

# Proposal

My folio boards embody the exploration of **the way body image has affected me psychologically**, alongside a **comparison between fertility and femininity**. My objective for a painting investigation is creating the visualisation of obsession and **paranoia** of exposing a nude body, which I suffered from in my early teenage years. I have decided on this particular theme because body image dissatisfaction and self loathing are things every woman experiences at some point in their lives, yet at the same time it is deemed highly **personal and secretive**. I struggled to grasp a clear idea of my investigation at the beginning due to body image being a broad and common theme, however collecting images of myself and developing a genuine perception of own body and anxiety through research has helped me navigate this with more authenticity.

## Stylistic approach

Rendering how human skeletal structure and muscles show through layers of fat and flesh, contouring **the way my flesh is pushed and stretched as I lie and sit**, recreating the texture of stretch marks and cellulite...

From **transparent and delicate layers of ink and gouache to thick and monumental finishes of oils and acrylics**, I could teach myself how different media and technical conventions allowed varying depictions of skin and details. I am excited to further experiment with non-artistic media, such as fruit and skincare products.

Working in **realism** has helped me focus on the **form and texture of the body itself**. Having to constantly and thoroughly observe and paint my body and face also forced me to appreciate and study them as artistic subject matter, which stripped the societal beauty standards and judgements from my body. **Incorporating abstraction and awkward perspectives into highly refined forms enabled me to introduce unsettling and uneasy sensations as the work progressed**. I was continuously inspired by Denis Sarazhin and Cristina Troufa's anatomy and contours, Salvador Dali's surrealism and Enrico Robusti's distortion and perspectives.

## Body image



Body image (eng. 'bɒdi ɪmɪdʒ) – a person's thoughts, feelings and **perception** of the **aesthetics** or **sexual attractiveness** of their **own body**

## What is body image?

Once you start to think that you have a flaw, your mind runs with the distraction and turns it into more than it is.

**The extreme form of poor body image is body dysmorphic disorder**, where dissatisfaction over a slight or undetectable defect in appearance becomes a severe obsession. A distorted perspective can be real for people from the pre-teenage years through to adulthood, with more women than men suffering.

## Artificial bodies - beauty that kills

**Historically, female bodies have been modified to meet the naturally unachievable beauty "norms".**

**Footbinding** is a Chinese cultural practice which had existed from the 10th century until the mid 20th century. Girls, 4-6 year old girls tightly bandaged their feet to alter their shape and restrain growth to produce small and desirable "golden lotus" foot. **Blisters, blood and pus accumulated under the bandages which often caused paralysis, gangrene, ulceration and rarely, death.**

**Corsets** were sporadically used in Western countries to structure women's torsos. Although in the Middle Ages corsets were worn by both sexes, male corsetry became a taboo towards the mid 19th century following reaffirmation of masculinity. From then corsets were mainly worn by women, and **as fashion changed, the initial V-shape became a more hourglass shape**. To accentuate the curves, aristocratic women were often laced so tightly that over long term it caused **rib cage deformity and pressed organs, causing poor breathing and/or digestion that led to faintness.**

These practices had severe detrimental effects on women's health which in turn **restricted their mobility, strength and therefore freedom**. For example, footbinding ensured a girl's marriagability and willingness to obey, kept women inside of house and therefore subordinate to their husbands.

Unfortunately, the **social construction** made women willingly participate in such tortuous experiences. Poor families could not afford bandages or expensive whalebone corsets and lack of labour associated with binded feet and waists, thus dainty foot and slender waists became symbols of prestige.

Another popular belief was that footbinding and corsetry could **prepare women for menstruation and fertilisation**, by increasing blood flow in the hips, legs and vaginal areas. Most beauty standards are product of a male dominated society, valuing **our desirability and reproductivity rather than own safety and preferences**. As a young woman, this trend is very horrifying and concerning.

## 탈코르셋: Veering away from society's beauty

Beauty standards have been an integral factor in development of fashion and pop culture throughout human history. Although its toxicity is well known, it is impossible to ignore the impact it is causing in our lives. However, there still are people who try to actively react against the toxic norm.

**The Corset-free movement** began in 2015 in a Korean online feminist community whose ultimate aim is to eradicate strictly standardised definition of female beauty and appreciate women in all natural forms. It involves rejection of heavy makeup, shaving, high heels, body-shaping undergarments and pro-anorexia imagery that the modern Korean society promotes and imposes exclusively on women.



When I first got to know about the corset-free movement in 2018, I was scared. It is no wonder a docile 12 year old girl raised in beloved South Korea, soaked and immersed in **K-pop skinny culture, innate misogyny, fatphobia, and male gaze**, was overwhelmed by the society's hostility onto a few women who dared to have an opinion on their own body. My country is infamous for early education, and it applies for beauty standards, too. In primary school, I was occasionally picked on for being chubbier and taller than my peers. **I was not allowed to be fat and "girly" at the same time. I became a target of mockery as soon as boys spotted me in a dress so I increasingly wore pants, larger and darker clothes.** I cut off my diet, which supposedly stopped my growth, but I would be happy if it helped me lose weight. And I was only eleven!

In 2020 when I finally realised that femininity is a choice, I cut my hair short and put on minimal makeup because I felt comfortable that way. **As soon as I tried to reject femininity by my own will, deacons in my Korean church would tell me how unwomanly I look and their wives were weirdly more welcoming on the days I wore heavier makeup.** Why would adults be so paranoid over a teenage girl making decisions about how her own body looks? Is it possible for us to construct a genuine conception of a beautiful body in this society? Are young girls deceiving themselves while believing in female objectification which the society implants into our young minds?

## Ode to Whom?

In this fast moving society beauty standards no longer need to explain themselves; girls merely as old as my intermediate school aged sister are easily exposed to a minute long videos on Tiktok and Instagram reels about unpractical glow-up tips and beauty trends from so-called "gurus" and put them in practice without question.

I do not believe my paintings could scare younger adolescents into comprehending a purely social construct of beauty, and I do not want them to. One can only completely embrace their body when the journey is self driven, not forced by some scary paintings by an arrogant 17 year old high schooler who desires to change the way world sees women. However I hope my paintings could be visually daring and confrontational enough to render the adults frightened. I aimed to make them feel a similar shock they had when they saw my naked face when they encounter my pulsing and rotting, bare body. So I was pleased when the non-artist adults commented on my works as "terrifying" because it meant I was on the right track. In a way these folio boards are my way of saying **"Look what you made me do"**.

# Fruitful, Beautiful, and Fertile

The fruit in art portray the transient nature related to our existence. Fresh fruit represents fertility, vitality, youth, and abundance. When the fruit is stale and decaying, however, it characterises the inevitable mortality of our presence in the world. I am going to investigate this idea further by studying the relationship between fruit and women in the **15th century Renaissance art and Korean media from the 2000s.**

I will be focusing on fruit's (mainly pomegranate's), association with beauty and fertility and zoom into the details of the pulp, examine their 'grossness' and compare their textures and colours with those of garments and human skin throughout the year.

