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Senior Project

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<div align="center">Senior Project Paper</div>

At the beginning of the year, I had absolutely no idea what I was going to do for my senior project, and I left the thought alone until the start of November. I knew that I wanted my project to be on something I enjoy; something I am willing to put in an immense amount of time and effort. I looked towards my hobbies and everyday things that I take pleasure in. Three ideas came to mind. I began to hover around the idea of doing something either basketball-related or something in the art realm such as singing and drawing. Ultimately, I settled on the drawing option because I imagined that it would be cool to draw a portrait for everyone in my class.

My idea of drawing a portrait for everyone seemed simple and basic so I thought of ways I can spice things up to make the project even more interesting. I thought that perhaps instead of drawing a portrait of everyone, I can use black and white pictures to create a digital collage of a portrait. Or I could find a way to make every portrait different artistically perhaps with different styles and mediums. But after long considerations, I concluded that although it would've been much more fascinating, I suspected that I would not be able to finish these exotic ideas. However, I presumed that maybe my project may be too basic after all, so I thought of several ways that I could give it more context. One of my ideas was to feature a subproject that is more research-oriented and connect that research to my drawings. I was planning to conduct research on the effects the environment has on efficiency and what factors can enhance productivity or be

a distraction for students in today's society. That was the plan for a couple of months and after talking to Beth and Molly about this plan, I was convinced that it was a solid and feasible plan. So for the first few portraits, I took notes on my working environment, time, and my mindset. I also was working on an online survey I can send out to my fellow classmates with questions about their style of work, environment, habits, and distractions. The reason behind that was so I can get a real-life sample of what students' tendencies are. That way, combined with the upcoming research, I can make a more accurate conclusion on what makes students more efficient. However, after a couple of months, I abandoned this idea because although it will give my project more content and make it more entertaining, I realized that I do not have the time and luxury to complete all my drawings and do a research-oriented subproject. Instead of diverting my attention and effort into both drawing and research, I decided that it would make more sense if I concentrated on the quality of the project by polishing and perfecting my portraits.

To get started, I had to gather all the materials I need. I went to Michael's to get a few big pieces of paper that I can cut into the size I want. But then I came across an 11 x 17 drawing pad that contains 24 pieces of drawing paper which is perfect for my project. With this, it is much more convenient and efficient since I can eliminate the process of cutting the paper into the size I want. Then the next step of my process was taking photos of each of my classmates. I could've just asked each of them to send me a picture of themselves that they are satisfied with, but since I'm doing a detailed graphite portrait, standard quality pictures are not going to cut it. So instead, I got permission to take everyone's picture on picture day with my own Sony camera. This way, not only the quality enable me to zoom in and capture the details, it makes them more accessible to me. Once the preparations are set, all I had to do was dive in and start drawing.

Stage One: Formatting

      The first stage of the process was creating the reference printout. I inserted an image into google docs and adjusted the image into the format I want. Since the original picture is in color, I decided to set it to black and white because not only is it less expensive to print out, it can give me a better perception of light and dark, highlights and shadows, and the overall contrast of the figure. As shown below, image 1 is the original that I took with my camera, whereas image 2 is the formatted version of the same image. As you can see, image 2 is the formatted version of the reference photo. It is centered, the extra background is cropped out, and it is recolored. By formatting the image and fitting it onto the page, it made the next step a whole lot easier.

Image 1: Original Image

Image 2: Reference Image

Stage Two: Gridding

Since I didn't want to freehand the preliminary sketch, I decided to use the grid method. The grid method is a convenient way to get the outline of the drawing and getting the proportions accurately. So once I had the formatted black and white reference printout, all I needed to do was grid it. Gridding is simple, it doesn't require much skill or talent since all one needs is accuracy. The print out is 8.5 x 11 inches, so what I did was, with a light pencil, I drew a line down in the center of the page. And starting from that midline, I marked a point every two centimeters until it reached the side. Then I marked the page from the top to the bottom with the same two-centimeter scale. And once I have markings on all four sides, it was just a matter of connecting the dots with lines. Since my

drawing paper is 11 x 16 inches, I decided to enlarge the scale from 2-centimeter squares to 2.5-centimeter squares.

