MANDATORY ASSIGNMENT 03:
ILLUSTRATION

INTRODUCTION

My main focus in this assignment has been to capture emotions, especially emotions related to darkness, depression, passion, and love. These are emotions I think correlate with the song I chose. I wanted a dark, yet evocative expression, and tried doing so by using photography, drawing and vector elements.

Interpretation of Task
First sitting on my own wondering what exactly was meant by a photo based illustration, I read through earlier forum threads to find out what was expected of me to do. I eventually interpreted the assignment in the way that the illustration for my selected song had to somehow have a photograph in it, and that something I made in Illustrator (vectors) would have to be incorporated. I had to visualise the song by using the photo based and vector elements I chose, without using any text or typography.

Concept and Target Group
The listeners, and the artist. Since everyone's personal taste in music is different, I can't say neither an age group nor what gender would enjoy this song. It is all up to everyone's personal liking, but in saying that the song itself may speak to someone who could be going through a rough time. A Letter For You is the kind of song one can put on when one needs some time out. It is emotional, and its illustration needs to convey this message.

Message/Achieved Action
I had to consider this being a photo based illustration that had to have some kind of vector elements in it, and not use any text, to convey my message. So the choice of elements and colours had to be well thought through.

Song - A Letter For You[1] by Svartravn Sorgtung. I first thought it would be impossible for me to make a song selection since so many songs are very close to my heart, but the minute I thought of the song I have chosen, I knew this was the one. This is a quite dark, sort of mysterious love song.

Colours - To me the colour choice of black and greys in different values, as well as red felt very logical because of the dark mood of the song.

Elements - This was something that changed quite drastically along the way. But I believe that what I have ended up with – a person, a dark forest, ravens and blood/scratch marks – convey the message that I want this illustration to.

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1   *Creating a hyperlink for this specific site does not work, but copy-pasting the URL does.*
         http://urort.p3.no/#!/Band/svartravns
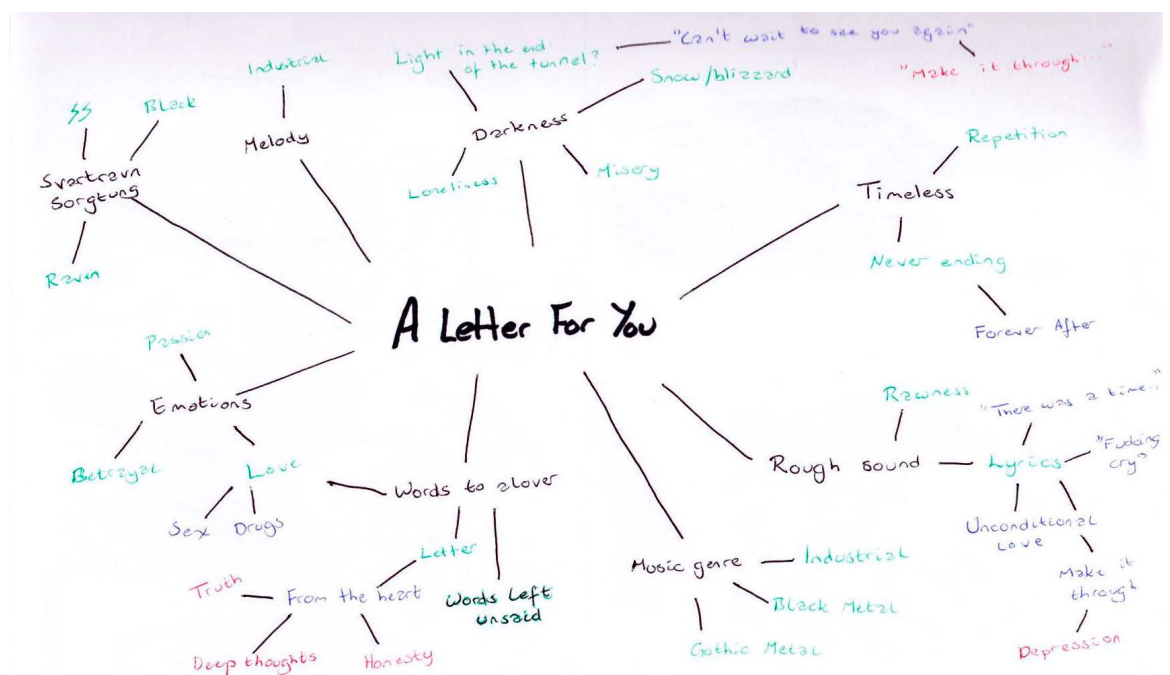
RESEARCH AND WORK PROCESS

I managed to come up with an idea for my illustration quite quickly, but I put a lot of thought into the whole process at the beginning. I needed to do some research and closely consider what kind of style and mood I wished. This is something I tried putting up on *my blog* as I was going, and will describe closer through this report.

Research and Analysis

Defining Target Group and Design – The target group is people with a liking to this kind of music, and maybe in particular people who have been in love and maybe hurt. I would say the target group is between 18-35 years, and both genders. At the same time I think the artist should like it as well, since the assignment says the idea is that the artist has contacted us asking for an illustration. Having been a close friend of the artist himself, I know his tastes and personal liking were very well reflected in his music, and I think a pretty dark and mysterious illustration is something he would have enjoyed and liked. Svartravn Sorgtung's music isn't for anyone since some of his songs can be really dark, but at the same time a lot of his songs – and *A Letter For You* in particular – have that timeless, never ending feel.

Illustration Styles - Based on my song choice I decided that I wanted a rather dark illustration, which could speak to people who maybe have had their hearts broken, or maybe are feeling a little lonely or depressed at times. This is not to say it is an illustration for sad people only, but I do believe the song and the meaning behind it could have a quite emotional feeling for certain people. This song is quite dark, yet romantic in the feel, and I thought dark colours, red and contrasts should be integrated. My concept for this illustration was thus to capture a sense of emotions such as depression, loneliness, love, light in the end of the tunnel, and darkness.

