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New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Scholarship Visual Arts 2023

93306 Painting

TOP SCHOLAR





Proposal and idea generation

Being a teenager in this era of uncertainty, change and constant growth can often be tiresome yet exhilarating. Our reliance on social media means we are constantly in a state of communication with those closest to us, often creating interesting yet confusing dynamics between our relationships with others, ourselves and the places we inhabit.

For my painting portfolio I aim to show the way my generation interacts with each other, themselves and their environments. I also aim to delve into themes of identity and a loss of identity as a result of the way we live, overexposure to imagery and our disconnect from the natural world and our need to both consume and create imagery. I will do so by painting moments from my life combined with surreal and conceptual elements. I want my paintings to feel like responses to my life and I hope that they reflect back onto the viewer, regardless of their own experiences.

I was inspired to make this the theme of my portfolio due to the constant negative press about my generation's relationship with social media. I don't want my paintings to be inherently negative or positive, as life never is one or the other.

Initial Brainstorming

Brainstorm

People + Places → The relationship between people, places & objects & the feelings associated with them

Interior + exterior + Portraiture

Technical

Layering
Opacity
Colour
Environment

Positive + Negative connotations of relationships between people, places, objects, self

Personal connections
Natural vs built environment
Domestic lives
Ugliness contrasted with beauty

Subject Matter:

People I know?
Myself?
Pinterest people?
Places in Wellington
Urban places + Natural
Interior spaces → Architecture

Over exposure to imagery & media

- Loss of identity
- Overexposure to sensitive imagery
- News + media
- Loss of sensitivity
- Layering images

Main Ideas and themes

Human interactions and social media

I wanted to create paintings that captured moments in life with a strong focus of figure and human interactions and how they are affected by factors in our lives such as **social media** and **overexposure to imagery**. Whether my own experiences or ones I can relate to. These interactions are primarily between groups or individuals but also extend to animals, objects and the spaces we inhabit.

Contemporary life

I wanted the paintings to be relevant and representative of life now for my generation. I also wanted the composition to speak to this too by making the paintings look like photographs you would find on social media or on your camera roll while maintaining a surreal quality, **representative of the strange world we live in** and how we navigate it.

Overexposure to imagery

In today's day and age we are constantly being exposed to imagery whether it be violent, emotive or banal. This undoubtedly creates an effect on the way we interact in society. Therefore I decided I wanted to also convey a sense of over exposure to imagery, specifically through creating paintings that showed **imagery being created, being consumed and the imagery itself**.

“Social media has really affected the landscape of social interactions in many different ways that are hard to define and hard to understand in terms of their downstream effects,” - Adam Stern, assistant professor of psychiatry Harvard Medical School.



THE TV SHOW 'Who We Are' is a piece of media which felt very in line with the ideas I aimed to convey around my generation and how we interact with each other, ourselves and our environment.

Gen Z: A generational identity crisis?

Social media particularly damaging to mental health of Gen Zers, says study

Compared with other generations, members of Gen Z spend more time passively consuming social media

The Impact of social media on modern relationships

by: Brody Wooddell
Posted: May 30, 2023 / 09:22 AM EDT
Updated: May 30, 2023 / 09:22 AM EDT



First works

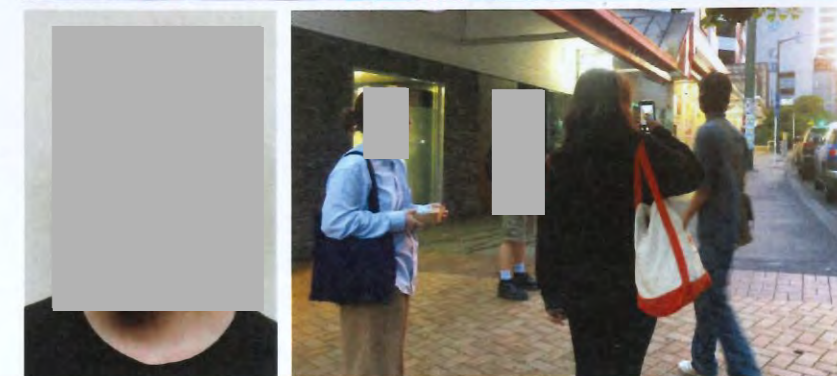
For these initial works I used mainly photos that I had taken. Moments with friends that portrayed the ideas I had started to develop. They felt very intuitive. These works also provided a jumping spot for more conceptual works later on. For example the two children watching television with the silhouette is the beginning of a more developed concept that I carried throughout my portfolio.

