

# The Emotional Gaze: A Symbol Of My Mother's Deep Reflections In Term Of Artwork

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## ABSTRACT

My mother, Rusimah Ibrahim relates the thoughts of contemporary mother, living in a petty apartment with her out-of-work husband with her three toddlers, who must take care for the foods, schools, pay the bills and every single thing. The pressure of my mother felt for the half of her life is not a barrier to survive. It is because she held on to a principle that she believed would be able to change the behaviour of my father. As an artist, I took this opportunity to study my own lives and record my experience, in this way which the way I love. In the way that gives evidence. This thesis marked my process of collecting her struggles and suffer into a documented narrative based on my own perspectives and interpretations. This thesis work, I transform her facial's entire identity into something substantial. As I reflected on the impact and meaning of my mother's life story as a conduit for the art process, I felt extremely fragmented in my own personal reactions and recollections towards her suffer. Therefore, I treat each painting individually as I respond to her experience and memory that I hold. Moreover, each artwork approaches different stage of her experience. As a painter, I choose watercolour medium as my tools to represent the idea. Somehow I felt increasingly cognizant of how my mother and I became closer and my feelings and attitudes changes toward our relationship started to resemble in my artworks. However, my intention would stick in one agenda which to produced artworks and being honest I personally think that the findings are enticing, nevertheless.

**Keywords:** My mother, The Gaze, Emotional, Personal Experience, Deep Reflections

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Where to begin this story? From my mother's biography or mine? Well, I assume an introduction is a must. Somewhat, in any case, if your mother is similar to my mother, this story will make perfect sense. My name is Ruzamira Abdul Razak and my mother's name is Rusimah Ibrahim, and I have been asked to record my thoughts and point of views about my mother in the way of art making. If you know me at all, as a daughter, to be honest, I am not a good daughter in many ways. Actually, we were not that close back then but then I realized that we had a lot similarity. But somehow, we were always in a different ideology. I always kept this in my heart which overstated by Abu Hurairah (Muslim Scholar). "Your mother, your mother, your mother and then your father ". I am here not to argue about the responsibility of a child towards her parent but somehow I have been with them for the past 23 years to realize who deserve better to be as a good company. Even the Holy Quran, Surah Luqman 31:14 asked to be grateful to our mother after all she has been through to raise and made us until today.

My thesis work centres on my mother and her emotions with marriage over the past 23 years. It is a biographical narrative which I need to have a person (Zinn, 2004) mentioned that a person who actually

lived and will talk about life and personality from the subject matter. Supposedly, a biographical have to have a real life subject and an account of one or more major event's in the subject's life. On 31 October 2013, I lost my mother for a while because she ran away and has to file a divorcee after a conflict with my father. These events have formed the primary impetus for my current work and research, as I have watched and become part of my mother's experience over the past 23 years. Women have been trained to be as a full-time housewife and have no income for themselves. Therefore, when it comes to the issue of divorcee they have no preparation to survive in the future. Therefore, my Mother's lifestyle is dramatic to be highlighted comparing to others.

Mother's conflict began since she was married, and her life story got more attention than me than the others. After that, the storyline of her become more tragic when she struggles to manage her life until she chooses to be a widow. Because of the intensity part of Mother's life is strong; I realize that her dramatic storyline suits the interpretation of distortion painting.

Barwell (2010) overstated that how work of art can be dramatic, and melancholy must pose itself as a problem for anyone who believes that work of art is not a conscious entity. To put it differently, that only conscious entities can have emotions and feelings. By all means, the way in which a painting is sad cannot be in exactly the same way as the way a person is sad. With this attention, the way my style of artworks shows are not delivered in a direct way but it shows that there is something in contrast or converse whereby the images in the artworks obviously shown. After all, it cannot be exactly different either to state the painting is sad or how to recognize the sadness or suffer in the painting. By the same token, one did first know what it means to say that a person is sad and how to recognize the sadness by knowing the rules before judging. This might be because the emotions are ambiguous, complicated and complex. In particular, it might be impossible, to sum up, the emotions with neat labels whether it be happy, sad, or angry. Before we go into deeper about this research, the subchapter will elaborate a bit on where this going and what are the idea will embark in this paper. To be exact, which back to basic, me as an artist to produce an artwork in the first place. The process of art-making as well as contribute the rationale on the product is from the idea which sparks me to explain the story behind the artworks. In addition, at the same time, I had my personal time with my mother in the context of art which benefits me in getting know my mother's suffer life back then in a different way.