Mind Map – On my mind map I wrote down all the things I relate to the song, as well as the artist's music in general and him as a musician. Having all these words (Darkness, Timeless, Rough Sound, Music Genre, Words to a Lover, Emotions, Svartravn Sorgtung, and Melody are my main topics) helped me a lot when considering which elements I wanted to include and what I wanted my photo based part of the illustration to be based on.
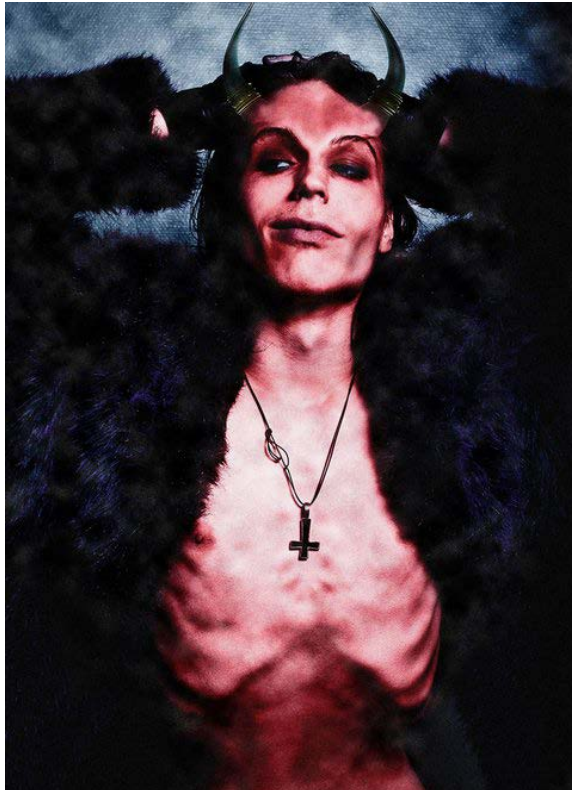
Moodboard – I used the words from my mind map to create a Moodboard. This helped me set the mood and style of the illustration even better, and helped me come up with even more ideas for which elements I could use. These images' sources are linked under "Sources and References."

Photo References - Since this also had to be a photo based illustration, I found some pictures of the artist that he'd had taken. This was something I thought could help me in both visualising the artist, helping me grasp who he was, and maybe inspire me in relation to both elements and images.

Photo Based Illustration – This is something I found a lot of students had issues understanding, so I found a description of this on *Webopedia:* "A type of computer art that begins with a digitized photograph. Using special image enhancement software, the artist can then apply a variety of special effects to transform the photo into a work of art."

Coming Up With, and Refining Ideas
I knew I wanted a dark, kind of mysterious illustration, and I let this sort of guide me when I started sketching.

Sketches - With the mind map next to me and the moodboard on my screen, I jotted down a few ideas when I first began. Some are more abstract than others, but mostly they have some kind of obvious meaning to them. I tried drawing all the things I could think of, and did this roughly so that I could quickly get down all the ideas. This is what I like when drawing by hand; when I start working digitally I always want to make even ideas look perfect.

(Raven)

(Ribs)

(Raven crying)

