

The Surrealist Experience of Body Dysmorphia

Lavender Jane Gartlan

MY BRIEF

I love surrealism for its the portrayal of the body, particularly the female body. I find it to be the most authentic portray of emotion and present the beauty and disturbing thoughts the mind can hold. The images surrealists have created have opened my eyes to different perspectives to the world, art and design.

I believe the idea of self-image and body dysmorphia can be a surrealist experience.

My experiences with body dysmorphia have led me to hold unrealistic standards for myself. Haunted by thoughts of my own body not being how I believe it to be, eating disorders and living in a society where body modifications and surgery are possible, my self-image has fluctuated over the years.

SURREALISM is an art movement that aims to revolutionise the human experience with a balance of reality and an unconscious dream state with focus on the strange, uncanny and unconventional.

Aspects of the art style include

- Expressions of the subconscious mind
- Art designed to unsettle and transgress boundaries
- Liberation of thought

MY BRIEF I want to visualise my experiences with body dysmorphia through a character that represents my distorted image of self. I wish to create the world that she lives in, containing elements reflecting my own life experiences. This project is deeply personal, and I would like to portray that by creating an emotive visually striking character design with the use of prosthetics .

I chose to do this because I really like the idea of makeup being a part of performance art. Performance art is something I have taken part in myself for the very reasons of highlighting different bodies and showcasing my lived experiences.

Me performing at the Prague Quadrennial 2023 for Irelands student exhibition

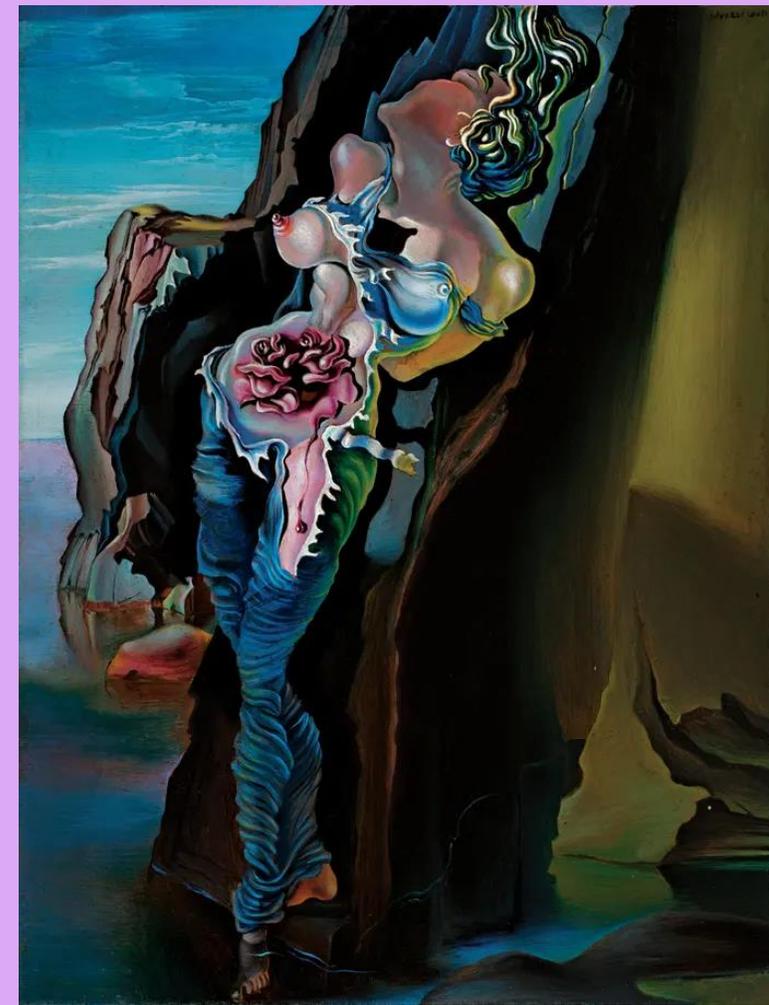
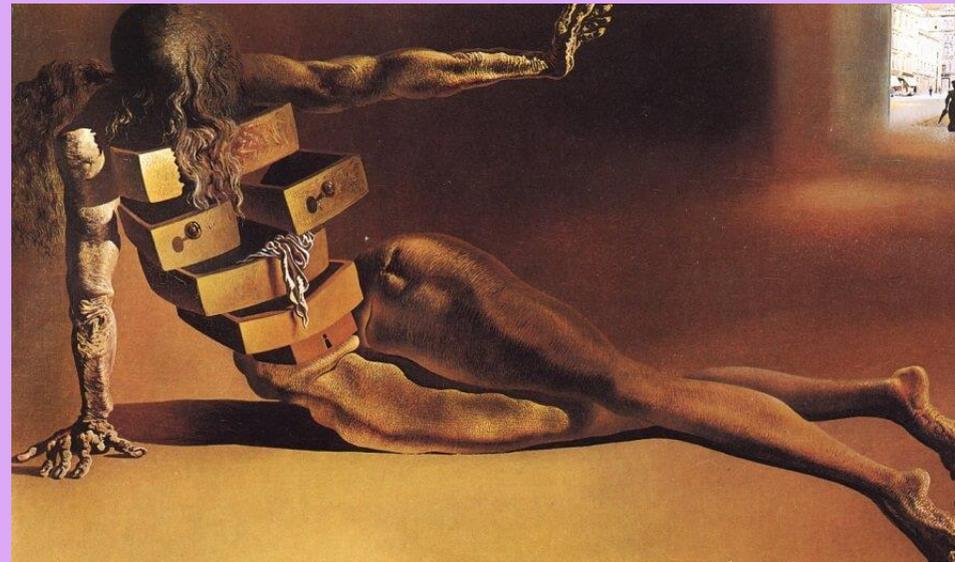
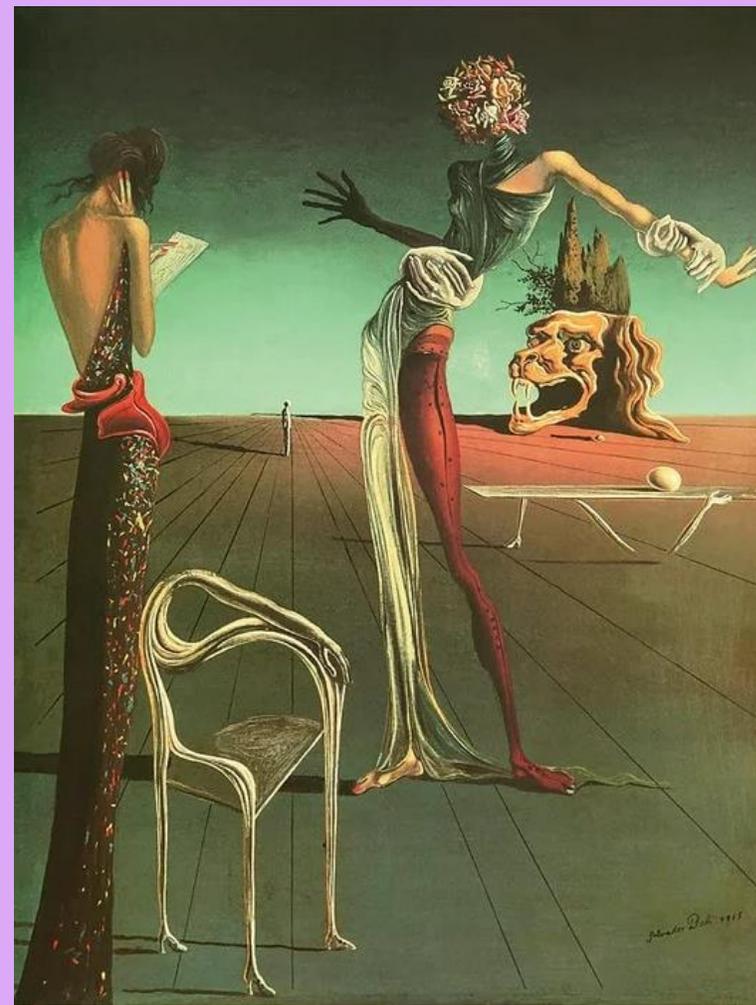
Further explained in notebook



SALVADOR DALÍ

Salvador Dalí's work is one of my inspiration points for my own artwork and this project. His ability to portray his subconscious containing elements of everyday life in dystopian surreal worlds with absurd characters I think is beautiful and a true portrayal of human emotion and experience.