## Symbolism of fruit in the Western Canon

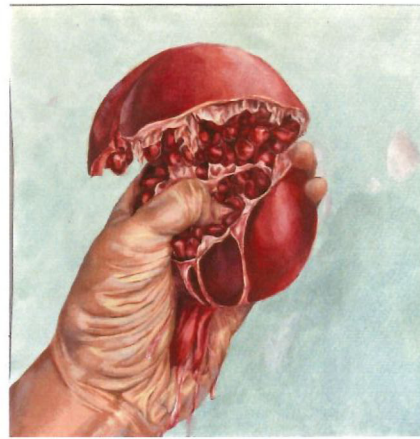
**The Pomegranate** has a strong presence in Western art history. Most prominently, it has been entitled a '**forbidden fruit of the dead**', derived from a narrative of Hades, the Greek God of the underworld, using pomegranate seeds to trick Persephone, the Goddess of spring, into returning to the underworld. Pomegranate was sometimes used as inspiration for the **fruit of original sin** within depictions of the garden of Eden. However it also served a role of **fertility symbol**, especially during the Middle Ages, for its rich red, jeweled seeds.

Later in the Renaissance which stimulated the rebirth of Classicism and its fusion with Christianity, the ruby red fruit was rebranded as a symbol of **life and birth** due to its association with Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love and sex. Hence the Catholic prayer "blessed is the fruit of [Mary's] womb, Jesus."

**Citrus** fruit was also considered a predominant symbol of female fertility, because their inside resembled **mammary glands** found in breasts when cut in half. The golden **orange** fruits also symbolised the **Medici** family who patronised Botticelli. Depicting it alongside the pagan characters of beauty, love and eroticism with swollen abdomen, sinuous curves and entangling revealing forms indicate the theme of **sex, and conjugal intimacy**. This could be interpreted as a reminder for newly married members of this family who received the painting as a nuptial dowry to **serve the family via reproduction**.



Botticelli, Primavera



Botticelli, Madonna of the Pomegranate



School of Botticelli, Madonna and Child  
"Ancient Hebrews equated the number of pomegranate seeds to the number of virtues one possessed, so Mary, the perfect human devoid of sin, appears one with the Holy Spirit and attains the same coloring as the pomegranate."

## How were fruits used in Korean ads?

### "Beauties love pomegranate"

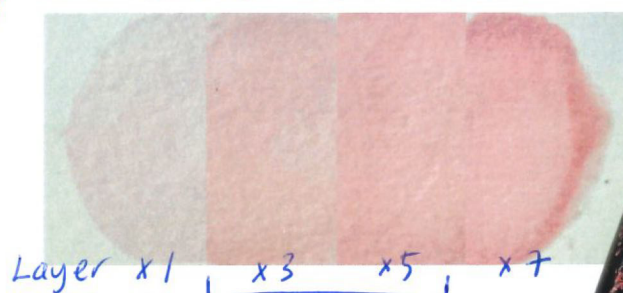


When the ads for "**Beauties love Pomegranate**" aired in the early 2006, the concept of 'well-being drinks' were trending throughout the country. By casting Lee Joon-gi, who was labeled as "**a boy who's prettier than women**", the ads received unexpected attention right from the beginning and the drink surpassed 10 billion KRW in sales within the 35 days of its release.

Ads targeting women effectively reflects an ideal image of a woman of that era. The 2000s Korean media emphasised women's innocence and daintiness and these values are well portrayed in the screenshots containing young celebrities with flawless skin in weightless gowns, associated with fresh and ripe fruits. Catchy slogans which last for years are also important, however the largest defining factor of a successful advertisement is pinpointing the target audience's needs. The astronomical sales numbers show us that most women's needs in the 2000s when I was born was harmless and organic beauty.

## Experiment:

### Painting with pomegranate juice



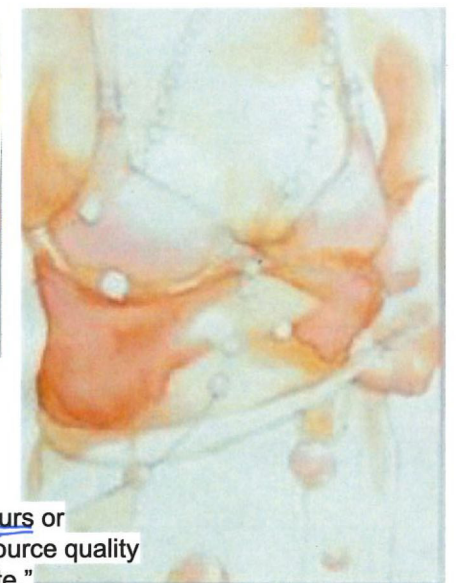
Layer x1    x3    x5    x7

like the subtle pink hues

After approx 1 hour the juice was completely dry & did not leave a sticky finish



Fat, Total 0g  
Saturated 0g



"No artificial colours, artificial flavours or preservatives, Real simple - we source quality fruit to deliver the Real McCoy taste."

### "Don't eat it, give it away to your skin"



As the straightforward name suggests, "Skinfood" is a cosmetic company whose major products are made using extracts of fruits. Skinfood too effectively promotes this brand identity by exploiting the 'well-being trend'. The most well known characteristic of the Skinfood ads is the scene towards the end where the product is scooped out with a spoon like pudding. The slogan is simultaneously narrated, which conveys to consumers that **although the product is safe enough to be eaten, it is more valuable when applied for a more beautiful skin than to digest**.

# The Bathroom

## Bathroom psychology - a private space for personal experience

Krishna Kumar Nair, a research scientist and a counsellor, concluded that teenagers may spend extensive time in bathroom as it is the only place where every individual can be the original personality. According to psychology, this is the place you are least worried about what others will think about you - you will comfortably undress or mock in front of mirror where the small space between four walls shuts down external judgements and allows your thought to stay close. Proving to this, my anxiety springing from negative body image was fully and solely exposed when I was alone showering in a confined booth. I would spend a while observing and pinching my fat under dripping water, then would stand in front of a large mirror picking up every part of my face and body which I was not satisfied with, without worrying about what others might think when they saw me like this. Thus I will be using **bathroom as a main spacial device** to reinforce a personal experience and exploit the **repetition in tiles** and **reflection** on mirrors to further induce a disturbing and confrontational effect.