(Rose falling apart)
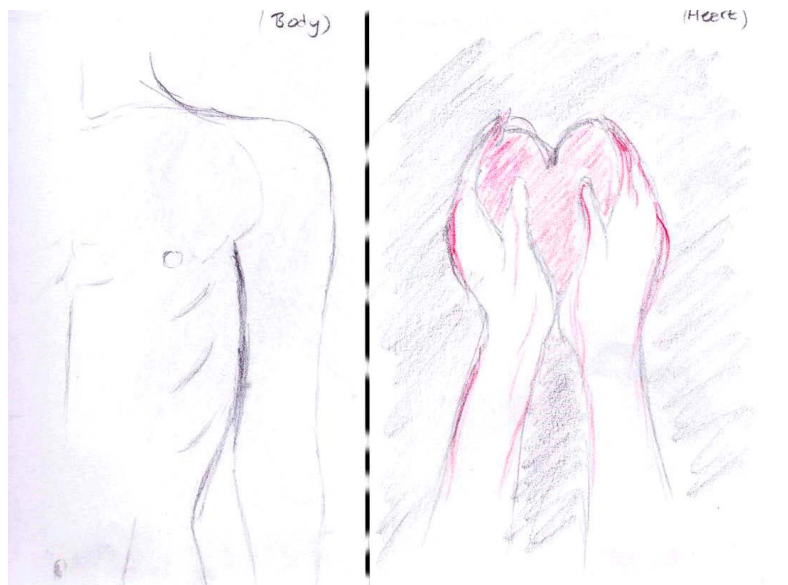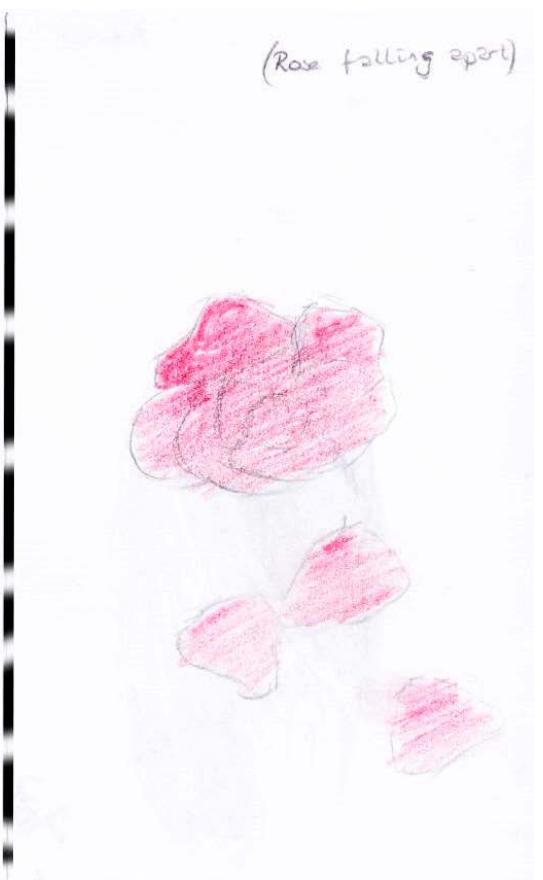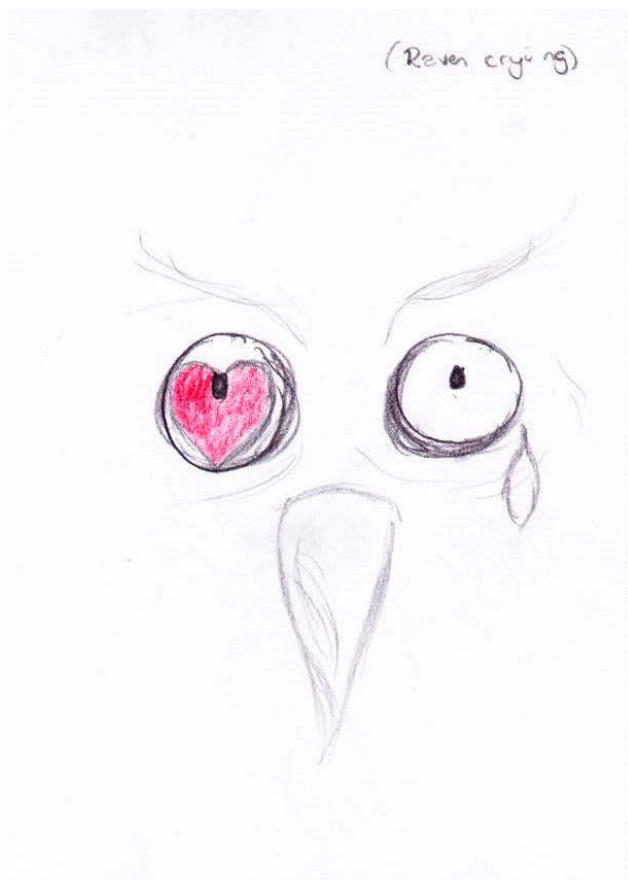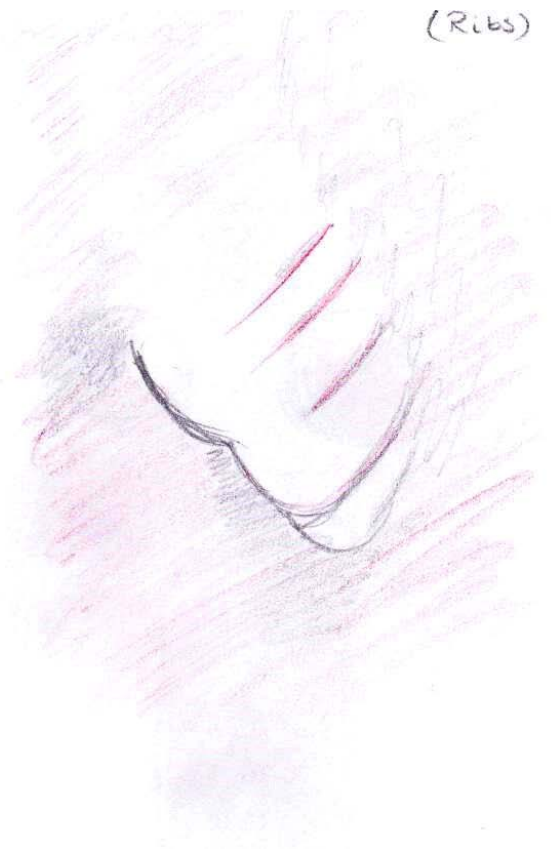
Many of my sketches were inspired by ravens, because of the artist's name, which translates to Black Raven. Because ravens very often are rather mysterious, I think this fit to the actual song. The "ribs" sketch in the top right corner is an idea I got from looking at one of the photos of the artist. This was something I was thinking could create some interesting lines. The rose falling apart came from the idea of roses symbolising love.
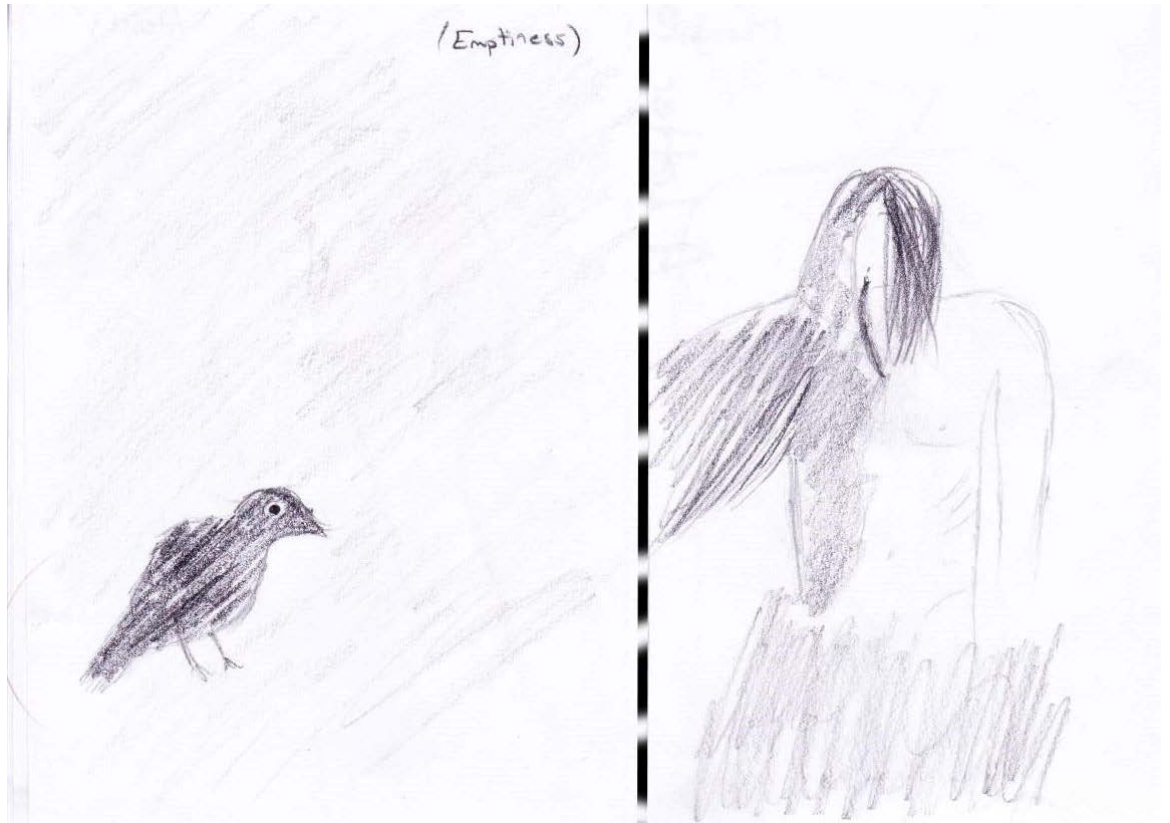