The topic title, "The Emotional Gaze: A Symbol of My Mother's Deep Reflections in term of Artworks", as my inspiration which leads as well to the research paper and artworks. Thus, my focus on this study will not deviant and make my direction toward this research become clearer. The discussion process in future about the topic has popped up a lot of questions through my mind, and the most disturbing question was played in my mind is how am I going to grasp and achieve it? What are the process and criteria that I must fill in? Then, I wrote down with several questions that blurred but would help to narrow down the scope of my research. First questions are how can the image of my mother's gaze contribute to the sense of her deep reflection in a series of painting? Second questions are to what extent the beauty of nature act as a symbol to manifest the tenderness of motherhood? Third questions are how does my mother's emotional expression could be conveyed through her eyes gaze in watercolour painting? For the first objectives is to explore the image of my mother's eyes duplication, distortion, and composition. Then, secondly to interpret nature as a symbol of beauty and tenderness that related to motherhood. Thirdly, is to explore my mother's eyes expression by watercolour painting technique.

After knowing the questions and objectives for this paper, I have to reassure that my focus should not overlook and deviates from the first intention. These questions and objectives act as my hint and guidance, but not in a way that fixed but more flexible based on the situation. For the namesake of art, this art process is a process that full of explorations, experimentations, and uncertain results. However,

this research will end up nothing without the process of making art or producing art has not been practiced by me. Therefore, art thesis is about practicing it which will fit its purpose.

Before I shut the chapter down, let me sum up the flow of the research. There are five chapter which different in every chapter but held on one topic. The function of every chapter is to manage the flow of the paper as legit as possible. Chapter one act as the introductory that explains in general about the whole idea and offer a basic information about the paper. The introduction part will include several questions and objectives to guide me through this paper. Plus, it provides information about my intentions, perspectives, and inspirations of what I have been doing. Meanwhile, chapter two will take place to help me on contributing the idea and artist that I am referring to. Additionally, it consists of prior literature based on the art making. Somehow, it acts as the guidance and for the second steps it actually transforms the reference into our own style. By the way, in chapter three will conduct the process of art making where all the explorations, experimentations and failures will take over the place. After that, in chapter four will explains in detail on the visual analysis which the final artworks. Last but not least, chapter five which took place as a conclusion that I need to sum up in overall and as a whole of the research. But, in the end, I could never confirm the feeling of mine would be the same as the audience can feel. Which I think it is time for them to judge.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *A. Eyes the Windows of The Soul*

“Eyes the windows of the soul” which often be called by the people as they could deliver various non-verbal signals and in fact, the eyes contain a lot of information about the emotional state of a person. The eyes are a normal part of communication which quite useful to read the body language as easy as looking at people’s eyes. When someone is worried or sad conditions, they automatically will furrow their brow and obviously, the eyes will look smaller. Yet, when we had a cheerful day our eyes will show as bright eyes. That is why we often raise the eyebrows when we feel happy to make it look brighter and bigger, (Ludden, 2015).

True or not, well, I am not sure to define that eye is the windows of the soul or maybe we could say it is all an illusion. But one thing for sure, if your eyes are in good conditions and healthy, your body will be full of light. Same goes for the other way, vice versa. I believe that the ability of our eyes is depending on our physical state. According to Benjamin (2014), the interesting part is when the most poignant picture conveyed from our hearts through our eyes. It seems like a reflections state of mind and it is not merely window.

Basically, there are a lot of activities of eyes such as eye gaze, staring, glancing, or closing eyes. The moment I look into my mother’s eyes it tells sort of emotional journey and I wanted to explore some pretty specific things even that tells the total stories sort of emotion. As I have been watched and become part of my mother’s life over the past 23 years, I could sense her eyes language very quickly. Even though she showed the mouth shape of a smile for the sake of politeness, but I could read the eyes are the giveaways. Somehow, she forgot about her eyes gives a lot of unspoken answers that she was fake a smile. Usually, when she truly in a good mood, the mouth shape of a smile not only brighten but as well as the eyes which crinkle the corners in a “crow’s feet” pattern.

