

Practitioner's statement

String Art Portraits

Ben Abanat

Having lived in Indonesia for the first 12 years of my life, I've experienced the sights, sounds and smells of a third world country and become accustomed to a culture so different to anything else. Moving to this wealthy land of Australia was the hardest thing I have experienced in my 17 years of life, yet I count my blessings and appreciate the difficulties that comes with being a 'Third Culture Kid.'

This practical is directly influenced by my cross-cultural heritage and portrays the beauty of holding a personal relationship between two countries. Each portrait represents the two sides of my identity, Indonesia and Australia, and through the contrasting emotions on each of my faces, my battle of confusion is displayed. Using nails and interconnecting layers of thread, I endeavoured to show how my experiences in other countries have shaped my identity, working together to create something tangible and whole.

Grace Kim and Wifredo Lam are two artists who also identify themselves as being 'Third Culture Kids'. Kim's controversial hair installation portrayed concepts of identity in a way that would confront the viewer, making them feel uneasy and disgusted. The two artists have experienced the confusion of where home is and what lies ahead. Taking inspiration from these two artists, I applied similar ideas in the style of Debbie Smyth's thread portraits. By highlighting the shadows and facial features, I have created two detailed self-portraits that show explicit emotions and depth. Each face contrasts expressions of both joy and pain, based on images that were taken in Indonesia and Australia. I did not intend for each country to be represented by a single expression, rather, I wanted each emotion to display my feelings after moving to Australia. Pain, torture and confusion tore my heart into pieces for three years after moving. However, these last two years have seen a gradual change in my attitude, to a point where I can see the beauty of my heritage and accept what lies ahead in my life.

I wanted my final to express this change in my attitude and show the beauty and individuality I have found in my identity. I have achieved this through the use of contrasting watercolour splashes applied in a haphazard manner in the background of my final. Warm tones and organic shapes portray an 'explosion' coming from where the connecting thread meet in the centre, symbolising the beauty of my heritage. While the blue and green colours show the comfort and serenity I feel of my original home, I have used warmer oranges and reds to depict the anticipation of things to come in my new home. Furthermore, silver and gold leaf adds texture and luminosity to demonstrate the array of emotions I continue to feel.

I believe art becomes effective when an artist is able to explore more than just technical skill with media, demonstrating personally relevant ideas with depth. The use of thread provides symbolic meaning in my struggle for connectedness and belonging. My background as a 'Third Culture Kid' has given me a privileged position as a global citizen, serving to bridge the gap between cultures.