The plan behind the "emptiness" was to have a single raven on a grey background to symbolise exactly emptiness. The raven would have been my vector element, and the background the photo. In the bottom right corner is another idea based on one of the pictures I found. In general, all my ideas are based on words I wrote in my mind map, images of the artist, and images used in my moodboard.
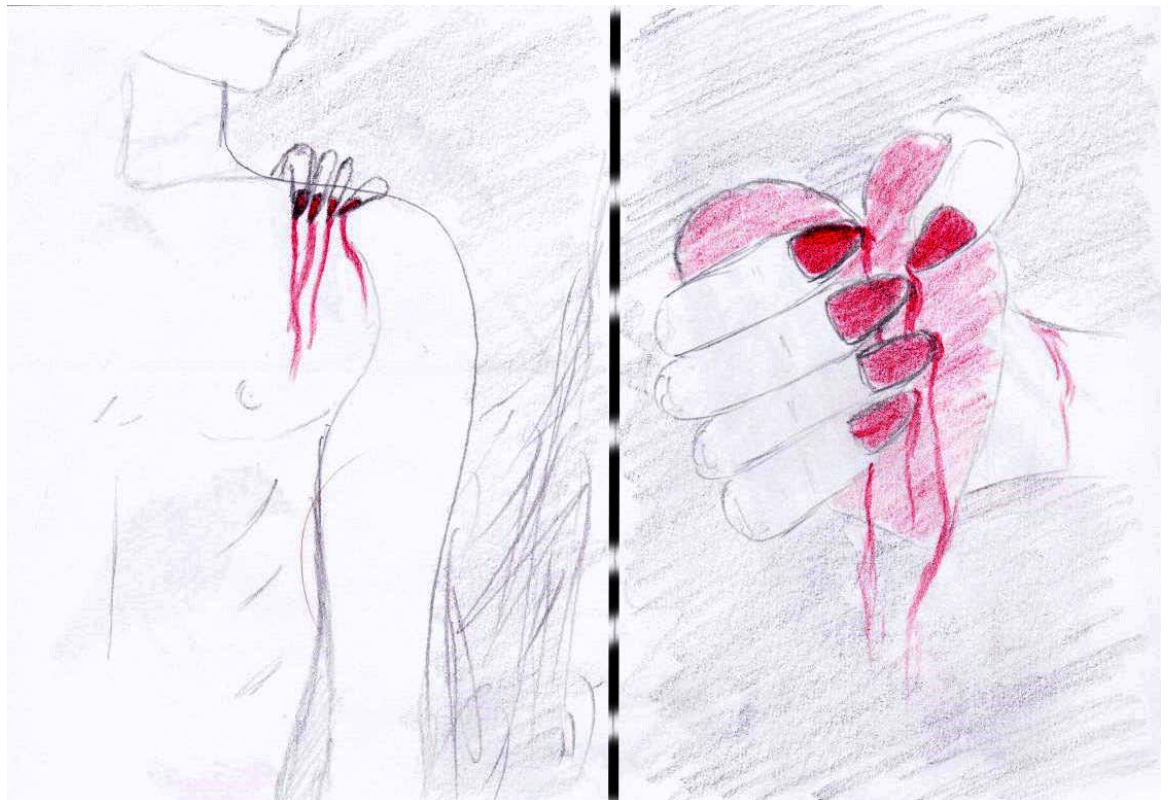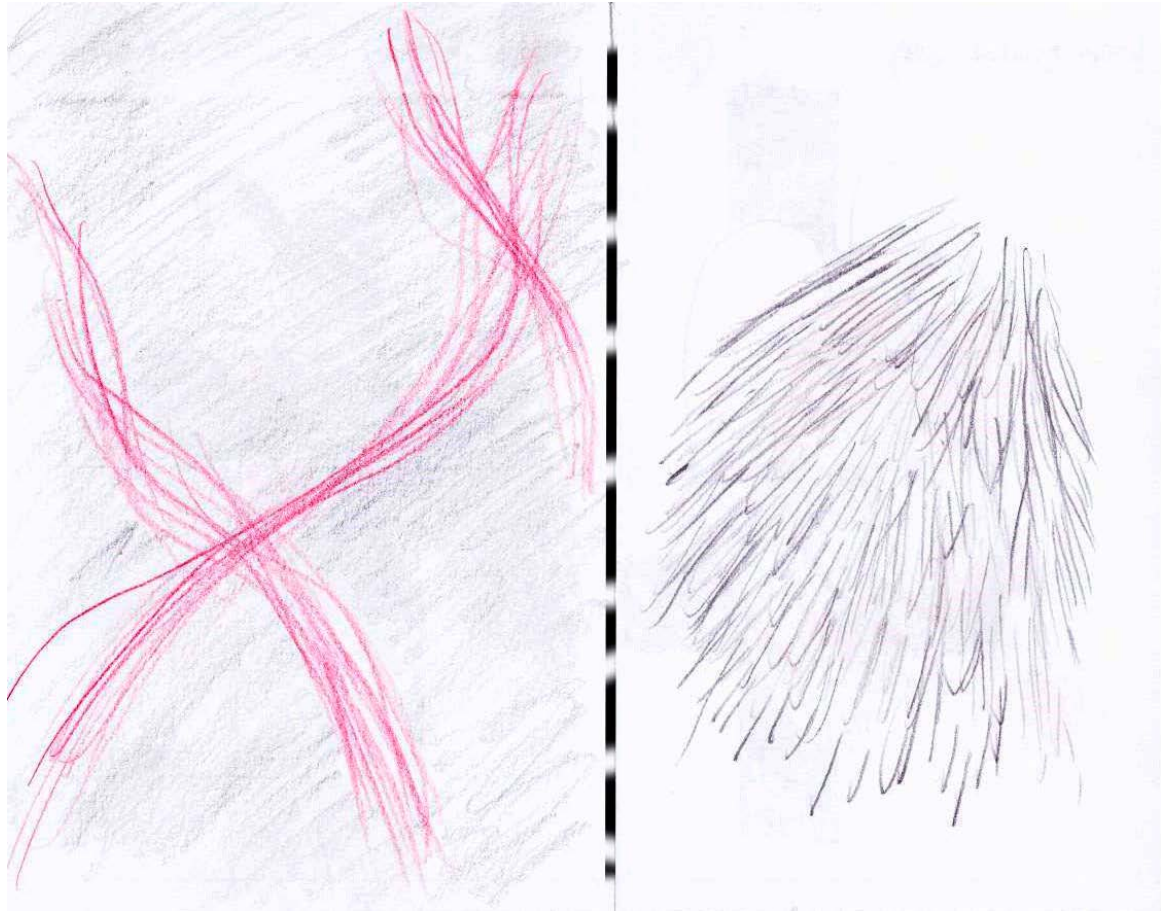
The two ideas on the top are some of the more abstract ideas I came up with. These were meant to be dark, but draw attention by using a lot of lines, creating a sense of action. Then below I tried out something less abstract again. The plan was to describe how much power love can have over a person, and how sometimes one human being can be in complete control over another.

