COMPARATIVE STUDY:
The changing conventions of portraiture within the context of time and place that they were created.

Exploring this topic lead me to discuss and analyse the uses of colour and symbolism in portraiture and the significance of origin in meaning. This comparative study inspired me to explore the theme of identity and oneself in my own artwork.
Born in 1881 in a small town called Málaga, and later spending his teenage years in Barcelona, Picasso grew up as an artist. His talent was recognised by his parents from a young age, and Picasso was encouraged to pursue it. Neither his father, considered a mediocre artist, nor any art academy could teach Picasso in the way the artistic scene of Barcelona could.

Picasso first moved to Paris in 1900, and shared a small room with a friend. He lived in extreme poverty, burning his artworks to warm the small room they lived in.

Picasso fell in to a depression that would last for years to come. This depression was echoed so clearly in his paintings, no one would buy them. The painting of poverty lead him into deeper poverty himself, and only sent Picasso into a deeper depression.

In his first trip to Paris, his paintings did not sell well. The audience did not react well, in fact they cared little for them. The sombre tone was not appeasing to the masses, and many of Picasso’s work were burnt or painted over as no one bought them.

‘Self portrait’ was painted by a young Picasso in 1901. Although he was just 20 years of age, he paints a gaunt, aged figure of himself. It dawns the start of his blue period, also contributed by one of Picasso’s dear friends, Casagemas. Subsequent to his failed attempt at declaring his love for a girl, he attempted to kill her, instead killing himself. Picasso credits his use of blue during this period to Casagemas suicide.

“It was thinking about Casagemas that got me started painting in blue.”

- Pablo Picasso

The poverty of Paris and Barcelona definitely influenced Picasso’s sombre tone. Certain artistic and social circles that Picasso found himself in were particularly interested in the ideas of anarchism. The political theory that rejects all hierarchal control, and advocates social freedom and a world in which society can cooperate as equals.

**Contextualisation - Pablo Picasso’s ‘Self-portrait’**


Picasso's self portrait is not a direct representation of his physical form, it is much more a representation of his internal self. Picasso places his internal identity onto his external image.

He portrays a much more aged version of himself, perhaps indicating his need to mature mentally in order to cope with the crippling poverty of 1901 Paris. His dark hollow cheeks exemplify this destitution. Hunger manipulating his body. Picasso also gives a ghostly paleness to his skin, the only hint of warm colour being his lips. The use of blue for the shadows gives a cool tone to the painting, making even the audience feel just a little bit colder. The large thick coat exaggerates this icy cold atmosphere, almost bringing the audience back to the Parisian winter in 1901. The coat dominates the painting despite the lack of details, darkening the overall feel greatly.

The whole figure is outlined by a harsh dark edge. This sets the figure in its dark state, defining Picasso. The plain blue background and texturised paint makes the audience perhaps picture the cold dark dirty room he would have been staying in.

The focal point of the painting is certainly Picasso's face. However, our eyes are directly drawn to his. The lifelessness and lack of shimmer depicts a dead soul. We are unsure of where he is looking, at us, or down to the floor. With only black circles for pupils, they appear very hollow and flat. The deep sockets suggest a tired character. Picasso's ragged unkept beard only further accentuates his poverty. Not only can he not afford to shave regularly, but does not have the energy and motivation.

The colour dynamic presented here is key to the expression of Picassos intense emotion. To the right are a neutral and warm toned version of 'Self-Portrait' I have created. The atmosphere given by these tones are extremely different from the mood of the original colour palette. Picasso translates his inner emotions and mood into a physical representation, not necessarily accurately portraying his physical figure, but portraying his mind and himself truthfully. He personifies his depression into his silhouette.
CONTEXTUALISATION - FRIDA KAHLO’S ‘SELF-PORTRAIT WITH THORN NECKLACE AND HUMMINGBIRD’

**AUDIENCE’S WORLD**

**AUDIENCE 1940**

*The Mexican Revolution is still occurring despite the war being over, and the emotions from the revolution are still a part of Mexico’s attitude.*

*Frida Kahlo had many lovers of both sexes, but had a lifelong partner, Diego Rivera. Kahlo often claimed that Rivera was her soulmate. At the time this piece was painted, Kahlo had had an affair with Nickolas Muray, which led to her divorce with Rivera, leaving her heartbroken.*

*“My painting carries with it the message of pain.”*  

*The audience however did make connections with symbols and meanings, and the message Kahlo was portraying was crystal clear. The painting was first bought by her ex lover Nickolas Muray due to his pity for her financial problems.*

