

The finished plastic model is light and rough. To give it intrigue for an art show I decided to use a mirror to reflect the figure. Seeing the object in the mirror would create a polished result. For the mirror to create the desired effect it a little depth. I found a 7" mirror at the local craft shop and purchased an 8"x8" canvas to mount it. I also bought some small round magnets to add to the lift effect.

I mounted the mirror onto a piece of scrap foam-core so it would not slide, slit the canvas and slipped it in. Then glued it with a thick goop to the stretcher bars. My goal was to use the back of the canvas with the mirror covering the inside.

I painted the base black so it would not be reflected in the mirror and glued magnets on both the canvas and the plastic sculpture being careful to align the polarity. The magnets are perfect for a stand-off. They can be assembled on location making shipping easy. The result still lacked excitement, so I focused on a surface pattern. I played with gluing a newspaper to the plastic but felt that was too thin and finding something that represented the 'self' was difficult. I searched the web for 'word cloud' and found a free site. I dropped my artist statement in to see how it would shape up. I then adjusted the results by adding some duplicate words increasing the font weight produced by the word cloud. I saved the file to my Mac Book Pro and adjusted the colors in Adobe Photoshop using the magic wand to make selections. Everyone should have a magic wand just to say they used it in their creation, especially a self-portrait.

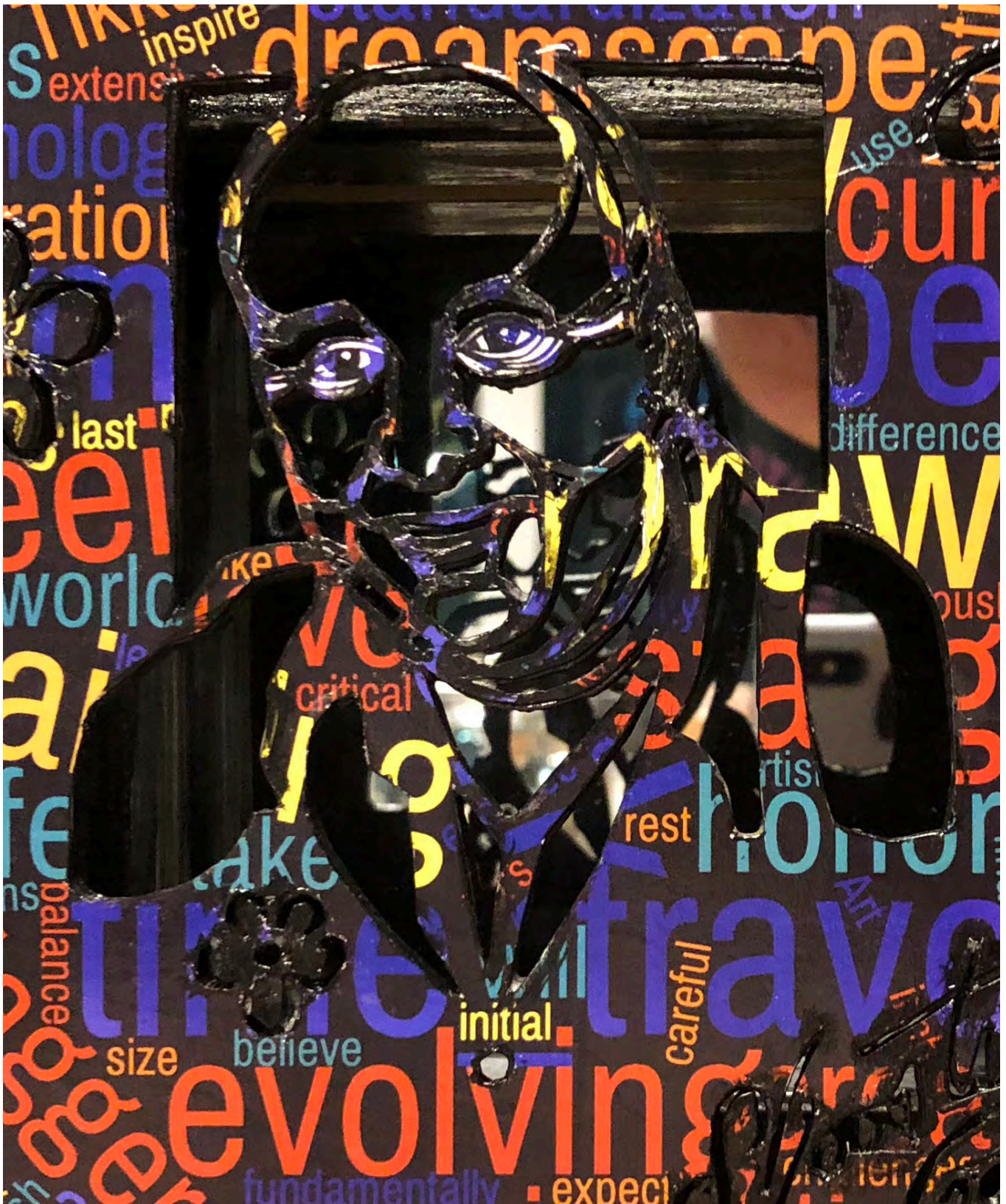
In Photoshop, I adjusted the size to match my project, 200.28 mm x 200.28 mm. It had to be exact to match the 3D model. I got the measurements from the 3D printer. I added the inside shape of the stencil as a layer so I would have an outline to cut and saved the file into pdf to ensure the print process would not alter the size. I printed the result using card stock on an OKI 931 color printer. Then cut it by hand with an exacto. The edges were white from the paper and the tiniest cuts impossible to make. I also broke the top of my exacto. Plus, I liked the tiny white the process left in the eye, the parts I couldn't cut.