Getting all these ideas down on paper and visualising them by hand quickly helped me see which idea(s) could work, and which would not. I personally really liked the one with the upper body as the main subject. To do this I used one of the photos of the artist as reference, and I think it fits the song for several reasons. One, the song is pretty honest, and from the heart. I know it's hard to hear the lyrics, but it is in fact a love song (a letter, as you get from the name), from him to the love of his life. So I'm kind of thinking, what is more honest and "out there" than a naked body? Two, it's quite simple. Three, it does show of the artist without it having to be him since the face isn't there. And four, I could work around this idea in quite a few different ways.

Since I wanted to create a pretty dark illustration, I decided to do a few more sketches on black paper instead of white. So I thought it would look better, or at least more the way I wanted it to this way.
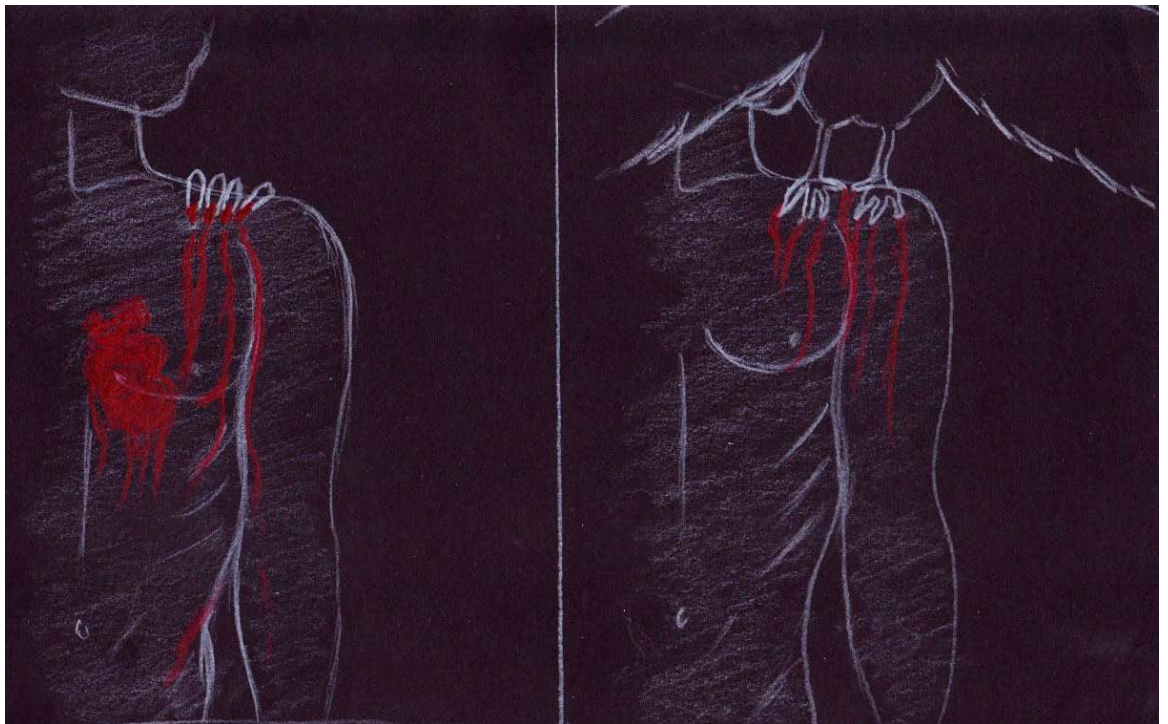

I spent a lot of time debating with myself whether to use the hand or the raven – however, I ended up thinking the hand would work best. If this was an illustration for the artist himself and not just the song, the raven would be a reasonable choice because of his name, but for this song I think the hand would be better. This kind of symbolises love, and again, how much power it can have over you, so to speak.

The idea behind the heart, outside of a body can be explained in a few different ways. One, the woman has ripped his heart out, maybe hurt him. Two, he speaks from the heart in the song. Three, love makes us vulnerable…and I could still give more examples. But this is the idea I decided to bring with me to Photoshop, and develop further.

