

VISUAL ARTS

An artist's body of work and artistic practice often links to a form of self-expression. The need to express one's personal experiences and beliefs is seen in Frida Kahlo's "Broken Column" 1944, Jackson Pollock's "Blue Poles" 1952 and Yayoi Kusama's "I Am Here but Nothing" 2000. Whether it is unforeseen events of the past, the need to visualise the inner mind, or a personal condition, the artists' unique use of materials, techniques and symbols allow them to express their needs as a way of self-exploration.

The self-portrait artist, Frida Kahlo began to paint as a way of comfort and self-expression in her lonely days in hospital, "I am happy to be alive as long as I can paint." The horrific car crash she experienced in her youth had been an influencing factor in her paintings as Kahlo's works often suggest pain from the incident's consequences. This is exemplified in her painting "Broken Column" 1944, where highly controlled brush strokes and the inclusion of minute detail are used to create personal symbols that reflect her personal situation. The tears and piercing nails represent the pain she endures due to her broken spine, represented by the broken Column, while the nakedness of her body implies her exposure to harm. The barren landscape furthermore depicts her isolation in hospital, while her masklike face displays a sense of self control to carry on in these tough times. Kahlo's work was so personal that it was thought incapable of expressing universal emotions. Although some may identify her as a surrealist painter, Kahlo contradicts this, "I painted my own reality". She not only relied on her pain and body as her source of art but she constructed herself in her paintings. Her many artworks put side by side are able to tell her biography "I paint myself because I am so often alone and because I am the subject I know best" The more knowledge a viewer has of her life, the more understandable the meanings of her symbols become. Therefore it is seen that as a way of understanding herself, Kahlo uses art at a personal level, developing symbols and motifs to tell her story on the canvas.

American painter, Jackson Pollock, further used art as an outlet for his emotions. He believed in the notion of "art for art's sake" and explored his self-identity through action painting. The emergence of this avant-garde style in the modernist era heavily relied on the artist's physical and emotional involvement as the importance of the painted surface was emphasised over the imitation of reality; depth was now the actual build-up of paint and raw emotion. To Pollock, the act of painting was a pure psychological event. His strong fascination with the subconscious was influenced by Jungian philosophy, the idea that art comes from within. Pollock used drip painting to produce turbulent canvases with tangled threads of pigment as seen in "Blue Poles" 1952. This technique involved the absence of brush to canvas contact, allowing a more fluid depiction of gestural motions that are often linked to his state of mind. The bold 'poles' give a sense of chaos as the lines appear to be slashed in a ragged manner. His artworks serve as extensions of himself that display his personal feelings that were impossible to represent objectively. These large scaled works appear to have "no beginning or end" and Pollock often works on the floor to better immerse himself in his work. His works are almost impossible to replicate to the exact details as there are almost no representational forms and the painting style itself is very unpredictable; as Harold Rosenberg states it was rather "a series of exemplary acts". This makes his artwork even more personal to him as replicas cannot truly be made. Pollock's main purpose in making his art was for himself; therefore we see how art has been used to express his inner emotions as a way of maintaining serenity in his mental state.

Yayoi Kusama, also produced art that dealt with her psychological state. Kusama experienced hallucinations of polka dots and patterns ever since childhood till now and she uses her artwork to self-obliterate as a way of "returning to the infinite universe". She explored her obsession with repetition, accumulation and the concept of infinity through her installations, "my art originates from hallucinations only I can see." Her installation, "I Am Here But Nothing" 2000 simulates a traditional 1950s Japanese living room covered with stick-on ultra violet neon dots that glow under UV florescent light. These dots covered every surface of the environment to produce a flattened illusion of the three-dimensional space. The title itself refers to the concept of infinity as dots may be

associated with the stars and planets of the outer universe but also the cells and molecules of the inner universe; hence implying the never-ending fusion of alternating parallels. The artist had used her artwork as a way of placing the audience in her perspective in order to induce them to feel the same isolating, dizzying visions she feels. The choice of setting a Japanese domestic environment further alludes to her heritage and on an even more personal level, her difficult childhood and the presence of her overbearing mother. The severity of Kusama's condition has often been debated, whether her artworks are valid or not. This indicates how strongly Kusama has based her artworks on such a personal aspect of herself. Her artworks serve as windows to the audience, allowing them to experience her personal condition as well satisfying Kusama's own needs to self-obliterate.

In reflection of the artists Yayoi Kusama, Jackson Pollock and Frida Kahlo, it is evident that artists use their own unique art making practices to conceptually express themselves. This notion is often seen as a way of comfort and serves as an insight to the audience as to who the artists really are.