



Formative feedback

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| Student name | Thomas Pal | Student number | 520377 |
| Course/Unit | Context and Narrative | Assignment number | Five |
| Type of tutorial | Written | | |

Overall Comments

The final portrait has a direct and immediately engaging effect. On one hand your idea has a graphic simplicity, but it does also project complexity for you, with possibility to suggest transferability to similar situations for viewers. Below I've expanded on some contextualizations for the work and, as this is the last assignment, feedback on assessment preparation.

Assignment 5 Assessment Potential

I understand your aim is to go for the Photography/Creative Arts Degree and that you plan to submit your work for assessment at the end of this course. From the work you have shown in this assignment, providing you commit yourself to the course, I believe you have the potential to pass at assessment. In order to meet all the assessment criteria, there are certain areas you will need to focus on, which I will outline in my feedback.*

Feedback on Assignment

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Quality of Outcome, Demonstration of Creativity

I'm very pleased that you have stepped outside of your comfort zone and explored a very different way of making an image through montage.

The image has a strong and immediate graphic impact. This is achieved through the straightforward connection between your idea of you as two distinct versions of yourself evoked by the juxtaposition of military and civilian clothing. The third element of the medals brings in another dimension of personal and professional pride and esteem which traverses the two variations of you.

Although the portrait is assembled using principally three elements you've taken the time to align and scale them to give the impression of there being one complete person, but made up of different parts. By controlling your expression and orientation to the camera, and importantly the lighting, you connect the parts again to say that this is one and the same person. The overall atmosphere or narrative of the portrait is serious and dark. This is intended because you chose to stare out directly at the viewer, the lighting is foreboding and you have deliberately suppressed any sense of approachability. In this sense the image presents a chilling snapshot of a man staring into the mirror and closely scrutinizing himself in terms of outer appearance at a point of change of life.

In your statement you talk about a journey so I would invite you to literally think of this as a journey and a larger narrative project. If the image was part of a sequence or was positioned within a larger open series I wonder what else you would have chosen to explore about this time in your life that went beyond this unfaltering photographic stare. The term that is often used for the transitional state in which you are for the moment is *liminality*. This is a condition of mind where you leave one state of existence behind but you are not yet fully within something else – you're on the boundary or threshold between two states.

As you are not in a rush to finish this work for assessment I'd like to see you use this image as a structure and to embark on a series of quick experimental pieces using a wider range of poses, expressions etc. and to see what else is possible that pushes your work further into this really interesting space of being multiple people and being in transition. This would let you be freer and open to discovery as a working strategy. As you already have this image in the bag you needn't concern yourself with finish and worry about correctness. See the reference to collage as a history and do look at the wide range of work by someone like Hannah Hoch in the early part of the 20th century.

The method of conjoining appears to be that you've shot each part separately and then ripped the images printed onto paper to assemble the final images. Importantly, the vertical paper tear runs directly through your face – maybe suggesting some type of rupture or fissure between the two versions of yourself. I say this because the process of rough-and-ready ripping of paper could also be associated with a destructive handling of images. It's not clear whether that vertical rip is a device linked to meaning, exploring how you feel personally/emotionally about the transformation from one life to another? The question is there for you to explore further.

Coursework

Demonstration of technical and Visual Skills, Demonstration of Creativity

When responding to coursework questions try to step back to a less personal critical position. Of course you will form and hold personal viewpoints - some positive and some negative - about something you are asked to analyse, but when researching try to feed in to your writing, critical thoughts from published sources. This will steer the writing away from saying simply that you do or don't like something to building a convincing academic argument for the reader.

Studying in the arts is not different to any other field in that one's critical position on something is never fixed nor permanent - we learn new things absorb new knowledge and our understanding evolves. Simultaneously our understanding of diverse concepts grows, as does our subject specific vocabulary expands to give us tools to express new thoughts.

Research

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis

Below I've offered a few research sources to help build your appreciation of how this new work sits within both the genre and history of montage and how it might connect with the work of other artists and debates around representations of multifaceted senses of self. This idea that underpins the image of feeling that one straightforward portrait cannot represent the narrative and complexity of your change in life at this time is well-trodden ground.

You might not agree that the fundamental idea of imagery being able to examine being more than one single sense of self, connects in any way to the work of Claude Cahun because he was focused on gender, but give it a look with an open mind. Although you didn't need to use disguises or costumes you did make some very clear decisions about the right clothing, the best expression and you carefully controlled the aesthetic style through lighting and framing. Rather than construct a picture of you to give the impression of a single shot outcomes you very explicitly made the work about construction from parts to echo the three elements that are on your mind.

I can see and appreciate enormity of moving from the military into a civilian life and you provided a clear and personal account of why you made the work and why it looks the way it does. You gave this work a lot and the final piece certainly communicates your intentions. As a portrait it projects a clear set of signs to the viewer and once the image is contextualized with your statement it could be associated with other message-based imagery such a propaganda and advertising – you might not agree.

Learning Log

Context, reflective thinking, critical thinking, analysis

Something I'd like to be able to see on your blog is the way that you took risks and chances visually. Sometimes you set out with a definite vision of what your image might look like and whilst this is not always wrong you need to leave room within your processes to play, ask daft questions of the medium and discover something new about yourself.

This photographic approach is a new one for you and I applaud your spirit. It seems to have been constructed with the view of making one singular image that expresses a significant amount about a complex stage in your life.

I feel that in any given assignment there should be built in by the author some capacity to return to the work and its supporting idea for further exploration. So rather than think in terms of meeting the brief exactly, you should probe and push the edges of what is acceptable. This is particularly so at degree level where you will be required to be a reflective and reflexive learner and where in the final stage of the award you will be asked to build a coherent body of work that can be sustained throughout the final course and beyond.

You've done well and now completed all of the assignments and coursework. Now you need to return to each of my feedbacks and get to grips with both the course 'learning outcomes' and the 'assessment criteria'. With these at the forefront of your mind try to assess yourself overall, get an understanding of your strengths and weaknesses and invest time to ensure that you meet the assessment criteria and learning outcomes fully and equally.

Suggested reading/viewing Context

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/45018/1/six-enigmatic-photographers-who-shattered-the-traditions-of-portraiture>

<https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/493636809135741589/>

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/11/08/whos-writing-this-notations-on-the-authorial-i-with-self-portraits/>

Dawn Ades, (1986), Photomontage, Thames and Hudson

| Strengths | Areas for development |
|---|---|
| Receptive to exploring complex ideas | You do need to show more evidence of independent research and reading to inform your writing |
| Happy to push yourself into new technical solutions and ways of making images | Adopt an approach to all assignments that leaves the work open to future expansion |
| Provides good personal accounts of your reasoning for making the work you do | Return to the learning objectives of the course and assessment criteria to diagnose your strengths and weaknesses |

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| Tutor name | Dr. Andy Langford |
| Date | 07.07.2020 |
| Next assignment due | Completed |