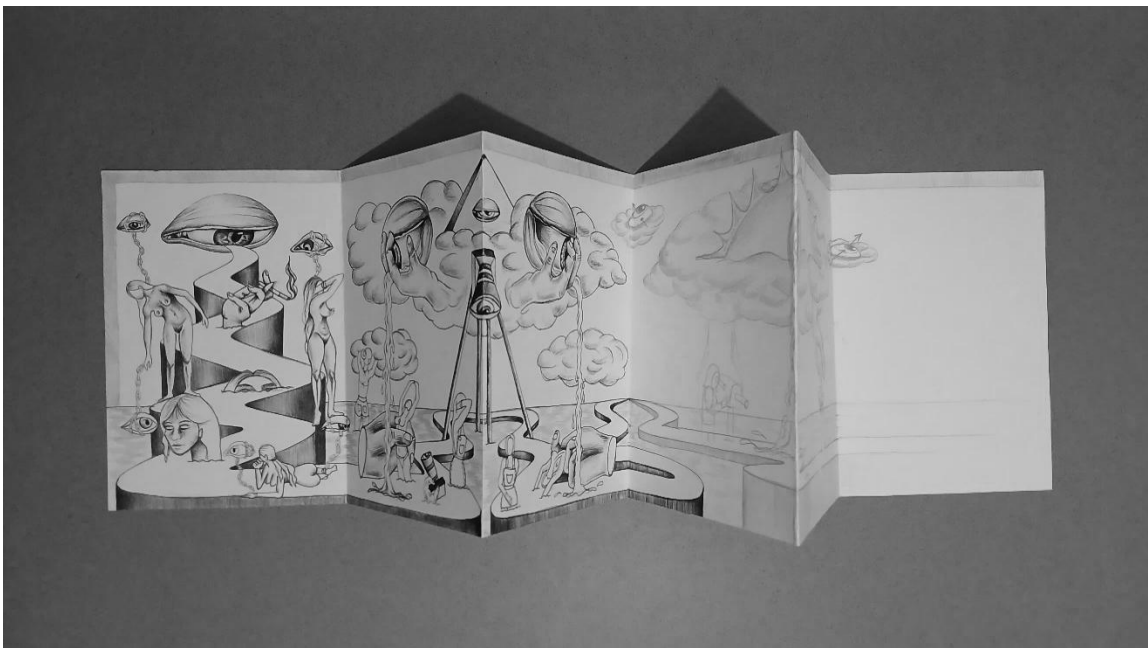


*Figure 9: Sketches and concertina of the “battle” of the male gaze*

However, after much sketching and deliberation, I ultimately decided not to pursue the idea of illustrating the history of the Male Gaze. Instead, I chose to remain on the emotional path, focusing on conveying the consuming sensation of the Male Gaze whilst still drawing inspiration from its history. This initial, unrealised concept played a crucial role in shaping the final piece, allowing me to refine my thinking before settling on the final concept.

Still explorative at this stage, the first sketch of Triptych Piece 1 (figure 10) emerged as a vision of naked women standing in a flowing river of a gazing eye, fully submerged within its stare, with no possibility of escape. I sought to convey the suffocating experience of being subjected to the Male Gaze. This sensation was intensified through the imagery of ropes binding the women to the eye, reinforcing their restraint and entrapment within the gaze's scrutiny. At this stage, I knew the figures needed to be nude, to amplify the invasive and exposing nature of the gaze. This vulnerability was central to the intention of the piece, and the nude figure studies I conducted over the summer had prepared me for this visual choice.

