

Faces as a narrative

Special Project Report

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Introduction

Being born and brought up in different places, in different contexts, interactions with other people and experience of different circumstances consciously or subconsciously have made people what they are or what they have chosen to be. There are various factors that keep influencing people's identities and personalities.

Respective identities are reflected through various manifestations like their posture, body language, clothing, mannerisms, behavior, gestures or their expressions or faces. There are stories about themselves that they reveal.

Images of themselves that they create or those that are created on their own. However they are revealed within the scope of the readability of the observer. The observer too has developed this sensitivity based on his own contexts, experiences and associations he has established through his own understanding of events, circumstances and other people.

It is perception of these identities or stories through faces that is intended to be studied through this project. The route to it is also through my perception of identities and how I read people through their faces.

Various dimensions of faces

1 The idea of beauty: What has been the perception of beauty over the years? How do trends in beauty change? How is there a general consensus for the idea of beauty? Without preconceptions or the knowledge of trends what would constitute to be beautiful for any individual? Are there any established standards to beauty at a given point and time? How are they formed?

2 What kind of perceptions do we develop subconsciously by just looking at a face of a person? How do we form opinions without having known anything about them previously. Are there any characteristics that are very apparent and so invisibly perceptive that its difficult for the sub-conscious to not have an opinion. Can these be perceived from a still photograph of faces which is deprived of the person's mannerisms, behavior, tone, attitude or reactions to a given situation? Does it still convey the identity of the person? Can one weave a narrative or establish the situation around the character? How much does one trust in his ability to perceive an identity visually from a person's face?

3 How much are we aware of our own face at different points and time? Most of the times when we are consciously occupied with something else, we hardly realize what our face suggests or the signals it

unknowingly conveys. On the contrary there are also situations where we are consciously aware of our face and we exercise control on what we suggest. How does this conversion happen? How can we tell a difference between the conscious and the natural expressions.

4 All stories are mostly based on characters, a context, a situation or a state of mind in a given time and space. When we listen or read stories we do picture the characters in our own way just as we visualise the entire narrative. A lot of this perception comes from the detail descriptions in the story itself, pre-conceived notions or certain other associations that are built over a period of time and differ from person to person depending on their exposure. The different interpretations or perceptions of the characters allows for their multiple imaginations. Observing the associations that different characters have with their faces would be interesting.

5 Interaction with an actor and understanding how he perceives the role of the character he plays and becomes that character. The study would particularly attempt at understanding how he subjects his face differently while playing different roles. The study could also involve considering examples of films with varied characters played by the same actor.

Understanding of the self through self-portraits

Our existence lies in the awareness of the self and our perception in the minds of the other. There are attributes affiliated to the inner self that get reflected in the outer self. However as the inner self is abstract in existence, its manifestation to the outside is only a mere representation, when it ought to be a vivid reflection. The inner self is best understood only by the self. What is portrayed outside is only within the scope of physicality.

An urge to portray oneself comes from the need to understand one's own being. In our inability to decipher or define our own state, these representations help us connect with ourselves by means of personification. By doing so one actually tries and extracts the inner being so that it can be looked upon, experienced, understood, contemplated upon and let be...It allows one to play the role of both the insider and the outsider as the language derived is hereby common in origin. A lot of such attempts in self expression have been done through writing, sculpture,

portraiture, paintings and photography over the years by different people.

One of the most trusted and recognizable identity of oneself has been the face. How much are we aware of our own face? What is our face like in different situations, phases or states of mind? If face is quite representative of one's identity, how does the same face represent all the experiences we have? A mirror showcases only an honest physical replica. A personal interpretation of one's image enables integration of the very state of mind at a given point and time in the expression. Such an expression of oneself through the world around us is real, honest and is a witness to our own being.

The project is therefore divided into the following aspects:

Study of the works of artists or writers who have attempted at self expression. Understanding myself and attempting at self expression through self portraits and writing.

Paul Klee on manifestation through art

Herbert Read in his introduction to Paul Klee in the book 'Paul Klee on Modern Art' says 'an art like painting is itself a language-a language of form and colour in which complex intuitions are expressed'. Explanation of art is an exercise in self-expression according to Paul Klee.