## Public bathrooms

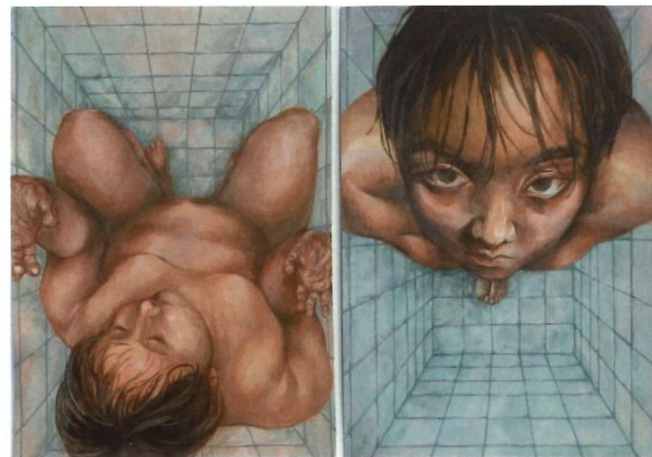
As a year 9 student who had freshly moved to New Zealand and struggled with language barrier, I often found class times very challenging as I did not speak fluent English and was not confident enough to make friends in my core group. **Whenever I felt too overwhelmed or pressured, I would raise my hand and lie to the teacher that I needed to use the toilet.** Then I would just sit silently inside the cubicle and enjoy my freedom away from the bombardment of foreign language until I felt relaxed to go back into the classroom. Back then, that small box built with four white walls which shut away the outside disturbances was my **panic room** in new school where I felt scared and alienated almost all the time. **I still walk into the bathroom and sit on the toilet for a few minutes when I get tired of painting for 6 hours straight at home,** because inside there I do not have to look at the ugly works in process and stress myself by picking up on every details I will have to refine by the end of the night. I can recollect myself and gain resilience to continue artmaking after spending a few minutes for myself in my bathroom.

Nevertheless, my experiences with school bathrooms are not all soothing or nostalgia-worthy. As years passed, my English improved and I made new friends that I no longer sporadically flee to the bathroom during class to deal with crippling self consciousness. **Lately, I cannot help feeling rather unpleasant than comforted when I use bathrooms in school: the artificial smell of strawberry flavoured vape juice,** people using bathroom as a gathering place, and why in the world can't a person just flush down the toilet after using it? Using school toilets are not at all private nor comfortable nowadays. This has inspired me to depict the **transition of bathroom from a calm and familiar place into somewhere eerie and agitating** over each subsequent painting.

## Claustrophobia

An intense fear of confined or enclosed spaces. The difference between a fear and a phobia is that a phobia is an intense and irrational fear toward particular things or situations.

Symptoms of claustrophobia are **similar to symptoms of anxiety and a panic attack**, such as sweating, shaking, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, trouble breathing, crying, intense need to leave the situation, etc.



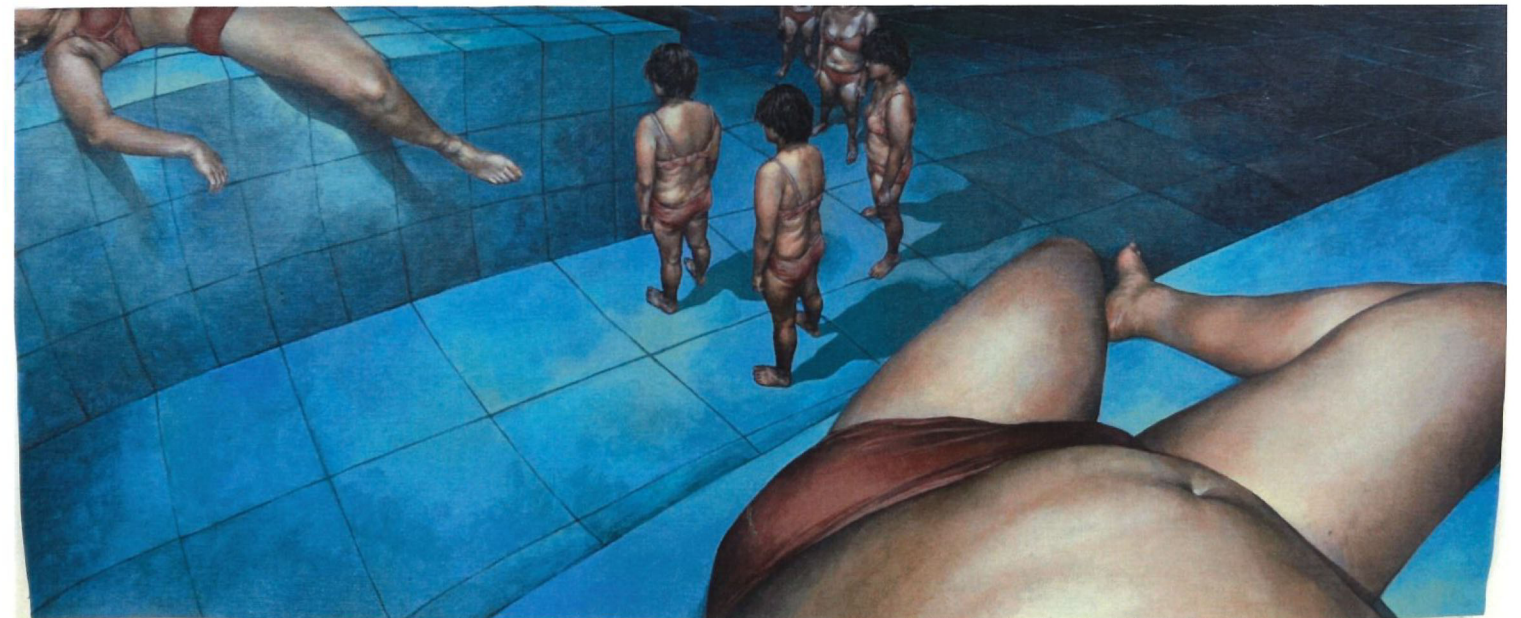
I thought the repetition of tiles would form a grid could help building up tension and convey the obsession of trying to fit into a standardised value. **The linear perspective also intensifies the sensation of falling in, which provides an increasingly compelling visual effect.**



## Liminal space

Derived from the Latin word "limen" which means "threshold," liminal space is a location which is a **transition between two other locations, or states of being.** In architecture, the concept of a liminal space encompasses physical spaces that, due to their function, are transitional in nature - hallways, waiting rooms, and parking lots are the archetypal examples of such places.

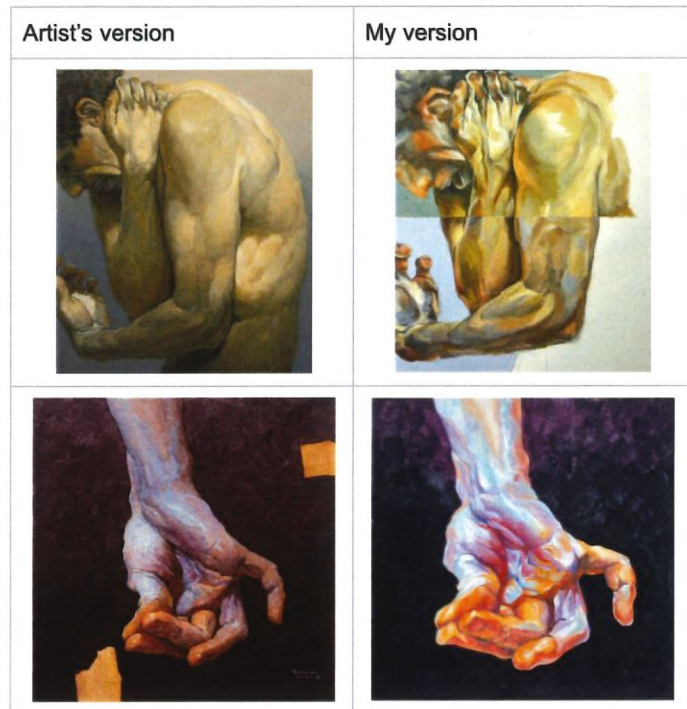
Liminal space aesthetics relate to the unique feelings of **eeriness, nostalgia, and reverence** people report when presented with such **places outside of their designed context;** most notably, their function as intermediary points between origin and destination. **The absence of external stimuli such as conversations, interactions and people's movement creates an otherworldly and forlorn atmosphere.**



**Incorporating the liminal space into my bathroom backgrounds by enlarging tiles and removing walls and doors allowed me to cohesively extend the idea of a transitional state my body experiences as it slowly merges with a pomegranate and rots.** The creepy otherworldliness of this spatial concept highlights **the feeling of apprehension** the repeated fleshy bodies emanate.

