

Inside, Outside, In Between

Phobia & Fear of Judgment

Elodie Grenville

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Everyone fears something. Some people are terrified of being alone, some people fear pain, some people are afraid of poverty. Yet, many of these fears are rational – no one questions them. But with phobia, it's not rational. Living with phobia is like a constant battle – your logic and reasoning are crushed by an overwhelming sense of anxiety. In our society, we are taught that we must face our fears. We're taught that the inability to overcome them is childish, it's weak. And yet, in my experience, it just feels like the harder I fight, the harder I fall. Disregarding the judgment of others is never easy, even less so when it's about something you're ashamed of – I can't help but make assumptions on how others view me: immature, strange, a freak? For me, struggling with phobia comes hand in hand with my fear of judgment; this being what I hope to portray in my art. One catalyst for this project was my visit to the National Portrait Gallery in London during the summer. I was exposed to huge variety of art styles and was fascinated by how many stories could be told through portraiture. Each face carried their own meaning, their own message. Self-portraiture intrigued me and I was inspired by the decisions of each artist to reveal a part of who they are and what they've experienced. The visit made me question what I would do in their place. Which part of myself would I want to show the world? What message would I want to send? These questions led me to the decision that what I would like to investigate is an innate fear in all of us; the fear of judgment. Through my project I want to provide an insight as to how my circumstances make me feel. I aim to create awareness for mental health – particularly anxiety and phobia – and reveal the internal interpretation of external judgment.

Throughout history, art has been utilised to convey emotions. Artists Van Gogh and Francis Bacon are famous for their mental strains – using their work to portray their suffering in abstract and impressionist manners, giving viewers a unique insight to their minds. Meanwhile, the likes of Gustave Courbet portray his emotion in more naturalistic styles, allowing dramatic lighting to highlight his realistic expression and imply internal torment. Gustave's self-portrait 'The Desperate Man' (Fig 1) particularly stood out to me as I found his motivations notably intriguing. Beside displaying his inner emotion to viewers, critics also state that "His desperate state of mind is not a shameful sickness but a badge of artistic pride... he equates genius and madness". The artist takes his suffering and turns it into a symbol that his beyond himself. Throughout this project I hope to take pride in the emotions I display. In portraying my fear of judgment, I hope to grow stronger as an artist, learning to embrace the discomfort in my work and instead, much like Gustave, translate it into a bold self-expression which merely reinforces the importance of its message.



My initial self-photoshoot focused on capturing emotion, observing the work of photographers such as Jill Greenburg. The way she captures such raw, desperate emotion was an aspect I was eager to explore, especially experimenting with subtle facial nuances which implied vulnerability and despondency. Using a tripod and timer I tried to capture naturalistic lighting and expression, putting myself in the mind state of dealing with these fears in attempts to capture the insecurity and intimidation. I also experimented with some longer shutter speeds, allowing for a sense of fluidity

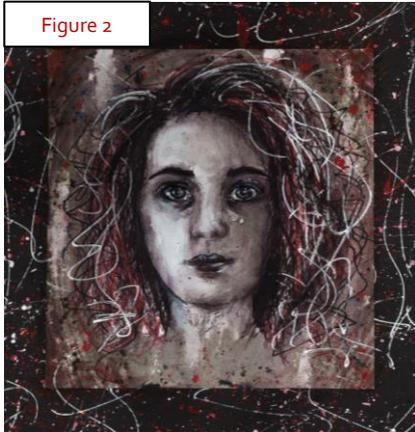


Figure 2

and movements, which added to the layering, implying the complexity of emotions and thoughts. Following this photoshoot, I began to explore iconography like stitches to suggest feeling trapped/silenced. Using special FX makeup I did another photoshoot, this time with a hand held camera to try explore more dynamic angles. I experimented with a variety of medias like pens, inks and pastels and concluded that I wanted to test out further textures and layers.

It is innate for humans to want to visually express how we feel. However, the complexity of human emotion provides room for many interpretations when physically represented. With so many elements vulnerable to a

polysemic reading, it was important that the artists I observed truly correlated with what I wanted to represent.