According to him an artist is no different from a layman except that he is gifted with the ability of creative expression and is able to release himself through the creation of form. As he explains an artist understands the world by his ability to decipher its various complexities and drawing certain order from the organic web like that of the roots of a tree. The artist then stands as the root of the tree where his understanding is processed and then he reflects this understanding that spreads as the crown of the tree. The crown here is like a reflection of the roots and can never be exactly the same but only its manifestation.

Any art has certain physical properties as it is visible and tangible. The image is composed of various dimensions used in varying proportions. The formal factors are the line, tone value and colour - the line denoting values of measure, the tone values between black and white characterizing weight and colour with its own independent identities characterizing quality. Combinations of

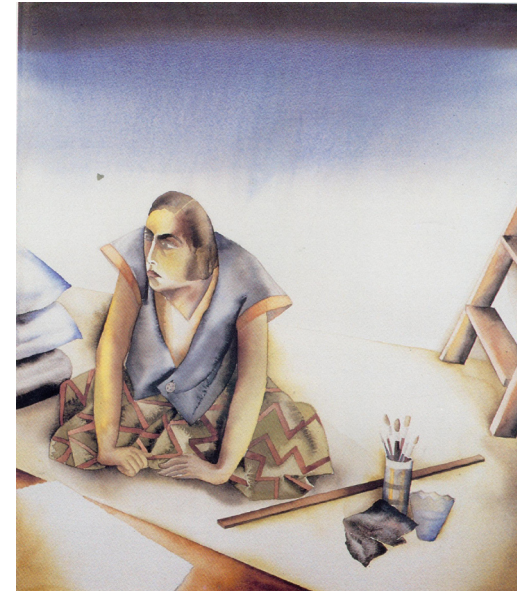
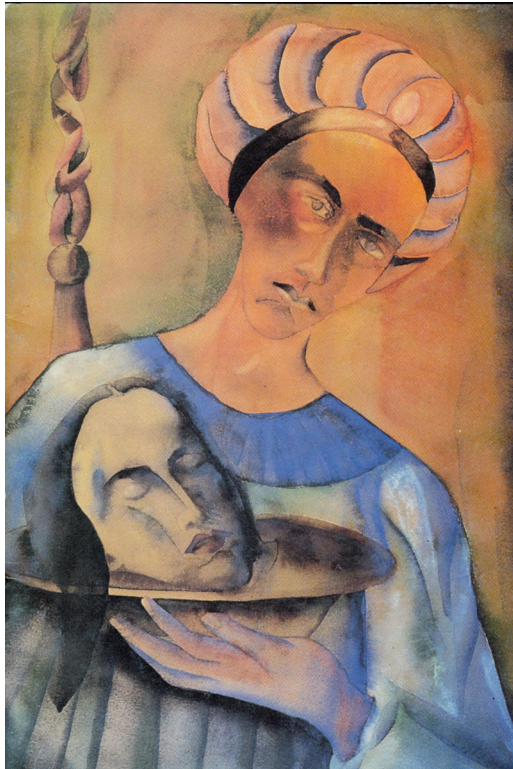
these in varying proportions results in the several possibilities of expression.

A composition created using the formal factors is an outcome of the state of the artist's mind and not conscious associations of certain finite meanings with the formal structures. A reader can therefore never draw precise relationships between the artwork and the intended feelings. Just as the stimulation of the art is unexplainable, so is its perception. This allows for a painting to be looked at in many different ways through different sensitivities. The object in pictures may look serene or severe, tensed or relaxed, comforting or forbidding, suffering or smiling. When put in combination with other such objects, the meanings may change. The same painting may have a different meaning for the artist as well as each of its onlookers and everyone can relate to it differently.

Also an artist may not replicate the natural forms as it is, as it is not the recreation of a realistic form that concerns him but the recreation of the forces that create the forms. He relies greatly on his vision and depth of feeling. He exercises complete freedom there.

As he puts it, 'realities of art help to lift life out of mediocrities; for not only do they to some extent, add more spirit to the seen, but they also make secret visions possible'.