Kaye Donachie is a British contemporary painter. She utilises figure in a way that I really love and wanted to emulate in my own work. Her figures are often in a very banal, every day context, yet her use of colour and lighting provides depth and uncertainty to her paintings. I was very inspired by her painting style for these first works.



For my next two works I aimed to combine the photographic and everyday quality of my first works with my themes relating to social media and overexposure to imagery and the effects these have on the way my generation interact with each other. I utilised silhouettes as a way to show that we are constantly looking at ourselves through the eyes of others and vice versa due to social media. I also blocked out the features of figures as a way to show a loss of identity that can come as a result of the way we live. These works also develop my colours and painting style which I carried throughout my portfolio.

I combined two images to create the second painting. I used a portrait which I found that reflected the emotions I aimed to portray and then used figures from a photo I took, and had used previously drawn, to create the silhouettes in the background. Although this second painting is quite dim and dull in terms of colour palette, I still managed to utilise layering and transparency to bring in the surreal bright colour scheme of my



Clarifying my ideas on Panel 1

For the final two paintings on panel 1 I wanted to clarify the ideas I had started to play around with on the beginning of panel 1. This provided a perfect place to jump off for the next two panels and allowed for my ideas to become even more developed later on.

I used reference photos from my life and manipulated them slightly to add depth and tie in with my theme. For example I added the laptop which the two figures are looking down to in the second painting. I also stylised these figures through my use of proportions and colour.

I am really happy with how these works turned out in particular in terms of the colour and brush marks. I tried to push myself out of my comfort zone with the bright colours and intentionally limited myself on the finer details as a way to create a distinct style that I carried through my whole portfolio and further developed.

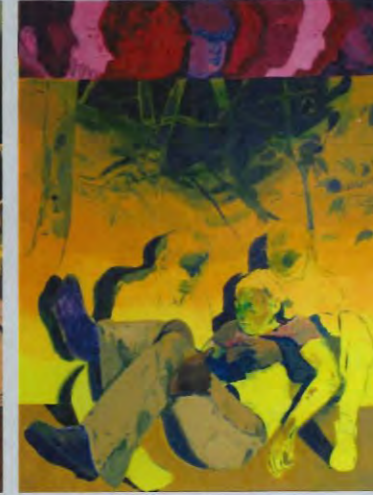
'Anthony Cudahy is an American painter. Cudahy's approach is both figurative and abstract and takes inspiration from a breadth of source material ranging from personal photographs, movie stills, queer archival images and ephemera, and art history. In allegories of history's forgotten, he shows how active the past is in shaping the future.'

I was drawn to Cudahy's use of colour and figure in everyday yet spellbinding contexts. I also find a lot of similarities between mine and his approach to imagery and his broader themes definitely resonated with me while influencing my ideas.



'Doron Langberg is an American painter. Langberg paints in the style of genre painting and portraiture and addresses issues of gender and sexuality by making love and desire a shared experience through the surface and subjects of his paintings.'

I was mainly interested in Langberg's painting style, however his themes of relationship and intimacy are something that I explore throughout my board, just in my own way



Introduction of key elements

The Grid

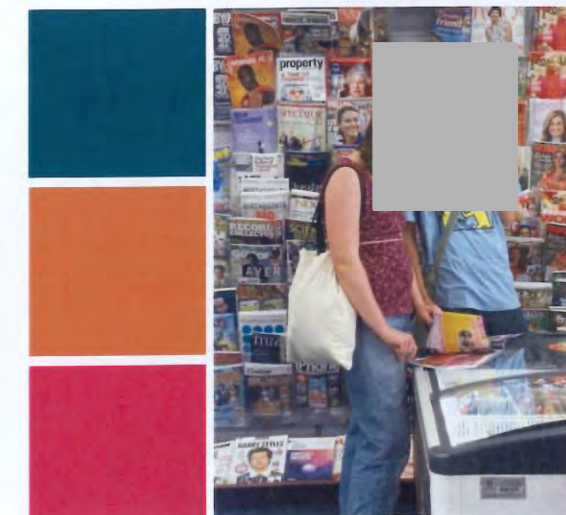
The gridded element of the first painting was used as a way to convey my ideas surrounding overexposure to imagery and social media. A lot of the time we are exposed to imagery in a similar grid, be it instagram, pinterest or your camera roll. We get lost in these grids and enter a state of mindlessness. This is shown through the vacant look of the figure. I continued this grid throughout my portfolio.