Particularly fascinated with his portray of the female body with sensual poses while contrasting with grotesque imagery.



Woman with Head of Roses, 1935

The Anthropomorphic Chest of Drawers, 1936

Gradiva, 1931

How could I recreate one of these paintings using prosthetics and makeup to alter the body this severe? The facelss women, broken toren apart, fragmented.

SALVADOR DALÍ

I was in Prague in June 2023 and went to a Dalí exhibition. His work is absolutely astounding in person. Below is a collection of prints he did that visualise distorted fantasy like creatures as if human caricatures lived in their own surreal world. These inspire me to create odd fantastical characters.

His sculpture of elephants are so breathtaking in person then the paintings. You can experience the scale of the surrealist idea that his giant elephant is being held up by tiny twig legs.

The feeling I experience when looking at his work is what I want others to experience when looking at my own work to take away their own interpretations, a sense of unease but ultimately the beauty.



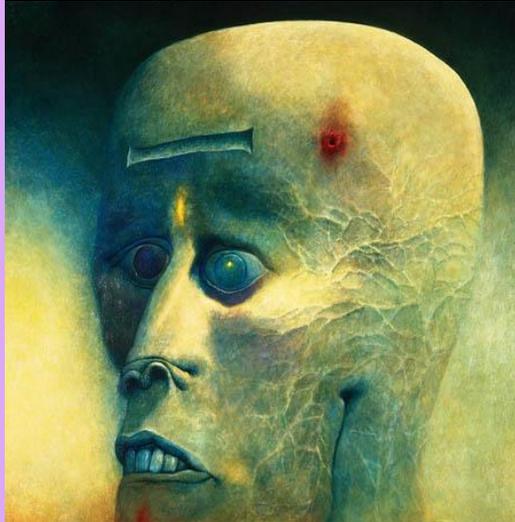
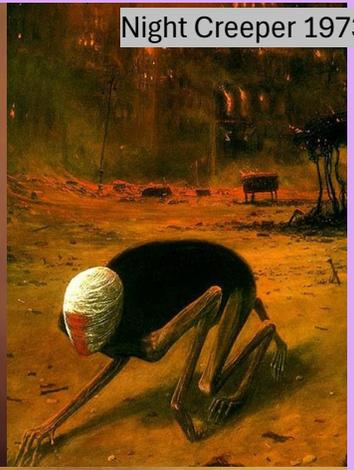
ZDZISŁAW BEKSIŃSKI

Beksiński is a Polish surrealist artist and I have a profound love for his work. The creepiness, the distorted dystopian worlds with grotesque imagery and equally profound sadness is palpable throughout his work. His work falls under 2 periods, expressionistic and formalism. Both he portrays surrealist fantasy worlds and characters. Motifs of war, women, gothic architecture and death.