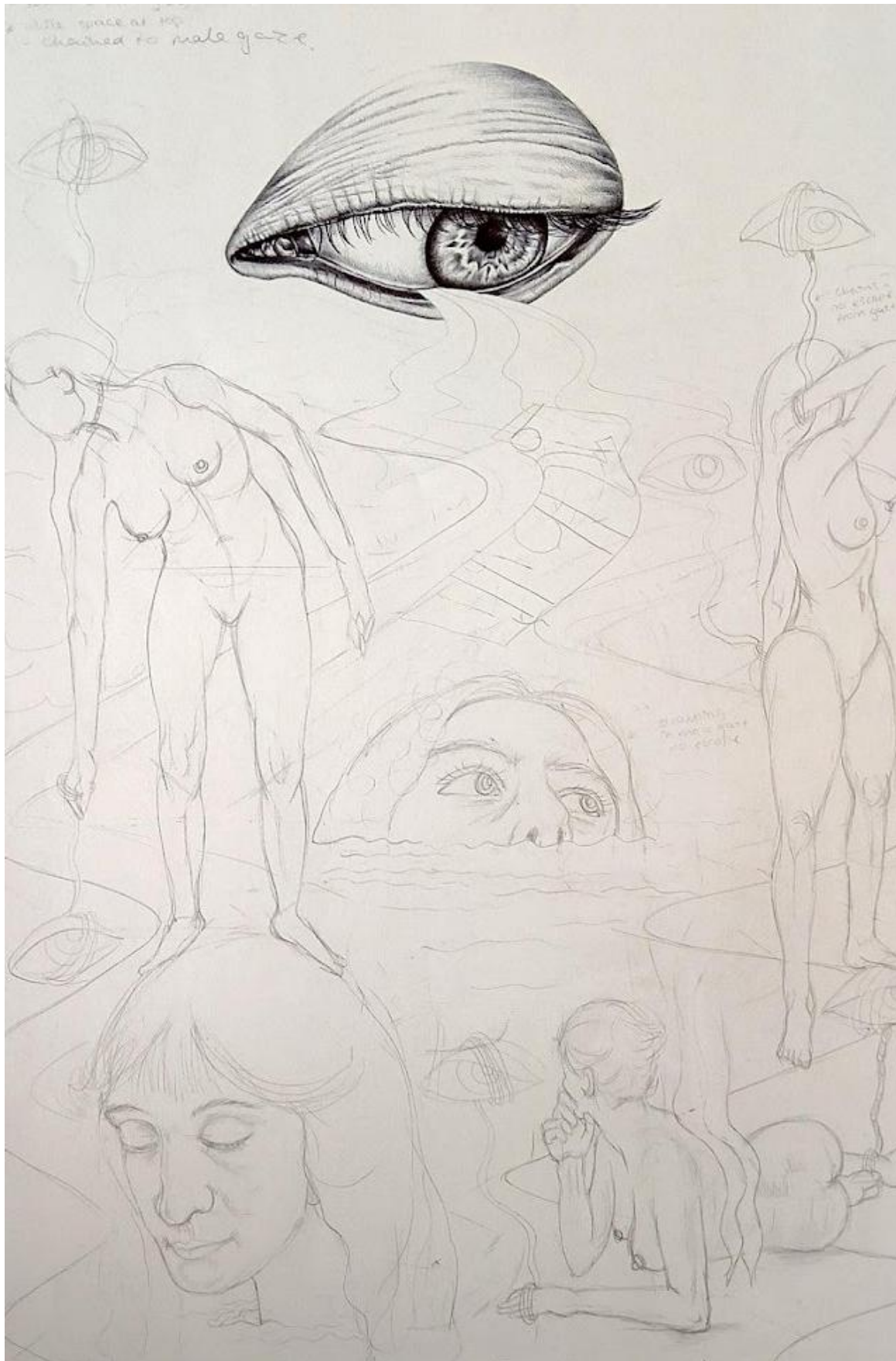


Figure 10: Initial sketch of Triptych Piece 1, size A2, 420 x 594 mm

## ***Chained & Unchaining***

After this exploration, I knew I wanted to focus my practice on the experience of being bound to the Male Gaze, *chained* to its expectations, surveillance, and demands. To represent the psychological weight of living under constant scrutiny and the difficulty women face in escaping it. Through surreal imagery and detailed illustration, this work reflects the lasting impact of patriarchal structures on the female body, identity, and the concept of reclaiming it.

Returning to my original practice of drawing with a ballpoint pen on paper, felt very natural as it is a medium in which I feel most confident. I wanted the final work to be visually striking, with a high level of detail and realism. Over the course of the project, I realised that hand-drawn illustration allowed me to communicate my feminist ideas most clearly, combining hyper-realistic technique with my surrealist approach. While my hyper-realistic filmmaking had previously been successful, for this message I intended to convey, illustration proved the most appropriate and resonant form of expression.

I have developed the detailed ballpoint technique over many years, refining it further throughout the summer in preparation for the *Confirmative Praxis* body of work. From the start, I knew that pairing this medium with a surrealist visual language would most effectively convey the feminist message at the heart of my practice.

Spending hours testing different pen brands and paper weights before finally selecting a soft-tipped BIC pen and 200gsm white, acid-free paper for the final piece (figure 11).

This careful choice of materials was essential for achieving the precision and control required.

While in the Netherlands, I was immersed in Dutch art and surrealist influences, which further fuelled my commitment to developing an authentic illustration style grounded in surrealism. I was particularly inspired by Dutch illustrator Redmer Hoekstra, whose fine-line pen work emphasises realism with surreal imagery. Hoekstra has spoken about the time-consuming nature of this process and the importance of precision, stating, “It is important to make the drawing as realistic as possible to let the alienation have the highest impact” (Hoekstra, 2010). This approach strongly resonates with my own practice, and in my final piece, I similarly aimed to heighten the impact of the surreal imagery through meticulous detail and realism.



*Figure 11: The detail of the ball-point pen on 200 gsm paper*

The decision to illustrate naked women as mannequin-like figures arose naturally from my illustrative style, presenting them as model-like forms. The dictionary defines a model as both a physical form “a three-dimensional figure or object made from a malleable material such as clay or wax” and a “standard or example to be followed or imitated”. The figures I began to illustrate are depicted as flawless, perfected, and thin, reflecting how women are moulded and shaped by societal expectations and the Male Gaze. Their facelessness is intentional; objectification leaves no space for individuality or personality. As Simone de Beauvoir writes, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (De Beauvoir, 1949; Smith & Bruce, 2016). Women’s attributes, gender roles, and femininity are moulded like clay by societal and patriarchal expectations rather than by nature. Communicating this absence of natural identity was central to the meaning of my illustrations (figure 12).

While drawing the eyes in my final piece, I used multiple photographs of my own eye as reference. This process prompted an unexpected moment of reflection, leading me to question both the work and its meaning. Could the piece simultaneously represent the exposure of the Male Gaze and the reclaiming of power from it? I realised that I wanted the work to encompass both concepts, reflecting the reality of navigating these conflicting emotions as a woman. As Florence Given suggests, reclaiming the gaze and bodily autonomy becomes an act of resistance (Given, 2020). My intention was for the piece to provoke questions, thoughts, and emotional responses in the viewer, while offering recognition and relatability for women who may see their own experiences reflected within it.

Catherine Stimpson Feminist Scholar reflects on feminists reclaiming their bodies during second wave feminism as she states “The woman’s naked body, was no longer reserved to pornography, but the body was a source of pride and of health. The body was to be celebrated and enjoyed” (Demetrakas, 2018). Choosing to use my own eye in the final piece became a way of reclaiming the Male Gaze for myself. As a woman who experiences the effects of the Male Gaze and internalised self-objectification, creating this work was an emotional and raw process. The piece not only exposes the Male Gaze but also represents an act of reclaiming my body and agency from past experiences. The process became both healing and liberating, challenging societal expectations while reasserting control and power.