### *B. Watercolour Create Sense of Emotion*

Muliyadi (2007) overstated that the most suitable medium of expression is watercolour, as it adapted to spontaneous approach. Through various approaches and techniques for instance the wash technique

and the overlapping of colours can easily be treated by using the medium of watercolour. Additionally, the ability of dried in a speed time suits for outdoors painting. Besides that, I knew that there were several artists that used to oil paints but watercolour is ready availability and a very famous medium of visual expression. However, I cannot be denied that after local artists received a formal art education in art institutions and schools the use of oil paint became more popular later on. On the other hand, watercolour was quite famous back then in the year 1930s, its treatment various from one artist to another. The spontaneity of the brushstrokes is a clear connection appears through Chinese calligraphy as it's a major form of art for Chinese society. In fact, as stated by Hsieh Ho; Chinese artist that brushstroke is an important medium to constitute expressions of the artist's inner self. Plus, while doing the process of appreciation in such nostalgic artworks would trigger the sense of sadness and evokes feeling melancholy to the viewer. Moreover, the artist's sincerity, soul-pouring, confidence can be seen in the artworks as a total involvement by doing a spontaneity technique.

Thus, for me watercolour is not only as a medium or art supply but it is beyond than that. There are bunch of feelings appears in one palette but I guess not everyone could see it. Every single watermark is a new mark and amazed me every time it appears. The fascinating adventure when each brushstroke appears beautifully in spontaneous way. Hence, it allows me to feel joy and free while the process is run, as the ideas can roam free by using watercolour. At the same time, my imagination and inspirations bubble to the surface and made me explore art in the way that ease me. To be expert is not the first list as I do not have to worry about it but the main part is what dive me right in a smile on my face. I discovered that watercolour made me so exciting to use because it do so much movement by itself and I consider these colours are alive.

I actually gravitate towards things that are melancholy and most of the colour scheme that I use more greenish, bluish, dull, cool, and natural colours. When I created her facial expressions for me it gives the sense of longing and the sense of belonging in her eyes even though most of the artworks are faceless. Plus, I found the artworks which is very romantic and nostalgic. The ideology and perception of colour differed in each country and it is consisting personal memories. For instance, my mother loves the colour of magenta so much and used to choose that colour every time selection of buying stuff. Meanwhile, the relationship of my mother and I very close and somehow there will appear good associations that come from the magenta colour. But, honestly, I could say it may be true that colours seem cool colour to another person, but it is like warm and friendly colour to us. Well, maybe to convey the emotion in art is shows your true colour which I believe has a powerful way to resemble the emotion. I could agree to anyone whoever says that a watercolour painting does invite poetic associations which possess unique physical characteristics. Therefore, along with the personal associations there are cultural associations with colour proven (Amy, 2017).

### *C. Artist References*

Ibrahim Abu Bakar was born in 1925 and died in 1977. He is from Alor Setar but stay in Penang where his artworks sold along Chulia Street and Penang Road. The main medium used by Ibrahim Abu Bakar is watercolour and excelled in romanticized local landscapes.

The mother's love is infinite and probably it is impossible to reply completely. There is no substitute for the love of mother. From the start having us until we become what we are today is unstoppable love from a mother. Being in mother's love our heart and soul will fulfilled with the peace, courage and confidence. This artwork obviously story of a mother who sacrificed everything for the sake of her children. Same goes to the life story of my mother who provides us a roof over a head to sleep, serve a food in the table to eat, clothes to wear, running water and pay the bills. Every day her daily routine spins and keep spinning non-stop.

Unfortunately, the leadership of my family were not handling well. Based on Al Tabari (Muslim scholar), a father is just like a sun who always lighten the life of his children. He supposed to lead and

held our hand to go through the right path. For me, the sun does exist but in different appearance which is my mother.

Based on Artist Research Yi Chen (2013), The Chinese male artist produces an artwork based on modification of all the images from magazines and different collages and choose a women as main character to his artwork. Yi Chen creates another figure from the idea based on collages which contains of hybrid figure and mix all the images. The issue is about our society who obsessed of beauty and it is a reflection of distortion in the idea in through the images. The idea of beauty by using hybrid images of women is the main intention of the artist. Basically, we always heard about women who typically participated in the media. For instance, the advertisement that seeks for perfection concept to be serves to the public. To be differing, Yi Chen used element to ironic the situations. Hence, main alibi through his artworks is the distortion of figure.

Next, Yi Chen has classified women from various types of ethnicities, age, country, and races. The aim of the artist is to distort the images of them by change all the subject matter's appearance. The distortion can be defined by changing the size, scale, and isolated bits of the subject bodies. In addition, the artwork represents those women who love plastic surgery, suntans, and cosmetic surgery. The ideation of Yi Chen's artwork does help me in many ways to give inspiration by producing an artwork which related to distortion. Well, it is true that my issue is not about the beauty but the concept of distortion by Yi Chen really pull out the topic about people whom against the normal creations and reality. Therefore, it is same as my intention which to creates an idea about my mother who against the norm of normal life. Being a mother and a father at the same time for me is extraordinary while the father exists to do nothing.

