

## The Human Condition/Nature/Experience

I am on a journey, characterised by curiosity, isolation, satisfaction, grief, love, joy the search for gratification and the awareness and inescapability of death, and by my side though not usually acknowledged, is the rest of the world, on the same journey, in the same direction, following a universal path, fulfilling the human experience; an extremely personal, yet universal concept. Underpinning it; the Human Condition, the unalterable, the inevitable; experienced by all, inherently and innately, no matter and independent of gender, race, culture or age.

On a similar scope, in the Samkhya and Yoga darshanas philosophies, the self is the spiritual entity that defines human existence.<sup>1</sup> It is the bedrock of the individual being, without a beginning or end, immutable and perfect, above senses, intellect, time and space, and thus, in my own belief, the self is universal and uniform. Our appearance, our placement and our experiences are the only matters separating us from those you sit next to on the train, however even these, can be common amongst others. In Buddhism, this universal being is constructed not through a void of perfection, above senses, time and space, but through suffering. Their philosophies, beyond the major one; reincarnation, acknowledge that each human will undergo pain, torment, grief and loss. Such sufferings will touch all, and thus suffering becomes an extremely universal concept, with no victims and no favourites, but affecting all of us together. However, they also emphasize that humans will prosper, and that to prosper or suffer is determined on how one treats another.

In conjunction with this notion, it is in my own belief that suffering, as expressed in Buddhism, and all that consists within the human condition can mask a person, eliminate their individuality and connect them with others. On a similar scope, love and loneliness, belonging, aging, gratification, isolation and adolescence are nested beyond the first glance of a person, in the shadows of their skin, in the way they walk, the way they talk, the way they hold themselves and the people and places they are drawn to. It is not a

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<sup>1</sup> Website: *Comparative Religion*, article: *The Human Condition*

difficult concept to understand. Beneath everyone's outer shell, are the same feelings, the same experiences.

Upon viewing my artwork, I wish for audiences to understand this concept, and to feel connected with the beings, experiences, places or feelings portrayed in the pieces.

I hope to ignite a feeling of togetherness and connectedness and of empathy. When one can understand the feelings of another, or place themselves in the others shoes, to see and feel the way they feel. A way they too, would have or will feel. Though I consider myself starkly different from those I pass on the sidewalk and even from those whom I share a last name with, it is this feeling, of empathy that connects me with those I am surrounded by, no matter how different I consider myself. I feel things and will undergo, if I haven't already, similar, if not the same, experiences and emotions as they have, and vice versa. This, ultimately, is the link between all of us that bonds us together, in a way that no other species on earth can be bonded.

In connecting the audience with my artworks, I hope to get under their skin, to crawl into those parts of the body that are closed off but existent in every individual. I wish for my audience to feel understood, or to feel as if they understand another on shallow and vastly deep levels. To feel as if a part of them has been looked into and exposed, by exposing parts of another and allowing them to relate, whether they wish to or not.

These parts of a person, and matters of the human condition have existed for as long as humans have. However, in recent times, due to increasing technologies and industrialisation, the human experience has altered from one that evolved around and in concern for other people, into one that values materialistic goods. Thus people have forgotten how to communicate with others and even themselves, through the introduction of phones and other technological goods. In forgetting how to communicate, people's abilities to understand and feel empathy have declined, and rather than being concerned with the wellbeing of others, many are concerned with the wellbeing of either themselves, or their possessions. When such possessions are stripped away, we are left again with the blank slate of the self, the existential, emotional and integral human – a

relative state, shared by all, yet incredibly individual, that I wish to delve deeply into through the use of art. In this branch of my exploration, I could also emphasize the relationship between humans and technology as Nick Thomm does in the images displayed below.