# Agonising Bodies

## Denis Sarazhin



Sarazhin is a Ukrainian painter who has held several solo and group exhibitions and fair booths across Europe and the US after training in the classic Soviet Realism style at the Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts. As an Eastern European, he had and still attends ballet, theatrical performances and opera, and gets inspiration for work from modern dance because they provide opportunities for him to observe the movement of the body and its structure.

Using oil paints, he combines classic chiaroscuro techniques with a vibrant colour palette to render his life-like and evocative figures. With the mixture of bright cold and warm hues, his agonising figures appear more dramatic, chaotic and somewhat confronting. He conveys movement through bodily suggestion and painterly method, expresses an inner radiance and produces light suffused with emotion.

## Jenny Saville

Saville is a contemporary British painter, known for large-scale paintings of nude women, fleshy and flawed bodies. Frequently obese and distorted by angle, Saville's bodies confront traditional ideas of femininity and beauty.

"In her depictions of the human form, Jenny Saville transcends the boundaries of both classical figuration and modern abstraction. Oil paint, applied in heavy layers, becomes as **visceral as flesh itself**, each painted mark maintaining a supple, mobile life of its own. As Saville pushes, smears, and scrapes the pigment over her large-scale canvases, the distinctions between living, breathing bodies and their painted representations begin to collapse."

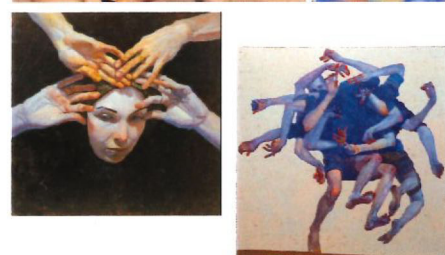
From an interview with The Guardian 2016

Her studies focused her interest in "imperfections" of flesh, with all of its societal implications and taboos. Saville had been captivated with these details since she was a child; she has spoken of seeing the work of Titian and Tintoretto on trips with her uncle. Saville was able to observe a New York City plastic surgeon at work. Studying the reconstruction of human flesh was formative in her perception of the body—its resilience, as well as its fragility. Her time with the surgeon fueled her examination into the seemingly **infinite ways that flesh is transformed and disfigured**. She explored medical pathologies; viewed cadavers in the morgue; examined animals and meat; studied classical and Renaissance sculpture; and observed intertwined couples, mothers with their children, individuals whose bodies challenge gender dichotomies, and more.

stylistic experiments



experimenting with glass medium



inspos

"On colour, I seek to avoid repeating how it is in nature, using knowledge of colour and how it should be, so I transform this in the manner I need to in order to achieve the compositional goals I seek. This opportunity also gives me an additional visual language in addition to the overall compositional language. ...I started exaggerating or changing colour depending on what mood I needed to achieve in the finished pieces."

"closed contact" series, collaborated w/ Glen Luchford



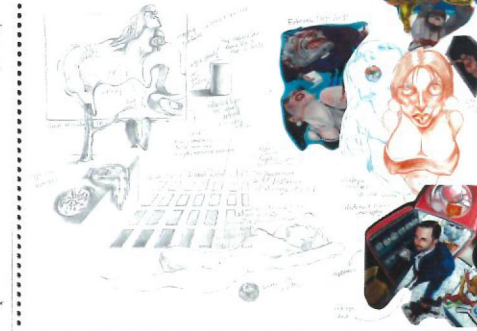
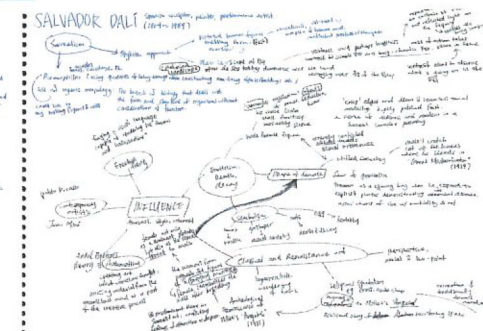
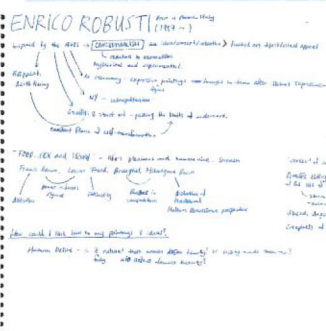
revealing grotesque variations of colour & beauty

"I wouldn't make this work if I was a guy."



People have presumed her work is anti-plastic surgery, or a comment about the **tyranny of thin**, but she says she isn't interested in passing judgment. It was the idea of **how bodies can be changed, and the stories of why they had changed**, that fascinated her. But her work is undoubtedly "female" - her women do not look like the idealised women, painted by men, who have dominated the nude for almost all of art history.

## Salvador Dali & Enrico Robusti



## Cristina Troufa



Style elements I could use

"The self-representation, as a visible element in my work is the result of a self-reflection, focusing on personal development." Troufa

- Bold areas of shadows over body
- Realistic proportions and contours for an intensified contrast when combined with otherworldly space
- Extreme high & low angles
- Multiple figures of myself

## Final paintings

### THE BED OF PROCRUSTES

Procrustes is a figure from Greek mythology who laid his victims on an iron bed and forced them to fit into it. If they didn't, he would either cut off the parts that hung off the ends or stretch those who were too short.

The bed of Procrustes has become a symbol for the act of forcing someone to fit into an unnatural shape.

I've decided to introduce this concept here to represent the extraordinary social scheme in which young girls are told to pursue and embody unrealistic body goals. I used to be affected by this idea a lot and wanted to literally cut off fats from my body.



Dali



extreme high angle  
Enrico Robusti & Cristina Troufa

curves centralising attention



Jenny Saville



Cristina Troufa

As the folio progressed, I no longer wanted to paint overflowing and dripping fat to talk about body image. In fact, that was a way I used to see myself. However I came to this conclusion not only because it is a cliché, but also because we are more familiar with those images from 'misogynism humour' cartoons. From American Anti-suffragettes to Anti-feminists in Korean online incel communities, man has always ridiculed woman for trying to own her body and rights for over a century. **I tried not to tag along with a convention established by men and not to turn real existing body types into something monstrous.**



So I sought for a new way to explore body image and a confrontational visual effect. Rebecca Hazard and Angela Faustina gave me an idea to use pomegranate as a new device to induce viscous fleshiness and grossness through its bloody luster and its inner skin's likeness to the texture of fat or human skin.