Alexandra Garant who studied in visual arts at Notre-Dame-De-Foy College known as the Queen of Double Eyes internationally. She ultimately settled in Toronto, Canada after graduated in 2001. After a big impact came to her life which suffering from a heart attack in 2012, she took a decision to fully commit towards her passion in art and how she see the world totally change in the eyes of Garant. Basically, Alex Garant is a pioneer of Contemporary Figurative Op Art and her artworks offer a graphic quality mixed with conventional portrait technique.

Alex Garant always played with figures of a dizzying array and the eyes relentlessly shift and as an audience, we will like experiencing vertigo after looking at the works. The way Garant remains immune to the disorienting effect of her works when she started from one eye, one corner and then she slowly build it up. After that, at one time together she only sees one section and after it done she takes a step back and feels the effect turn out well and successful. The unique approach in making art of human portraiture makes Alex Garant famous and well-known. At the same time, she maintains the realistic technique but the optical illusion technique that implemented in her artworks make it look totally surreal. The reason her painting comes out as double exposure through the application of photography in a process of making the artworks. Thus, to make a single one piece it has to combines with two different images. The artist sometimes makes her model's face doubles or even triples where it becomes hard to know what a blurry illusion is and what is real by creating this flickering sense. By the way, Alex Garant expecting that we as an audience to employ all of our sense while doing so and indulge in an image investigation process. Meanwhile, the idea of creating these doubling artworks comes when she simply doodling stuff, playing with symmetry and reflections.

Alex Garant artworks do inspire me to do a duplication, distortion, and composition through my artwork. Basically, all of the latest artworks of Alex Garant played with multiplication, symmetrical and distortion to change a bit the proposition of doing portraiture images. I borrowed the concept of her doing that technique, but I do focus on the eyes only. When you look at the latest artworks of mine you can see the delusions on the eyes, the facials expressions give some kind of shaking or something that has a movement. This is because I wanted to leave the emotion to be not too fatal or legit. It somehow offers us that the expressions are not static, and it could be changing at one time to another time. As well as how I have been witnessed in my mother's life which I could say that the faceless face of my

mother does contain a lot of unseen emotions. Plus, I believe that everyone has felt a variety of emotion through suffering and happiness in life. To create something that triggered the audience while stop and think about the artwork somewhat gives me more passion to continue making it.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### *A. Developing Method*

Based on Malins and Gray (1995), in the area of Visual Arts Practice-Based or Practice Lead Research is the specific methodology which proper for me to choose is which conveys the particular discipline- specific expertise. The revolution toward the emphasis of reflections in research of Visual Arts and the artists, craftsperson or designers which would come out by theoreticians, historians, critics or research related as practitioners through action and reflecting in and on action. Contextual review also includes as well as the specific methods which published literature, visual exemplars such as design, making and installation and live contextual information. The case studies in the meaning of based on the commissions has four site-specific public commissions which are context-specific description, context to the in-depth, analysis and documentation of the artwork.

Well, my method of produce an artwork is not a new thing in the art scene. I rather say it is a conventional method or traditional of making artwork. But, I can assume that the process, the flow or the intention might not be the same as the other. However, to make it easy and simple, I used the method intentionally just to fabricate my data. In a way that offers permanent evidence in the future. Somewhat, give the memorial thing back in the future and has personal sense on it.

#### *B. The Idea from Past Experience*

The idea is very universal and cannot own by certain people or only one person because idea could be shared by everyone. There is no specific status, wisdom, rank, wealth or any kind level of a hierarchy. Indeed, how to get an idea does not go through a special process. The idea is very different from one another because an idea can have a various point of view based on personal past experience if we look through from their observations. Why? Because for me, every single person even our own family members will get different thoughts even though we are on the same roof, eat the same food, played the same game. Therefore, the idea for me is very infinite and exclusive even the rough idea almost the same but petty things took place to differentiate the idea between among us. As I mentioned before, my idea is from my past experience and I guess I still in the storyline. At first, it was hard for me to decide whether right or not to make my life as the main cast in my artworks. I was always wondering maybe this is one of the methods to shows my appreciation and gratitude towards my mother in the context of art. Again, I mentioned here that is like a form of documentation which made me proud and will read over and over again in the future.

