

“The Perils of Perfection” – a cardboard and chicken wire sculpture



“My artwork features three cardboard birds, flying straight upwards in the race towards perfectionism. The middle bird flies upward normally, while the bird at the top flies without its head, and the bird at the bottom has already fallen, headless. They represent this exhausting ‘race to perfection’ that I saw in the culture around me, as they flight directly upwards, a path that doesn’t allow them any chance for rest without falling. If they flew out another way, all the sides are wide open to lead to their freedom.”

I started creating this sculpture based on the idea of goal setting. While I can see the benefit of goal setting, I also thought that sometimes, the practice led to a difficult road of perfectionism. When you’re looking at nothing but your own faults, and in a constant race to improvement without stopping, you may well do damage to your self-image and cause some real burnout. It was a theme I was identifying as we were goal setting at school at the beginning of the year, so many people were already tired from the stress of assignments. While I knew that self-betterment done right and thoughtfully is a good thing, I could also see people taking goals the wrong way, and never stopping to consider what they have achieved, in favour of only ever looking forward.

I wanted to use birds as my main focus of the artwork, since I believe they symbolise a lot of what people desire in life, as beautiful creatures capable of the complete freedom of flight. Due to this I also think they’re a very evocative animal.

Originally, I wanted to use clay to create a sculpture, since its one of my favourite mediums to use, but after some sketches and planning, I decided it would be too heavy to use clay, so I decided on using cardboard instead. I love using cardboard for artworks, since the textures you can create are so rich by ripping and taking advantage of the congregation. For my final artwork I built the birds by creating a chicken wire “skeleton” and gluing the cardboard in layers over the top of the shape.

My final artwork shows three birds in flight, trying to reach the top of the cage that frames them. They represent this ‘race to perfection’ that I saw in goal setting culture, as they flight directly upwards, a path that doesn’t allow them any chance for rest without falling. The bird at the highest point is headless, having lost its mind, but it continues to fly regardless. But while the birds fly directly upwards, the cage is open to the world all around them, and if they flew out another way, they would be free all along, making the real cage the struggle for perfection all along. If they were to let go of the desperation for perfection, they could be free, and embrace the enjoyment and freedom of flight.