## Painters of Flesh

### Rebecca Hazard

Rebecca is an Auckland based painter who also works as an art technician at my school. Her hyper realistic works since year 13 closely examines raw meat. I was lucky to attend her artist talk this March that was held in Scott Lawrie Gallery as a part of her solo exhibition "Honey, you're caving in."

**Here are some extracts from her talk:**

"With the show you see that it's titled "Honey, you're caving in." I think it sets up how I want people to psychologically approach the work. ...I wanted people to humanise and empathise the work. ...At the end of the day they are out of my studio and they exist in space for you to interact with and have your own personal relationship with."

"Meat is something that I find so curious, it is in a very borderline position. It is dead, but is hasn't decayed yet. It is a potential state but we still choose to consume it. It is in a very abject position for us that's really throwing you when it's posed, you want it to be away from yourself. Like flies, like menstruation, or sex. **We don't want to discuss that or be reminded of that.** It also shows to us that in terms of power and hierarchy, people [as consumers of meat] don't want to acknowledge the communality of animals that exist within their own structure and unity."



"You're removing that skin layer, you're slightly removing your idea of self. I want you to have a slight death of the ego in experiencing something in that abject borderline position. So within that you are being brought into the state with communality with meat, and I love that it's something that we are usually so horrified of and we treat so harshly."

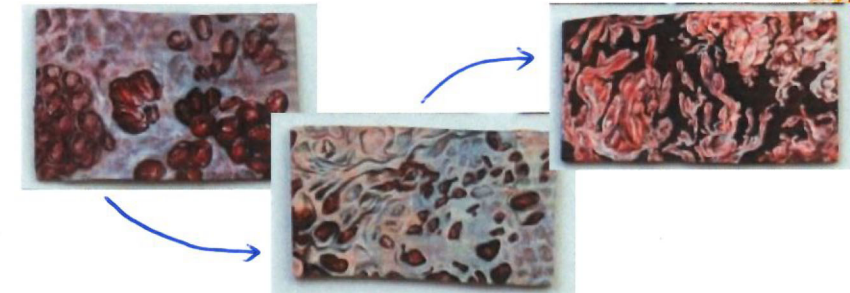
Rebecca said that she was interested in comparing the textures of roughly cut edges of canvas with natural textures of meat. In a way, her canvas itself became a skin for her artworks. I was inspired to compare the highly refined visual of lustrous fruits with a coarse and ragged cardboard base and question the value of something beautifully painted with so much time and affection on a nonproductive material.



### Angela Faustina

Angela Faustina is a USA based realist painter, whose works capture juicy, ripe pulp in brushstrokes through the medium of oil paints. Her magnified imageries focuses on translating vibrancy of life onto the canvas, reflecting on other natural forms and textures.

The succulence and bold intimacy of fruits Faustina paints appealed to me like those of living body cells or viscera. I am going to recreate some of her paintings of pomegranate and fig to reinforce the idea of 'becoming one with the fruit (introduced in my pomegranate juice painting) by depicting a transition of pomegranate seeds into flesh and bodily tissues in my cardboard series.

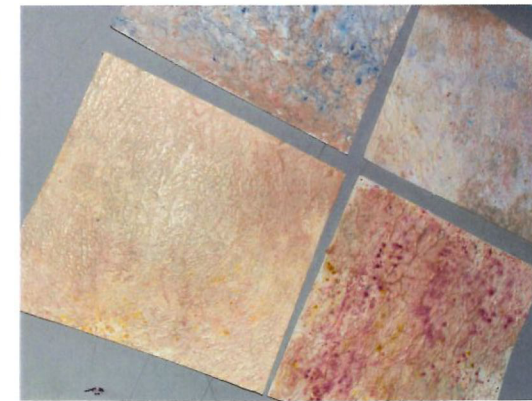


### Experiment: Crackle medium

Both artists work in oil paints, however my main artistic medium is acrylic paints due to my trained skills with it, easier preparation and faster drying time. (my last oil painting study was disastrous!)

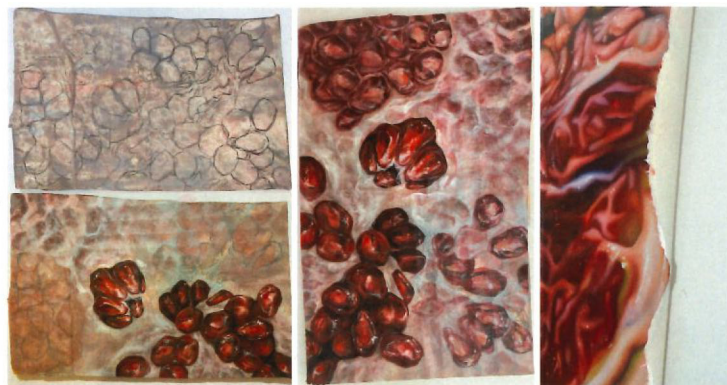
To emulate the shiny finish of oils on Rebecca and Faustina's 'flesh', I experimented with crackle medium which also produced a glossy surface along with interesting cracks that could resemble the texture of stretch marks.

### Preparing a textural base:



Sprinkling dye powder directly on the wet modelling paste created interesting patterns, almost like mold or rash.

I used a palette knife to spread the paste and stamped on it to bring in roughness. It was a completely new stylistic approach compared to the highly refined paintings I usually produce. It was an entertaining experiment to refresh my painting streak.



# A Biological Connection

## Relation between Physical Attractiveness and Reproductive Success in Humans

Animals found in nature display sexual dimorphism, a term which describes physical differences of the two sexes such as male birds having ornaments with no known function that evolved to attract female attention. This allows better species recognition and gives selective advantage to males and females with a trait favoured by members of the opposite sex.

Same in humans living in industrialised settings, according to an evolutionary perspective, physical attractiveness functions as a cue of mate quality and reproductive value. According to a thesis by researchers in Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland), breast size and waist-to-hip ratio function as important features used by human males to assess female attractiveness because these features serve as cues to fecundity. It was documented that women with higher breast-to-underbreast ratio and relatively narrow waists have higher fecundity as assessed by higher daily levels of progesterone and estradiol. Such gains in hormone levels among the preferred mates may lead to a substantial rise in the probability of conception, thus providing a significant fitness benefit.

## Growth and Reproduction - mitosis and meiosis

### Fat cells

Somatic cells, including fat cells, multiply through a process of mitosis - a type of cell division which produces two identical daughter cells with double sets of chromosomes. When the fat cells grow too full, it divides in half and becomes two, and this process repeats.

Post-DNA replication, the chromosomes are separated into chromatids - and are moved to opposite sides where they are then enveloped by different nuclear membranes. They now become nucleus of two different daughter cells respectively.

### Gametes

Sex cells are produced through a process of meiosis cell division. During meiosis, the replicated DNA form homologous pairs and are divided into two separate cell membrane to form two daughter cells with two full chromosome sets. These chromosomes then again separate into half and the daughter cells are split into two new cells respectively, resulting in total of four genetically unique gametes each containing one full chromosome set. In animals, two haploid gametes each from different parents fuse to produce a viable diploid zygote which then develops into an foetus inside its mother's womb.