#### *C. Working Space as Practice Inquiry*

As mentioned by Whitehead (2009) in his Living Theory- Knowing in Action that a practice-based research has to have a process development as a practitioner, to progress and to making artwork in fulfil satisfactory works, products, and designs. I am grateful and thankful especially to my lecturers who provide the unforgettable, conducive and exclusive studio I ever had. The equipment, the air conditioner, the electricity, the unlimited working time and the most important thing the vast studio I ever had.

Of course, this opportunity would not be wasted, and I guess I could call UiTM Jalan Othman as my second home. It is a pleasure should not be taken for granted. The working space does influence me to



always produce artworks. I did not take a solo time or not rounded with a friend 24/7 as a reason to avoid being here though.

### *D. Photography and Photoshop Act as Transition into Artwork*

Photography is like an assistant for me as it has helped me a lot during the process to transfer the images of my mother into artwork. Yet, my source imagery is from photography and I have since handled on-going the research on the ontology of medium. I can predict, maybe in silent mode, there was a question on why I did not do still life technique while my mother is living in front of me. To be clear, I am not a realistic painter and could not handle to make artwork in a speed time. Plus, the lack of time to be side to side all the time with my mother is an impossible thing while I am staying in the studio. Then, based on my artwork, I have to do vary process before I start to finalize my idea. Therefore, for me, still life or life drawing was not my thing.

After the process of photography done, I wanted to alter the normal imagery which might otherwise be taken as truth into something that surreal, imagination and illusion. Sometimes, I build up points of confusion and merging where imagination could blend with the subtle portraiture. At the early age, I love to make artworks that not represent beauty or realistic form but I loved to do in another way. Which in distortion approach, therefore, I need a source like Photoshop which guides me all the way to imagine the imagination. At the first layer, the process is followed by a very logical sequence of development, but the result turns my portraiture work into surreal stuff.

### *E. Sketches A Step to Final Artwork*

In my opinion, to create a final and finished piece of my artwork has gone through a preliminary sketches process that absolutely critical. Well, maybe there are a few artists skipped to prioritize this part of the process in their artworks but as for me, this step acts as a heart to my final artwork. If there is no idea development from the sketches it seems that I could get this far. It is always surprising me when I saw a different idea came out in every each of my sketches. I could not lied and completely bypass preliminary sketches entirely and just popped out nowhere into a finished piece with no development whatsoever. Fortunately, I did not see preliminary sketches as a wasting time along the way to get to the final piece. Yet, it is actually opposite which the process of preliminary sketches made my final piece done well, saving many hours of my time with backtracking and frustration when working on the final stage. In order to create a success preliminary sketches, the process from sketch to final gradually done like a natural progression until finished artwork.

### *F. Grisaille Technique in Watercolour Painting*

According to Jansen (2008), grisaille can be defined as a very first step of painting or fully detailed under-painting done in greys and pronounced as Grizz-eye. Basically, the subject will fill with a common colour that establishes harmony for the artwork. The lower quality pigments would perform well on the piece by using the light under-painting. Besides that, it shows the first chiaroscuro or called as the treatment of shade and light in painting or drawing and allows the artist to alter the light and shade of the painting until the achievement success to the desired effect.