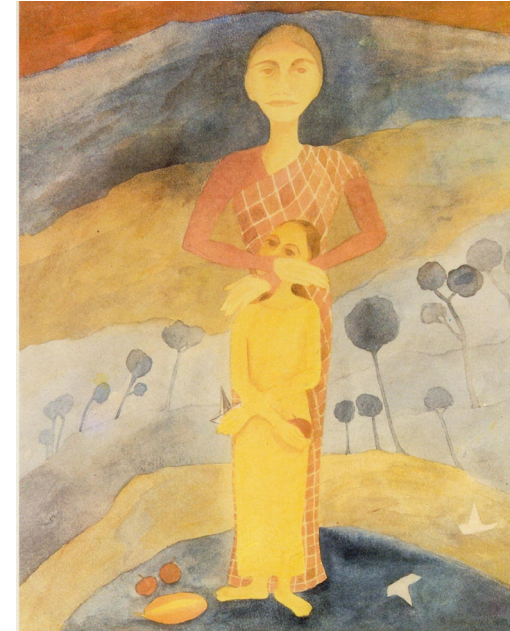
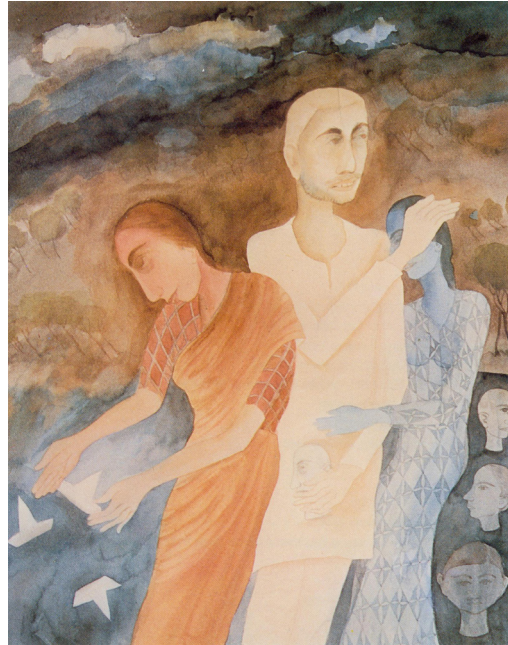
Expressions of Anju Dodiya



The entire series of her self images have a certain continuity, certain similarities between them. Each image still depicts a different circumstance, a different event or moment. In each she depicts a certain kind of stillness, a pause, a sense of reflection on her existence. She is mostly looking away in search of conclusions to her unsettled mind. She is solitary in most of her representations caught between her day to day activities, questioning her choices and trying to balance between her freedom and

conventions. According to Kamala Kapoor, in her paintings she has manipulated technique and subject matter to a deeper logic : the articulation of her dilemma in contemporary times. Her postures, the activities she is involved with in her paintings, her clothing, expressions, artefacts around and the spaces created have metaphors that can suggest quite a few things and yet there is vividly a sense of a lot of things still hidden or left unsaid. The way they might be for the artist herself.

Expressions of Lalitha Lajmi



Here the artist in her work through a common protagonist has depicted her experiences as a woman through everyday life. In very dull, muted or earthy colours I feel the artist has euphemistically concealed the portrayal of her strong opinions of discomfort with her own state. In many places she depicts an interaction with many people where they put on different roles before her to extract whatever they desire from her. She is somewhere expected to grant those things unconditionally either out of

submission or on account of the responsibility of the role she is supposed to play. She is deprived from her own opinions or choices and is enter twined in situations where she is expected to only obey or empathise and submit for the other. There are many ways in which she wishes to release herself of a state she has somewhere created for her ownself. Her choices over herself compel her and hold her back. She keeps looking for ways. I believe she somewhere finds them in her paintings.

