Brooke Grayson

35x60 cm

The Untangling – Self-portrait

acrylic paint, graphite pencil and string on paper and plywood.

My piece depicts myself on the aerial hoop/lyra, being dangled from the strings attached to my fingers above. This is meant to represent myself as a puppet, being controlled by my own hand as the puppeteer.

Aerial is my sport, my hobby, my artform, and my therapy. Since I started I feel like I have found myself again on a mental and emotional health journey, after being lost for several years. It brought me confidence, coordination, and control and allowed me to set myself free from the darkness of my own mind. Aerial has helped me immensely in navigating my way through life and supported me on the path to discovering my true self again.

When I think of a puppet master, I think of someone who is in control of not only their puppets and the objects around them, but ultimately themselves. This idea captured the main goal of my aerial journey perfectly and gave me the chance to tell my story in a way that makes sense to me and allows me to express every emotion that came with it.

This artwork is a reminder of the importance of doing things that make you happy and allow you to remember who you are. That you are your own person and should be in control of your own mind, rather than letting it control you. It is a reminder to keep pushing through and that you are worthy of every bit of light that touches your path in life.

My artwork is a multimedia piece, with the use of graphite pencils, acrylic paint, string, and gouache paint. The focal point or the piece (the self-portrait in the aerial hoop) is done in graphite pencils. I enjoy using graphite pencils because they allow me to capture every single, shadow, highlight, detail, texture, as well as each individual emotion that went into the process of creating the piece; from taking the photos, to transferring it to paper and shading in the values. Because of this, graphite pencils were the most appropriate choice for this personal piece.

The hands of the puppeteer were done in crimson paint and are also a focal point of the piece, standing out from the crisp white background. After taking photos of my hands in the position that worked for the “puppet” I shaded them in using only shades of crimson red paint, loosely basing it on the reference photo to give it a messier and fuzzier look. Since crimson comes as a deeper and more vibrant version of red, it is often regarded as a symbol for vigour, passion, and courage, but also has been taken as a representation for anger, revenge, and ruthlessness. Because of these connotations and strongly associated emotions, I decided this bright and sometimes aggressive colour would be the most appropriate for my final artwork and it’s intended meaning.

Rather than draw the strings on the canvas/plank of plywood, I elected to use real string by tying knots in the pieces and gluing it to the limbs and figures on my piece. Using this technique allowed my final art piece to feel more genuine; as if the ties are actually there, connecting me to my own hands and keeping me in control of myself. This materialises my story and brings it out and away from the canvas slightly. I died the strings with crimson paint as well, so they would be more cohesive with the piece overall and provide more dimension. I started with normal crimson at one end and slowly darkened it in a gradient. This also gave the string the chance to pop against the bright hands and the dark hoop, which was completed in black gouache paint in order to assure it wasn’t lost in the dark values of the graphite pencils.

I am satisfied with the quality of my graphite drawing, however, I would spend more time on it if I were to complete it again, not rushing the smaller details like the hair, wrinkles and folds. I would also be more careful when sticking the paper with the pencil drawing to the plywood plank to ensure there were no bubbles that interrupted the flow of the piece.