Unlike my initial muse-based artist inspirations, Russ Mills was much more contemporary, inspiring me to further explore my portrayal of emotion through his techniques. His work observes a clash of styles ranging from classical to pop surrealism, whilst also drawing inspiration from artists like Picasso, Ralph Steadman, and Pollock. I feel these elements are notable in his works as he utilises a range of textures and mark-making aspects including splatters, scratches, and energetic brushstrokes all of which are scanned and combined on a digital platform – many of these textures I find reminiscent of feelings like stress, panic, and a hectic lack of control. This idea of layering intrigues me as not only does it create a visually appealing result but it also links to the complexity of the emotion I aim to portray, the amalgamations of feelings, thoughts, and worries all symbolised through this collage style. Aside from the texture in his work, the colours he uses are also symbolic. I find red to be a reoccurring aspect in this project. For me it carries a range of connotations, linking to the fear and stress of my topic while also correlating with the high energy/intense feelings. Although Mills uses digital media, many of his techniques in line and texture can be replicated using ink and paint. I enjoy the fluidity of these medias, especially ink which creates different textures depending on it's application method (paint brush, sticks, glue spreaders).

He states that his art attempts to "Tackle the isolation, insignificance, and fear that each day delivers by channeling that negative energy into something useful that others may find engaging". These negative feelings are clearly represented in his work, his primarily monochromatic colour palette and energetic use of texture representing a variety of emotions, the composition and daunting expressions of his models also helping reinforce these themes. I've enjoyed exploring his use of line and texture, the combination of realism and detail through wild and energetic mark-making being aspects which I feel help convey my message of 'a fear of judgment', showing the seriousness and reality of the portraiture while also portraying abstract feelings and emotions.



Figure 3

To further develop an accurate portrayal of fearful feelings, there needed to be stronger visual iconography. Influencers like Tim Burton are well known for evoking fear in their audience; his stylized and iconic characters are well known for their eerily lanky limbs, twisted figures, and harsh lighting. Burton draws a lot of inspiration from personal experience, identifying with his character in 'Frankenweenie' stating "I just linked up the feeling with Frankenstein with the way I felt. The creature, and also the mad scientist. And my neighbors were the angry villagers". This personal identification allows him to create characters with strong identities, hinting as to how his negative feelings allow him to provoke similar emotions in his audience. Drawing inspiration from his stylized characters and rawness of expression, I created illustrations which aimed to translate how I felt. One key element comes from the idea of being watched, the intimidation and fear of critique and judgment portraying itself through sketches of eyes and crowds of unidentifiable figures. To



Figure 4

further reinforce feeling trapped and constrained by my own mind I sketched hectic and tangled lines as well as helpless, caged figures – representing the need for secrecy. I also considered the more scientific side of the thought process, observing how anxiety disorders are often caused by abnormal nerve cell pathways in the brain, essentially connoting that a disconnection in neurotransmitters can cause these emotions. It was from this research that I concluded wire was an ideal media for my piece, not only symbolizing the nerves and connections but also the tangled and twisted iconography of emotions.

Following this research and experimentation I noticed the term 'freak' was a reoccurring theme in my work. Freak Shows began to popularize in the early 1800s, exhibiting biological oddities and using unconventional people to entertain the public. They exploited the 'abnormal', using 'freaks of nature' for personal gain, often humiliating and alienating their performers. These sideshows were a popular form of family entertain and merely made life more difficult and isolating for people with deformities. In the 4th season of the TV show 'American Horror Story', the life of 'Freaks' was observed, displaying a dark and thrilling take on their circumstances. The show's setting of 1950s Florida displayed discrimination, alienation, and social ignorance, forcing viewers to acknowledge history's abusive treatment of the deformed. The theme of being subject to such scrutiny and judgment linked closely with my fear, the vulnerability and experiences of the unfortunate working as a perfect exaggerated metaphor for how I feared people may view me. As an ideal icon for my topic I explored the ranging aesthetics of a 'Freak Show', looking at traditional striped circus tents (the lines being reminiscent of a cage), vintage and faded colours as seen in AHS's Freak Show, as well as the alternative rich colours in other carnival aesthetics. I found the contrasting tones appealing, also appreciating the idea of being under a spotlight, as the performer would be. I decided that the use of lighting would translate the themes of