**KAHLO’S WORLD**

*Frida Kahlo grew up during the Mexican Revolution, and it became a subject of passion for her. She was very influenced by social and political trends, and even lied that her birth date was the date the revolution began to establish a connection between herself and the revolution.*

*Unfortunately, a car accident at the age of 18 severely injured her. Kahlo used painting as a therapy. The accident was horrendous for her, but without it, she would not have pursued painting as a career.*

*Frida Kahlo’s work was often described as surrealist by critics and the public. This was due to her heavy use of symbolism. However Kahlo disagreed to her work being surrealist.*

*“They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn’t. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality.”*  

*The audience however did make connections with symbols and meanings, and the message Kahlo was portraying was crystal clear. The painting was first bought by her ex lover Nickolas Muray due to his pity for her financial problems.*

**FRIDA KAHLO**

*Frida Kahlo’s world*

**AUDIENCE**

*1940*

**Frida Kahlo**

*Self-portrait with thorn necklace and hummingbird*  

*1940*

*Oil on canvas, 61.25 cm x 47 cm*
This self portrait by Kahlo was produced shortly after her separation from Rivera. While there were many affairs on both sides during their marriage, which they both acknowledged, the final straw was Rivera’s affair with Kahlo’s younger sister. Kahlo documents her intense suffering and loss from the divorce. Despite both their numerous infidelities, Kahlo was still deeply and desperately in love with Rivera, although they later remarried. In the moment she painted this self portrait, Kahlo was forced to believe she would be separated from Rivera forever, which left her stricken with grief. Her emotions can be clearly seen through the intense symbolism throughout this portrait.

The first thing the audience notices is Kahlo’s expression. From this alone we can see her blank gaze, suggesting a lack of happiness in her life, and a state of depression over Rivera. Kahlo’s gaze fails to meet the audience as she is swallowed by her internal thoughts. We can also see she is surrounded by many creatures, but somehow still looks alone. This depicts Kahlo’s solitude and isolation due to her separation from Rivera, even if she wasn’t alone. Our attention is then brought to the thorn necklace wrapped around Kahlo’s neck, blood spilling out of the wounds. This combined with a white shirt gives a comparison between Kahlo and Christ, perhaps referencing the intense suffering and sacrifice that Christ went through. Kahlo seems to be enduring the pain, just as Christ had done on the cross. A dead hummingbird hangs from her necklace. Although a hummingbird does symbolise good luck in Mexican culture, it is black and dead, giving a sense of hopelessness.

On one shoulder stands a monkey. This monkey can be seen in many of Kahlo’s paintings, and was a gift from Rivera. Monkeys symbolise the devil in Mexican culture, and it can be seen fiddling and tightening the thorns on her neck. Perhaps we can say this monkey symbolises Rivera, as he is the one who has inflicted this suffering onto Kahlo. On her other shoulder we can see a black cat, again symbolising bad luck and death.

Kahlo’s hair is tied up in a traditional Mexican style, with two lace butterflies. Kahlo made a habit of putting Aztec and Mexican symbols into her paintings, and in Aztec culture, butterflies were said to hold the souls of the dead. Two flower dragonflies can also be seen, contrasting representing new life and change. Perhaps each butterfly represents the death of Rivera’s and Kahlo’s soul as they separate, and each dragonfly represents new change in their life, as they begin a new one without each other. These symbols suggest both intense suffering in Kahlo, but also confusion. Kahlo was hurt and longed for Rivera to come back, but also wondered if this was what was best.
Contextualisation - Marc Quinn’s ‘Self’

“Doing one every five years, they become a sort of record of a life, in a sense that the real work to me is the totality of all the sculptures which exist in my lifetime. Which is how I think of Rembrandt’s self portraits - that each one is a part of a larger work which is the series.”

- Marc Quinn

Marc’s series ‘Self’ began in 1991 and drew from this theme. Quinn grew up in London in the 60’s. Studying the history of art in Cambridge, Quinn quickly became involved in the art world. He began exhibiting in 1990, and only one year later created the first ‘Self’ which was later bought by Charles Saatchi.

Through this, Quinn quickly became part of the Young British Artists. The Young British Artists dominated art during the 1990’s, and often led the art scene towards more contemporary works. The idea of life, death, and immortality was a trending topic amongst the art world in the early 1990’s. And he drew inspiration from it. ‘The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living’ created by Damien Hirst dealt with the ideas of death and humans limited time. It was also created in 1991 and followed the immortality trend.