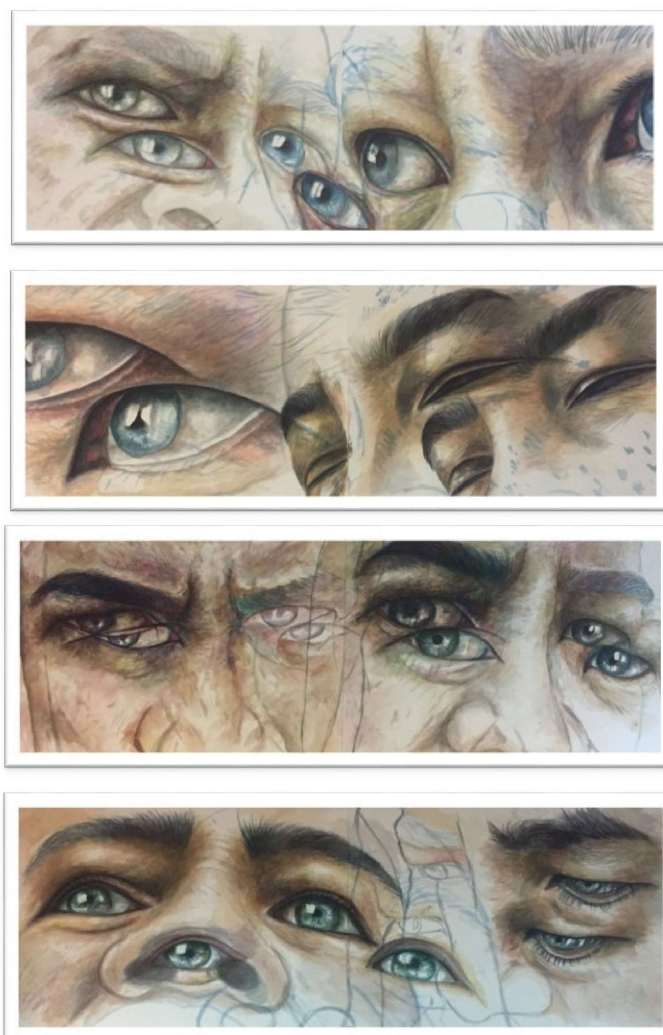
Through this grisaille technique, by using the light under-painting allows the pigments of lower quality to show up better in the watercolour painting. Plus, the low-quality pigment does look brighter and popped out more on the piece. While using this technique to create a form, I have not done a combination of many colours together and maintain the washing technique in the next layer purer, thus expanding the intensity range of colours. However, in all cases, the pigments that I implemented on the piece have semi-transparent and transparent. As an illustration, when I use crimson lake colour to P-Magenta colour to make it dark and I also opaque it a lower of reflective qualities of the P-Magenta colour. Then, if I blend P-Magenta colour over a dark area, the crimson lake colour will only tone

slightly but because the dark colour and P-Magenta has no combination, the color remains transparent and the subject of my mother will transform to have more depth.

## 4. VISUAL ANALYSIS

Firstly, I am using the theory of J.J Winckelmann which is dividing into four parts. The process will be done systematically, and the first layer is collect, categorize, analyze and using. In making an art appreciation of my artwork there will appear implicit and explicit story behind it which can be clarify by using descriptive and analysis method. There is a basic of four step structure of the Art Criticism in J.J Winckelmann.

### A. Watercolour Painting I



**Figure 1:** Mom's Complexity Emotion, 6.3 x 2.9 feet, Watercolour on paper, 2018

The title for the artwork above is 'Mom's Complexity Emotion'. I used Artist Alpha watercolour as my medium on the watercolour paper. The size of the artworks is 6.3 x 2.9 feet and it was made in the year 2018. Generally, the artwork shows women's facial expression whom my mother and performed in a rectangle format. For this artwork, I used a landscape shaped of canvas.

The artworks established the foreground and background. The background can be seen on the overlapping layer at the back. Meanwhile, the solid form of the portraiture can called as foreground. Plus, the foreground can be stated at the colourless part of the artwork. The arrangement of the artwork



is very symmetrical by looking at the stability of the colour. Even though, the form of facial expression has done as unfinished artwork. But somehow it is completed my desire achievement. The shape of the artwork obviously can be proven at the eyes which purposely focus on the eyes. The lines that leave the artwork unfinished has create the balance and success by not completing it. Well, maybe the colours used very nude, dull and pastel but to sum up it works the unity popped up well. The idea that I hold is the same as I mentioned before again and again. 'Mom's Complexity Emotion' as the title and I agree if anyone say the facial is faceless but in my point of view the faceless face does contains a lot of unforeseen fear, anxiety, depression and sadness deep in her heart through her eyes. That is why I loved to played with my mother's eyes because I could sense and read the eyes as I am her daughter.

## B. Watercolour Painting II



**Figure 2:** The left and right of Mom, 4 x 3 feet, Watercolour on paper, 2018

I could say that my trademark in my artworks has lines to shows the overlapping layer but for this artwork it does show the lines but not stand as overlapping technique. Plus, for this artwork there is a pattern at the background which rose flowers. Intentionally, I decided to do a same mode which not filled all the colours to the portraiture but only fill in colour in certain part. Looking at the light and dark tone has corporate well in one piece.

The idea behind the artworks is still the same about my mother but in the different mode which I create some kind of reflections. I attempted to look away of applying the pigments on the paper in a form of near trickery, trying to move it, manipulate it, stretch it, and put in a way that allowed border and boundaries of forms and colours to work together and materialize.

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