Stage Three: Outline

The third stage of drawing a portrait is creating an outline of the person. I always create my outline lightly because it is common for me to slightly adjust or tweak the placement of the outline. What I like to do first is instead of transferring what I see in the reference photo to the paper by focusing one square at a time, I like to get the overall outline of the figure first. Once I have a light overall sketch of the shape and the position of the features, with my observational skills, then do I try to focus on the individual squares of the grid while looking back at the reference. And since I already have the overall outline, to get more detailed, I had to treat every part of the grid separately and look at how different parts of the image come in contact with the grid lines. Sometimes, to get an even more accurate outline, for example, the position of the eyes, I would use a ruler and divide the squares into four parts. That way, I can know where exactly which parts of the eye lie in my paper. In some cases, I also take the time to outline the shadows and the lighter areas of the drawing so I get a better sense of the composition. I like to take my time in this stage because it is the most important stage in my opinion because you don't want to be hours into the drawing and realize you have drawn the eye in the wrong position or slightly off to the right or whatever. That's why I always approach this stage with a careful mindset and be aware of where I put my marks and outlines. Image 3 is a completed version of stage 3 of the process. As you can see, I have basically outlined the face, hair, and all the facial features.

Image 3: Gridded Outline

Stage 4: Shading

Once I have the outline, I'm no longer concerned with the placement of the facial features. Therefore, I can ease into the fourth stage of the process: shading. Shading requires a lot of attention to detail, hand-eye coordination, and observational skills. Especially in a black and white portrait, capturing the light and the shadow is a vital part of the process. It is one of the most important things that determine the quality and outcome of the drawing. Even if the position of the outlines is correct, the product still wouldn't look accurate if the shading is off. I usually start off this process by starting right on the eyes. Because I think the eyes are the most critical feature of the

face. Getting the eyes right is crucial for the drawing to look perfect. Without accurate eyes, it is

pointless to move on to the next part of the drawing. And since the eyes consist of intricate

details, it is necessary to sharpen my pencil so that I can get very detailed with the shade and

texture. For all the other facial features, since the reference image doesn't allow me to zoom in

and catch tiny textural details like the grain of the skin, I like it to be just detailed enough that the
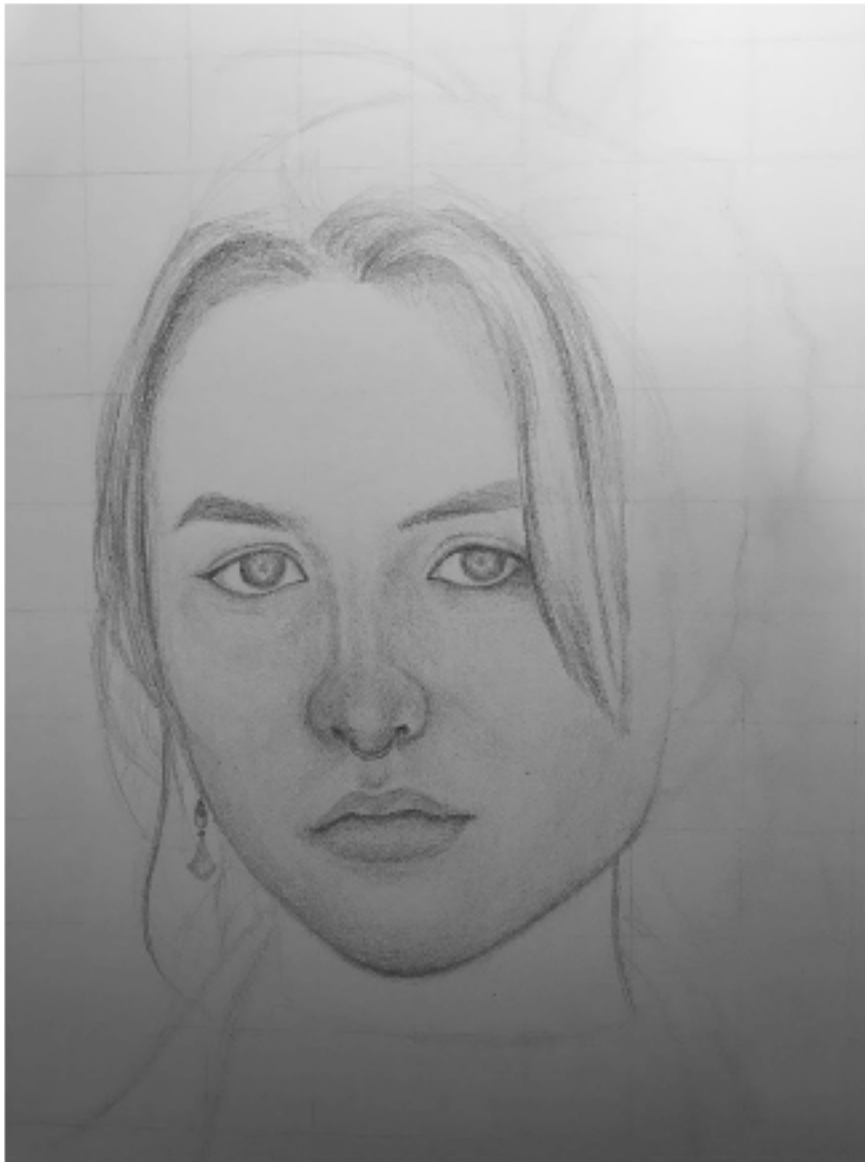
texture is still visible but also well blended. As you can see in image four, the skin doesn't have isn't as detailed as the eyes or the lips. I basically went over the skin with a light pencil with feathery strokes to give it a blended effect. The rest is simple and repetitive, by constantly referring back to the reference image, I can shade it rather easily by just looking at where the shadow and the lighter parts are.