Furthermore, I wanted the illustration to convey themes of self-regulation, internalised misogyny, and self-monitoring, reflecting how these forces have shaped my everyday experience and continue to operate in society. Ultimately, I hoped the imagery would resonate with women, encouraging them to reflect on their own relationship with the Male Gaze and the possibility of reclaiming it.

This aligns with Shaun Tan’s idea of being “intrigued by the ability of the reader to superimpose their own thoughts and feelings onto visual experience, without the possible distraction of words”. It feels particularly relevant to how I want audiences to engage with my work (Tan, n.d.).

Halfway through the final illustration piece, I chose to replace the ropes with chains, as this imagery was vital in conveying inequality within the visual narrative. The figures appear imprisoned by the gaze, bound to it with no escape (figure 13). The chains appear imprisoned by the gaze, bound to it with no escape (figure 13). The chains reference a significant moment in feminist history, when suffragettes chained themselves to the railings outside 10 Downing Street in protest against being denied the right to vote (Historic England, 2026). The illustrated chains symbolise both this historic act of resistance and the ongoing struggle women continue to face against inequality, particularly within the context of the male gaze.

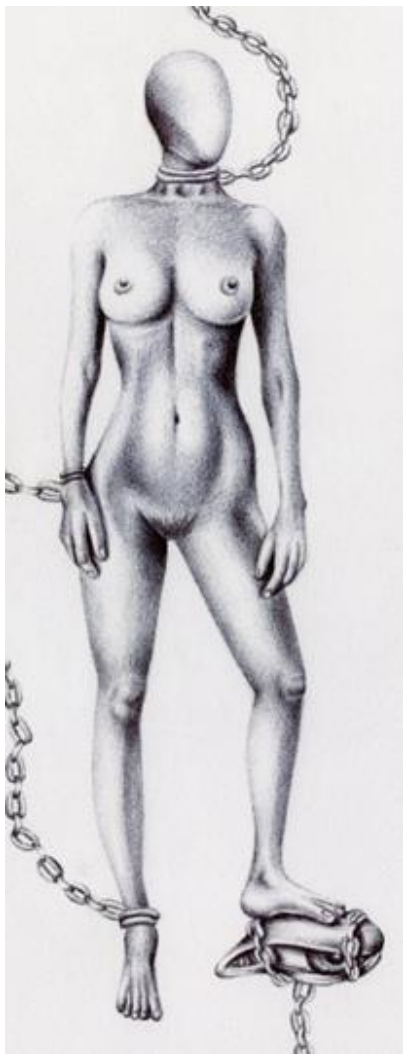


*Figure 12: Moulded by society*

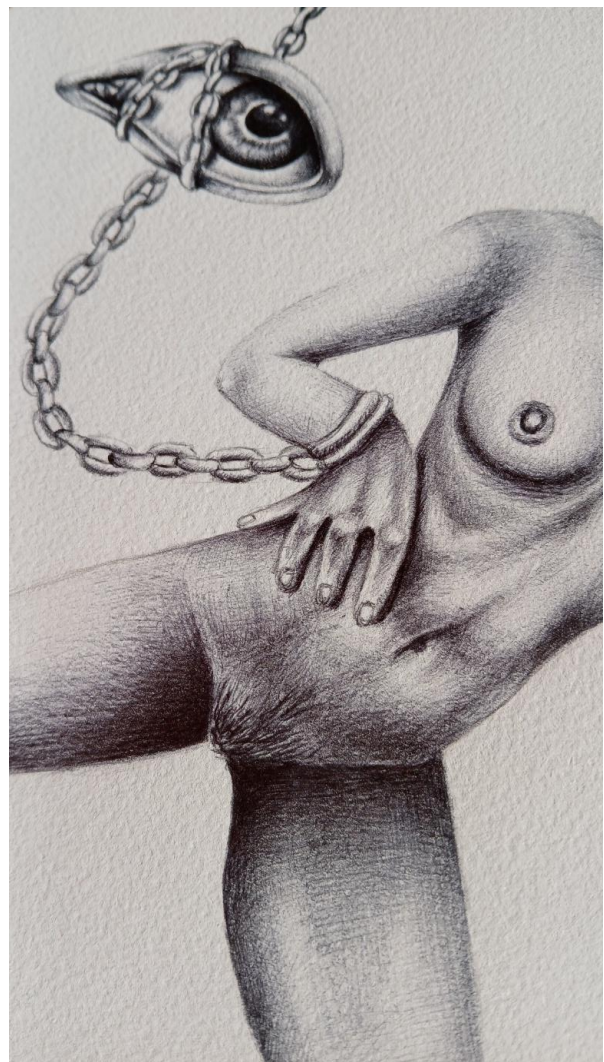


*Figure 13: Chained to the gaze*

Drawing inspiration from scenic surrealists such as Salvador Dalí, Leonora Carrington, I began developing a fully realised, immersive scene that constructs a world shaped by the male gaze. The work also carries a surrealist quality reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Although Bosch did not directly influence the narrative of my triptych, his fantastical imagery reflects an instinctive attraction to surrealism and the visual language to which I am naturally drawn. Further influence came from M. C. Escher, whose precisely structured compositions blur logic and illusion.

These influences emerged instinctively during the design process and were key in establishing my niche and distinctive illustrative style. From this point onwards the designing and sketch of the first triptych piece developed well, however not quickly (Figures 14, 15 & 16).