As such individuals, we are tangible, the concepts however that I wish to explore, the sensations and the emotions, are intangible - thus in my exploration, the visual matter of trials is left vastly open, it is for this reason that some will range from abstracted explorations mimicking sensations and emotions to realist beings or places, that allow the audience to relate, see and place themselves in and to the pieces. For example, unanimous places of comfort or discomfort – an unmade bed, the sky, a dark street, the water or the beach, a vanity set, mirror and sink or shower. All of which, can touch a person in one way or another, and simultaneously, arouse emotion or trigger memories, relative to the human experience and condition. On another level, I can also explore using landscape and setting to convey a certain experience or emotion – eg. A bush fire to convey anger and fight, a calm ocean to convey serenity and peace, a towering city, surrounding a ‘seemingly’ insignificant being to convey isolation and alienation.

*Rick Amor, The Light, Oil on Canvas//The Race, oil on linen, 2008, by Alyssa Monk*



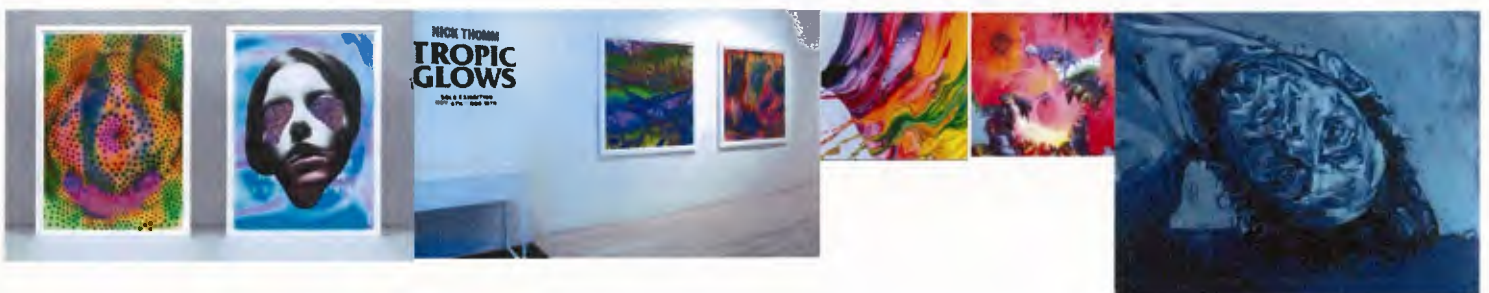
*Image of an unmade bed, taken from Tumblr, unknown photographer*

To mimic sensations and

*Rick Amor, self-portrait on a new york subway, 2004, oil on canvas*

emotion I will explore the use of colour;

vibrant cadmium oranges, and electrifying, ultramarine blues, fauvist tones and saturated pinks, quinacridone reds and crimson, juxtaposed with stark white, to celebrate life and evoke excitement. And dark, obscure, melancholic combinations of umbers, greys and sap greens to create a more miserable atmosphere within the artwork. I will explore using these colours in a realistic style or blended, marbled forms to create abstract work, or



*Nick Thomm, from his collection 'Tropic Glows', 2014 // Series of trials from Adi fetter, a 2014 Lauriston studio arts student*

monochromatic scenes as shown above and by. I would also like to explore people as subject matter; their bodies, facial features and expression. To do this, I will aim to investigate photography, and even sketching or painting freehand, without an image for influence, to get a raw, unidentifiable face. For the photography element, I would like to choose people with interesting faces, hair colours or expression, so to provoke greater visual discussion among the audience.



*Unknown from Tumblr*

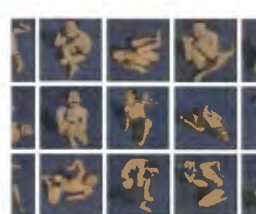
*Smirk, oil on linen, 2010, Alyssa Monk*



*Where's your head? Carl Beasley // Being, oil on panel, Alyssa Monk 2003 // Unknown from Tumblr*



*Smear, oil on panel, Alyssa Monk 2012 // Emptying, oil on panel, Alyssa Monk 2014 // Cassidy, “ “*



*Unknown from Tumblr  
The Tao of Laughter,  
Yue Minjun Name  
unknown, Yue Minjun*