Image 4: Shaded

Stage 5: Adding Contrast

Once I have the drawing down with adequate shading, it's time to switch to a softer

graphite pencil for the sake of darkening the shadows and increasing the contrast of the drawing.

Similar to stage 4, I like to start with darkening the eyes since, as I said it is an important feature

to get right. Then from the eyes, I work my way out darkening the shadows around the eye and

the eyelids. Then I usually move on to the cheeks and add definition to the cheekbones. Once the

face has more contrast, all that's left are the hair, the ears, and the neck area.

Stage 6: Other Features

For me, drawing the hair is one of the hardest parts of this entire process. I usually start

from the left side of the forehead and move across over the top and finish on the right. This way,

it becomes more efficient and easy because it allows me to avoid smudging the parts where I

already shaded, therefore, saving time. Drawing hair is hard because not only do I have to

continuously look between the reference image and my drawing, I also have to be precise with

the shade and the texture. There is also a matter of negative space, which I use for the strands of

hair that's brighter or highlighted, which makes it even more complicated. What I like to do to

start off this stage of the process is, first, mark where the darker hair is going to be and where the

highlights are. Once I do that, I can erase the gridlines and start shading. The direction I shade is

also important since hairs are linear, the lines I draw must correspond to the direction the hair is

growing. I use a softer pencil for the hair since the hairs are usually darker than the face. This

way it'll add more contrast. As you can see in image 3, I already started part of the outline for the

hair sticking down since it was crossing the face but that should give you an idea of what I meant

by outlining the hair. Then in image 4, you can see the hair is lightly shaded. As we move on to

image 5, you can see that it is the final result and everything is shaded, and the strokes in the hair

are the same as the direction of growth in the reference image. Once I finished the hair, I started

to draw the ears next. Since I already have the outline for the ears, the rest is pretty simple. I just

had to apply the right shade to certain parts of the ear where there are shadows and highlights.

The neck area is the last part of this stage. It is also really basic, I just had to shade it correctly

within the outlines. Sometimes I like to even shade the clothes to make it even more realistic so

it's not just a head floating around in the middle of the page.

Stage 7: Final Touches

This is the last step of the drawing process, and I have to approach this step carefully

because, in order to notice places that need a little bit more work, I have to pay attention closely

to everything. Whether it is the shading around the mouth or the position of a strand of hair, it is

important to take a look at everything and constantly compare it to the reference image. Take a

look at image 5, which is a picture of the final product.