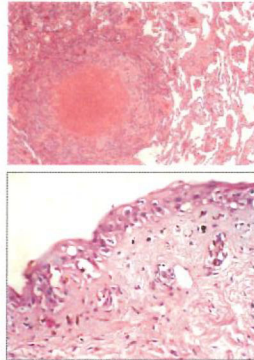
## Fertilisation and embryo development in humans

Following fertilisation - sperm union with the egg -, the single-cell embryo forms which is called a zygote. Over the course of the next seven days, the human embryo undergoes multiple mitosis cell divisions; cells increase in an exponential manner e.g.  $2^n$ . At the end of this transition period, the embryo becomes a mass of very organized cells, called a blastocyst. Once the embryo reaches the blastocyst stage, it begins the process of implantation in the uterus - the first stage at which those cells destined to become the fetus separate from those that will become the placenta.

## Decomposition

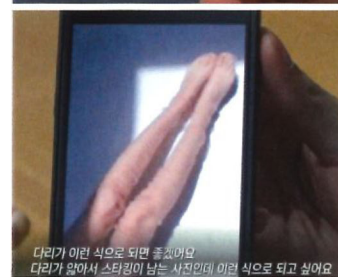
When the heart stops beating and the lungs stop breathing, our body cells no longer receive supplies of blood and oxygen. Cells, without oxygen supply, eventually die and the body loses capacity to control its own enzymes and bacterial activity. This causes the body to decompose.

**Adipocere**, also known as grave wax, is a white waxy crumble that accumulates on the fatty parts of the body e.g. cheeks, breasts, abdomen, buttocks. It is produced by the chemical reaction between fat and hydrogen or water in the presence of bacterial enzymes. Adipocere is resistant to bacteria and can slow further decomposition.

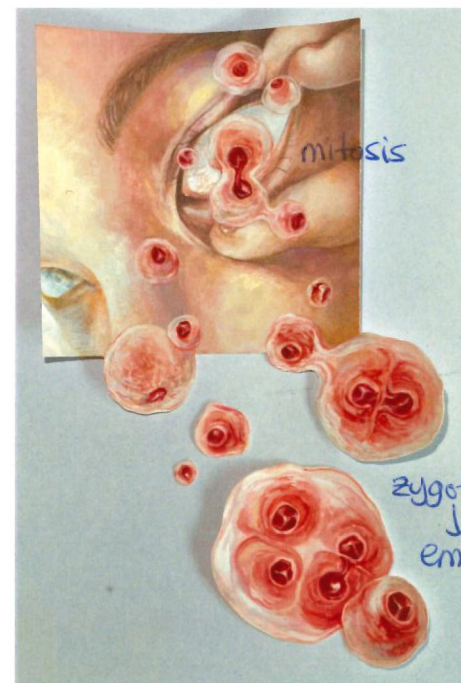


**Necrosis** is the premature death of cells in living tissue. It can occur due to lack of blood flow, caused by bacterial infection clotting small blood vessels. Because the body's immune defenses travel through the bloodstream and it cannot reach to the necrotic area, the infection spreads rapidly and can be difficult to control.

Like necrotic skin infection, detrimental body image and eating disorder cannot be ceased easily once established. In an episode from a Korean investigative journalism show "Unanswered Question" they interviewed pro-ana teenage girls who purchased and consumed illegal anorectic agents to achieve the ideal body that is "skinny to the bones". They have confessed that "I still want to be skinnier" despite suffering absence of menstruation, memory loss and depression.



Even the stockings are loose!



## Experiment: Decay Through Expectations of Femininity Painting on my body



Combining textures of pomegranate + decomposing flesh

## Stylistic artist model: Kim Jakobsson



Albeit fun and interesting, I figured continuing to paint hyper-realistic self portraits on 2D canvas would help me navigate the rest of the folio more cohesively and did not include this work in the final layout.

Understanding my subject matter plays an important role in my practice; I will never start painting something until I have observed, taken several photoshoots and produced multiple sketches of it. Thus I found painting on my own body as an essential step in my artistic study to truly understand the physicality of flesh and paint, prior to creating illusional rotten skin on canvas.

# Red, Blue, Tension and Explosion

I have always been interested in the relationship between the colours blue and red. In last year's painting folio board which explored nostalgia and homesickness as a main theme, I used blue to represent my homeland and the past and pink for my new life in New Zealand and the present.

Whilst my colours from 2021 are in a harmonious pastel range, I wanted to experiment a new palette consisting with much murkier, greenish blue and cooler, fiercer red for a heightened sense of conflict and contrast.



## Science behind red

Red, among all range of colours, attract most attention and are spotted the most easily by our eyes because it indicates **blood**, and blood means **hazard**. Our eyes and brain actually evolved to pay attention to red in order to assist survival!

Psychologically, red increases pulse rates as it prompts the posterior hypothalamus which integrates with the sympathetic nervous system that causes dilation of blood vessels. This reaction is known to raise blood pressure therefore enhance metabolism, increase respiration rate, stimulate sexual drive and appetite.

## Did you know?

**Women see more shades of red than men.** This is because cone cells (key photoreceptor cells responsible for colour vision and sensitivity) lie on the X chromosome, and only women have two X chromosomes. This opens up a chance for women to have two different types of red cone cells, and enabling them to see a wider range of reds.

My biology teacher has added that this is also because historically women were foragers and we had to distinguish between well ripe berries and the unripe or rotten ones in order to stay healthy and survive.

I am curious if men will recognise every variation of red used in my paintings.

I want my red to be seen as a colour of danger, horror and grossness. Initially suppressed by the blue, it slowly **intensifies** and **seethes** up, at last **explodes to invade the eerily tranquil background**. Just the way body image can slowly eat up a person without even noticing before it is too late. In my last painting, stress and tension finally gushes out in the most violent and obnoxious way I can possibly depict. The red will grow and consume the whole space in the end.