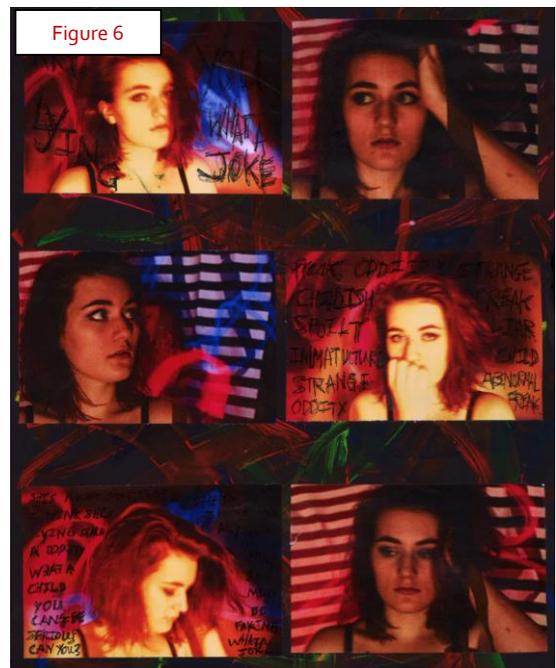


Figure 5

vulnerability and isolation, the intimation of being alone on stage, spectated by an audience who are there to judge. With this inspiration, I desired to bring new colours into my piece, branching out from primarily red tones in introducing blues, purples, and yellows – these complimenting the theme and connoting their own meanings.

I next decided to use photography to experiment with new colours and patterns. Exploring the idea of external stress, I observed the unconventional technique, 'light drawing'. This photography method uses long exposure settings to allow photographers to 'paint' with light, creating surreal elements of line and form. Photographers like Aaron Bauer were particularly inspiring as I appreciated the variety of pattern and shapes they created with light, creating a fascinating sense of time and movement. The fluidity of the line implies how what I fear is the thoughts and judgments that I worry may surround me – this was reinforced by etching words onto some of the photos, indicating the hectic and claustrophobic emotions created by the fear of judgment. I enjoyed exploring the abstract portrayal of thoughts and emotions and was lead to deeply consider the impact of colour within my work.

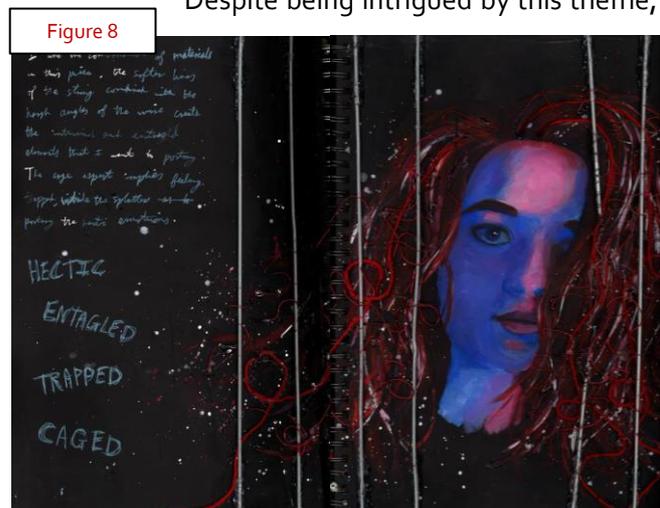
Using handmade filters, I experimented with a wide variety of lighting. Photographer Geoff Jones was highly influential, his composition and dramatic lighting fueling my exploration. Within the photoshoot I tried to channel some of the deeper emotions triggered by this topic, using the idea of a spotlight to evoke the sense of intimation/awkwardness brought on by my fear of judgment. The bright yellow/key lighting also held strong implications, reinforcing this idea of a spotlight and the intimation of being watched and exposed. Meanwhile, the colour red was reoccurring and represented the feelings of frustration; both at myself and at the fear of what others may think. It's warm, vibrant tone also communicated the strength of the feelings and implied a culmination of elements including panic and intensity. Meanwhile, the blue lighting and colder tones portrayed the idea of 'weight', showing the heaviness and guilt associated with this theme - implying the inward feelings as opposed to the outward ones displayed through warmer tones. To conclude my photoshoots I tested different filters and editing techniques, observing the impact of highly saturated images as opposed to less vibrant, more faded colours. I felt the rich tones connoted the strength and violence of the emotions while the faded ones suggested the colder, mournful effects of them.