Image 5: Final Product

Throughout this entire journey of completing portraits for everyone, I came across a significant obstacle. I started drawing in October because I was primarily focused on the college application, so when basketball season came around, my pace began to slow down significantly after I finished my first and second portrait. Since I have practice three days a week and games usually on Tuesdays and Saturdays, my time became limited. In the first few weeks, I was able to complete about one portrait per five days, but when my free time decreased, so did my pace. I was only able to complete one portrait per two weeks. As the pace died down, my routine was messed up and I started to spend less time drawing as the season furthers on, to a point where I completely ignored the project. It was too much work for me to juggle between schoolwork, basketball, and my project so I just decided to procrastinate and divert my attention to making the most out of my last year of high school basketball. At the beginning of the season around winter break, I thought that I had time to complete everyone's portrait so I didn't think it was a big deal because I have time to catch up after the season's over. But after the season finally ended in February, I had not picked up my pencils in so long, I was completely out of it and lost interest. I became lazy and had zero motivation to finish this everlasting task. I was in the state for a couple of weeks trying to push it off till later. But as I dragged it on and on, my interest level got worse and worse. I needed something or someone to rejuvenate my interest. But no one can do that except me. I knew if I don't discipline myself and start drawing again and make it a routine, I would never be able to finish everyone's portrait. So instead of restarting the drawing process, I thought about alternative ideas that might cut my workload short so I don't have to draw as much. But I wasn't able to come up with an idea so I told myself that I just have to just do it and ride it out. I counted the time left and divided the number of portraits I still need to do

into the number of weeks. I set a schedule for myself in order to time manage and prevent myself from slacking off. There were about two months between then and the date of the supposed project night, and I had 9 more portraits to complete. So I forced myself to draw at least one and a half portraits per week. Once I got back in rhythm, my interest shifted back and I was able to complete the portraits consistently. But after the school was shut down, I began to slack off again because since we had no school, I had a lot of extra time on my hand. And my first instinct was to procrastinate. Ultimately as the date of the presentation crept closer, I was about three portraits short. Luckily, the presentation was canceled and I was satisfied and relieved that I was able to complete all 16 portraits before my departure back to Taiwan. I think if I were to repeat this project again, I wouldn't change anything except for setting a schedule that takes into account basketball and other extracurricular stuff. Since it was so challenging to be in rhythm and finish in time. This entire journey was a reminder that I am not someone who likes to get things done right away. I tend to procrastinate and put off homework or work in general until it's necessary. And I think I have learned something valuable from this experience. Time management is the key to success. As my life moves forward to the next chapter, time management is vital if I want to be on top of things and be academically successful.

In February, I came up with the idea of making a short time-lapse film of a step by step process of drawing a portrait. I just finished Caroline's portrait at that time and I was beginning to work on Mondo's. So I popped up my phone above the desk and filmed it. Each portrait takes about 6 to 8 hours to complete and for Mondo's, it took about 7 hours. Obviously I wasn't able to finish that in one sitting so I would work for like an hour every day for a week. So in the video, the lighting might be different because I would work on it sometimes in the day and

sometimes at night. After I put all the sections together into a whole video, I added pictures of the other portraits into the end so that when I present it, the audience can see everything I did. But unfortunately, that did not happen due to the virus.

I didn't really need a mentor that can help me with art since I already have experience in this field. I needed someone who can provide me insights and critiques and help with my writing. Beth was that mentor. She was an ongoing mentor that helped me develop new ideas along the way to help move my project forward. She also set up meetings to check up on my progress even when I'm in Taiwan. I don't' think I could've asked for a better, dedicated mentor than her. I also talked with Skydriet and molly briefly when I began my project, and they also had ideas that were interesting but I just wasn't able to do them. I think I was able to do this without much outside help, and I wonder if it would be any different if I had an art mentor throughout this process.

Overall, although it was stressful and challenging time-wise, I had fun with the project. Along the way, I began to have the idea of giving away each portrait to each individual in the class. I feel like that has always been my intention but I just didn't know it yet. I wanted this to be a final gesture of appreciation and show my love towards all my classmates for they have all been a part of my life during this memorable time. And I hope that with the portraits, they can remember all the memories we share, whether good or bad, and just appreciate and cherish those memories.

Appendix

Photos of all the portraits are below

Colin Williams 15

Mimi Hollinger 16

Ash Aldridge 17

Aiden Kelly 18

Hudson Yoxall 19

Kai Hensley 20

Reed Hays 21

Gavin Sellors 22

Luna Artraga-laak 23

Caroline Langley 24

Mondo Ramos 25

Eva Silberstein 26

Ella Rademeyer 27

Yifang Chang 28

Jazmin Piva 29

Pete Bannister 30