Silhouettes

I also introduced silhouettes as a way to convey how it feels to perceive yourself through the eyes of others which is a feeling often felt on social media

Interior Space

In the background of my second painting I utilised an interior environment. This was the beginning of my exploration around the way we interact with our environments and is developed further later on



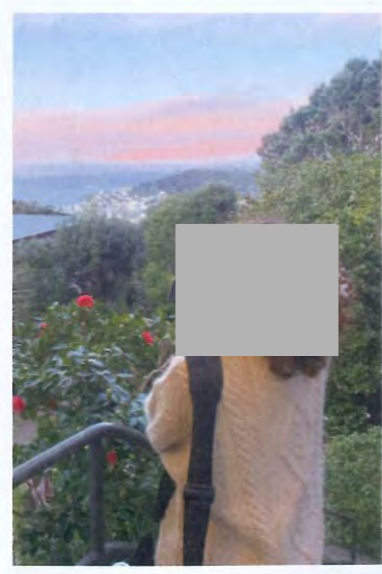
Developing new ideas

With my new artist models in mind, Anthony Cudahy and Doron Langberg, I decided to create a series of works that fully reflected the influence they had on my own practice. I focussed these works on a central theme of interconnectedness, particularly within friendship but also through technology, hence the blue glow portrait. I used photos I had taken of my friends as the reference to fully encapsulate the idea behind these works. I wanted each of these paintings to have a glow-like quality to them which I think I achieved through my use of underpainting and layering.



Symbolism behind the horse

This is the first painting where I introduce an animal into the composition, however animals, especially horses, become a recurring element in the rest of my portfolio. I used the horse in this painting to show the randomness of contemporary life and how things often don't make sense. Its presence doesn't make sense here, yet none of the figures are looking at it, as if to say that they are used to life not making sense. It is also there to show the distraction my generation has from reality through social media and technology

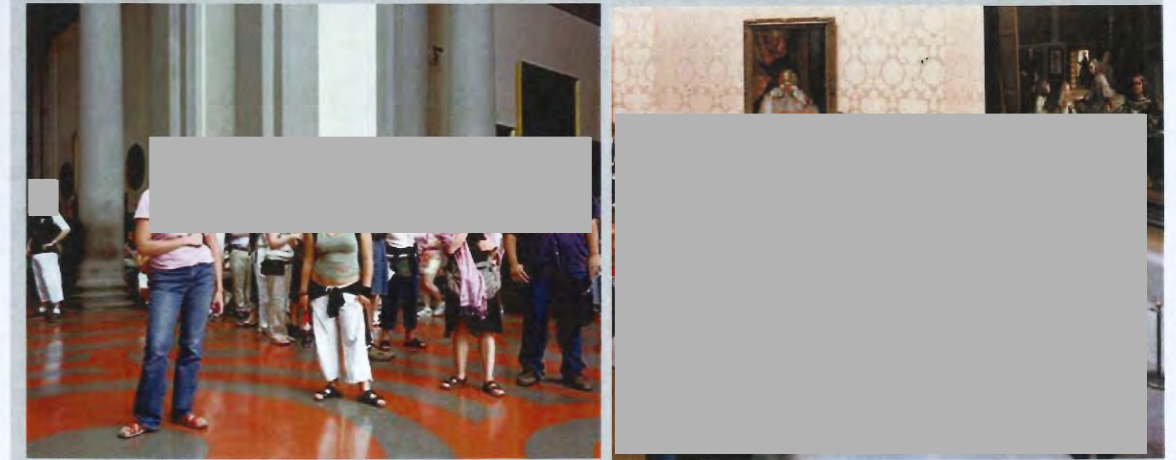


This series also explores my generation's constant need to document our experiences and aims to ask why we need to document the moments in our lives we value the most. And how far is too far.



