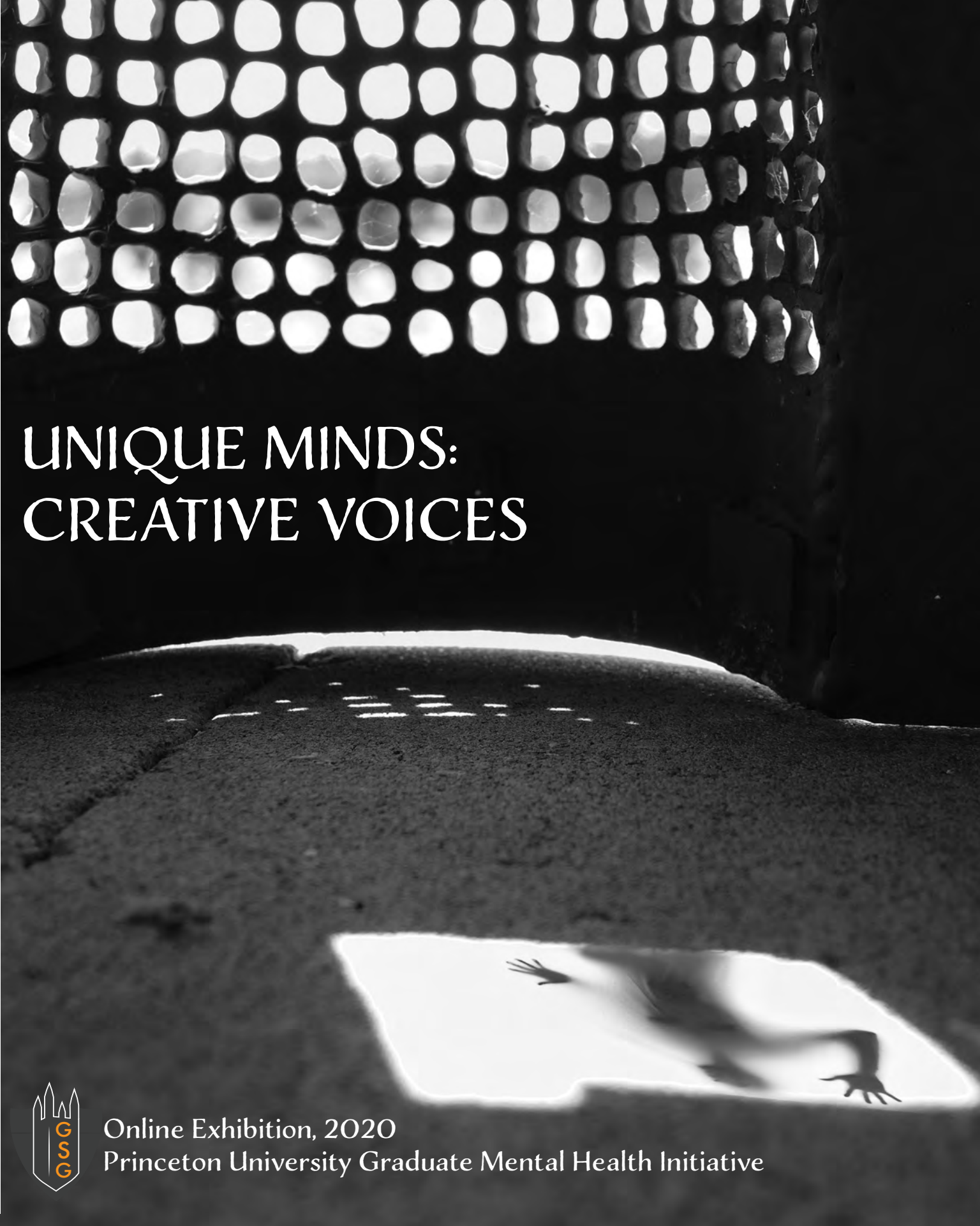




UNIQUE MINDS: CREATIVE VOICES



Online Exhibition, 2020
Princeton University Graduate Mental Health Initiative

UNIQUE MINDS: CREATIVE VOICES

online exhibition of art and creative writing for
mental health awareness

November 9 — December 31, 2020



Princeton University Graduate Student Government
Princeton, NJ

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Cover: Maia Reim, *Quarantine*, Digital photographic Giclee print, 2020



Princeton University
Graduate Student Government
Graduate Mental Health Initiative

This catalogue of the virtual exhibition, Unique Minds: Creative Voices, is presented by the Princeton University Graduate Student Government's (GSG) Graduate Mental Health Initiative as part of our annual campus-wide Mental Health Awareness Month in November. The GSG's objectives in hosting Mental Health Month have been to acknowledge neurodiversity and mental health difference as a part of the campus community, reduce stigma, increase awareness, share stories of lived experiences, and aid members of our community to feel less alone in their challenges.

We wish to thank all of the contributing artists and creative writers for being an integral part of this discussion and for helping to make Princeton University a more mentally healthy community. We are grateful for the creative work you shared with us and your unique voice that adds to the ongoing mental health conversation at Princeton University and beyond.