Untitled painting, 1984,



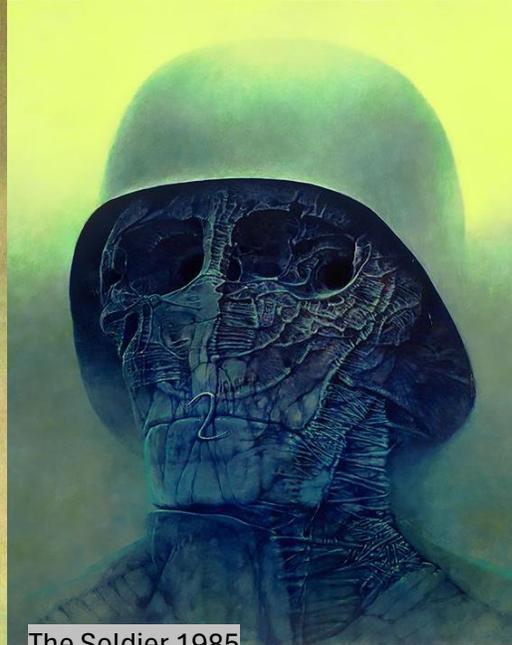
Night Creeper 1973



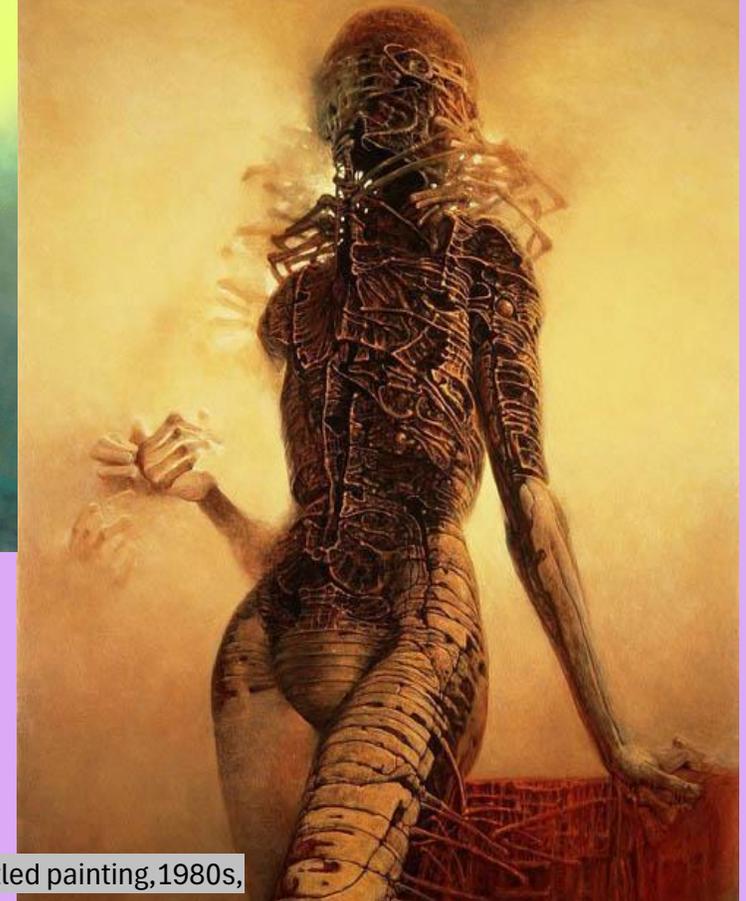
Untitled painting, 1960s-70s,



Untitled painting, 1960s-70s,



The Soldier 1985



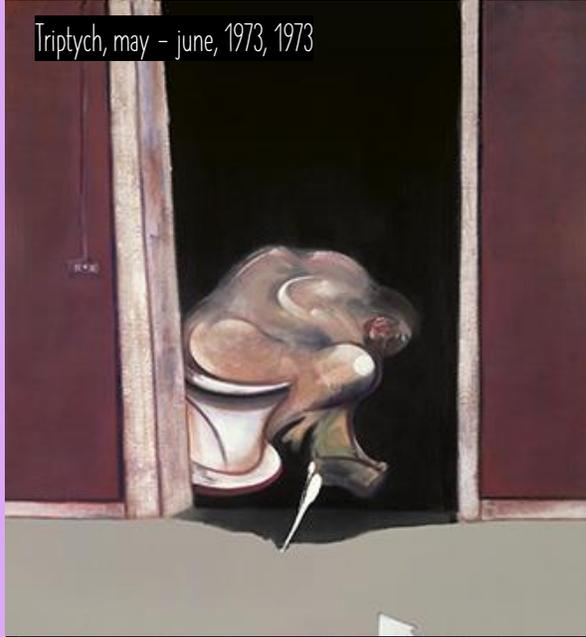
Untitled painting, 1980s,



BEZ TYTUŁU, 1978

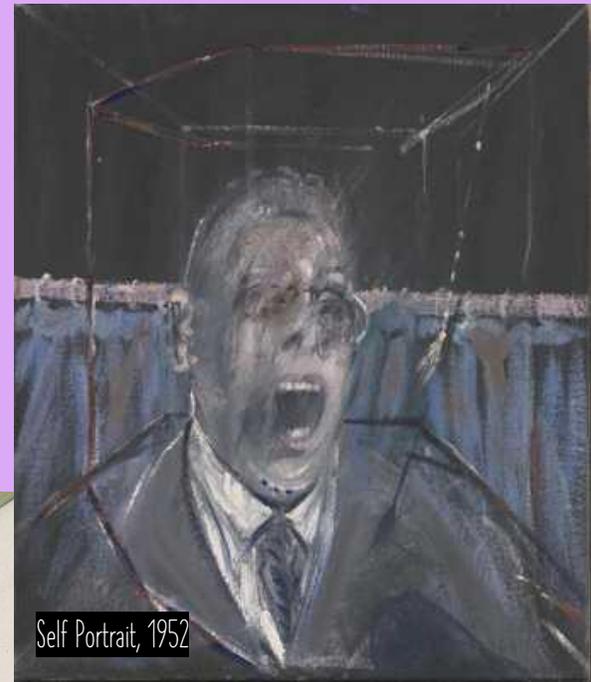
FRANCIS BACON

Triptych, may - june, 1973, 1973

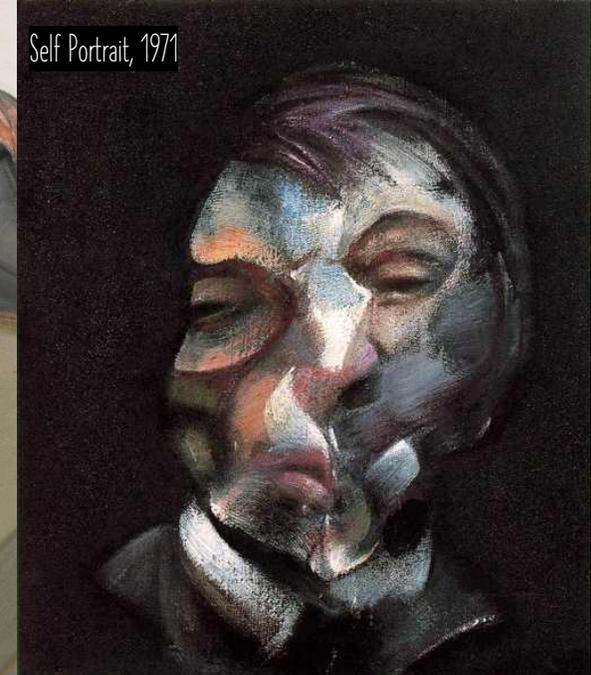


Irish British artist that illustrated disfigured portraits with grotesque and unsettling images presenting the darker side to the human condition.

I love Francis Bacon's work for there is a great sadness to his art. His self-portraits grasp a brutal honesty of raw emotions exposing us to fragmented faces pieced back together in a violent portrayal of self.



Self Portrait, 1952



Self Portrait, 1971



Self Portrait, 1962



Three Studies For A Portrait Of George Dyer, 1969

CLAUDE CAHUN

A genderqueer French artist from the surrealist movement of the 1920s/30s
They used photography as a medium and did collage in a performative way

I love her work for it is their own true portrayal of her gender in a very different way to the other artists mentioned.
I love the idea of hiding themselves being masks and makeup while showing a deep more personal side to her feels of self



Self Portrait (full length figure in cloak and masks), 1928

I am in training don't kiss me, 1927



I.O.U. (Self-Pride), 1929-1930

LEONORA CARRINGTON

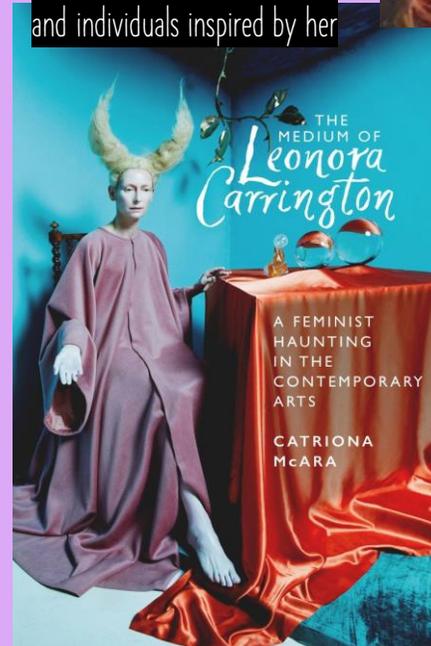
One of very few women that participated in the surrealism during its movement. She has had a profound impact on the feminist movement.

She spent most of her life in Mexico and was one of the last surviving surrealist artists passing in 2011 aged 94.



And Then We Saw the Daughter of the Minotaur, 1953

This book represents Carrington's art as a medium herself and the organisations and individuals inspired by her



The Meal of Lord Candlestick, 1938

"Animal/human hybrids, giant goddesses, spaces for magical transformation, and enigmatic creatures populate Leonora Carrington's artworks and writing. She created a pantheon of subjects that convey her interest in the sacred—one that is untethered to a specific religion or culture—and its presence in the intimate corners of our psyches." – <https://www.moma.org/artists/993>

Her characters are so beautiful and weird and the worlds they inhabit are fascinating. While could represent nothing they do evoke such fantastical ideas of the imagination.

TILDA SWINTON

Tilda Swinton was a model for Tim Walker when recreating Leonora Carrington characters

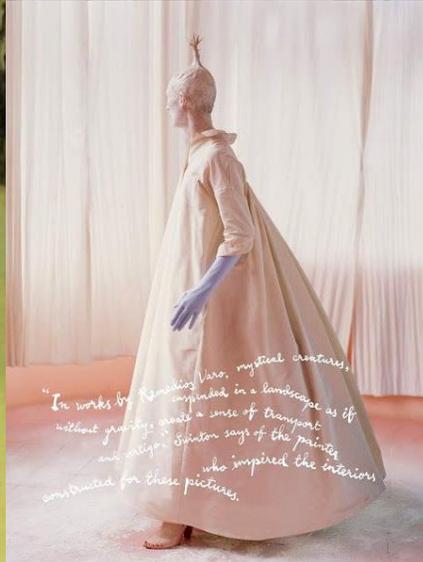
Tilda Swinton has acted and performed in many roles all of which involving some form of transformation using makeup, hair or costume.

These transformation into other characters, people, a role invites feels of a new persona. The experience of feeling and seeing the world through someone else's eyes and enacting that through performance.