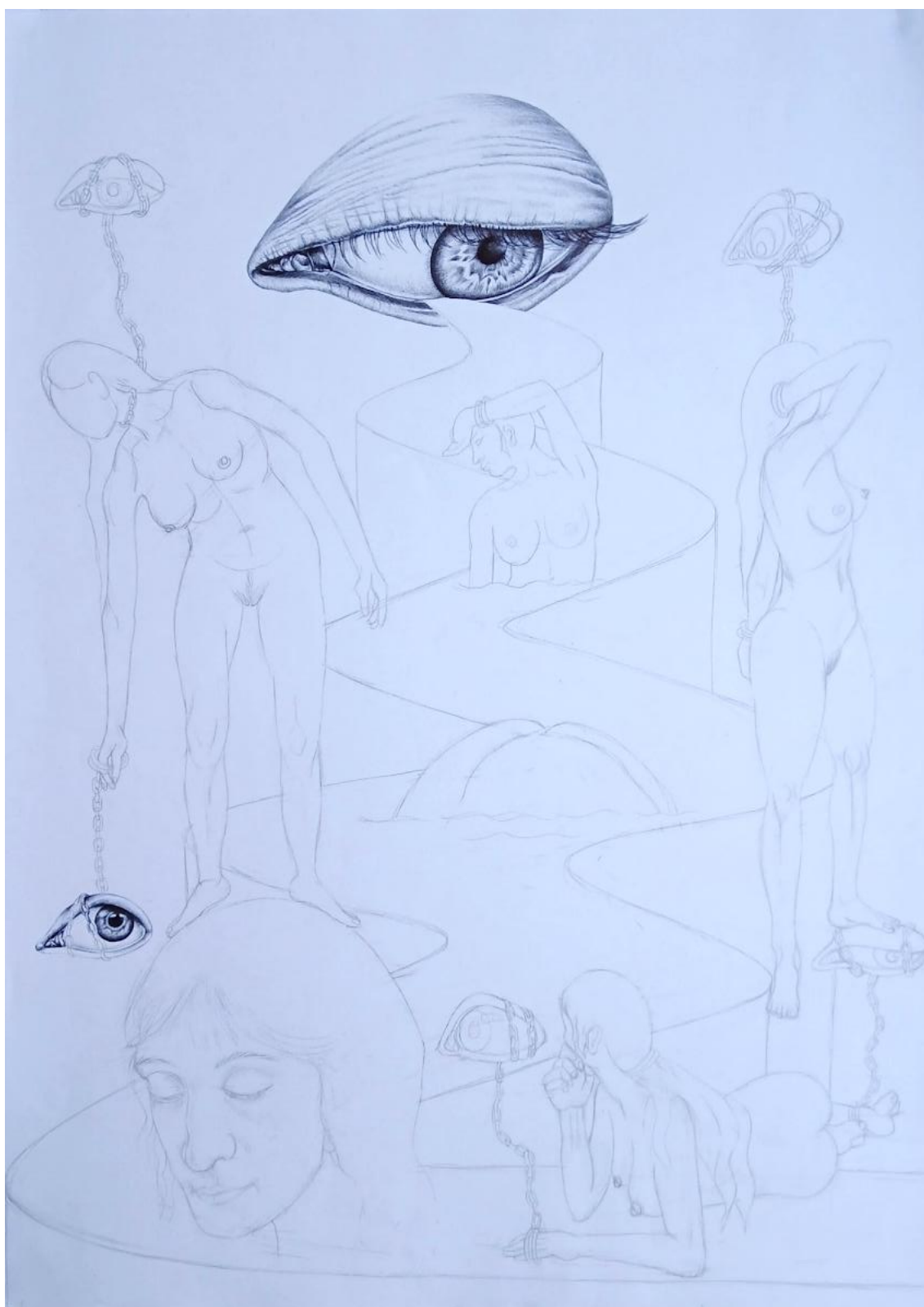


Figure 14: Refined sketch, size A2, 420 x 594 mm

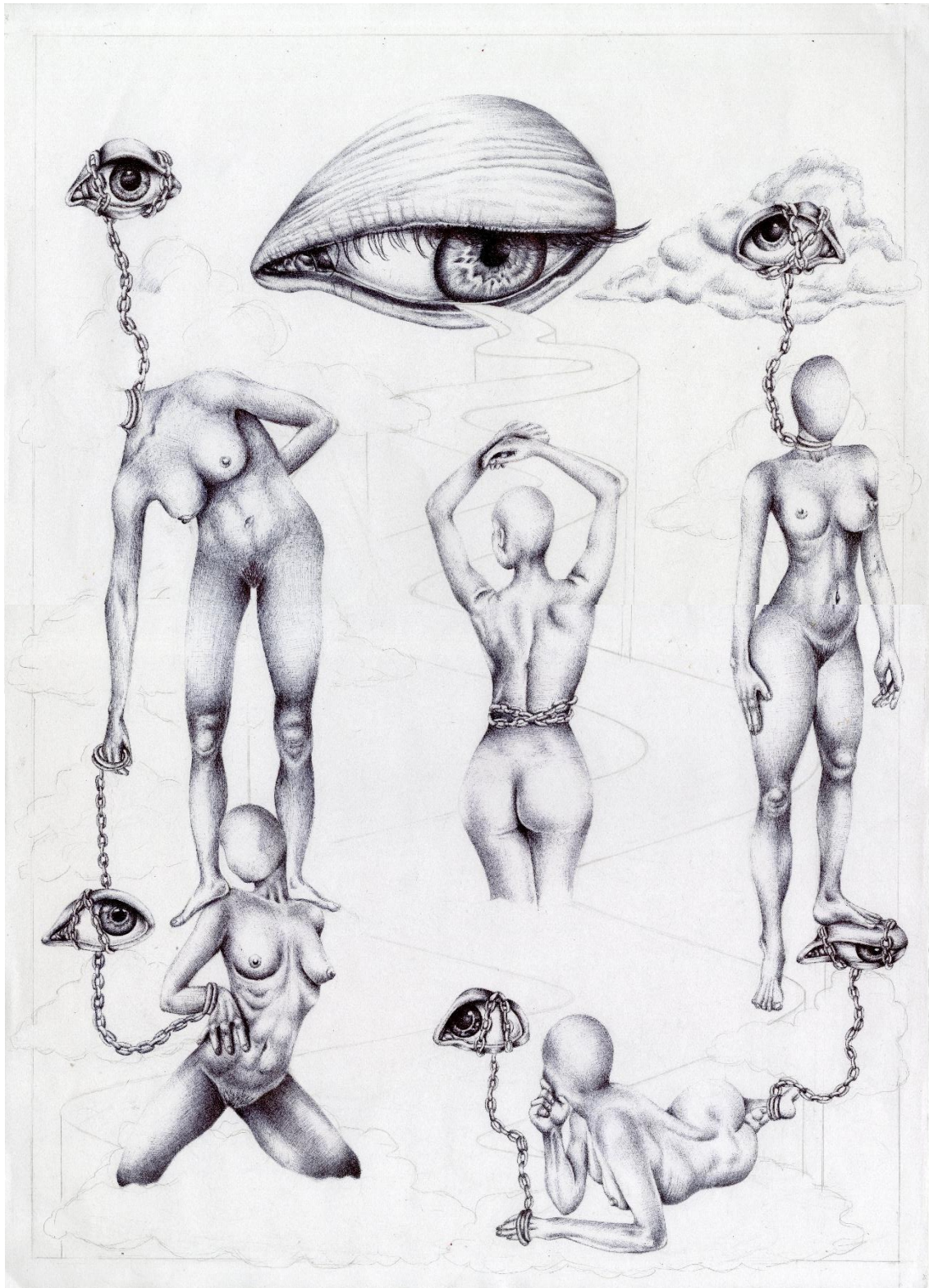


Figure 15: Sketch of scenic development, size A2, 420 x 594 mm

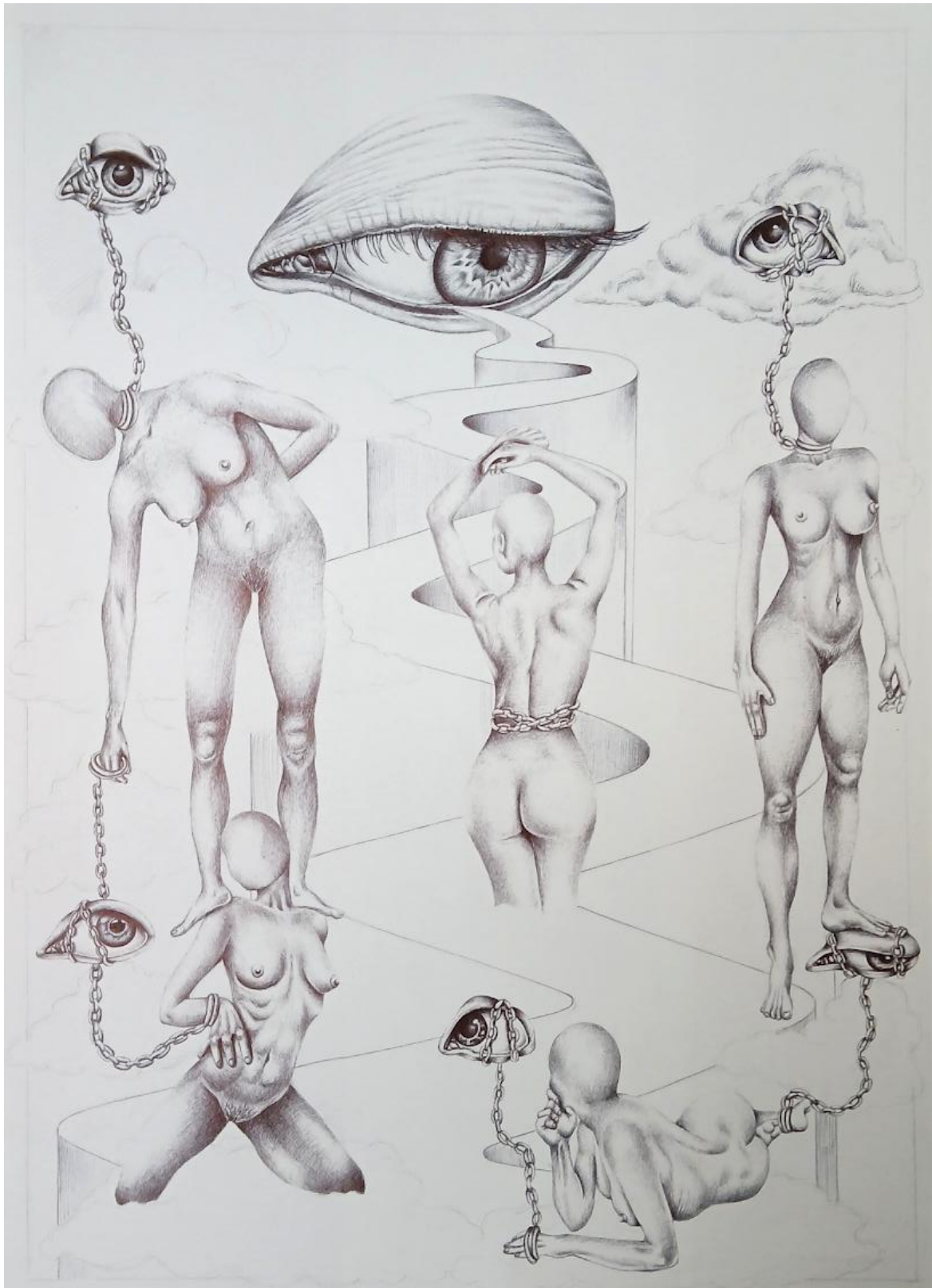


Figure 16: Further scenic development, size A2, 420 x 594 mm

The final piece was originally intended to be a triptych of A2 pen drawings; however, I made a conscious decision to focus on a single piece of work instead. This choice was not solely due to time constraints, but also my preference for working at a larger scale. The level of detail I draw is the best quality A2 minimum and my commitment to prioritising quality over quantity. The level of detail required was extremely time-consuming, particularly in rendering the chains, which carry significant symbolic meaning and therefore demanded careful attention. Additionally, following the *WIP symposium* (work-in-progress), there was insightful feedback and discussion of focusing on a single image and enlarging it significantly for greater impact. This prospect greatly excited me, leading me to focus on creating one statement piece rather than a triptych.