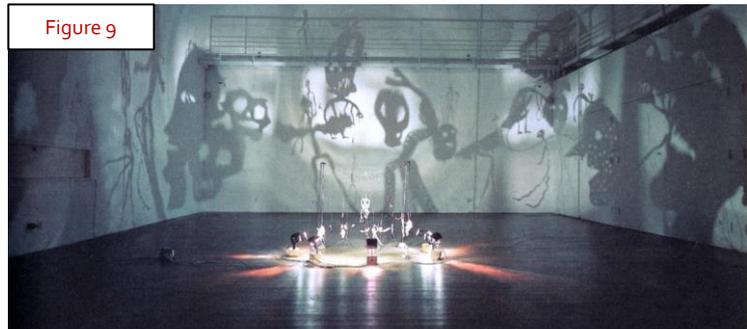
Artist Tom Bagshaw encouraged me to develop the realism aspect in my work. Although the emotions I wanted to portray were quite abstract, it was important to also show realism in my portraiture to truly connect with viewers and hopefully help people who relate to my topic. There are many aspects of Bagshaw's work that inspired me – the solemn, dark expressions of his paintings as well as the way his portraits blend into the background, clear brushstrokes and texture connoting a roughness that I felt implied the messiness of emotions and the feeling of not being in control of your own thoughts, as is often the case when I'm faced with my phobia, the irrational nature of it creating a frustrating, complex opposition of feelings. I also was inspired by the flashes of colour within his work although I wanted to exaggerate this further, reinforcing how when anxious, thoughts and emotions are constantly flickering in a complex and hectic state. While observing Bagshaw I also experimented by mimicking some of the iconography in his work – observing a painting of a broken statue photoshopping this onto my own photo. Although I appreciated the symbolism within these pieces, the idea of masking one's true self, I concluded that my own 'freak show' iconography may be better suited to the surrounding of my piece as opposed to directly onto the face, as I felt this was more representative of fearing external judgment.

Using oil paints I began to create realism portraits which trialed both the faded tones as well as stronger, vibrant colours. I experimented with bold brushstrokes in the background, using acrylic paint colours which complimented the oil paints, the textures allowing for a richness and depth which exaggerated the highlights and shadows of the face - this dramatic portraiture aiding the presentation of strong, fearful emotions. I further considered how I could incorporate other techniques like the iconography of figures/crowds, as well as the range of textures and patterns I'd previously observed – each of these aiding the representation of external judgment and the complexity of emotion. I introduced the use of thread and strings, testing them as straight stripes to connote feeling caged and messily sticking them to suggest the themes of tangled and hectic feelings. I also tested stage makeup as would be worn by clowns and performers, another element of the Freak Show. I felt this portrayed feelings of not being taken seriously and worrying about aspects of judgment like being seen as a joke. I concluded that the hectic style and texture of the hair made it unnecessary as having such an abstract surrounding required the face to be slightly more simple to ensure the painting didn't become too busy and risk detracting from the meaning. Through further development I combined many my experimental medias – using strings, wire, inks, and paints to build up a multi layered piece. I liked the 3D element brought on by the wire and strings as I felt this was immersive and gave more depth to the piece, also representing how our emotions can surround us in a metaphorical sense. To



conclude the hair aspect I used paint and inks to splatter the page, this adding to the layering and conveying the messiness and complexity of the piece.

