



Portfolio of Writing

OBSERVATIONAL WRITING

PRACTICE-BASED WRITING, IDENTIFYING & SCOPING

STUDENT NUMBER: 2001034

BA FILM & TV

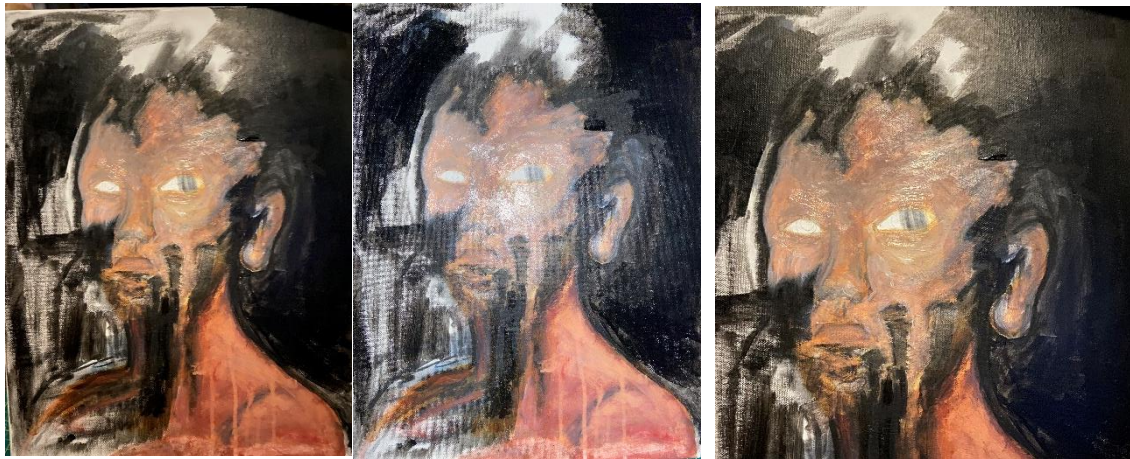
WORD COUNT EXCLUDING BIBLIOGRAPHY: 1629

ROBERT JONES

For my exploration I have chosen to adapt the poem 'Spirits of the Dead' by Edgar Allan Poe. I will produce this through the means of painting, using a 29.7 x 42.0 cm canvas with a series of acrylic paints. I have chosen this piece as I have a particularly deep connection with it as it addresses the topic of loss and death in a way by which I find most interesting. The poem discusses death in a way that somewhat identifies with the concept of 'life after death' found in many religious practices. The line 'The spirits of the dead who stood, in life before thee are again, in death around thee' suggests that when we lose someone they are never truly lost and that their spirits remains among us. This particular line is what essentially formulated my connection with the poem as I came across it at a time when I had lost my grandmother and, in a way, found it most comforting to think in the frame of mind that she still remained with me. Therefore, to deepen my connection with the poem and to further my understanding of what a connection is, I have made the decision to transfer aspects and concepts within the poem into my own personal art piece. For the basis of my piece, I wish to produce it in the style of surrealism, a movement which raised in the 1920s under the influences of Dada and abstract art. I wish to produce my piece in a surrealist style as I believe it is best fitted when it comes to the topic of death and how we still don't truly know what happens to us when we pass and so these shared ideas of having a soul or passing through life in a spiritual sense seems most bizarre to me. The poem itself is very gothic in nature and much of Poe's work falls under the category of gothic literature and so I wish to also take inspiration from this and captivate both a surreal and gothic approach to my piece. I began my process by taking up some initial research based on the surrealist movement, I looked into the manifesto itself and various artists by which I took inspiration from such as Frida Kahlo's 'Girl with Death Mask (1938)' and Andre Breton's 'La Cage, (1948)'. The line '..we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices' is taken from the Surrealist Manifesto written by Andre Breton in 1924. I found this line most appropriate for my essay as in essence it conveys how we as humans ignore anything that is without hard evidence and that even the slightest illogical thing is ceased as a fragment of the imagination or false hope. Which is potentially why Poe's understanding of death is so altered and that he connects with it, in a way which comforts him. This idea of comfort also being the reason why I felt such a connection with the poem itself and so potentially this idea of 'connection' is a means of comfort for humans. With this idea in mind, I came to the conclusion to develop my piece based on the words of the poem itself and the ideas that radiate from it.