I tried to produce these two ideas digitally as well - to have some better working sketches - both with and without colour. For this I simply used a brush in Photoshop.
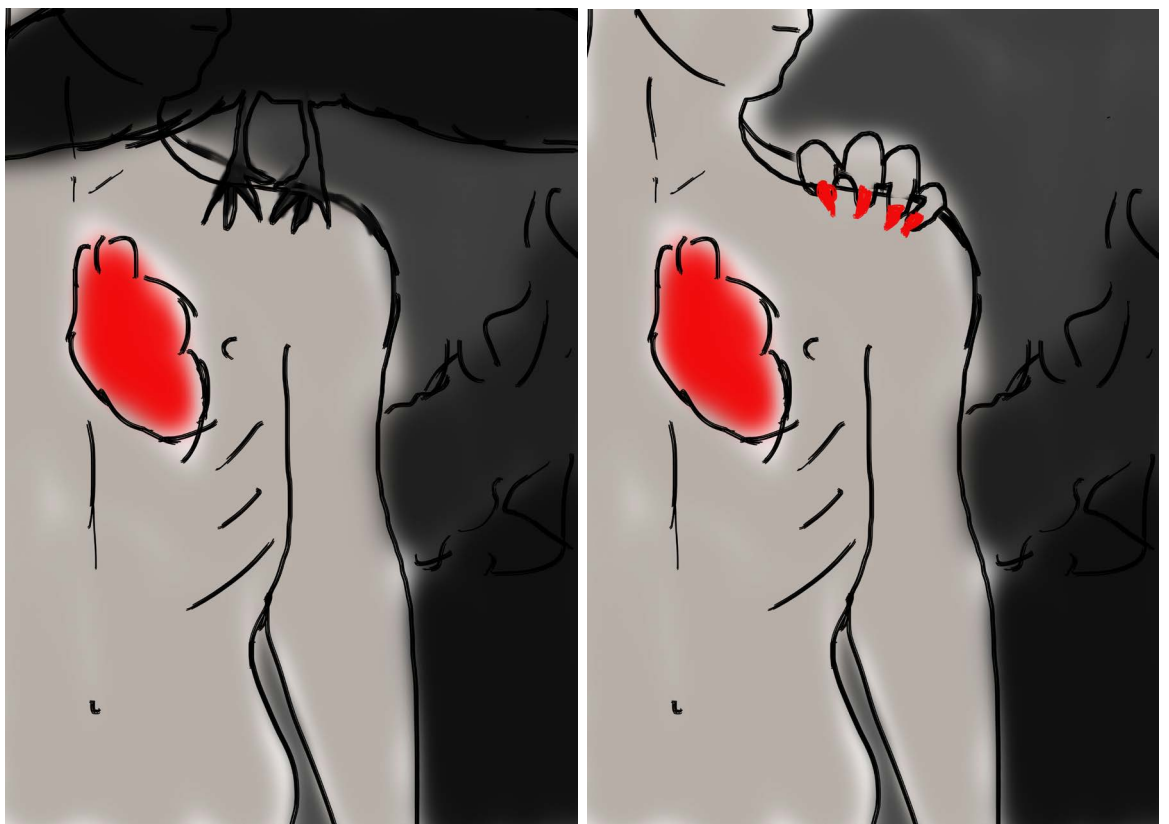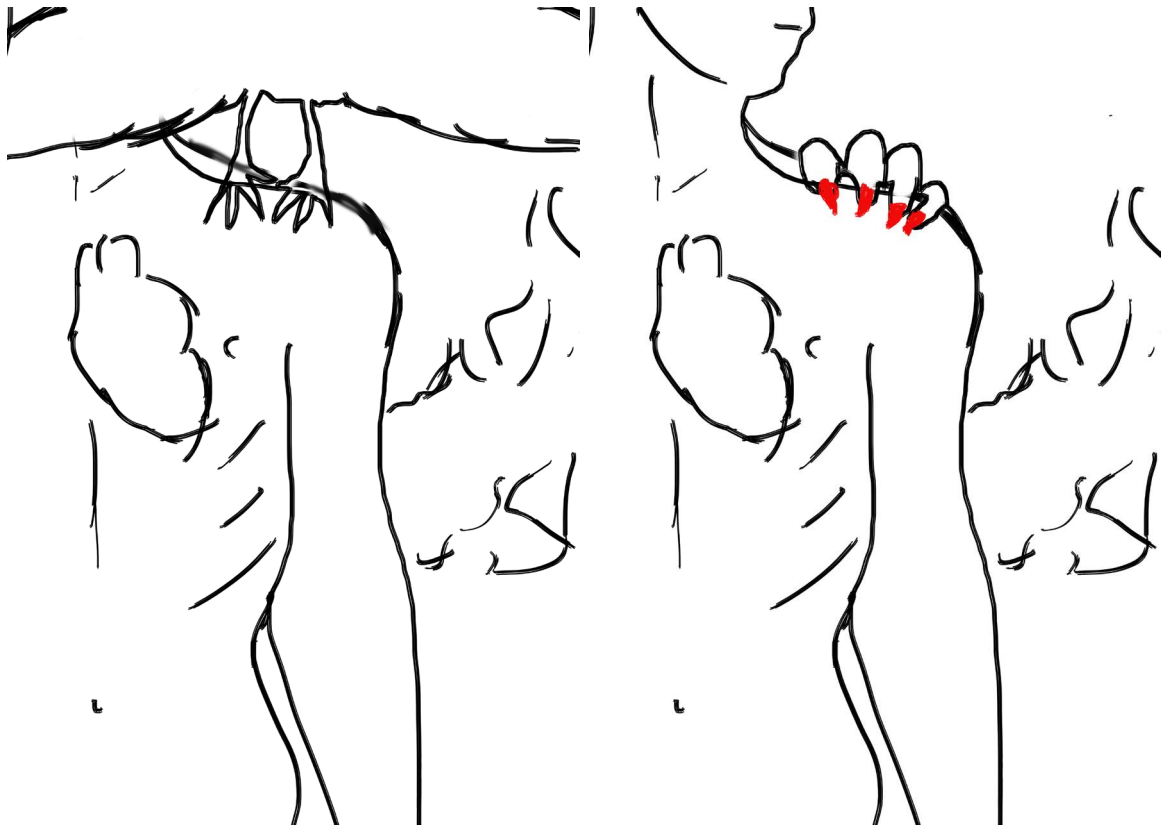
This is obviously not a construction assignment, but *Constructionmanuals* explains that a working sketch is "a drawing made from the working drawings to express a tasking clearly and to provide a quick reference to job requirements."