Examples of self-portraits



Nicholas Hilliard



Van Gogh



Edgar Degas



Leopold Boilly



Andre Derain



Claes Oldenburg



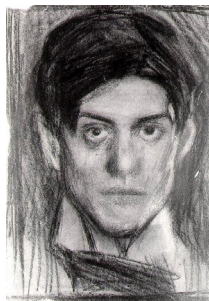
Gilbert



Tony Oursler



Warhol



Picasso



Fontin Latour



Paul Klee



Gerhard Richter



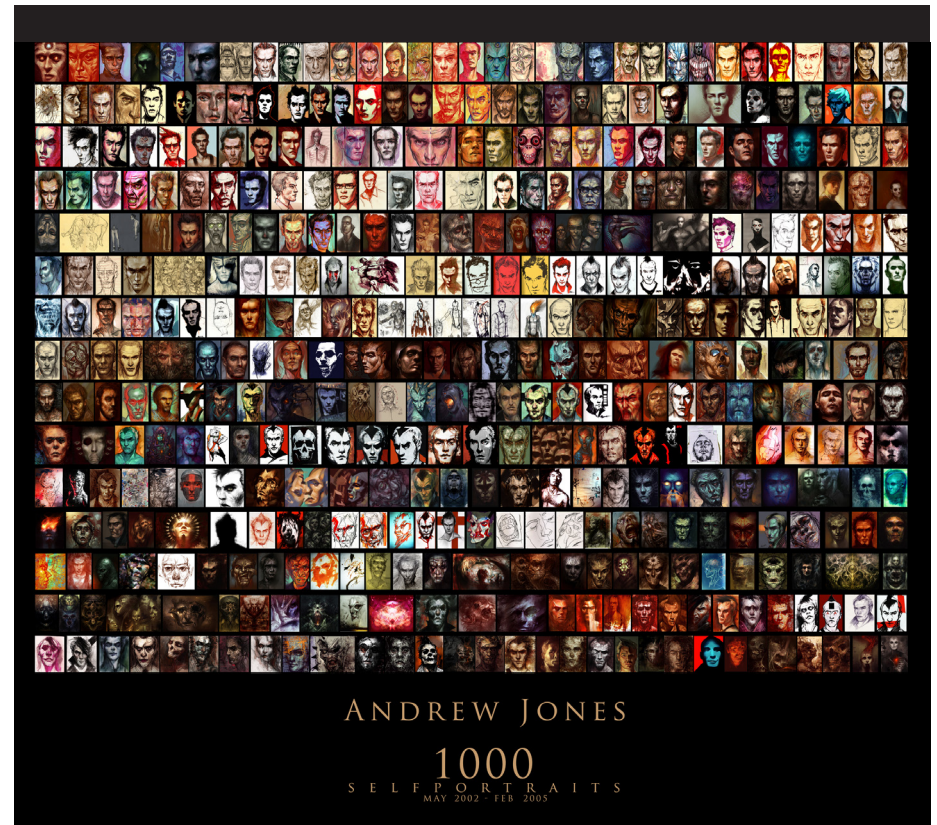
Earlyself Warhol

Examples of self-portraits

Artist Andrew Jones has made around 1000 self portraits in which he has depicted the manifestations of his own identities everyday. The resemblances and differences amongst these are astonishing. It shows the range of perceptions that the artist has had of himself. There are transitions in his images that are very evident. Each of these are true for the artist for the time when they were made.



Source: conceptart.org



Expressions of myself

Everybody spoke, everybody listened and silence prevailed. The silent and painful cries that followed were suppressed. Wonder if the muffled echoes couldn't reach outside or were they simply repressed.

It is so strange. I can't acknowledge the influences of so many things on me, elements that have literally nurtured, constructed and made both the conscious and the subconscious sides of me. Reasons known, unknown that kept working on me meticulously and are tirelessly still at it. It was an undercurrent, an activity I actively and passively participated in. I witnessed it every moment I grew; everyone else witnessed it every time I manifested it in thoughts, in dreams, in actions, in belief. In the same awareness grew the lack of it too. It became natural. It got embedded so beautifully well, the subject could herself not tell the difference. Witnessing it became subconscious. The conscious kept romanticizing the beliefs to an extent where it became a strength. The strength was absolutely pure and transparent and very well advocated the stand, thereby preventing the realisation of the loss of oneself. It wore the mask of the 'one' itself seamlessly and unfortunately the eyes were only trained to see what is outside and hence only identify with the recognizable reflection as seen by the rest, as shown by the rest.