In matters of style, I would like to focus on realism, expressionism and abstract art. And on aesthetics, I will focus on colour as previously mentioned; emotionally provocative colours and realistic colours to present people, places or emotion. An organic use of shape will enhance my ability to convey gentle emotions, in contrast with geometric shapes that can be used to overwhelm and daunt the audience. My exploration of space will also be important – as a large canvas filled to the edge with vibrant, muddled colours will evoke a different response and convey different feelings than that of a large canvas with a simple, bright, centred shape, surrounded by negative space. Whilst exploring the subject matter of people and places, the ‘mise en scene’ of trials will be vital. Where objects and people are position in a frame will need to be reflective of the messages I am trying to convey. Similarly, when conveying feelings through landscapes and settings, the landscape/setting will need to be clearly reflective of the message I am trying to convey. For example, a dry desert would clearly reflect desertion, isolation and perhaps heat and tension or even lust.

In a sense though, I would also like to support Bill Henson’s argument that “meaning comes from feeling, not the other way around.”<sup>2</sup> I want to extract feelings from the audience, and allow them to determine what the art means to them, or to evoke emotion amongst the viewers that allows them to understand the meaning I have intended.

Related to this are the philosophies of artist Jeffrey Smart, who suggests that students “must learn the difference between what [they] think [they] see and what [they] actually see. [They] have to question [themselves] and doubt [their] judgements” something that will require “scrupulous self-honesty”<sup>3</sup>. A self-honesty that will allow myself, in the exploration process, and the audience in viewing my artwork, to determine meaning, from the feelings I experience, create and provoke.

In adopting this honest approach to my exploration of the human experience then, I will hopefully be able to create aesthetically raw, emotionally straining, empowering work,

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<sup>2</sup> Bill Henson, quoted from book: *Menzies*, pg. 84, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Jeffery Smart, quoted from book: *Menzies*, pg. 52, 2014



that leaves the audience themselves to question what they think they see, and what they actually see. Thus, Smart is a point of influence for my exploration, though our subject matter differs, his approach to artwork is admirable, in addition to his techniques and use of oil paints. Rick Amor is similarly a point of influence, though his artworks focus on architecture, they evoke feelings of isolation and have viewers personally engaging with the settings and emotions conveyed.

More relative to my targeted aesthetic are the artists Robert Dickerson, Fred Williams and Yvonne Audette. Dickerson's 'Jockey's Head' visually connects with the audience, on a dark mysterious level with a prominent eye as the focal point. His use of space, colour and contrast is one I hope to explore by stylising a person, sharpening the features and altering their tones, to create an almost fearful creature. Audette's 'The Migration', a jumble of colour and facial features that reflects a similar subject matter to my own, in an abstracted style is also a point of influence for me. I hope my use of colour and style will echo Audette's, to reflect the thought-provoking and excitable aesthetics of her pieces. William's work has inspired me on other levels, his work displays the kind of melancholic scenes, use of colour, shape and line that I would like to explore. He does this most commonly through etching, a technique that I intend to trial, his work 'Knoll in the You Yangs' displays the kind of eeriness and skill I aim to reach.



Beyond these artists, there are interesting links between photographer Flora Borsi's work, and the work that I intend to create. Photography alone will play an integral role in my exploration process, and thus proves the relativity of Borsi's work, however her subject



*Taken from  
Borsi's 'The  
Lookbook'*

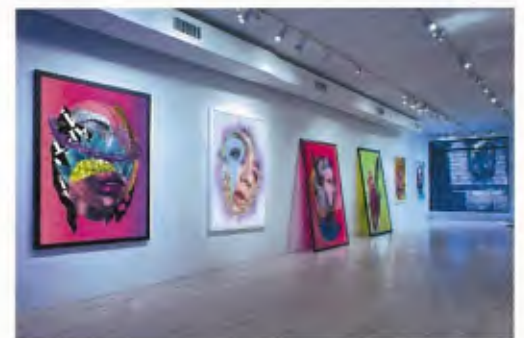
matter and creative approach are more influential to me than her work with the lense. Her photographic series the 'Lookbook', 'Ireel', 'the real life

models' and 'identity' are visually challenging, confronting and in most cases, relative to the human experience or condition. This is because in a large selection of her works Borsi has masked, distorted, stripped bare, or made unidentifiable, yet relatable, the humans in her photographs.<sup>4</sup> Borsi's use of mixed media is also influential, and I myself would like to explore painting onto photographs, photographing paintings, as she does in 'Ireel', or using Photoshop to combine trials of various mediums to create digital art.