Finally, I painted the edges of the paper and back side black so it would not interfere with the reflection in the mirror and attached the finished card-stock to the plastic sculpture using rubber cement.

I added self-sticking 3M Velcro mounting brackets to make it easy to hang and later clean up, and instructions on how to place the magnets for the final piece to attach.

In the future, I want to locate a printer cutter or laser printer to more accurately cut the decorative cover. Perhaps also find some nicer material. I would also like to learn how to use 3D software to get better control of the 3D dimension. I did, however, find software to produce laser cut marquetry so you can be sure I will be exploring that.

The result is a ponderous self-portrait, imperfect in craftsmanship leaving lots of room for improvement and further discovery. Isn't the journey the destination? I think it is.



Word Cloud with inverse layer applied
for cutting

Art criticism - the overall concept of working with a reflected surface does not work well at this small scale. It's intriguing, but not encompassing. It leaves the viewer a little flat. The 3D printing, however, has 1,000's of applications so choosing a simple subject works well at a small scale. Not happy with the overall result and going the extra mile to prepare and hand-cut the surface decorative element is commendable, as it is also imperfect. The human hand cannot match the pixel perfect cutting of a laser. Not cutting the white in the eye, however, takes human intervention and creative override. Lasers are stupid robots.

Using a word cloud for the surface leads to notions of the Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte's famous illustration, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe.", French for "This is not a pipe." What he meant was that a pipe is a physical thing and he made a drawing. It certainly is a pipe, but it's not. An interesting dichotomy. This is especially true because the words I choose were from my artist statement. Each of them rings true to my inner self-portrait. Of note are the words, Tikkun Olum. Many people have asked me what that means, it's Yiddish meaning - to repair the world, a nice mission for artists and all people.

But the word cloud is only the surface, next is the 3D stencil structure of my portrait. I guess it's a compliment that many of my associates ask, Is this your dad. Since I lost him recently, I hang on every scrap that includes his being. Yet, I usually shrug off their comment coyly with a simple response that I'm just old.

There is no mistaking that the final piece is ponderous, yet visually it is dismissed as holes in the surface. The mind misses it and instead sees the surface and peaks inside. It takes time to discover what it really is and by that time you've discovered the reflection in the mirror, certainly a figure of a person. That's me too. The funny thing is that when you see my reflected silhouette, you also see yourself and your surroundings. That's where self-portrait and self-reflection become one in the viewers' mind, and in doing so, we are connected, if just for a moment.

It's not art unless it's signed. The final piece is signed Shoosty, my artist nom de guerre, a pseudonym of my name, Stephen Shooster, that I use for art, thus another self-reflection.

Art allows us to have higher conscious conversations. Conversations like these are not normal in daily speech. The act of creation can be applied to everything we do in life. When we realize the banal is a miracle each moment becomes heaven or hell, again reflections of the self. Take a moment to reflect on this, What is the value of Freedom?

Artists have used self-portraits for millennium to highlight their skills, and find themselves, joining that cacophony of historical images if only for a moment is a worthy endeavor.

When we make art, we might annoy our friends with the details making them wonder why we spend so much energy on the task, but in the end, if we stick to our knitting with deep focus, we also establish creative leadership, if not for a moment of inspiration or even disgust, anything to grab the apathetic mind and give it cause. I'd say give your kids crayon and encourage them to write on the wall. You'll be surprised to end up with another Banksy*.



Shoosty 2018

Note - *Every surface Banksy touches turns to gold, doors, walls, bridges, everything.