Amy Dury is a UK-based oil painter who creates evocative and nostalgic works of art. Combining elements of realism with occasional abstract and gestural brushwork, Amy's figurative paintings have a distinct atmosphere to them.'

I was drawn to Amy Dury's distinct painting style and her skill when it comes to light and shadows on figures. She also explores similar themes of relationships and human connection.



Thomas Struth's Museum Photographs series influenced the subject matter of my paintings for the two middle paintings on panel 2. The composition and mundanity of these photographs reflected the ideas I wanted to convey around how our generation interacts with each other and also with space. I was particularly drawn to the top left photo of two girls taking a photo on their phone as I see a lot of my own surroundings in it. I decided to use these figures in my painting

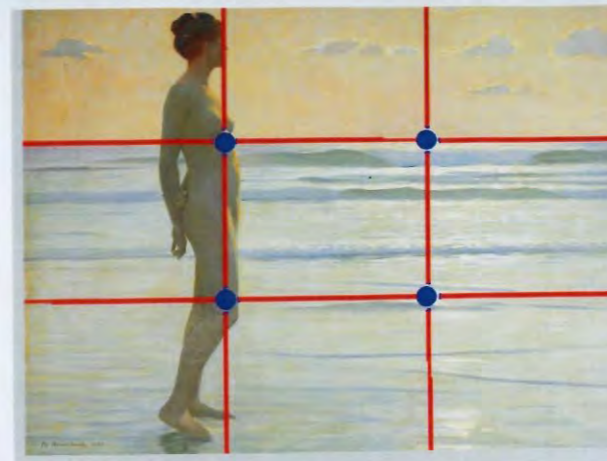
Bringing it all together

For my final painting on panel 2 I wanted to bring together all the ideas I had introduced in my first two panels and create one cohesive work that further propelled my theme. I decided to play around with both an outdoor and indoor composition which is something I had not yet done. This allowed me to create an interesting composition using the rule of thirds. The composition of this painting is definitely a step up from my previous paintings due to the dimensions of the piece and as it includes more figures in varying positions.

For a more developed and considered work such as this one I usually do a lot of planning, both visual and written so as to outline exactly what I want it to include.



This is a sketch/thumbnailed painting I did to plan out the composition of the painting. Although a lot did change, the main composition and colour remained pretty similar. I like to leave some aspects not planned as this adds to the enjoyment of the painting process



The rule of thirds is a guideline for both artists and photographers. It says that if you divide your composition into thirds, either vertically or horizontally, and then place focal areas of your scene at the meeting points of them, this will result in a more pleasing arrangement.

Bringing back the horse

All the figures in this painting are distracted from the horse, except for one. This is similar to one of my previous paintings and is to symbolise how distracted we are from the real world due to social media and technology. However, this painting also provides new depth to the metaphor of the horse as it shows how we are distracted from the natural world. The horse also represents our natural environment, and how we need to become more in touch with it



Inspirational paintings



Doron Langberg *Louis, Tristan, and Sarah* 2017



Bringing back old ideas

Up until this point I had mainly been exploring new styles with each series I created. Although these stylistic changes were subtle, I knew that for the rest of my board I should try to combine all the stylistic knowledge I had experimented with into a more clear and concise all encompassing style. I took inspiration from all my artist models up to this point for different elements of the piece. I used Cudahy and Langberg as inspiration for the interior exterior composition and for the left hand figures. I used Dury for the right hand figure and Donachie for the luminescent quality. I also combined many of my own stylistic ideas. For example I brought back the gridded background and the transparent clothing of my earlier works.



Going somewhere new

Even brighter colours

I have kept to a very bright and saturated colour scheme throughout my entire portfolio. However for these works I aimed to bring the colours to an even brighter level with some shades almost looking neon. The intention behind this is to create an almost visceral and attention grabbing quality to the paintings, which reflects the nature of social media posts and how our feelings are constantly amped up to the maximum

Practicing technical restraint

These two paintings, particularly the second are more paired back and capture more of the essence rather than detail of my subject matter. This was a very intentional choice as I was very inspired by the works of Amy Dury and Kate Gottgens, who very effectively capture light and dark through few brushstrokes. I also played more with monochromatic blocking of figures while keeping the overall painting very colourful.