Quinn was also inspired by Rembrandt’s self portraits, leading him to extrapolate self into a running series. The progression seen amongst Rembrandt’s work can be seen in Quinn’s Blood Heads.
“THIS IS AN ARTWORK ON LIFE SUPPORT. IF YOU UNPLUG IT, IT TURNS TO A POOL OF BLOOD. IT CAN ONLY EXIST IN A CULTURE WHERE LOOKING AFTER ART IS A PRIORITY.”

- MARC QUINN
ANALYSIS - QUINN

The medium of this piece is what makes it. On first glance, a messy mould of an ageing man. And on deeper inspection, 9 pints of blood in the form of a head. ‘Self’ speaks about not only the miracles of the human body, but also comments on the impossibility of immortality and the boundaries between living and being alive.

Quinn creates one of these frozen blood heads every 5 years, draining the blood from his body over time. Without the body’s amazing ability to replenish its blood supply, this piece would not be conceivable. Every detail of Quinn’s face is captured by the frozen blood, and as Quinn ages, the blood in every new sculpture continues to capture it.

Just as ‘Self was created by him, this material, his blood, was also created by him. The cast, of his head. When does this piece stop being him and start becoming an artwork? The moment the blood leaves his body? Technically, if he were to melt the head, he’d have enough blood to undergo a blood transfusion. In which case, all this ‘material’ would go from being a material to being part of a living organism. Is it alive only when inside his veins? We don’t look at blood on the floor and consider it alive. Yet the molecular structure, function, and ability of the blood is the same nonetheless. The boundary is hazy, and extremely perplexing to the audience.

Initially, one might relate this piece to immortality. Quinn has taken something organic that would otherwise rot away, and frozen it in a moment in time. But all it takes is for this piece to be lost is for the power to go down. The preservation of this piece relies on existing in a society in which art is valued, protected, and appreciated. This form of immortality can only exist in the ‘non-living’ blood. We could never hope to achieve this for ourselves, for it relies on existing in a society in which the earth, our home, is valued, protected, and appreciated.

Quinn continues to create these ‘Self’s’, and at some point will ultimately create his last self. This last self will come with his death, but Quinn states ‘I still haven’t decided whether it’s a good idea (making last portrait after death) or not because to me, this sculpture series is about the living and not the dead.’ This mentality captures the meaning of this piece, for as long as Quinn is alive, so is the self. Each head captures his progression in life, and to create a head of himself when he himself is not around, would be a lie.
**COMPARISON**

**PICASSO**
- **Theme:** Portrayal of Emotion
- **Content:** Self Portrait
- **Elements:** Metaphorical representation, blue colour palette
- **Composition:** Side on, face at focal point, large empty space fills painting

**KAHLO**
- **Theme:** Portrayal of Emotion
- **Content:** Symbolic self portrait
- **Elements:** Focuses on symbolism, vivid colours
- **Composition:** Head on, face at focal point, crowded space

**QUINN**
- **Theme:** Life, Death, and Immortality
- **Content:** Sculpture of head from frozen blood
- **Elements:** Dark blood, fine detail
- **Composition:** Head on, only part of piece is blood head
Comparison

Kahlo’s oil painting expresses her emotions not only through symbolism, but through her facial expression. The dullness in the eyes, and off centre focus, suggests Kahlo to not wholly be there. She lacks presence and energy in this painting, perhaps how she would seem in real life during her divorce. Both Kahlo and Picasso share this same blank stare. Picasso remains slightly more focused on the audience than Kahlo, but still lacks the life like features of energetic eyes. They are both missing a sense of happiness or positive emotion. Eyes are the window to the soul, and what is depicted through both Picasso and Kahlo’s Windowsed eyes is deep deep depression and a lack of purpose in life. Both Picasso’s and Kahlo’s portraits are created in moments of depression and emotional trauma.

In contrast to this, Quinn’s head focuses on accurately portraying his likeness in the form of frozen blood, not his emotion. It’s a cast of his head, identical to himself at that moment in time. Quinn follows mimetic theory much closer than Picasso and Kahlo. While Kahlo’s works are painted masterfully, just as Picassos are, it is not the main focus of the piece. One of the biggest shock factors of Quinn’s blood head is not just the blood, but seeing the life like mould of Quinn himself.

All of these artworks focus on the portrayal of the face. Picasso’s physical appearance and facial expression is the focal point of his painting; it is key for the audience’s interpretation of the painting, and the expression of his emotions. Quinn’s head is obviously the main feature of his artwork too. Kahlo too has a heavy facial focus in her painting.