As a result, I deliberately stripped the imagery back, reducing scenic detail and incorporating areas of white space to emphasise the core elements of the composition. This approach allowed viewers to focus on what I wanted them to see, giving the illustration greater impact and aligning it more closely with an illustrative approach. Therefore, in order to strip the imagery back, I started again. From scratch (figure 17).

The work initially began as a fully scenic composition but was gradually refined to retain only what was necessary to communicate the narrative, reflecting the principle echoed by the pioneering designer and architect *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe* that “less is more” highlighting that “simplicity leads to clarity” (Pixartprinting, 2024). I applied this to the visual storytelling of my illustration to voice my feminist message. This decision also leaves opportunity for me to complete the large-scale triptych after the course and exhibit it in gallery context.



Figure 17: Starting from scratch, size A2, 420 x 594 mm

It was important for me to embed subtle acts of rebellion and protest within the piece. Drawing the foot standing on the eye became a turning point, prompting me to think beyond exposure and towards resistance and subversion (figure 18). This led me to the decision to include, at my exhibition, a screening of the final scene from my feminist film *Silenced No Longer*, featuring the powerful image of a burning apron. This moment functions as an act of defiance, symbolising resistance and directly confronting the Male Gaze that is revealed and scrutinised within the illustration. This section of the work holds emotional weight for me, as it represents not only critique, but an active refusal to submit to the gaze itself.



Figure 18: *Standing on the Male Gaze*

As the illustration developed, the giant looming eye began to take on a monster-like form, with its arms rendered as chains wrapping around the women, trapping them within the Male Gaze. This transformation felt significant, and I was immediately drawn to it, choosing to preserve this quality in the final piece. To me, the Male Gaze operates as a monster: an ever-present force that watches, consumes, and controls.

“Capitalism turns us all into objects of desire” (Given, 2020). Given articulates this connection clearly, describing capitalism as a byproduct of the Male Gaze, with the two functioning in together. The male gaze has rendered women “incredibly vulnerable to capitalism, as we are encouraged to buy solutions to fix our biological ‘flaws’” (Given, 2020). Solidifying my intention to depict the gazing eye as a monstrous figure that enforces capitalist ideals and consumes women’s lives (figure 19).

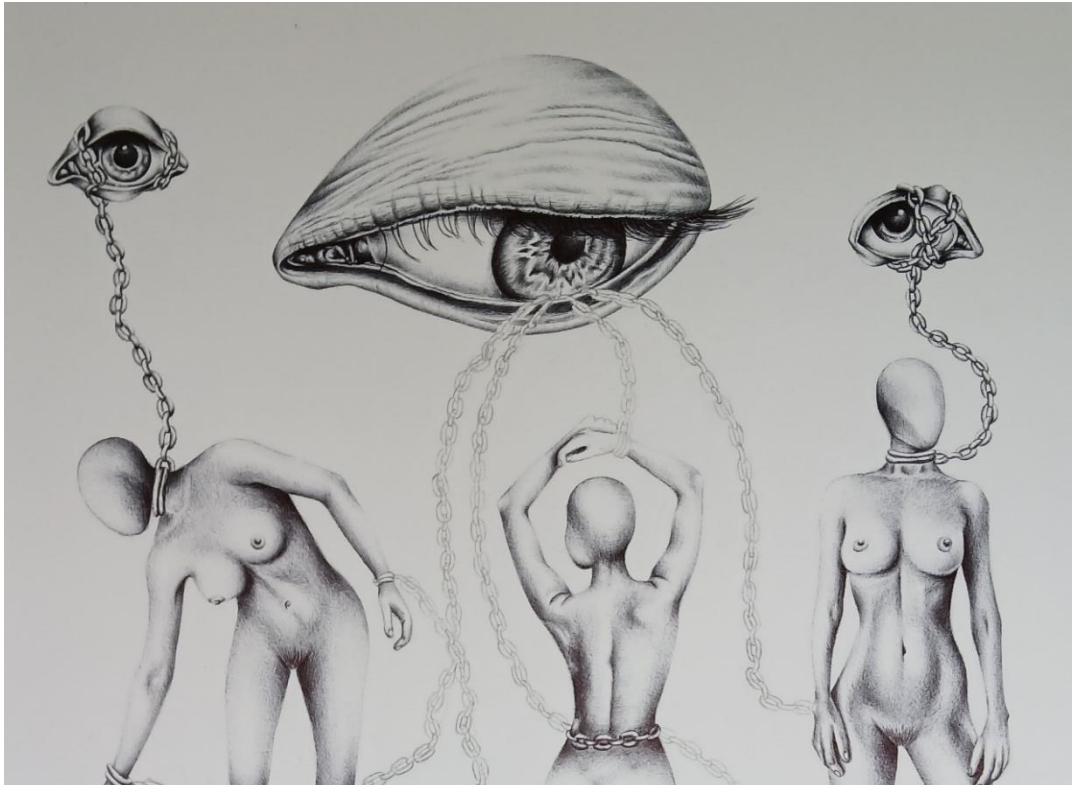


Figure 19: Monstrous form taking place

In addition, the monster-like entity took shape through its chains, resembling a creature such as a kraken or spider, engulfing its subjects. I also drew inspiration from Louise Bourgeois' *Maman*, whose, monster-like sculptural form stands as “nurturing” and “protective” giant arachnid, inspired by her own mother (National Gallery of Canada, n.d.) informed the tone of my exhibition imagery. This female monstrous form resonated with the surreal presence within my work, an entity that mirrors the oppressive nature of the Male Gaze itself.