*We would like to thank our many sponsors and partners including Campus Conversations, the Women*s Center, The Graduate School, Campus Recreation, the LGBT Center, the Carl A. Fields Center, the Office of Religious Life, the Office of Disability Services, the AccessAbility Center, The Center for Career Development, the Davis International Center, The Office of Alumni Affairs, GradFUTURES, Letters to Strangers, the Princeton University Neurodiversity Collective, the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, TigerWell, and Counseling and Psychological Services.*

We invite you to visit our Mental Health Awareness Month website for more details at mentalhealth.princeton.edu. If you have any questions about Mental Health Month, please don't hesitate to email us at graduatementalhealth@gmail.com. We hope you enjoy this catalogue!

The 2020 Graduate Mental Health Initiative

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CHANIKA SVETVILAS

Interdisciplinary artist and
Independent Curator who lives in Princeton, NJ
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I am honored to have the opportunity to curate this show as an interdisciplinary artist and mental health advocate and to be entrusted with this creative work. During this pandemic in 2020 with high unemployment rates, the presidential election, civil unrest, and grief, it is helpful to acknowledge the stress, strain, and challenges and rollercoaster of emotions we feel during this historic and unusual time. One way that we will come out on the other side besides embracing love, hope, and mutual aid is through our creative voices whether it is making a demonstration sign, painting a mural, baking, writing, crafting or creating art. I want to commend the artists and writers of Unique Minds: Creative Voices for their participation and sharing their work with the Princeton University community and beyond. It includes 39 artists and creative writers and 55 works. This exhibit of art and writing addresses wellbeing, mental health awareness and neurodiversity.

I want to recognize that some of the exhibition content can be triggering. Please take care of yourself and connect with others to share this conversation.

Chanika Svetvilas
Curator



CALVIN CHIN, Ph.D.

Director, Counseling and Psychological Services at
Princeton University

Art is a powerful way to counter the stigma around mental illness. It increases empathy by communicating feelings beyond words and language. Understanding the experience of people who are touched by mental illness, either directly or through the suffering of a loved one, is key to decreasing stigma and encouraging people to reach out for help when they need it. The art contained in this exhibit is a powerful beginning to this important conversation

Calvin Chin, Ph.D.

Director of Counseling and Psychological Services

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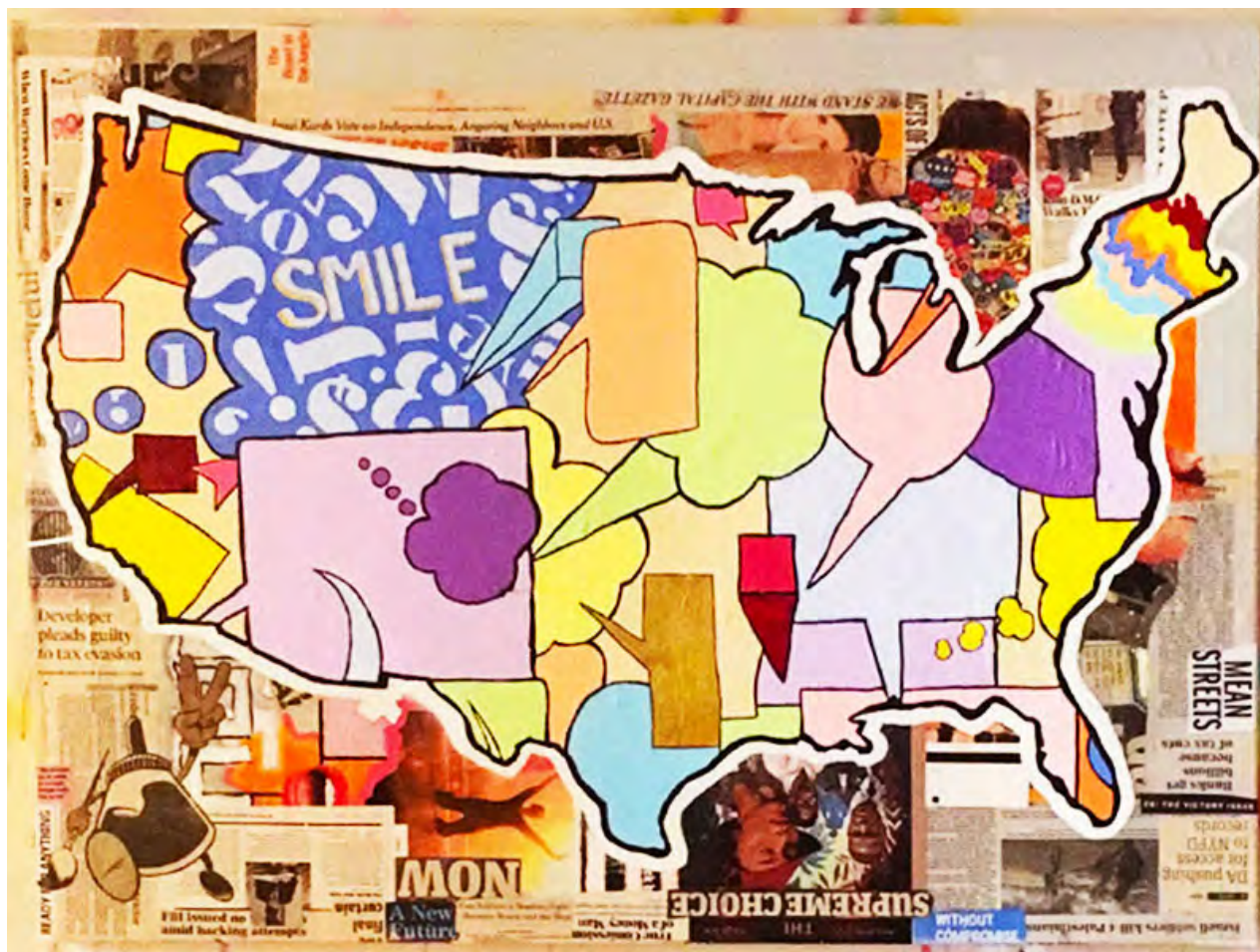
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LAWRENCE CIARALLO