Digital Sketches - Since I knew I would have to work with photographs for this assignment, I found it natural to continue my work digitally once I had come up with a small plan of what I wanted to do. To the left below; this was a very quick example I made in Photoshop, where I planned to make the heart and the raven in Illustrator later, and the photograph wasn't even mine. This was only to see, and try to visualise even better what my plan was. I then decided I would go for a hand instead of a raven, and drew the hand and heart in Illustrator to create my vector elements. I also changed the background to a photograph I had taken myself, but which I still think is appropriate for the illustration and the desired mood.


However, the hand did not at all feel right. If I was going to go for this, I really had to make a lot of changes to integrate it properly; I was thinking it would even be better to draw it in Photoshop instead, to make it look more real. I ended up removing the hand, and put some red lines there instead, as if the hand had already scratched and hurt him.

The more I looked at the heart, the less I liked that as well. This was yet another element that looked sort of out of place (which I guess, in a sense it was meant to be as well), but when I tried hiding the layer, I figured I liked that better. But since we needed to include vector elements, I went back to my idea with ravens, only in a different way. So I drew different ravens in Illustrator, and put these on the sky, which I think looked pretty nice. I also added a red layer over the sky, which helped lighten up the picture as well as giving it a completely new mood.

Since the ravens seemed to disappear quite a lot, I got the idea of duplicating the layers with the ravens, and then invert them (from black to white), and put a quite strong Gaussian blur on these inverted versions. I put those under the black ravens, and I think that really added the little extra to this. The background was still too dark though, so I added some light to this as well.
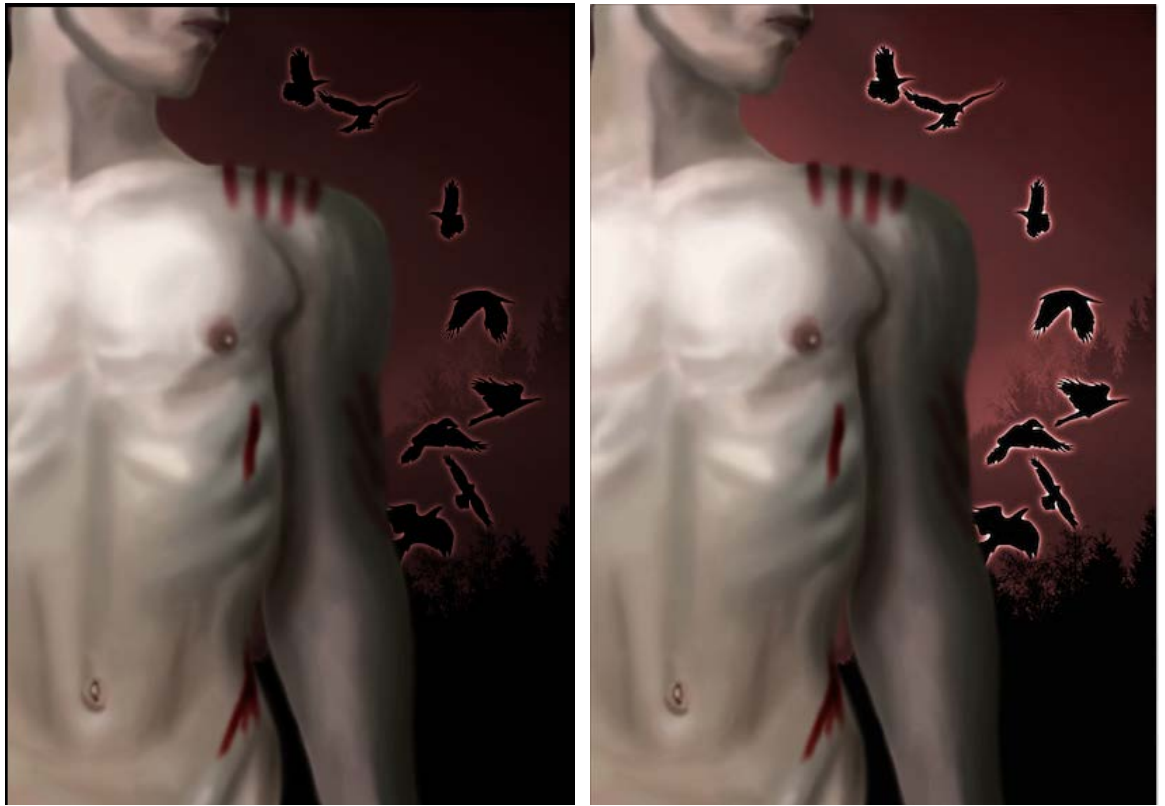
A3 Printing - Printing a few examples in A3 definitely helped me in finding ways to improve the illustration. This is how I found out that the illustration was too dark, that the ravens disappeared too much without the gaussian blur effect I put on, and that I really preferred the version without the heart. Seeing it in a bigger size than on my computer was also good.
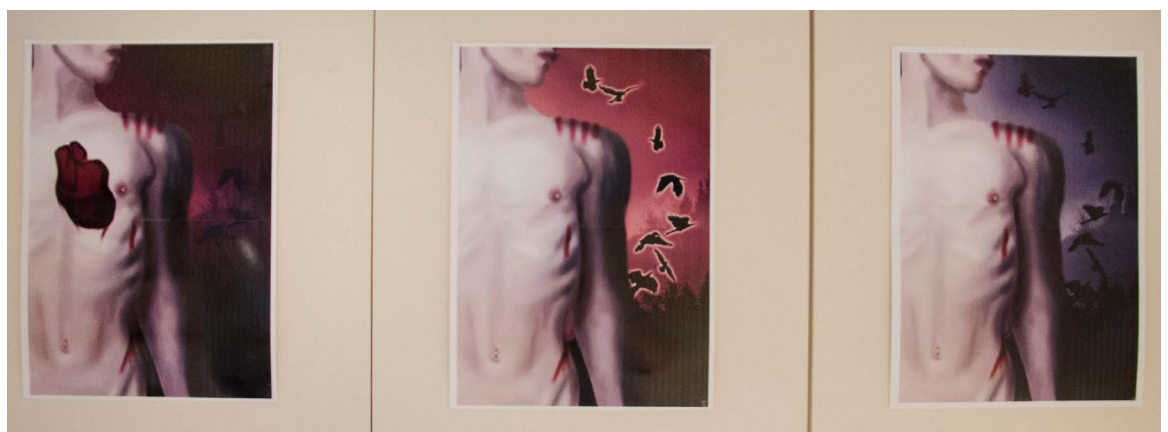
Another positive in having these versions hanging on a wall was that every time I walked away from it for a while, and then looked at it with a fresh eye later on, it was easy to spot what didn't work. Such as the heart; when I saw it placed next to a version without it, I realised it just didn't look the way I wanted it, and that it simply didn't work.