Close ups of Amy Dury's paintings

Kate Gottgens' artistic practice exercises the malaise that stems from the superficiality of suburban life, understanding entropy and collapse' to be central to the contemporary experience.' - Huxley Parlour

I was drawn primarily to Gottgens' style of painting where she doesn't show too much detail in figures. However I also found myself resonating with her choice of subject matter and composition. She deals with many similar themes around contemporary life and how the way we live affects us. For these two paintings I added her influence to my evolving style, along with all other artist models



Final idea of...
love and...
- Rabbit... to force.

The plan for this painting was originally very different, however the original idea carried on to the next painting.

Both of these paintings are very heavy on relationship. I decided to make both paintings include two figures as a way to make the viewer question the nature of the relationship at hand.

In this painting I used in another animal to play into the idea that we are out of touch with the natural world. I used a photo of my friend at a party for the left hand figure. Parties are a big part of my age groups social life and in turn are big inspirations for my paintings as they are full of interactions, both positive and negative. I purposefully cropped this painting so that the majority of both the figure's heads were cut off further creating questions around the nature of these two characters and the situation they are in.



For this painting I aimed to depict the complex nature of relationships in my age group. My goal for this painting is for the viewer to ask questions about the nature of the relationship depicted here. For example, despite their obvious intimacy, they seem disconnected. Are they posing for a photo? Are they hiding their true feelings?

I further created disconnect and intrigue between the figures by boxing in the face of the right figure to convey a sense that they are not present, perhaps they are online or not real.