Her passion for transformation and modelling the surrealist worlds of Leonora Carrington alongside Tim Walker if wonderful to witness and inspirational



Darvault, c1950, Leonora Carrington



"In works like Carrington's, mystical creatures, compressed in a landscape as if without gravity, made a sense of transport and allegory." Swinton says of the painter, who inspired the interiors constructed for these pictures.



TIM WALKER

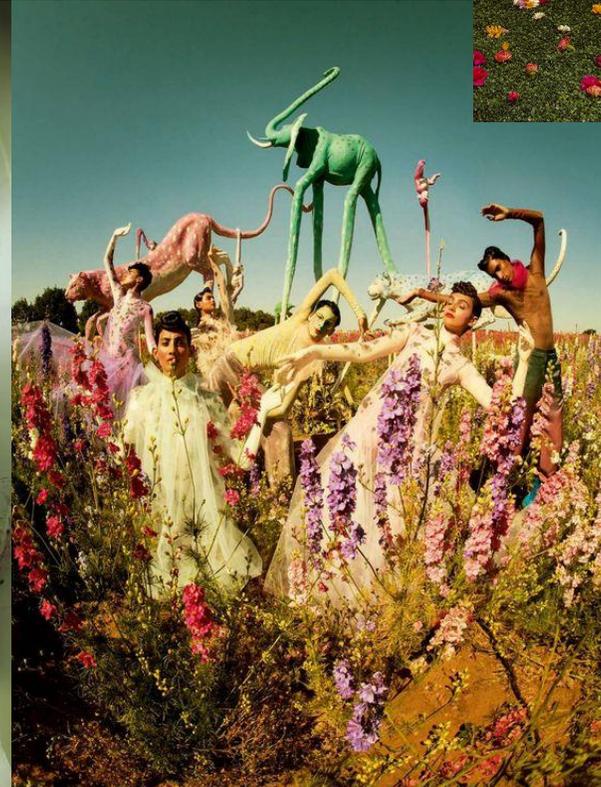
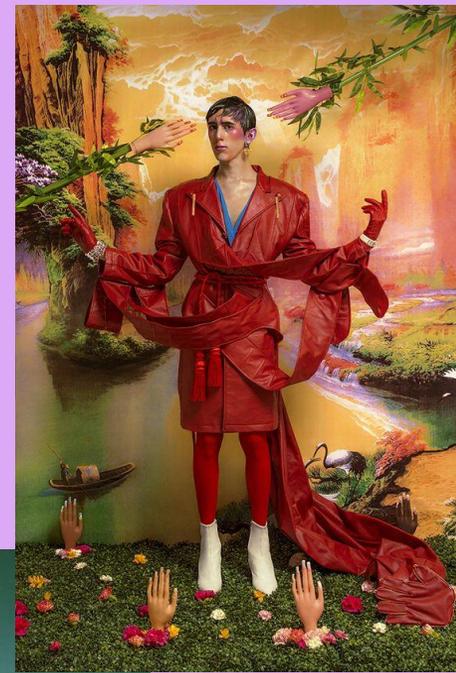
Tim Walker is a British fashion photographer that creates highly imaginative images for high fashion brands and magazines.

His style is unique and has been an inspiration for many.

The style of his set designs, shot angles and overall aura his images have can be seen as surrealist. The media of film and real-life construction of these spaces is deeply alluring.

Andres Manon

A Mexican designer and photographer that can be seen to have a Tim Walker flare but uses this inspiration to highlight the identities of the LGBTQ+ community



DOROTHY O'CONNOR



An art director and photographer from Atlanta, Dorothy designed rooms to represent events and the story of her life

Using the skill of set design to convey the message of her life is so beautiful. We all have our bedrooms and work rooms that we spend time in and make our own and the way she designer each room to present different aspects of herself is wonderful to see.

She had live models in her spaces during performances that must have truly awed the voyeurism aspect withheld in an audience



<https://mymodernmet.com/dorothy-o-connor-scenes/>

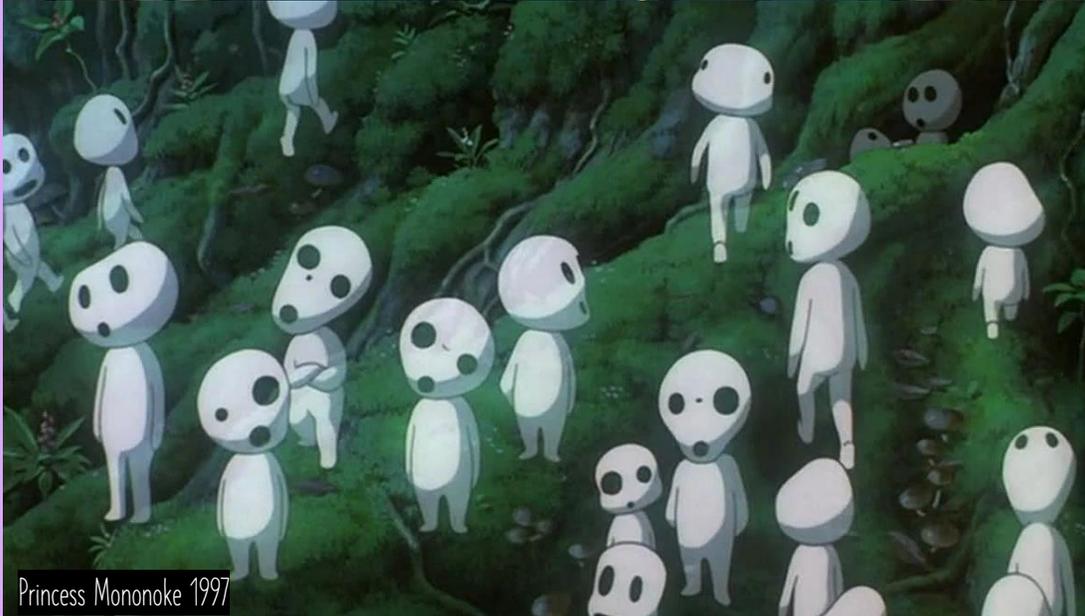
<https://www.dorothyconnor.com/>

HAYAO MIYAZAKI

I did my thesis called *Spirituality in Studio Ghibli films: Shinto and Miyazaki* as such I examine closely the characters Miyazaki has created and where he obtained his inspirations. Miyazaki created fantastical monsters and creatures inspired by Japanese folklore.

Miyazaki also portrays women in an interesting light with his elderly and witch characters being caricatures of reality, standing out from the other characters and even women in his films.

His characters are something out of a surrealist painting, blended into narratives involving magic and fantasy evoking a childlike wonder



SURREALISM AND MAKEUP

Makeup is a perfect medium for recreating surreal imagery. These are a few looks I think are stunning and indicative of the surrealist movement in modern day.

The use of prosthetics and the headpiece to change the shape of the face and create new angles and become otherworldly

Pretty sure this one is edited

I know for my project I would like an element of beauty makeup to drive home the concept that my characters are "normal" in their world

Illusion makeup and beauty makeup creating a surreal image



SURREALISM, MAKEUP AND PERFORMERS



These are some performers that have used makeup and sfx to alter their appearance for performance reasons.

Heidi Klum Halloween parties have been highly anticipated over the decade wondering what she could do to outshine the previous year



Doja Cat in recent years has begun to take part in the trends and has made headlines on magazines for her creative looks and standout conceptual surreal alter egos



Melanie Martinez has under an extreme change in performing since 2023. She performs in an alien mask and is rarely seen in public not in character

These are some prosthetics that were used on celebrities for a runway.