After finalising my ideas, I began the process of physically developing it. Whereby I created a guidance outline for the piece and began to develop it with the technique of 'Underpainting', which is a 'initial layer of paint applied to a ground, which serves as a base for subsequent layers of paint to help define colour values'. For my underpainting I used a series of burnt amber tones and dark blues as I find them the most effect bases to build upon when creating dimensions and shadows, especially when painting skin. I also used the technique of 'Blocking' whereby I used blocks of a single colour alongside the face to produce the initial foundation before I started working in the fine details.



During the basis layers of the piece, I began to reflect on further concepts which would potentially strengthen my piece and also contextualise my research into a more solid depiction. Consequently, I began contemplating this idea of connections being a form of attachment and that is when I began to look at the psychological concept of 'Attachment Theory (1958)' by John Bowlby, 'Actions or feelings such as fear, separation, or insecurity would all cause the attachment programming to activate, causing a child to seek out the individuals to whom it has been attached.' This suggesting that attachment is in a way instinctive and that we reach out to things by which make us most comforted or safe and so it seems that Poe's poem is a means of expressing his attachment, the safety net, that was his deceased wife. As a result of this it allowed me to sequence together the ideas that we connect with things that bring us comfort such as a piece of literature or art or even a person by which we then go on to attach meaning to. Subsequently, with that being my form of understanding I wished for the piece to consist of this distorted figure of an individual from the shoulders up that was somewhat submerging into this black abyss like background. My meaning behind this was to identify Poe's concept of 'spirits' and becoming one and so the distortion symbolises this transfer and conveys how the individual may not look exactly how they did in life but they are now a reflection of their soul, their true and final form. This was also inspired by an article I came across 'Your spirit self' written by the Hoffman Institute. It suggested that 'Your spiritual self is your most beautiful and powerful form. It is the authentic self, the unconditioned part..' therefore I wanted to portray the individual, human in nature but with slight distortion to objectify that proposal of ones spiritual self being their most 'authentic self'. I also wanted this surreal, unnatural effect so that the piece depicted no specific features that would typically associate with race or a gender and this made it more fluid so that the it could be open to every individual who would come across it and that they could connect and produce their own interpretation.

After finishing my piece, I began to reflect on both the process and research I had concluded. My main intentions when deciding to adapt the poem into a personal art piece was that I wanted to create a deeper emotional response and connection which could be understood by others. I have

found after analysing my piece that my initial foundations such as the research and finding meaning within the piece was one of the stronger elements overall as I allowed myself to further understand societal concepts such as attachment, connections and how we as a society cope with the more feared subjects such as death. Specifically, with the concept of connections to death, whereby I found through a journal from the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy that as a collective society we either view it in a biological way 'death is the irreversible cessation of organismic functioning' or a more nurturing way that 'human death as the irreversible loss of personhood'. Therefore, I find that I did convey my piece with more spiritual, consoling approach to loss and death much like the poem itself. I also find that through this process I have rekindled not only my connection with the poem but also how I had grown to accept my grandmothers passing and this had allowed me to enjoy the moments I shared with her, therefore not only exploring my attachments to the piece through an educational standpoint but also an emotional one. However, amongst these successes there has also been a few weaker segments to my exploration such as the execution. I felt that although I had a strong basis and idea behind what I wanted to develop, once I had finalized and created the piece it didn't seem as strong as I intended it to be. I was unhappy with aspects such as my line work and how my blending of colour had become quite dull and less textured than I wished. I also felt that my initial concepts had seemed to have faded when placed together and where I had kept the surrealist aspect, I had in a sense lost the gothic. Therefore, after critically analysing my piece, I decided to take up some final research to see if I could readjust my initial approach. This is when I began to look back at the poem, the personification in the line 'and the stars shall not look down' took my interest and I started to think about symbolism and how one item can be used to symbolise another. The word 'look' suggests that he was referencing the 'stars' to eyes and this reminded me of the phrase 'eyes are the windows of the soul' and so I took this into consideration when looking to strengthen my piece and came across an artist called Alia Ali who uses the technique of 'wrapping cotton and string around the face' to distort it. This then gave me the idea to sow over the eyes on my piece creating this idea that if the eyes of our physical bodies are removed than our soul is able to be freed. This then tying in with the idea of 'spirits' remaining amongst the living like the poem. As a result, I feel as if this salvaged my piece and illuminated my desired intentions.



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Reference images and personal sketches

Frida Kahlo (1938) – ‘Girl with Death Mask’



Andre Breton (1948)- ‘La Cage’



Personal sketches