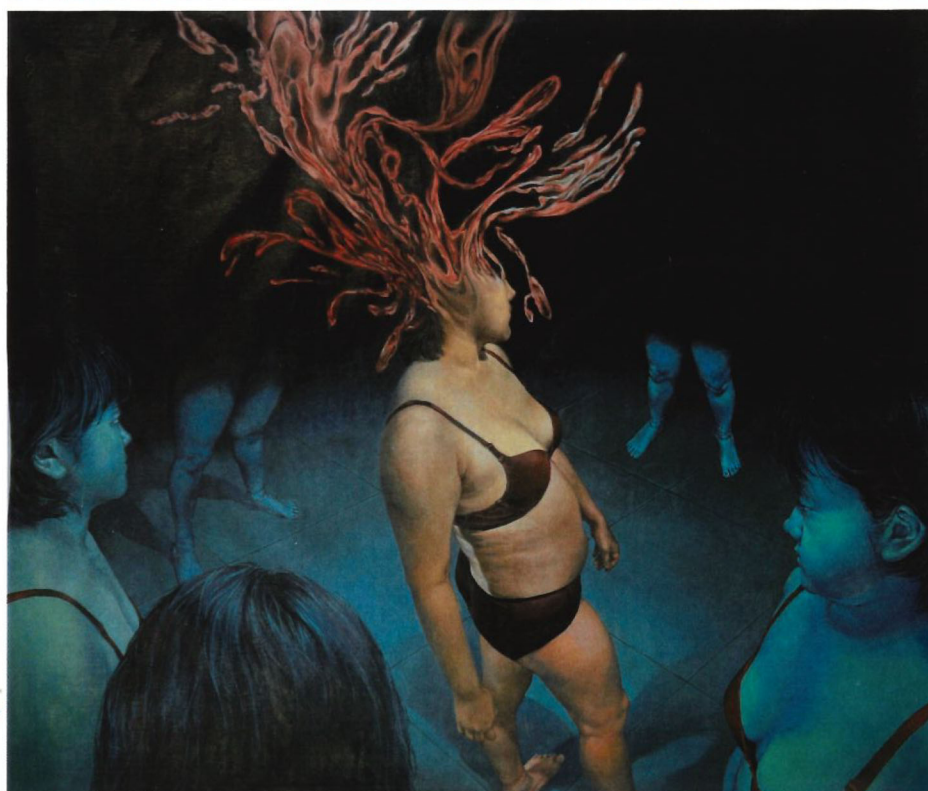
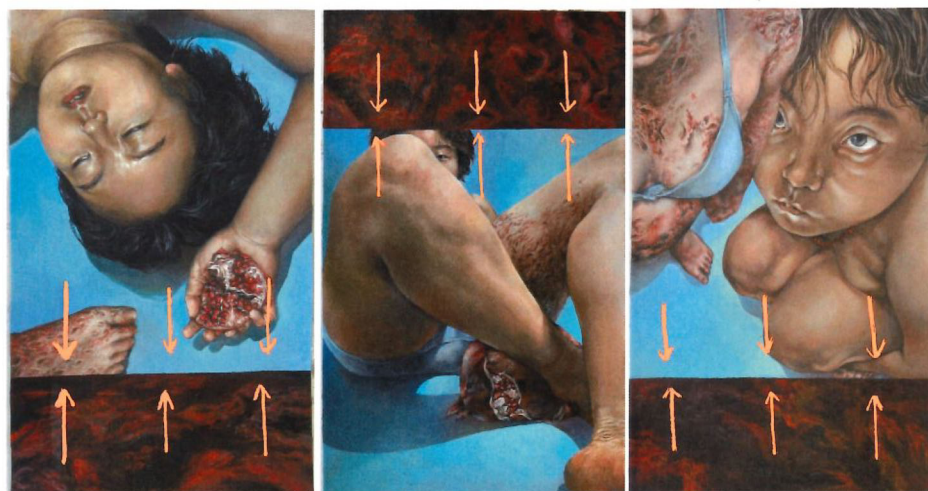
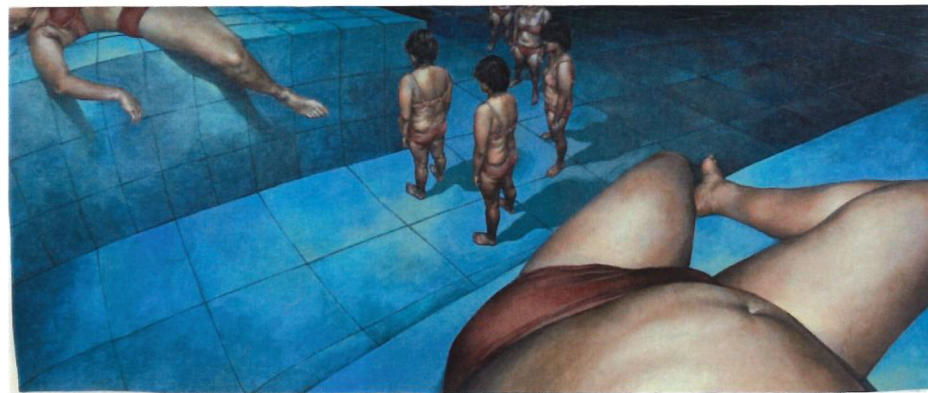
Underwears:  
red taking up  
blue & beige  
↳ a warning

Extended areas  
of darkness  
in the BG  
an omen /  
foreshadowing

red & blue  
pushing  
against  
each other  
↳ confrontation  
or conflict

- tension
- pressure
- stress

↳ EXPLOSION



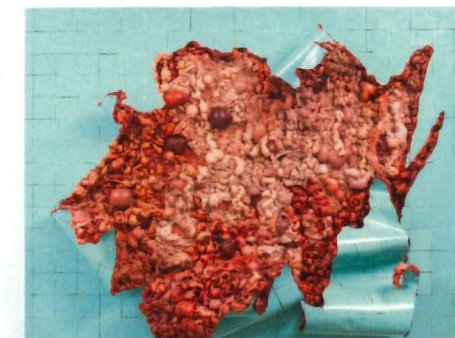
## Where to from now?

What I found fascinating about Rebecca's practice is that when she worked in a small storage room studio, she would sit surrounded by the giant fleshy paintings hung on the walls and when she looked up, she would experience the feeling of her own paintings "caving in" onto her.

She could even share this personal experience with the viewers in her exhibitions by placing her 2m long paintings slightly higher above the eye level. This allowed the viewers to physically look up to her paintings, to become fully engulfed and confronted by the magnificence of meat. This gives them time to carefully observe details of skin, flesh and fat and reconsider their relationship with meat as food and as a dead body.

I also want to create a place that can physically and completely envelope the audience in the colour red. I will make them horrified by my room of flesh not because of the ugliness of my actual body, but because of the visual of toxic outcome of negative body image I presented. This will enable them to inherently sympathise with the agony and horror of whom suffering from a destructive relationship with her own body.