ALEXANDER MCQUEEN, RUNWAY MAKEUP

For decades Alexander McQueen runways have incorporated surrealism. His unworldly fashion designs are elevated with the use of makeup and hair



These are some of the many amazing inspiring makeup, hair, headpiece looks from McQueen Runways that I like and could influence of my major project

SURREALISM AND THE BODY

Unfortunately, body dysmorphia can have an intense impact on the body.

I would argue that the self-image is a surreal concept as the idea of oneself can be so far removed from reality that it can't be actualised in our time and space.

The practice of changing your body to become your imagined and preferred self-image I believe to be the actualisation of surrealism on the body.

What is Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD)

<https://ocdireland.org/body-dysmorphic-disorder/>



The extreme transformation of the body from severe muscle growth with excessive exercise or steroid abuse, to underweight with starvation or food restriction.

These people look like characters from a surrealist painting and highlight the effect that body dysmorphia can have on the body.



SURREALISM AND THE BODY

Facial alternations with surgeries and filler



In our society, cosmetic surgery has become normalised, accessible and safer. Altering the appearance of self can be simple as a small amount of filler, tattoos or piercings to full facial reconstruction, body mods or dental reconstruction.



Extreme body modifications with implants, tattoos and piercings



Facial Feminisation Surgery (FFS) is something I have been interested in for a long time. As a transwoman, as a woman, I'm constantly told how I should look, and alongside the years of body dysmorphia, gender dysphoria is at work, and I dream of the day I could have FFS to feel more comfortable in myself and with my appearance

The idea of beauty is subjective, and I love seeing people happy in their own skin doing what they want to make themselves feel better or more like themselves. A quote someone told me that stuck since: "a person with tattoos is the most beautiful because they present their soul to the world"



SURREALISM IN FILM

Some films I like that have surrealist elements in set, styling and characters



An Andalusian Dog (Un chien andalou), 1925



Spellbound 1945



Vivarium 2019



Destino 2003



Pans Labyrinth 2006



Hellraiser: Bloodline 1996



Haunt 2019

FILM SAMPLE



Film sample mode 1. overhead shot of character in bed, possibly getting out 2. goes over to mirror, usually upset, picking at face + body, staring not sleep
shots would cut between normal + prosthetic or disced, to reflect their inner self



3. fighting with themselves, mirror shots over shoulder, trying to lean into self 4. crying in mirror



5. crying in room, collapsing in prosthetics. 6. character on bed crying into hand revealing through face 7. Dolly zoom into face of prosthetic 8. cut over prosthetics



9. violent magenta, crying, melting 10. prosthetic version in red lighting 11. crying at end normal smiling at self

Originally, I want to design this character for a shirt art film but unfortunately the team I gather became unavailable and I eventually decided photoshoot would be more indicative of the work I wish to produce.

This is the stills from the film edit I created and helped inspire shots for the photoshoot.

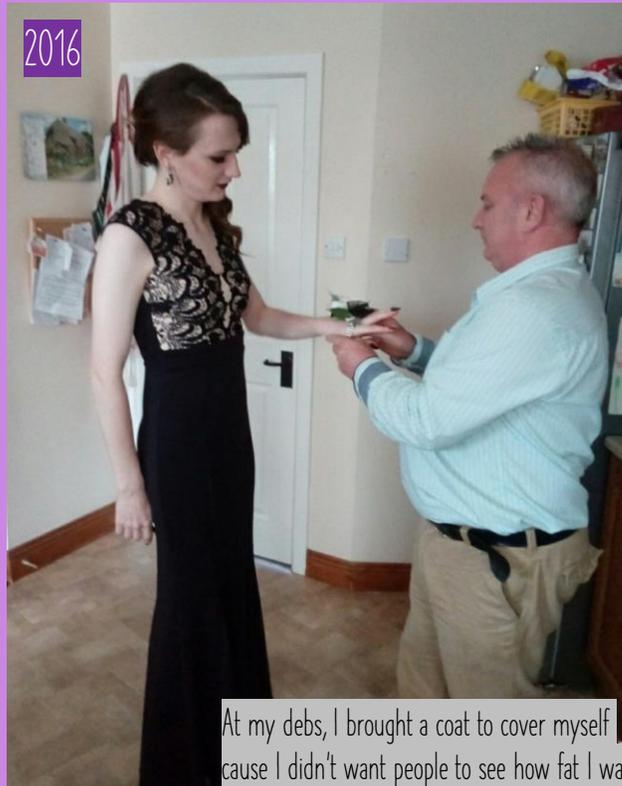
The character will be designed for film and street or gallery performance art purposes.

- Film edit attached to Teams upload and next slide

MY EXPERIENCE WITH BODY DYSMORPHIA AND ANOREXIA

From a young age I experienced issues with self-image and my body. I was a chubby kid, bullied and my weight being something other kids made commented on. When I was 15 (2014), I develop unhealthy eating patterns as a result to the years of hating my own body. Over the years, my eating disorders presented as Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating and ARFID (avoidant restrictive food intake disorder) mainly Anorexia. 2015-2017 was the worse of my eating disorders. My disorders continued into my 20s. I was 22 (2020) when I felt recovered, but I still have relapses into unhealthy patterns when I'm very stressed, but I'm able to manage them and recover quickly and it doesn't impact my health anymore.

The images below are from various times all of which I believed I was fat, huge, disgusting and wanted, needed to be skinnier and thinner and "healthier".



Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder that causes a severe and strong fear of gaining weight. You may have an altered view of being fat even when you are dangerously thin. You may use extreme exercise, calorie and food limitations, or bingeing and purging to control your weight.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH MY BODY NOW



In the last year particularly, I have really loved my body for how she is and looks. I started doing performances revealing my body that have boosted my confidence through the roof. I have gotten tattoos and piercing that have made me love my body even more.

My body has gone from lowest of 45kg to 90kg. My boobs have gone from AA to DD/E. and my face is so soft and round and pretty