Whilst in the final stages of the illustration I wanted to ensure it conveyed the feeling of being bound to this gaze, chained to its surveillance and demands illustrating how

difficult it is for women to escape its pervasive influence. I wanted it to reflect being *Chained* to the narrative of the Male Gaze.

In contrast to this, I intended my piece to simultaneously reclaim agency from the male gaze, challenging societal expectations placed on women, and assert control over how I am seen and how I see myself. Bracha L. Ettinger's *Matrixial Gaze Theory* supports this approach. Rethinking how subjectivity and relationships beyond the traditional male phallogentric gaze and emphasising new relational ways of seeing that reflect female emotion, connection and experience, rather than the disconnect of objectivity (Ettinger, 2020). Therefore, I intended for the piece to also convey the concept of women *Unchaining* themselves from the narrative of the Male Gaze

After an extensive period intricately drawing, at last I finished (figure 20).

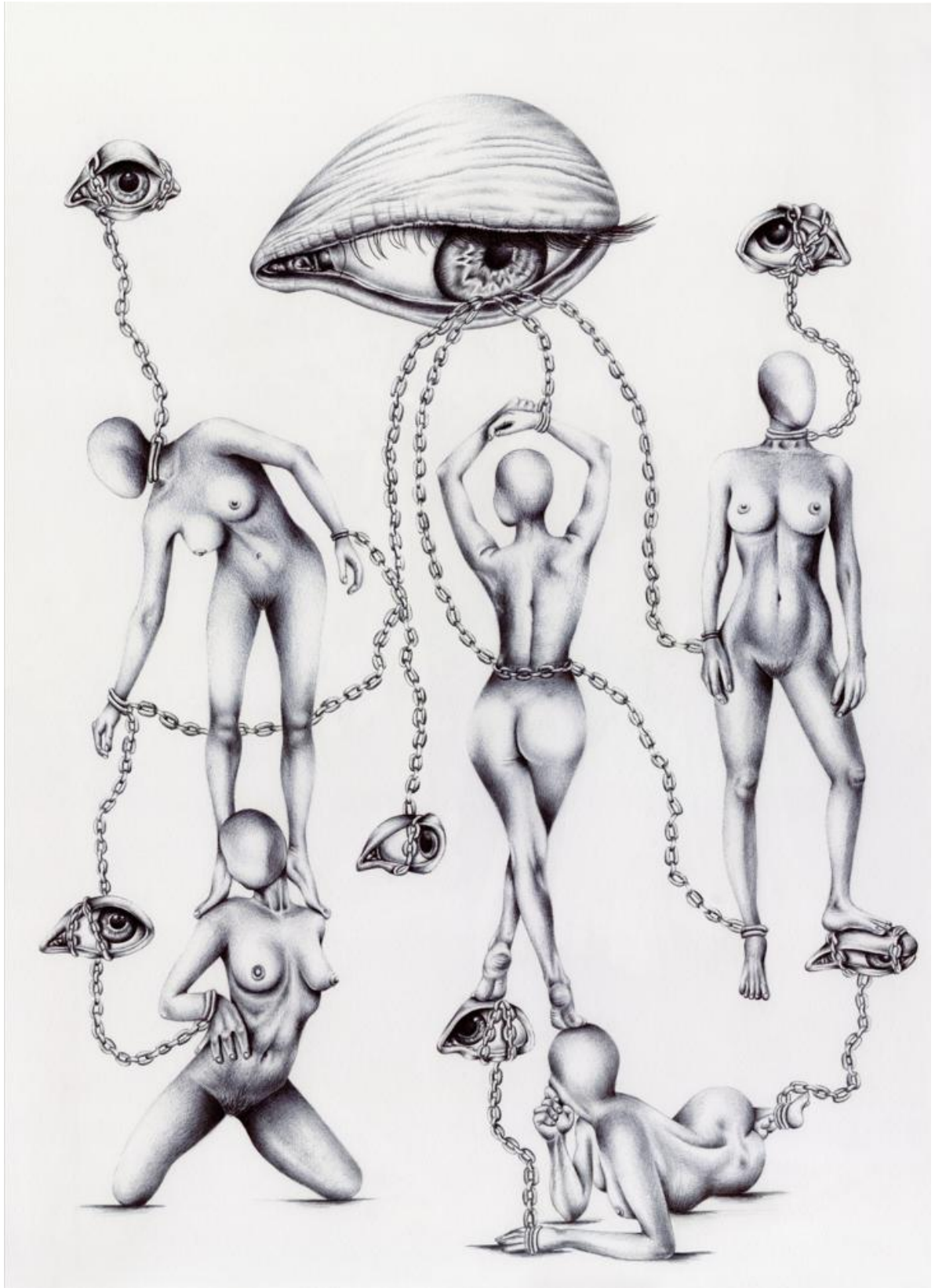


Figure 20: Final Exhibition Piece: "Chained to the Narrative", Original A2, Ball-point pen, size A2, 420 x 594 mm, 200 gsm paper

The final exhibition piece brings together illustration and film to reinforce the feminist themes at the heart of my work. The illustration explores internalised self-monitoring, objectification, and the lasting impact of patriarchal structures on the female body and identity. The burning apron scene from my *Silenced No Longer* film supports the themes of rebellion and the reclamation of the Male Gaze, which are also echoed in the illustration. Emphasised by the subtle sound of burning from the video, deliberately included so that viewers hear it while standing back and looking up at the illustration. Enlarging the illustration from A2 onto high-quality vinyl to fill the gallery wall was essential in creating an immediate, immersive impact, evoking the intimidating, all-consuming nature of the Male Gaze. This effect is emphasised by firstly by the contrast of the small video, to accentuate the illustrations size. Additionally, the spotlight strategically positioned to shine up at the eye, giving it a domineering presence. The light also marks a viewing spot, allowing visitors to stand where both illustration and film combine to immerse sight and sound (figures 21, 22 & 23).