*Taken from Borsi's series 'Ireel', the first image is 'behind the scenes'*

As I embark on this broad exploration of humanity, I look forward to learning more about myself, others and the world we live in, expressing this through visual art, and passing the knowledge I have gained on, through the works I create. To enlighten, engage and exchange emotion, and experiences, relative to the human condition.



*Nick Thomm, 'Tropic Glows' collection, 2014*



*Unknown artist, mixed media portrait*

<sup>4</sup> Flora Borsi, on website: [floraborsi.com](http://floraborsi.com), articles: *Lookbook, The Real Life Models, Identity and Ireel*





Week	Idea to be explored	Aesthetic qualities to be developed	Materials to be used	Techniques to be explored and developed
1	Week one I will focus on confirming my conceptual ideas	How to express the conceptual ideas in an aesthetically pleasing manner/what subject matter to focus on	Photography Sketching Water colour	
2	People and their expressions and emotion	Brush techniques and use of colour eg. Exploring skin tones, painting in a variety of styles eg. Realistically or expressionistically	Oil paints Mediums eg. Linseed oil	Application of colour, evoking or reflecting emotion through paint
3	The notion of identity in the human experience	Follow up of previous week however more identity based, which will include the distortion and masking of identity and thus a more abstract and expressionistic style	Oil paints and photography	Photographic editing skills, abstract style, painting technique improvement
4	People and their places of comfort eg. The notion of 'home' or other defining points of the human existence	Feelings of comfort, a welcoming embrace, connection between audience and artwork, relativity to the audience, nostalgia, familiarity	Photography and paints eg. Oils or water colour	Painting or photographing in a certain manner that allows the audience to feel connected with the artwork or see familiarity in it
5	Places of discomfort, includes mental places of discomfort eg. Ones state of mind, but also general places of discomfort eg. A small room, a dark city	Familiarity, mystery, connection, nostalgia, emotional, challenging, use of colour (dark colours) and light and shade	Photography, oil paints and print work	Skills in printwork, use of negative and positive space, photographic skills - transferring the photo into an artwork through the use of paint
6	Landscapes that convey the human condition, experience and emotion	Similar aesthetic qualities that the landscape themselves reflect - eg, a city overwhelm and convey isolation, and an ocean can convey peace	Photography and paints eg. Oils	Ability to bring a landscape to life/give a landscape emotional life - through brush strokes or capture of light
7	Emotion	Conveying emotion through colour - excitement and euphoria	Oil Painting or marbling	Ability to evoke a feeling or emotion through colour,

		through bright saturated combinations and melancholy and anxiety through dark and gloomy colours		marble techniques
8	Repeating previously explored ideas with different mediums and materials, eg. Emotion, comfort, isolation and identity, all relative to the human experience	Sketchy and rough aesthetic, chiaroscuro, sfumato, positive and negative space, line, tone, ect to create atmosphere, evoke emotion	Sketching, charcoal or print work eg. Etching or lino	Sketching or print work technique
9	“ “		“ “	Working on different scales – large and small
10	Narrowing down ideas, conceptual and subject matter possibilities in trial process	Light and shade, expression	Digital photography	Refining my camera skills and use of photoshop and capturing emotion and emotion within people, environments or setting
11	“ “	Aesthetically engaging artworks – that provoke visual discussion and shock the viewer in good and bad ways – discomfoting and comforting way s	Oil painting	By revisiting techniques and mediums or materials used I will refine and develop my skills in those areas further
12	“ “	“ “	Other painting mediums eg. Gouche or water colour	Creating an atmosphere through use of light and dark, tones, harshness
13	“ “	“ “	Sketching – variety of graphite pencils & charcoal	“ “
14	“ “	“ “	Print work	Further refine techniques in explored areas, through the process of trials