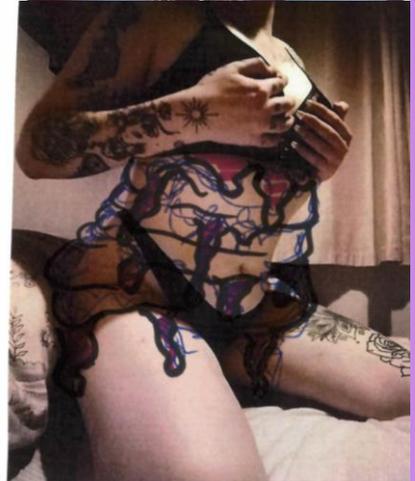
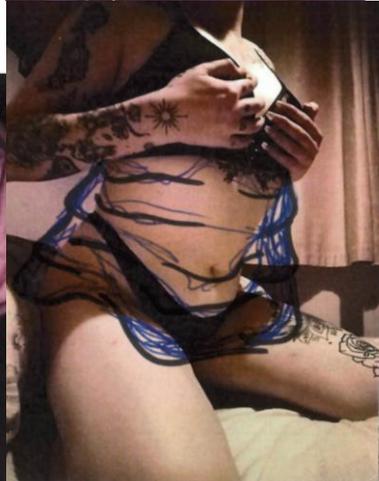
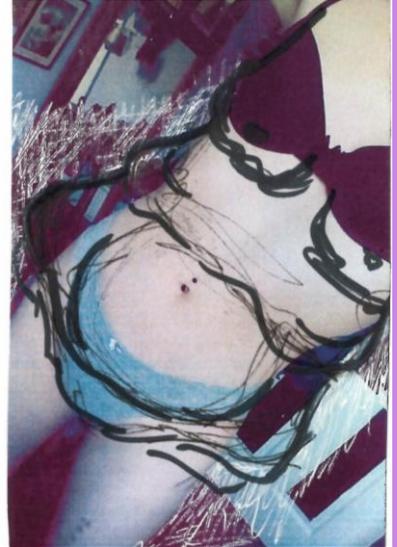
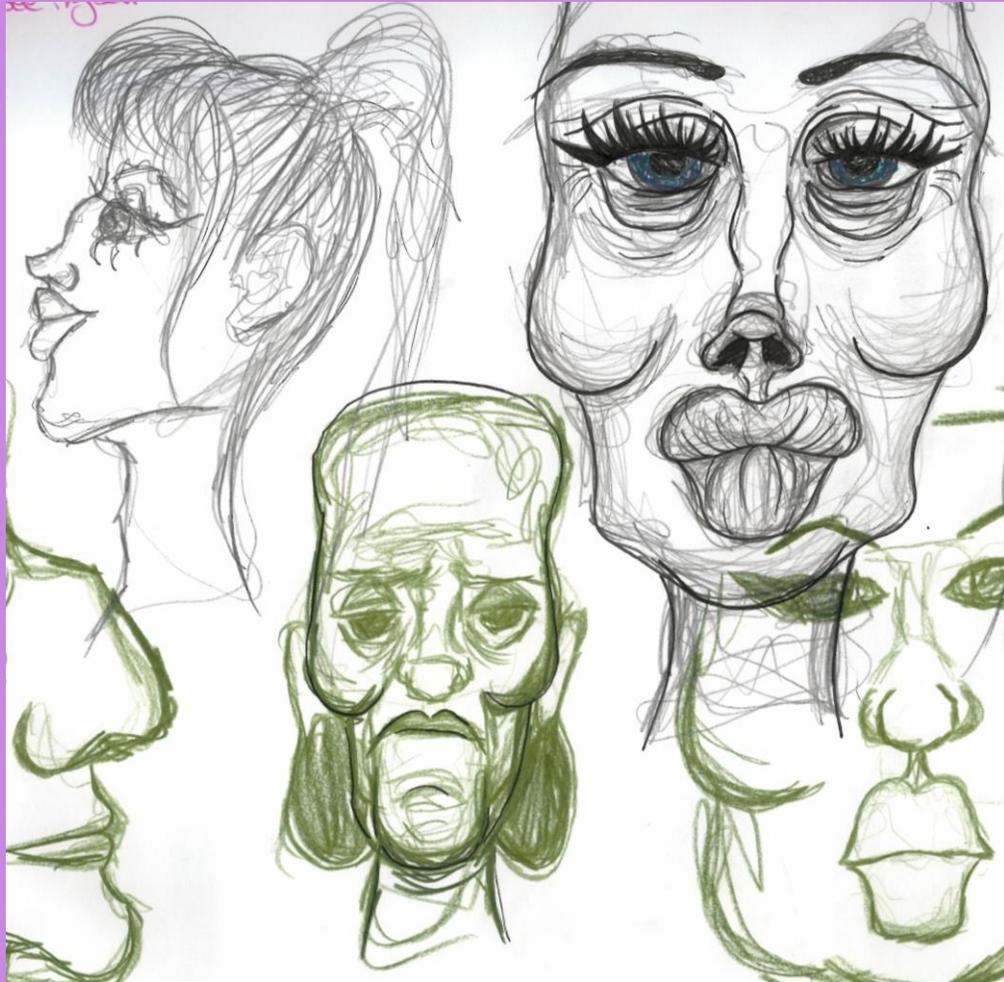
I have performed in front of crowds up to 100 people and publicly performed at a theatre showing what real bodies look like.



I love my body now more than ever and feel saddened to think of the abuse and hate I put her under in the past

DESIGNING CHARACTER

I sketched out my distorted self-image to get a idea for the character. I sketched different distorted shapes on photos on me and my body to explore possible ways the character might look. Elements I wanted to focus on was the nose, for head and stomach and these are areas of my body I have always been and still am self-conscious of.



DESIGNING CHARACTER

I sketched out ideas on Anas (my Model) face to visualise my self-image on her face and how that may look.

I explored a lot of different options and went back to rethink the idea. I thought of doing a piece of sagging skin but that went away from the idea I wanted to portray.

I wanted this character to be a visualisation of my self-image. A character that looks pretty but in an eerie disturbing way. A character that would make you look at your own insecurities.

I want to put beauty makeup over the prosthetics as well to further than this is who she is and I trying to look beautiful



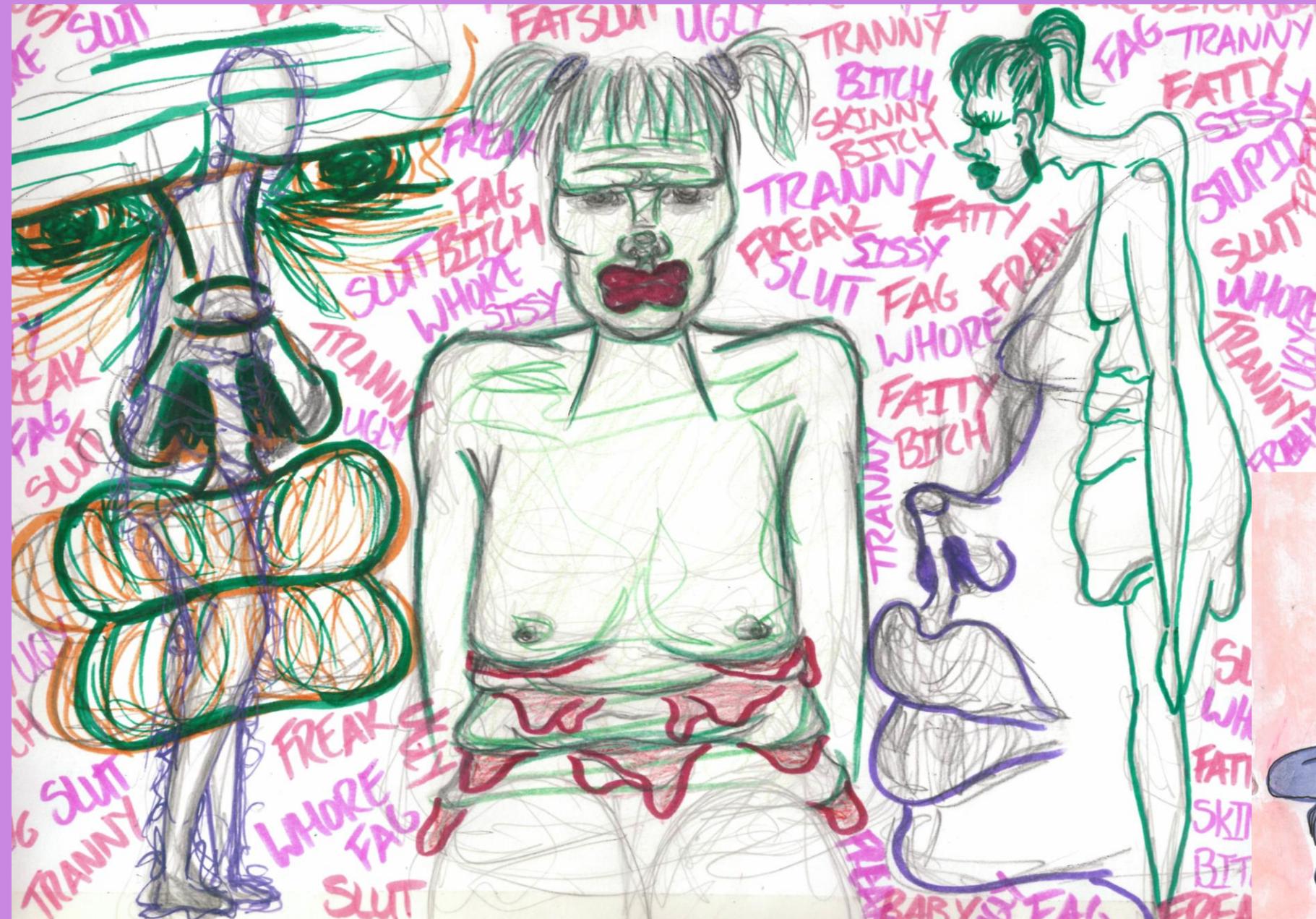
Beside designs I liked and further developed