It still dwell on the self within, but was evidently driven by the conditions outside. The amalgamation of the two in varying proportions for every different aspect led to the growing up of this content as well as the lost being. Have been very often on the edge, both defences worked equally hard and indecision or one of the disappointments was the only possible solution to everything. The disappointment wouldn't leave her alone and would ask for a fair reason for its rejection, haunting her till the end. For many things she quietly buried them, dismissing their very existence. As for the rest no depth was good enough to kill them.

The battle went on, and she kept fighting mostly against herself switching sides. The side best approved and understood by others obviously got more encouragement. Its enemy however fought all by herself with the might of her own being and her own beliefs. The approved one sought victory in acceptance and glorification of her act by the rest and thereby herself; the other one defined it differently and her victory here could not be measured. She waited patiently with a mature silence knowing her day would come.

In the course of battles, when all seemed accomplished and clearly visible it took just one realisation to reveal the fog that had always been

there. I accidentally (or by fate) stumbled upon something that had such a clear resemblance to me or that what was kept within . Deep enough to be out of my own reach. I had forgotten it so well, I must have barely missed the point beyond which I would have failed to recognize it. Its mere existence was so overwhelming, so unbelievable, I didn't realise how clearly I could see it even from a distance. The more and more I could unconditionally relate with it, the more the distance became immaterial. Well the distance persisted, it had to.

It purely, innocently stood startled by my attention. I could see through it and it only gazed back in wonderment. There was no common memories, no common language and yet it could be lived completely just by our presence maintaining the same distance. There were plenty other findings that I had supposedly discovered and had to live upto. And I was patiently, calmly and contentfully living them. But they wouldn't settle. They tightened my armour, darkened the lines and held me tight when I was never leaving.

I valued it just as much. Gave it all it required. Didn't fall short of anything I could give. It still clung tight, clearly declaring how much it owned me, that only it possessed me. I had rested rights for the same in it itself. Why then was I subjected to captivity?

I endured and endured till the suffocation almost killed the inner me. Where could I run? Where could I escape? It forcing itself on me gradually broke all my defences against it. It literally skinned my beliefs and it was a horror to realise what I had presumed to have found was never there. Conditions required for me to have found it were never granted. If there even came a possibility, my conscious self would have buried it before it were born. I had no choice but to be convinced with the choice I consciously made. I spared no efforts. I wonder from where did the inner sub-conscious surface?

I was honest with everybody associated with the condition and I was given no choice but to live it. How could I think otherwise any ways. I gave up when my very own people failed to recognize my faith and consoled me presuming it was all immaturity and frivolity. Lines that I had fortified for myself over the years broke. I started questioning myself.

It was when I could not explain or articulate or prove the inner self, that I realised there undoubtedly existed one. The more it remained ambiguous, and superficial for the others, the more it sought a deeper meaning in me. Its existence and its purity was unquestionable. The existence of such a pure finding of myself in someone only strengthened my belief

and I could not help but acknowledge how much it had unconsciously affected it.

Was it strength or was it weakness? My stand grew worse and worse. I lost all faith. I wondered why such a realisations had to happen at all. I was still on this side of the line and all the other me were against me. Battling my way through my false beliefs and ideal conditions, I grew distant from what I was. I found it meaningless. The more I grew distant, the more I dragged myself away towards the line. The closer I came to the line, the closer I came to the precious thing I found.

I was bruised and hurt. I tugged the rope so hard that it became loose and by the time I had crossed the distance, my disconnection with the previous was pronounced and I was set free from one end. It affected all the people within my lines and that as was unintentional heavily burdened me.

Quite some time passed, other things had to move on and they have. Which way should I go? I have reached the edge and I see my inner self waiting to be completed still patiently, quietly, innocently waiting beyond the line. I am still on the edge and nothing is changing. Which side should I fall onto? The previous side with all the realisation and all the pain it led to? Once again? Blindfolded again? Or

the other which is so disowned by this side that not even my happiness in it can make it realise. What more price can one attach to anything?

I keep moving and struggling and yelling in misery. While both sides hear it, see it, perhaps even understand it and yet keep silent waiting for time to surpass. I wonder what hope is the coming time bringing. I just wonder, wait and cry waiting for the uncertain to unfold.

Till then I strive. Strive to know myself more and more. Understand who am I irrespective of the influences and the conditioning, with an awareness that this might be a condition in itself.