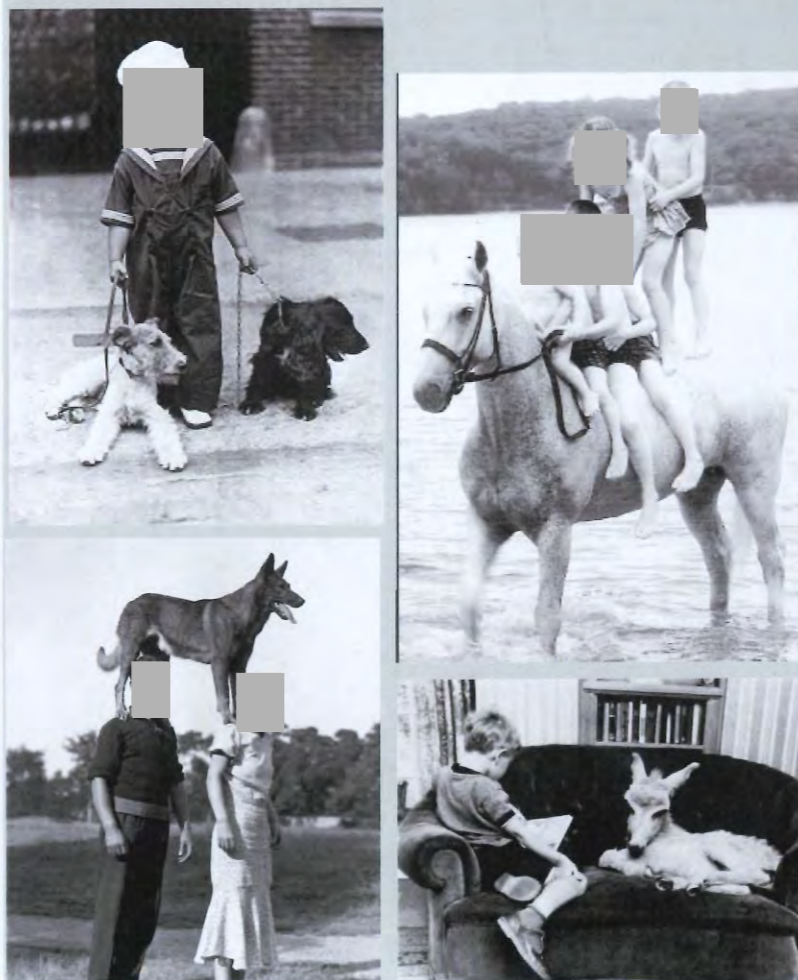


The Last Push

For these final two paintings I aimed to successfully convey my final thoughts on the themes and ideas I had been playing around with my entire folio while offering something new. Technically and thematically I think these are my two strongest works. For my penultimate work I decided to create an almost dream like atmosphere. I went heavy on the surreal aspects I had toyed around with previously. To enhance the dream like quality of this painting I made the bottom figure to appear as if he is taking a nap and made the two background figures appear almost ghost like. The painting style I employed on them is almost photographic, only capturing the most crucial shadows and highlights. The use of animal becomes even more absurd with this confusing placement. I am also very proud of the way I painted the sofa and clothing, almost as though fading into the background, further developing my ideas of identity loss due to an overexposure to imagery and social media.



While looking for inspiration I found a lot of **archival photos of people and animals** in odd contexts. The domestic yet surreal quality of these photos really intrigued me and I knew I had to use one as reference for my next painting. They tie together many of my ideas, particularly the randomness of contemporary life and our disconnect from the natural world.



A Happy Ending

While my paintings up until this point haven't been obviously sad, I knew that I wanted to create something hopeful and uplifting for my final painting. Living as a teenager in this day and age can be very overbearing. Therefore, while dealing with these themes, I knew that I had to provide something that didn't feel like a dead end, but instead a hopeful new beginning to end the portfolio. This painting is almost as if all the characters I had created throughout my previous work have come together and found each other, even the horse. I wanted to show that we are not alone. The overarching message of this painting is positive, however I still carried in more somber elements of past works. For example the right hand figure still feels disconnected, further displayed through his blocking in with the use of a monochromatic rectangle, and the use of interior space creates a disconcerting and surreal feeling.



Beyond the board

Personal painting practice

I have an extensive personal practice and am constantly working on artworks whether it be in school or out of school. This allows for the works I create at home and at school to bounce off each other, forming one cohesive body of work. I had the same thematic approach to my personal works as I did to my school works and aim to continue exploring these ideas and see them evolve naturally.

The works below are a few of the paintings I have created in my own time outside of school. They are a combination of generative sketches, portrait studies and fully developed paintings. These works not only helped me in my progression in terms of my portfolio but also allowed me to try things which did not fit into my portfolio/were different from the rest of my work.



Larger scale works

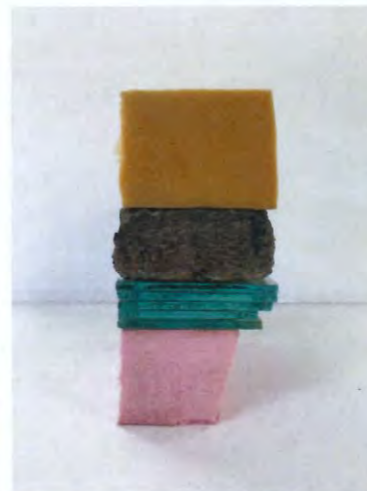
One of the biggest limitations I felt during the creation of my painting portfolio and as a student in general is the scale at which I was working in. While smaller scale paintings are just as worthy, I would love to experiment on a larger scale by creating large scale series of works, especially since many of my artist models do the same.

Exploration of different mediums

While I am able to manipulate acrylic paints in a way which works for my style of painting, I would love to create more paintings that utilise different mediums such as oil paints, ink, wax etc. Many of my artist models use oil paints which leads me to think they would work well with my style.

Sculptural/installation based work

This year I also explored sculpture and installation art through my completion of a sculpture portfolio. Although my themes are not directly correlated with one another, I would like to be able to work across multiple disciplines and bring ideas from painting into sculpture and vice versa. Below are some of my sculptures from this year



Anthony Cudahy's studio with large scale works in progress

Francis Upritchard is a New Zealand sculptor who 'creates a place where histories and archives can be viewed anew through playfully exploring aspects of partiality, misreading and uncanny coincidences.' She is most known for her bright figure sculptures.

I can see a lot of my paintings in her figure sculptures particularly the domestic yet surreal aspects she employs and I look to her as a way to extend my painting practice into sculpture. Although her work is different from my own sculptural work I think that she provides an idea of where I could go as an artist to expand both my practices into one overarching practice.