FINAL DESIGN



FINAL DESIGN

Character design in costume →



COLLAGE MOOD BOARDS



Collage on Surrealism and The Body



Collage emulating the concept of my project

HOW TO ACTUALISE MY DESIGN



I looked at how I can make this character real, and should I do it in various prosthetics or one big face piece? A mask? A costume element for the stomach or prosthetic?

I decide on a mix of gelatine and silicone prosthetics for face and stomach



American Mary, 2012
<- This vibe for final look



RBFX

RBFX

RBFX

NOSE AND LIP PROSTHETIC



Sculpting the lips and nose

I mapped out the shapes and smoothed out. Adding texture and had a lecturer review the sculpt before I moved onto making the rest of the prosthetic

← Reference images

BROW PROSTHETIC



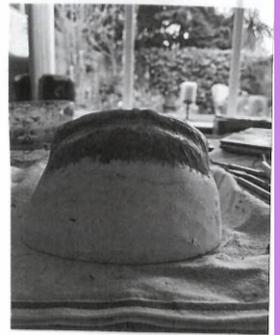
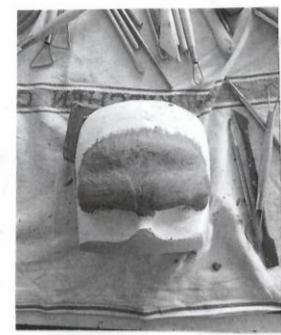
Had to cut my cast a lot as I over filled it with plaster and needed the brow facing upwards



I had to recast for brow as the first mould didn't come out right

As my first cast was too small and didn't cover enough of the forehead, I had to do another life cast using a bald cap to make sure I got enough for the brow piece.

Reference images →



sculpting the brow shape



I worked a bit more of definition after this photo was taken as I dropped the whole sculpt. I wanted this to be exaggerated so realism isn't an essential goal

I mapped out the shapes and smoothed out. Adding texture and had a lecturer review the sculpt before I moved onto making the rest of the prosthetic

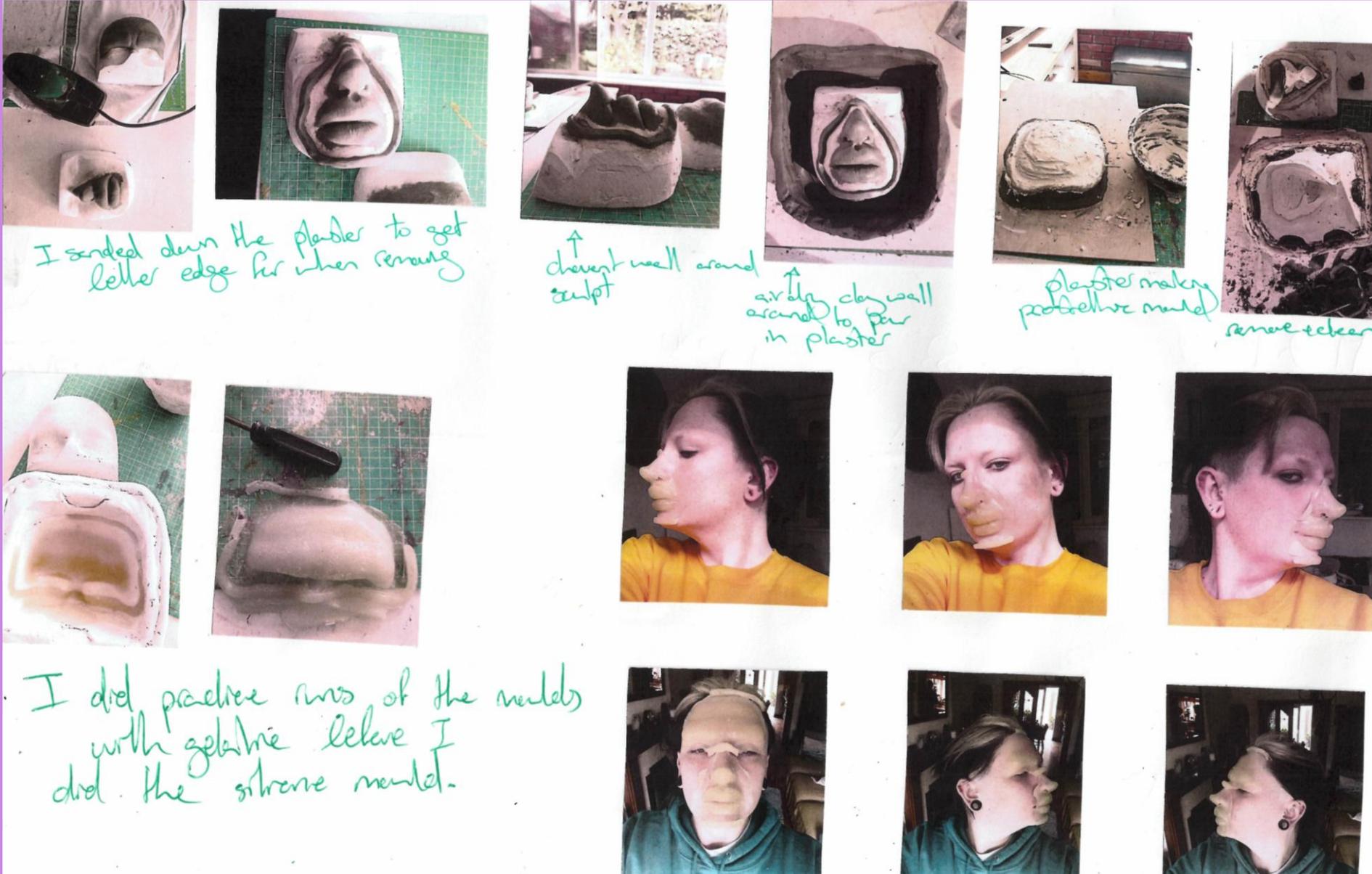


FACE PROSTHETICS

I tidied up my casts by sanding the edges to make removal a lot easier.

I made a wall around the piece for easier prosthetic removal. Used air dry clay to make walls around the piece to make the plaster mould.

I casted the moulds with gelatine to see the shape of the prosthetics and if the plaster moulds worked.



STOMACH PROSTHETIC

Reference images →

I wanted a stomach piece that hangs and squishy, beer belly like but more flabby.

The sculpt I made into 2 pieces, 1. because I didn't have the money to buy the amount of silicone to make the prosthetic and 2. easier for carrying and transport.

I wanted the bottom piece to be silicone and I knew by then that the costume would be covering the top anyway.



POURING SILICONE

Ideally the stomach pieces would both be made with silicone and probably a 50:50:250



The release agent on the plaster moulds and a layer of cap plastic before pour



The silicone in the face moulds and stomach piece



I did a test to see if the silicone will come off the plaster

I used the gelatine in the top stomach piece and used about 6 cubes of Maekup gelatine blocks.