Which is why it never ends and I only keep seeking within...
Its the only resort I have.

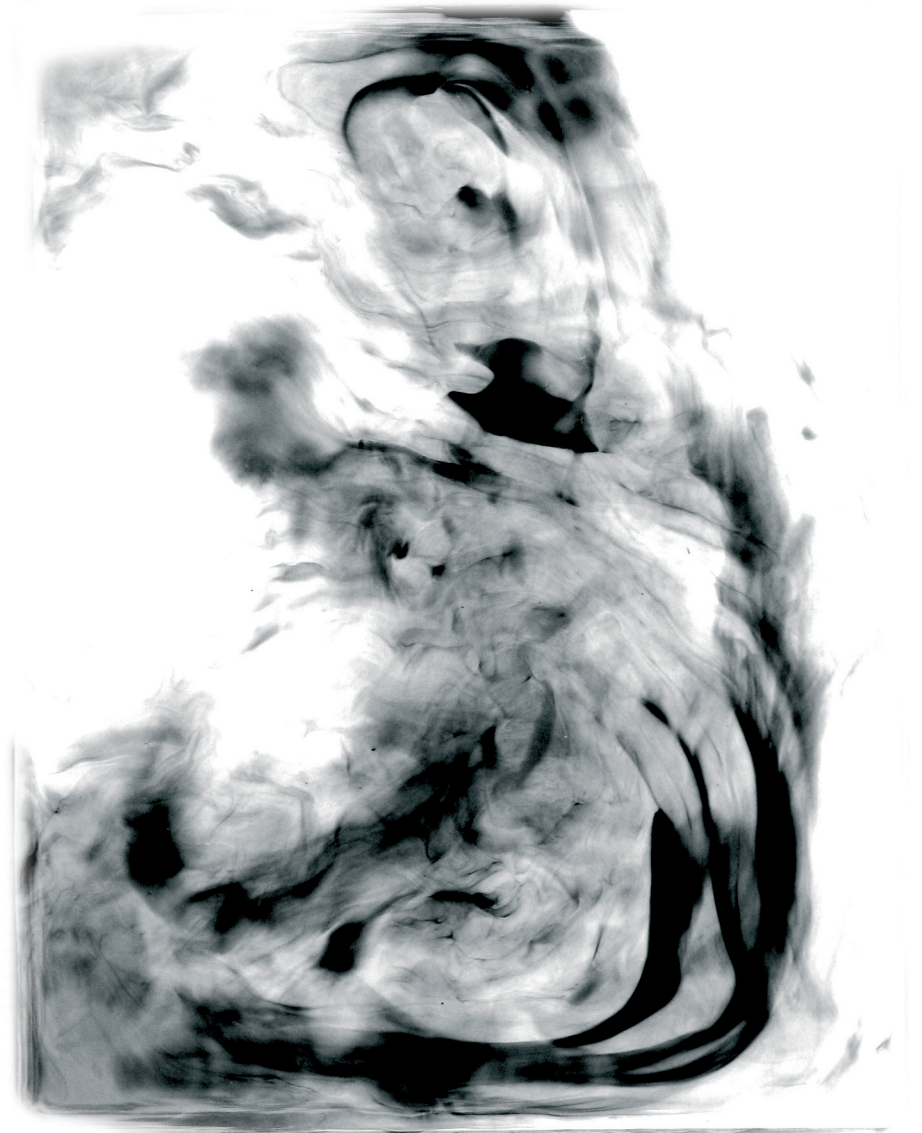






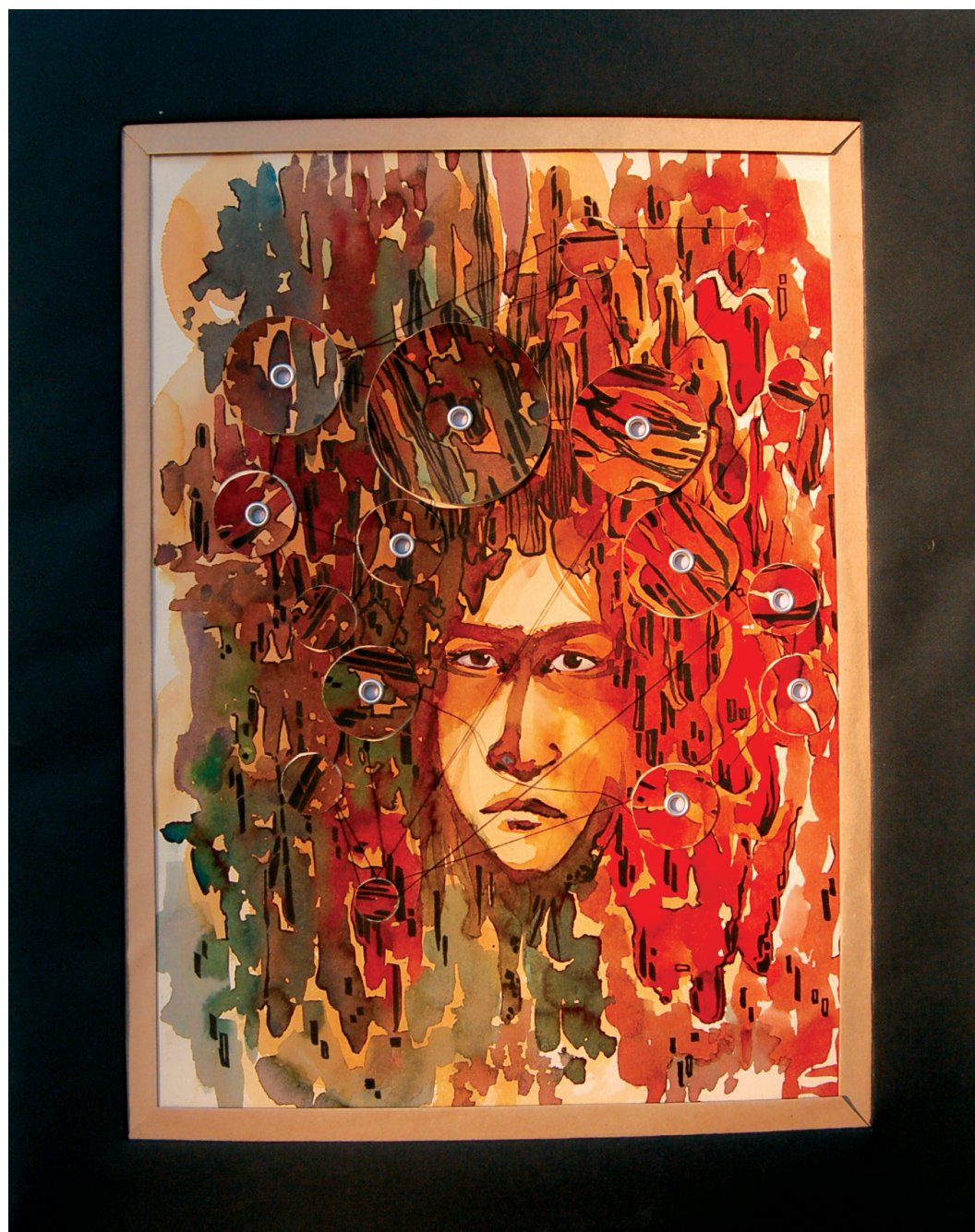












Conclusion

Unlike any other purposeful design project, this project allowed me to unlearn all the representation or problem solving techniques that I had learnt out of a formal design education. It helped me understand the sensitivity of the subject. In this case as it was my own state at a given point of time, I could feel and experience the source in first person. I realized how difficult the articulation would be and hence the challenge. At the same time I realized the potential that lied in art expression on account of its qualities and innumerable intricate variables.

I somewhere found a more satisfying way of looking at and understanding myself. I was completely with my ownself free from any external influences or dependencies. I let the manifestation or the translation of the feeling to the artwork happen a lot more naturally without caring about its readability as that clearly wasn't the end.

It is not even the final output that represents it all. It is rather the experience I had while I was creating it; as in pursuit of understanding myself, I constantly kept connecting the act with the source and not just the eventual image.

Just as my urge to understand myself shall always prevail, so will my desire to express in order to reflect upon it. I have somewhere found certain means of discovering myself and I am sure I would always have loads to explore towards this end.

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