Figure 21: Exhibition piece: "Chained to the Narrative"

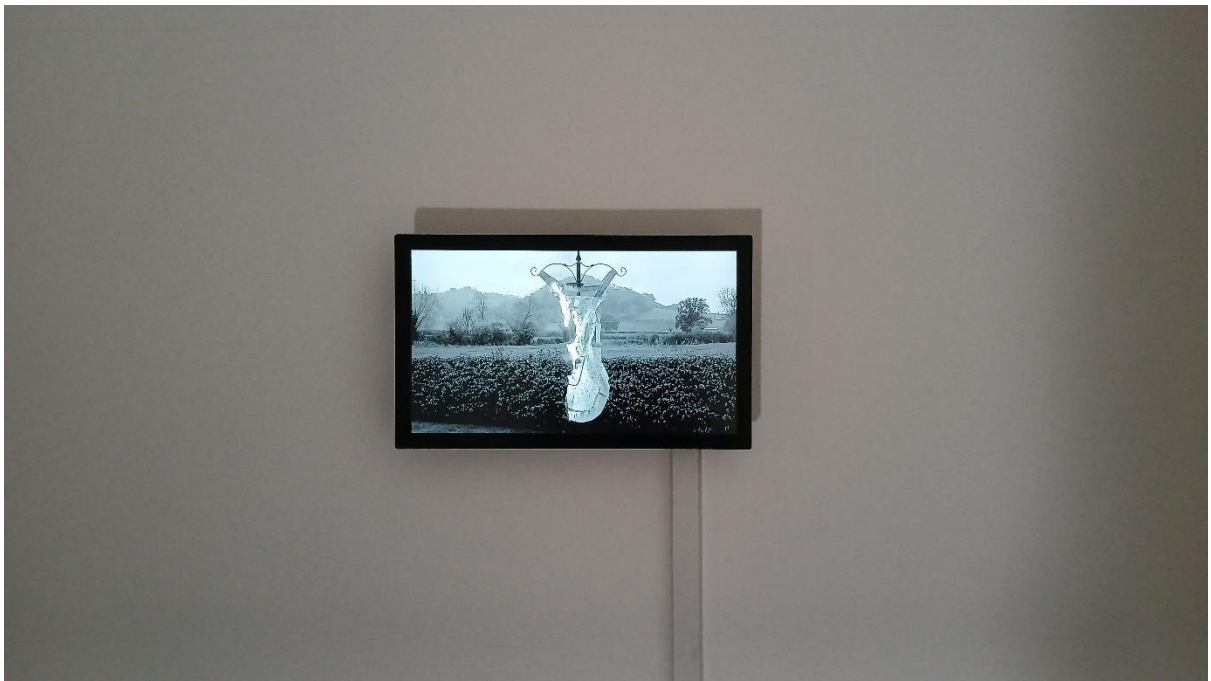


*Figure 22: Exhibition supporting piece: “Silenced No Longer”, the final scene*



Figure 23: *Exhibition Piece, Chained to the Narrative*

## ***It is only the beginning***

By blending surrealism and narrative detail, this body of work expresses the tension between female oppression and empowerment. Examining how society perceives and defines the female body. My exhibiting work is a stylistic exaggeration through film, and traditional surrealist illustration, highlighting the intensity of the Male Gaze. Insisting that we consider the struggle against objectification throughout the twentieth century and into present day.

On a personal level, this has been a cathartic experience for me. I have named this body of work *Unchaining the Narrative*, as I believe throughout the process of creating artwork, I have begun to unchain myself from the consuming effects of the Male Gaze, by letting these emotions out through the camera lens and onto the page. Through this experience my practice has deepened conceptually with feminist theory, lived experience, and emotional response, all coming into alignment to take precedence.

This work has demonstrated how illustration and film can function as a critical feminist tool for communication, creating both emotional and educational impact throughout my practice. While I consider myself an illustrator, I remain aware that a fine art flare underpins my work. I create surreal, conceptual imagery that sits between illustration and fine art. I have learned how to combine these disciplines, realising the potential of my practice functioning both conceptually and commercially. While my images may serve editorial, commercial, or cultural purposes, they retain a strong personal voice and artistic intent. The emphasis lies in idea-driven image-making where each element carries symbolic weight.

I do not believe I can conclude this practice, as the struggles of the Male Gaze remain prevalent in my life and in the lives of women. Still battling against objectification, and the fight for reclaiming agency over our bodies. During *Contemporary Dialogues* I have found my narrative and visual style and has clarified the direction of my future work. Marking the start of a sustained body of practice centred on expressing personal beliefs, seeking empowerment and relatability for women by challenging and confronting the Male Gaze through art. I will continue to create work in my traditional surrealist style, with feminism at the core of my practice not just as a subject, but as a framework shaping artistic intentions.

I intend to show art that resonates with women and connects the viewer to the realities of the Male Gaze. I plan to expand the triptych, exhibit within gallery contexts, and explore how my illustrations can exist beyond their original form. Therefore, this is not a conclusion for my feminist and illustrative practice, it is only the beginning.

I feel I have much more to say.

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