Seeing it in a larger size also gave me a new sense in terms of colour, and which areas needed to be lit up more.

When I later asked for feedback, I was recommended to remove the red layer on the sky and maybe even the glow around the ravens. The reason I added the glow in the first place was because they disappeared too much, but after removing the red layer I realised that this alone actually helped in separating the birds more from the sky. As a result of this I was finally quite satisfied with my result.

Update
This is what my first submission looked like.

After handing in this assignment I was recommended to do a few adjustments to the birds, such as changing the size of some of them to create more variation. I did this, moved around on some of them, and also nudged the body a tiny bit to the left. I also blended the colours on the body better, to make the "lines" disappear a little more.

DESIGN CHOICES

Style/Genre
Since this is a dark and emotional song, I have chosen a genre that correlates with this. The darkness and contrasts between dark and bright in the illustration are meant to create a feeling of depression, love, and passion. Love isn't necessary an easy subject and will sometimes be complicated – which he speaks of in this song – and that was something I wanted to convey.

Colours

Just by listening to the song, it is easy to realise playful and happy colours aren't the best choice. I knew I needed colours that could back up the emotions described under Style/Genre. So I wanted dark colours, and wished to include red. *Empower Yourself With Color Psychology* is a website by an Australian author who describes the meaning behind colours. She defines red as "the color of energy, passion, action, ambition and determination. It is also the color of anger and sexual passion," while "black is the color of the hidden, the secretive and the unknown, creating an air of mystery. It keeps things bottled up inside, hidden from the world." These are my main colours, as well as having different values of black, going towards grey and white. I believe her description truly do back up my choice of colours. Below are the ten main colours used in the illustration.

Another thing I focused on was contrast. As explained in our *Noroff lesson on Colour Theory* from Week 6, "every visual presentation involves figure-ground relationships. This relationship between a subject (or figure) and its surrounding field (ground) will display a level of contrast; the more an object contrasts with its surrounds, the more visible it becomes." It was important for me to have the body really stand out, and I believe that having it quite bright and the background dark was a good way of doing so.

Elements

My illustration is photo based in two ways: The background layer is an actual photograph, a photograph that I have duplicated and thus created more tension, and trees. Additionally, the body is drawn in Photoshop with a photograph as reference.

The vector elements I have used are all different ravens, flying in the sky. *Techterms* describes Vector Graphics as not being "made up of a grid of pixels. Instead, vector graphics are comprised of paths, which are defined by a start and end point, along with other points, curves, and angles along the way. A path can be a line, a square, a triangle, or a curvy shape. These paths can be used to create simple drawings or complex diagrams." Since Illustrator is a vector based program, and we were asked to use this program in this assignment, I created the ravens there.

I first drew a heart and a hand in Illustrator, but as earlier mentioned I didn't get the feeling I wanted by using these, and changed my vector elements entirely over to the ravens.

Composition, Layout, Grid

Graphic Design School further explains the figure-ground relationship. The idea here is that the figure is an "object in a given space, and 'ground' refers to the background, or space in which that object is seen." My figure is the body, and everything behind is the ground. Because "the nearer

an object is to a light source, the brighter its surface appears to be, so that with groups of objects, darker objects appear further away than brighter objects" (*Science.Jrank*), the figure also appears to be closer than the ground.

My composition, which is "the visual structure and organisation of elements within a design; it concerns the process of combining distinct parts or elements to form a whole" (*Graphic Design School*), has a figure that disappears out of the frame, but because of the Law of Closure, we know it is a whole body. The Law of closure "argues that we tend to 'close' or complete lines or objects that are not, in fact, closed," (*Graphic Design School*) and this especially applies to objects we know the shape of. Since we know a body usually has two arms, legs and a head, we know that my figure most likely has this as well. Behind the figure are ravens that create lines and thus movement in the illustration.

SELF EVALUATION

Reflection around finished product
Throughout the whole process I had a pretty set idea of how I wanted the illustration to be, and I'm glad to see that with the changes I have made, I have managed to create the illustration I wanted. My idea was always to capture emotions related to darkness, depression, passion, and love, and by using the colours that I have, and the chosen elements, I think this expresses this.

The illustration works in both smaller and larger sizes, but because it is an illustration in which there is quite a lot of detail, it – and is meant to do so – works better in a larger size.

Development and Process
Looking at my first hand drawn sketches and the finished product, it is rather obvious that a few changes have been made, but I believe they are all for the better. From having a hand that looked out of place, I now have a few ravens in the background that truly help back up who the artist behind the song is, and red marks that could say that the hand has already been there and hurt him. I believe illustrations like these are up for interpretation, and therefore think all the elements can be interpreted differently depending on who is looking at it.

I have learnt a few things in working on the assignment, such as bettering my knowledge in both Photoshop and Illustrator. In this assignment I really got to explore my main interests more, as photography and digital drawing are both things I enjoy working with.

Since we only had two weeks for this assignment, time was precious when working on the design. I had to really plan ahead to make sure I would get everything from sketches, to the actual design working in Photoshop and Illustrator, to the writing process. On the other side of the coin, I like deadlines and having to plan a project to make said deadline, and really enjoyed working on this illustration.

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

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