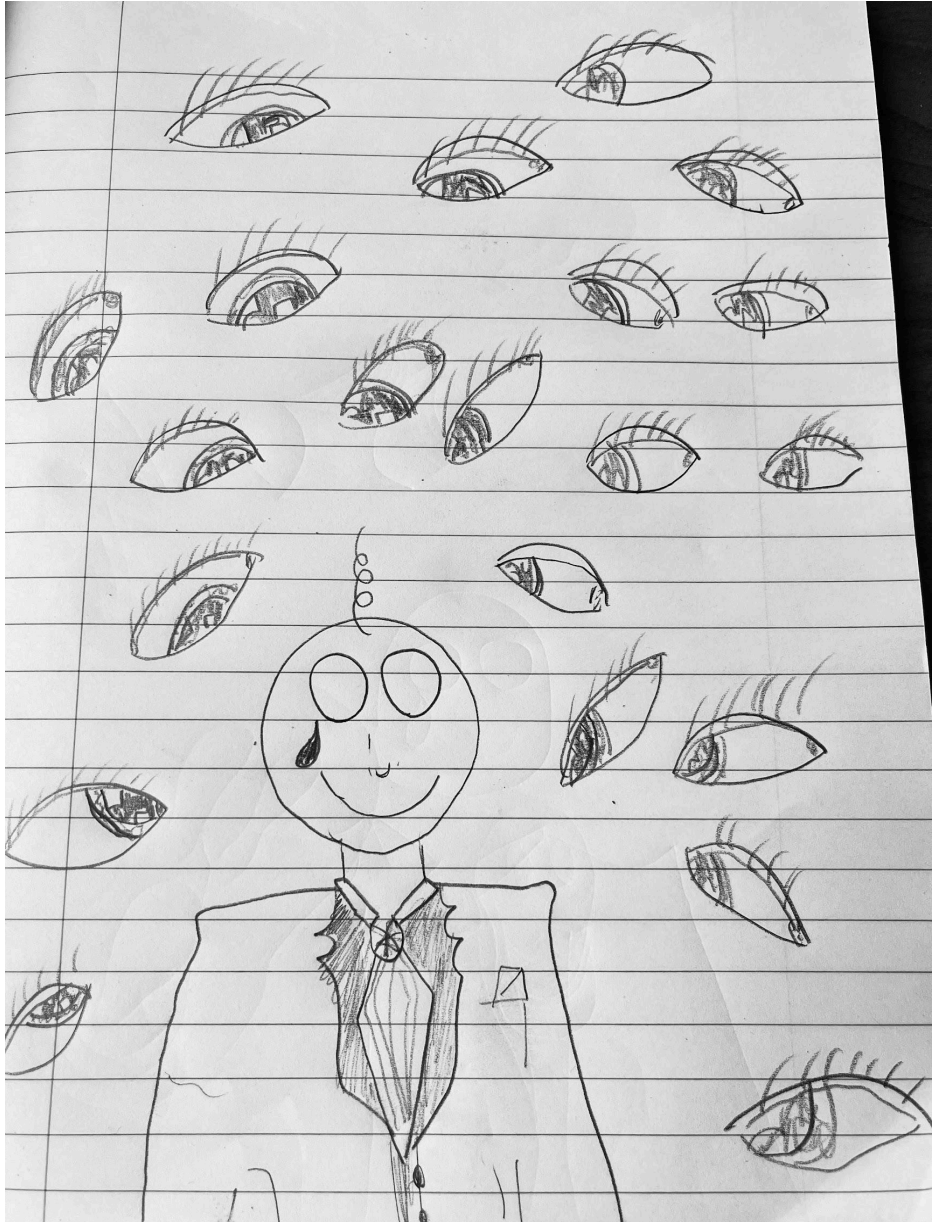


The Roles Society Watches Us Play



Description of artwork: A young child wearing a suit, smiling with a tear rolling down his face. Many eyes in the background are staring at the young child.

A theme I noticed throughout *The Handmaid's Tale* was the idea that nobody is the title and role they are forced to be in Gilead. I view this as a commentary on the idea that people play roles in characters throughout life, that everybody is similar and is constrained and limited by who they think they are. This idea is exasperated by the high-stress and brainwashing nature

of Gilead; everybody's role is chosen and if they don't fulfill this role there will be repercussions. In our society, these repercussions are social alienation, fewer career opportunities, and less acceptance by our peers. The people of Gilead's survival instincts are in full gear when it comes to upholding this role in society; "If I don't go through with this horrible unethical act what will happen to me, will I die?"

When we're younger we are free of society's restraints. We don't have to be a specific thing, we aren't put into certain boxes, we just... are. As you get older, societal expectations are subtly placed on you. Ideas that if you don't fit a certain archetype people won't like you, or even the thought that if you don't do specific things you aren't living your life correctly. The way I look at it; every kid is unique because they can express who they are, but the amount of truly unique people seems to go down by age. This isn't a negative thing about getting older, it's just the fact that because these restraints are subtle, they don't immediately register with us, they take a while to become instinct in our brains. People don't necessarily become less unique as they get older, they just lose the ability to express their true identity. Everybody's brain works in completely different ways, they're like fingerprints. Everybody has different inherent wants and needs; what makes somebody happy, the way people talk, and what they talk about. But when we're constantly shown that there's a certain way to live, a certain way to talk, a certain way to dress, we can lose track of who we are and what we want.

It all sounds very unfortunate that it can be hard to express ourselves based on our surroundings. It's something that I think about a lot, how do I know if I'm being myself or if I'm being what people want me to be. But in a way we're very lucky, all of these expectations are subtle, and the consequences of not meeting these expectations aren't life or death. This isn't the case in Gilead, the society of *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this book not conforming into a role means you can be killed.

"I am Ofglen,' the woman says. Word perfect. And of course, she is, the new one, and Ofglen, wherever she is, is no longer Ofglen. I never did know her real name. That is how you can get lost, in a sea of names."

This quote from *The Handmaid's Tale* illustrates the lack of identity and Gilead. This almost seems like a parody of real-life conformity. In our society, we change our identities and become very similar to everyone else, in Gilead even their names are changed to make them conform with everyone they are chosen to be identical to. In Gilead privacy is nonexistent, we feel like our actions are being perceived by people around us, but in Gilead, this is known to be factually true. Surveillance known as "The Eyes" watch what you do, just your actions and make sure that you're conforming.

I took inspiration from the real world and the fictional world of Gilead when I designed this artwork. The artwork depicts a young child with blank eyes and a tear coming down the left side of their face wearing a suit. The idea behind this is that conformism strips humans of their inner child or a representation of who they are. The blank stare represents that this part of their soul is lost inside them. The eyes represent two things; the way that we can feel watched and judged to conform. If we break or shed a tear, people will notice and deem us as different. The

eyes also represent the surveillance in Gilead, a more actual way to show being watched to conform.