Although I felt that the portraiture aspect was largely concluded, I decided that my piece would benefit from a stronger performance aspect – the use of 3D materials inspiring me to research installation artists. Reminiscent to my Freak Show theme, I was intrigued by the idea of using a tent as well as lighting and shadows in the piece – also viewing it as an effective way to incorporate the



Christian Boltanski
Théâtre d'ombres 1984

iconography of human figures. Upon researching Installation Art I discovered the artists 'Julie Gough' and 'Christain Boltanski' – these two being notable for their use of shadows. Julie Gough's work 'The Consequence of Chance' (fig 10) depicted a tent with the shadowed silhouettes of people visible through the canvas walls. The concept of using a tent seemed a sensical option as it would allow me to play with bold lighting as well as create an enclosed space to truly immerse viewers. I decided that the serious nature of my topic provided a real opportunity to express a message of awareness and provide insight to how the fear of judgment may make one feel – thus the small, dark environment of tent would be ideal to allow viewers to gain an intimate and deeper understanding of the project.



Figure 10

Moreover, I was fascinated by the work of Boltanski who created a range of unnerving and whimsical figures which are projected to a much larger scale using lighting, his work often exploring the suffering experienced during the holocaust – focusing on themes of death, loss, and memory. I also loved this imagery as I felt it perfectly portrayed how our minds can blow thoughts and feelings out of proportion – making what in reality may be a small and meaningless scenario into a huge and unaskable problem in our minds – as is often the case with one's fears and anxieties. Boltanski's characters also showed similarity to my own illustrations – the idea of figures with large eyes and crooked body language linking to the intimidating, watchful observers as well as twisted and insecure performers I wanted to portray.

For the tent I sketched several designs to find the most practical option for stability and for viewing the artwork. I researched average heights and concluded on a design I could make using tent poles, bamboo sticks, and canvas fabric, deciding upon a striped pattern with a deep red tone and a similar wide red ribbon to act as a finish around the rim. I also tested out a range of inner lining materials, considering their appearance in the lighting and how effectively the shadows would appear. I chose a silky dark purple which I tested using pink/blue lighting – the silk created beautiful reflection of the lights, the ideal shadow effect. To reinforce the theme I designed a sign stating 'Welcome to The Freak Show', it's sharp and distressed appearance and inclusion of fairy lights aiming to draw viewers into this unknown world. For the figures I reconsidered

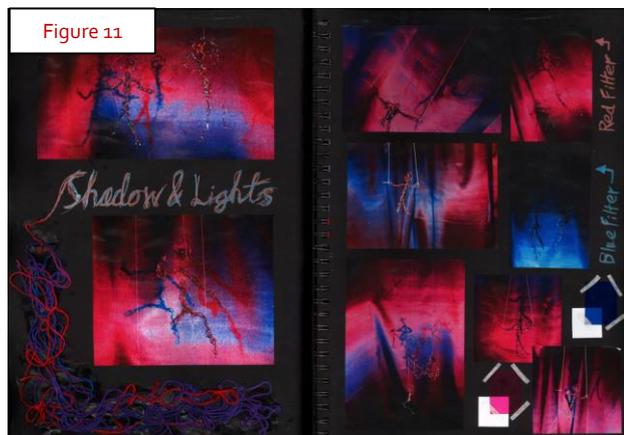


Figure 11

Tim Burton's designs as well as the wire artist 'Barbara Licha', concluding on a long limbed humanoid style created using an inner wire as a basic skeleton followed by raveling thinner wire around this. This effective design allowed figure to be bent into a range of body positions, hiding their face or holding their knees to suggest insecurity and fear (a photoshoot of shadows showed me the impressions created by these stances). The style of the wire also suggested the confusion and tangled emotional aspect, I felt was a clear representation of stress and anxiousness. I realised that I didn't need to create figures to represent an audience because I instead wanted the viewer of the piece to understand that that was their role. By having multiple figures hanging around the piece I wanted the viewer to perceive that they were afraid of their gaze, reinforcing the idea of the Freak Show in that the audience steps in to the tent to view its contents, and thus the artwork represents the fear of just that. By having the figures hanging and entwined amongst wire and cages they were portrayed as helpless and trapped. I also hung up my portraiture photography, sketching a variety of words and patterns onto them to represent a range of different elements within the project. The darkness of the tent allows for the spotlights to highlight the painting and its surroundings, thus creating an intimate experience for the viewers as the tent becomes its own world, free of distraction and allowing them to focus and interpret the art, overall representing a clear fear of judgment.



FINAL PIECE



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