I used silicone on the face pieces and the bottom stomach piece.

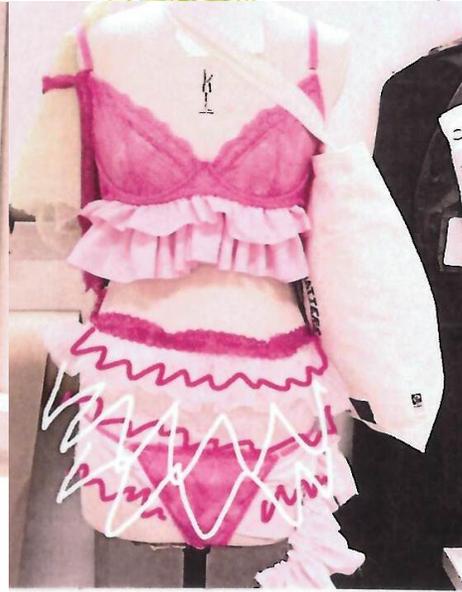
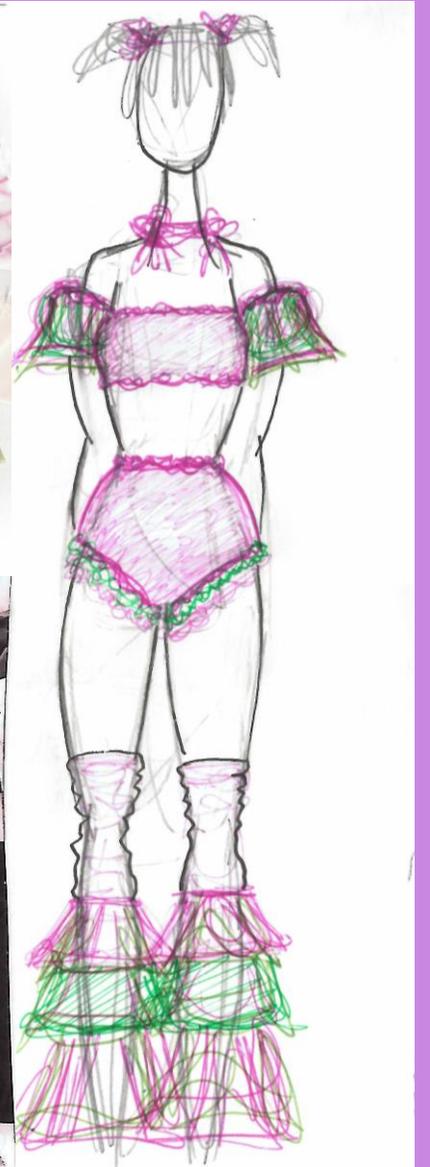
- A:B:D
- The nose was 50%:50%:100%
- The brow piece was 50%:50%:150%
- The stomach piece was 50%:50%:220%

COSTUME

I designed the costume and then Jay @vomaxdesign made the costume and I assisted.

I bought the fabrics and played around with gathering them and layering to see which I liked and then wrote out my notes and idea for Jay

I wanted the costume to look like underwear but wearable but needed to be extremely absurd. The idea of underwear but its bulky and impractical. The pink and green combo as well I think is beautifully eerie. Like pink vomit.



Figuring out layering, playing around with the fabric

Costume design



SET DESIGN

I decided on a maximalist aesthetic as with most Surrealist artworks **TEXTURE** and **LAYERING** are vital. The idea of a hellscape of clothes and personal belongings will aid in the visualisation of the character being overwhelmed.

Inspired by the look of a charity shop or thrift store where non consistent objects and clothes are massed into one space to create something beautiful. The space will be exemplary of the characters bedroom, a personal safe space, with objects and clothes reflective of my own life.



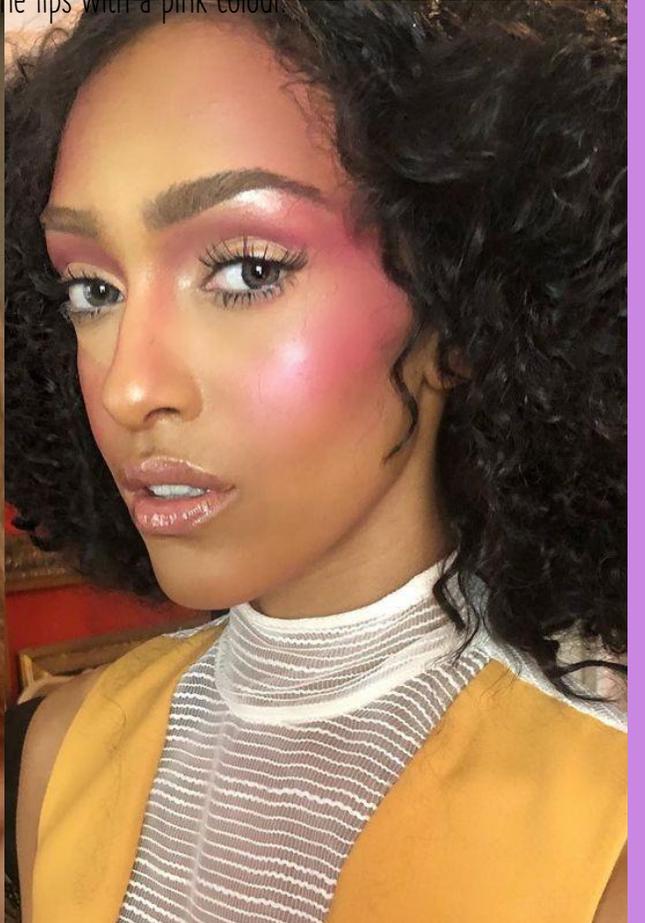
BEAUTY MAKEUP

Due to the focus of the project being on the prosthetics I didn't want to do anything crazy with the beauty makeup. I knew I wanted it to tie into the bright pink of the costume but still be subtle and natural.

Having the makeup as "natural" "normal" as possible also aids in the surreal energy of the characters transformation that this is her face and if how she looks.

Also, this ignores the thought that she does see herself this way and is trying to do makeup to make her look and feel beautiful.

Ana has hooded eyes and with the brow piece I knew I want to have big lashes and a more focus on the lips with a pink colour.



PHOTOSHOOT DAY

I built the set and did the set dressing with the help of some friends. The set was built over 2 days and I loved it!

I believe I captured the exact world I believe this character to live in.

I wanted this space to reflect my own dream room as a child, overloaded with pink and messy and a real teenage princess bubble-gum hyper pop haven.

I included elements in the set that related to my own life experiences. The sex toys, alcohol, pills all have relevance.



I got 3 film flats + 3 bounce boards to build walls of room - using fabric I covered the walls

Set Build

took 3 Days - 6 hours to build + had help from friends but mostly did it myself

me

lightly dressed set Day 1

Day 2 - dressed set

color correcting

Day 3 - shoot Day

should have gone all way around bed

Makeup

didn't like how it make out as something went wrong with nose + lip piece

-will do re do of just makeup xxx

The full body makeup transformation took about 4-5 hours with breaks, checking on set and getting into costume.

The process didn't go exactly how I planned but the outcome I could not be happier with. The character is everything I imagine myself as on my bad days and makes me so happy to see her actualised.

The whole process has been very healing and eye opening to the years of hate I have had towards my body and face. I hope that joy of this world ive created but the equal pain ive felt, can both be seen in the final images

BEFORE



AFTER