Kahlo and Picasso’s paintings tell us something about themselves: their feelings, emotions, and lives. Kahlo helps us to explore not only herself, but her culture. Her signature monobrow and moustache are part of Kahlo’s way of trying to express her culture. Kahlo’s Mexican heritage was just as much a part of her as her husband Diego was.

Quinn on the other hand uses portraiture to comment on the external world, life, death, and immortality. We can see this effects their creation of the work and their style. Kahlo uses heavy symbolism to paint her feelings onto the canvas and Picasso uses space and colour to reveal his depression. While Quinn, using only the symbol of blood, creates an identical replica of himself, mimicking the real world.

While Picasso lacks symbolism, both Kahlo and Quinn make use of blood and it’s connotations for their pieces. While Kahlo uses it to represent suffering and pain, Quinn uses it in a cold clinical sense to reflect on life and death. Picasso’s non vibrant blues, and reserved posture hides away from the audience. Both Quinn and Kahlo shy away too, failing to directly meet the viewer’s gaze, suggesting vulnerability. Kahlo’s need for love, whether it be from Rivera or the audience, is shown in this head on, close up view, and demonstrates her extreme emotional condition. Quinn’s work also seeks the attention of the viewer, not to express his feelings, but to express his views. The viewer cannot help but contemplate the artwork.
SIGNIFICANCE TO MY OWN WORK
PABLO PICASSO’S ‘SELF-PORTRAIT’ 1901

Pablo Picasso’s ‘Self-Portrait’ and other works from his Blue Period inspired me to really explore the possibilities of colour as a way to express emotion. When looking at ‘Self-Portrait’, the depression portrayed by Picasso seems to swallow his whole being, defining who he is. However, emotion is fluid, and the painting makes me wonder if Picasso was ever happy during his Blue Period. Did sorrow become him?

To the left is one of my pieces called ‘Emotion’. This concept of emotion being fluid but also defining who we are led me to experiment with how colour can portray this. This piece is comprised of 4 layers of glass, with three layers of different colour palettes in between the glass. Below is a portrait of myself.

Each colour represents a defining emotion, sadness, happiness, and purity. Yet the alternating layers show how each emotion can alternate. While they are all integral parts of who I am, just as Picasso’s depression inspired him, they are not the be all and end all of who I am.

Picasso’s classic oil painting and my contemporary piece both explore how we can manipulate colour to send a message.
SIGNIFICANCE TO MY OWN WORK
FRIDA KAHLO’S ‘SELF-PORTRAIT WITH THORN NECKLACE AND HUMMINGBIRD’ 1940

Kahlo does not just express her emotional state in this painting with the use of symbols, but also considers her culture and ethnicity. Her eyebrows, moustache, the humming bird and other Mexican symbols are her way of saying this is ‘who I am’. However her facial features and hair are often exaggerated in her painting compared to real life as we can see in the photo below on the right. This provoked me to consider just how much we can manipulate our selves to send the message we want.

To the left is one of a series of photo manipulations taking women from famous artworks and recreating them in real life called ‘Skin Deep’. I used a combination of makeup, wigs, accessories, and Photoshop to recreate the looks. On the bottom left is a photo of the same model in ‘Skin Deep’ but without any of my physical and digital alterations.

Kahlo manipulates her self to emphasise her heritage and culture. In my piece I use manipulation to adopt anothers culture.

ELEANOR SHORT
‘SKIN DEEP’ 2015
PHOTO MANIPULATION

FRIDA KAHLO
’Skin Deep’ 2015


SIGNIFICANCE TO MY OWN WORK
MARC QUINNS’S ‘SELF’

Quinn’s head deals with the connections between body and soul. Quinn questions what makes us, us. His head is made completely of his own blood, completely of himself. Does that make the piece a part of him, or are they physically separate?

My piece ‘stories’ deals with how other physical aspects of our bodies can control who we are. ‘Stories’ is a figure of a head, created out of a story describing someone’s trials and tribulations of dealing with a genetic disease. The story ends with the person deciding to not let it dictate what she can or cannot do or be. And while it is still a part of them, depicted by the story wrapping around the face, they separate themselves from the illness, the illness is external, just as the writing.

Quinn separates body and soul in the sense that, all this blood was his, and is even in his head form, but it is no longer his anymore.

The writing of ‘stories’ is created with a 3D pen. It uses liquid plastic to create the thin fragile lines. A bust is used as a template to form the head shape.

ELEANOR SHORT
‘STORIES’ 2015
PLASTIC
30cm x 15cm x 18cm