## Artist model 1: Adriana Varejão (oil)



From "Tongues and Incisions" series



From "Jerked-beef Ruins" series

## Artist model 2: Kim Jakobsson (oil)



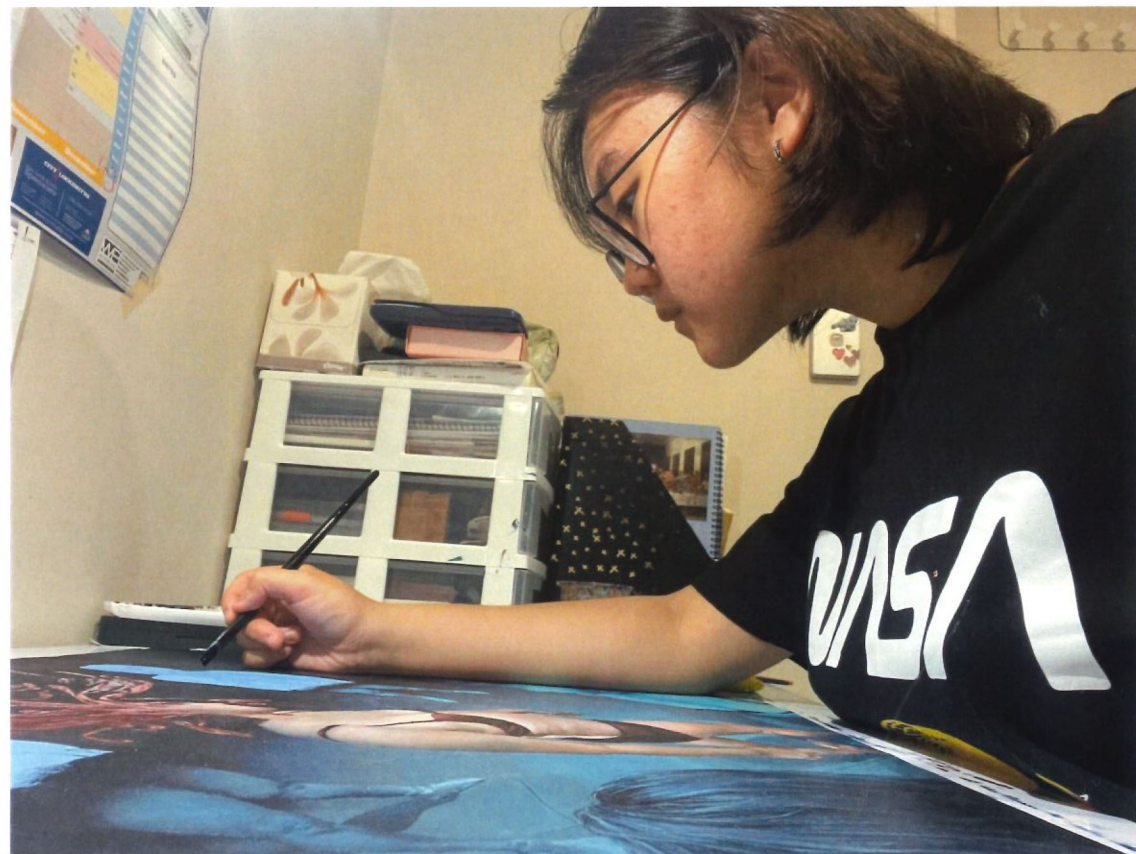
From "Flesh" series

In order to do that, my work has to vere into complete abstraction. I will have to focus on using colour and texture to their full potential in order to imitate the visual effect of flesh and viscera; it is a shame that I will hardly be able to bring in microscopic illustrative details (which is my whole identity) into such a grand-scale project. The key is to create viscous and expressive 3D forms and oil paints would be the best suited medium for that. I will need to train my oil painting skills for a considerable amount of time before initiating, and I may need someone to patronise my project to cover the cost of oil paints put into this work.

# The Struggle is Real

## Late night paintings

For most of the nights a month away from the final hand in, I would stay awake until 4 in the morning to paint. I sat in the corner of my room with a desk light on and just painted nonstop from 7-8 p.m. until the next morning. Sitting on the desk for over 6 hours straight, I had to suffer back pain and text neck throughout the whole year. Sitting in a bad posture for prolonged hours also resulted in poor blood circulation. When I felt numbness on my thighs and feet I lied on my stomach and stayed in a 'frog position' for a couple of ten minutes and went back to painting. My shoulders also began to ache from carrying heavy bags full of paints and a separate container for paintings from places to places. I could not leave them at school because I had to paint at home every night in order to catch up with the pace of the rest of the class. I am all about details, and painstaking details take ages to be created. I then started experiencing numbness and soreness in wrists and fingers - I also take Art Design and had to use a computer for several hours per day, so there was a lot of stress accumulating on those parts. Above all, the most disturbing factor was my desire to sleep. I chose not to surrender to activities that produce melatonin and fought it with caffeine. I emptied over 10 cans of energy drinks in October and collected them to create a rainbow. I was not joking when I told my friends I exchanged some years of the rest of my life with this painting board!



## "Trust the process!"

Being a pathological perfectionist and an artist at the same time is torturing. As a high achiever I have high expectations of myself and the artworks I produce, and this really showed as I delved into hyper realism. Constantly having a reference in front of me while painting has pressured me to depict exactly what's in the photo onto a canvas. Because I was making self portraits exclusively towards the end of the second board, I could pick out flaws right away and was compelled to continue fixing the work until I was content with the level of resemblance. Often times I had to spend 5 hours only to paint a single foot perfectly, or forced myself to stay awake all night to complete the designated portion according to my daily plans. When painting alone at night I would sometimes burst into tears and sob out of stress because my works in progress looked so ugly, but just never stopped painting thinking I can rest when everything is over. Looking back, I barely had a day without artmaking since day 1 of term 1. Nonetheless, I am grateful for being able to improve my artistic virtuosity, resilience and time management skills in a very short period of time through working consistently. I am also thankful for my mum for tolerating a grown up daughter's sporadic tantrums and for my painting teacher for trusting me and encouraging me to complete this journey.

## Vertigo alongside the paintings of falling into space

I was diagnosed with vertigo 5 days before the mock exams started and could not use this valuable time for painting. I could not read or write properly because of the strong spinning sensation and obviously could not risk continue working on detailed pieces with a deteriorated vision. To compensate for dizziness and lack of balance I had to squint my eyes constantly and had to pay extra attention in every movement I made, which resulted in tiredness, nausea and headache. I could barely walk by my own on the first two days. Luckily I recovered a lot over the next 7 days and could begin painting again. Having a few days of good rest refreshed my brain and actually helped me to fully immerse myself in painting for the next couple of weeks. Through my experience with vertigo I gained a better understanding of the horror of lack of orientation and limited vision, which allowed me to use the receding space and darkness more effectively in latest paintings to heighten the obnoxious and apprehensive mood.

## Do struggles make someone a better artist?

Pablo Picasso believed "art to be the son of sadness and suffering"; "If we demand sincerity of an artist, we must remember that sincerity is not to be found outside the realm of grief." Van Gogh have suffered from anxiety, absinthe addiction, and seizures and severed his own ear a several months before he painted "The Starry Night". Frida Kahlo painted "The Broken Column" reflecting on her bus accident that broke her spine, collar bone, ribs, pelvis, and punctured her abdomen and uterus.

I certainly believe in the idea of a tortured artist, based on my experience throughout the year. Through series of struggles I learned to push myself beyond my limits and improve, in terms of mentality, physical tolerance, knowledge and artistic skills. The key is not the struggle itself, it is more about what the artist does with the struggle. Masters like Picasso, Van Gogh and Frida do not let go of challenge in vain, they turn it into something for the world to enjoy and be inspired by, and through production they can recover. **Frustration towards the misogynist and lookist world fueled my creative spirit and allowed me to find true value in my body as an artistic subject matter at the beginning of the year. And my own aspiration for learning dragged me through multiple all-nighters, overcoming physical restraints.** I wouldn't have been able to achieve this level of refinement and insight if I chose to simply succumb to stress and frustration and gave up on procreating. In the end I grew much more capable and resilient than what I thought I would ever be. And I still aspire to create in the face of harsher challenges that are yet to come in my life to stand along with those great artists that we call geniuses.