Smile (amidst the chaos), 2019

30 x 40 inch
fluid acrylic - mixed media on canvas

In an age of inflamed hatred and fear it often feels necessary and urgent to confront these evils with love. Indeed, Dr. King taught us that "hate is to great a burden to bear" and that he "decided to stick with love." The collaged materials represent all of the issues facing our nation and the word boxes within the map represent the multitude of solutions. Although difficult I find it important for our mental health to remember to smile, persevere and dedicate ourselves to a lifetime of righteous, non-violent, democratic action.

I've walked by a bog near my home and marveled at the pristine water lilies that emerge through the mud. Life is filled struggles and adversity. If we push through the muck, joy will eventually surface.



CHERYL GIOIELLI

Joy through Struggle, 2020

20 x 30 inch
Digital Art



PHILLIP MCCONNELL

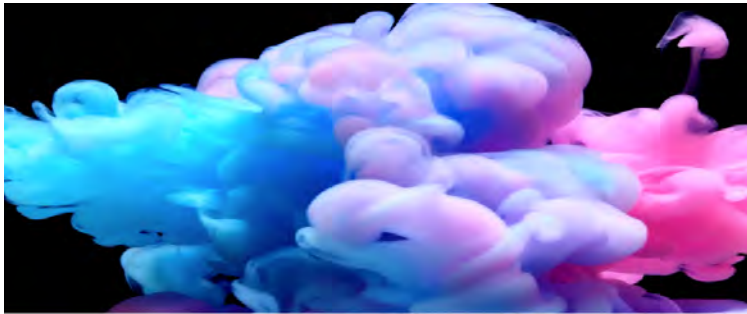
David dot exe, 2020

24 x 36 inch

Glitch art on canvas

I am a 30-year-old artist from Trenton New Jersey. Creating from the scope of a post-internet millennial, highlighting varying factors of the human condition using my emotions as a catalyst to craft various disciplines of art. By weaving complex narratives around subject matter dealing with love, loss, heartbreak, depression, existentialism, and nihilism. My focus is on abstract, surrealist digital art and a photographer whose concentration is in highlighting the human condition through my experience and the different macro/micro concepts of nature.

I am a digital artist specializing in an art form known as glitch art. Glitch art is the aestheticization of digital or analog errors, such as artifacts and other “bugs”, by either corrupting digital code/data or by physically manipulating electronic devices. To create my art I convert picture files to text files in a basic notepad program. The notepad program reads the text file of the picture as lines of code, there I can manipulate the code by adding or subtracting color or by taking pieces of other pictures and blending them with each other. My sources for images come from different aspects of photography (landscape, portrait, urban, nature, and macro) and different concepts of Glitch Art (VHS, aesthetic, vaporwave). By doing this I can create something new out of something broken.



Feeling purple: a series of short poems

written by Teresa Marx

I feel protected when the sun sets.
the stars glisten the cheeks of strangers
and I wonder if I should say hello
I've always done better in the moonlight



they find your story terrifying -
let them be uncomfortable.
let it manifest,
while you dance.



your worth is not tied to
societal expectations.
you're so much more than that



TERESA MARX
Feeling Purple: A Series
of Short Poems, 2020
Poetry

I've shattered windows with my scream .
only to pick up the broken pieces
and make a stain glass window.

the darkest corners of my mind
remind me I have yet to become them

vulnerability and
judgment
cannot share space.
*don't pretend they are
friends*

you deserve to eat from the
sun
you deserve to rest on the
moon

I have struggled with anxiety, depression, and PTSD for the majority of my life. I know firsthand the power of having a safe and judgment free space to create art - dance, poetry, music, and painting have allowed me to come back to myself over and over again, even when I didn't feel worthy. Creating through movement, whether with my body, pen, or paintbrush, has empowered me to heal, to confront some of my darkest demons, and to find humor- even in the scariest corners of my mind. My goal is to always create from an authentic place, and to hopefully remind others that they aren't alone.

JACQUESE ARMSTRONG

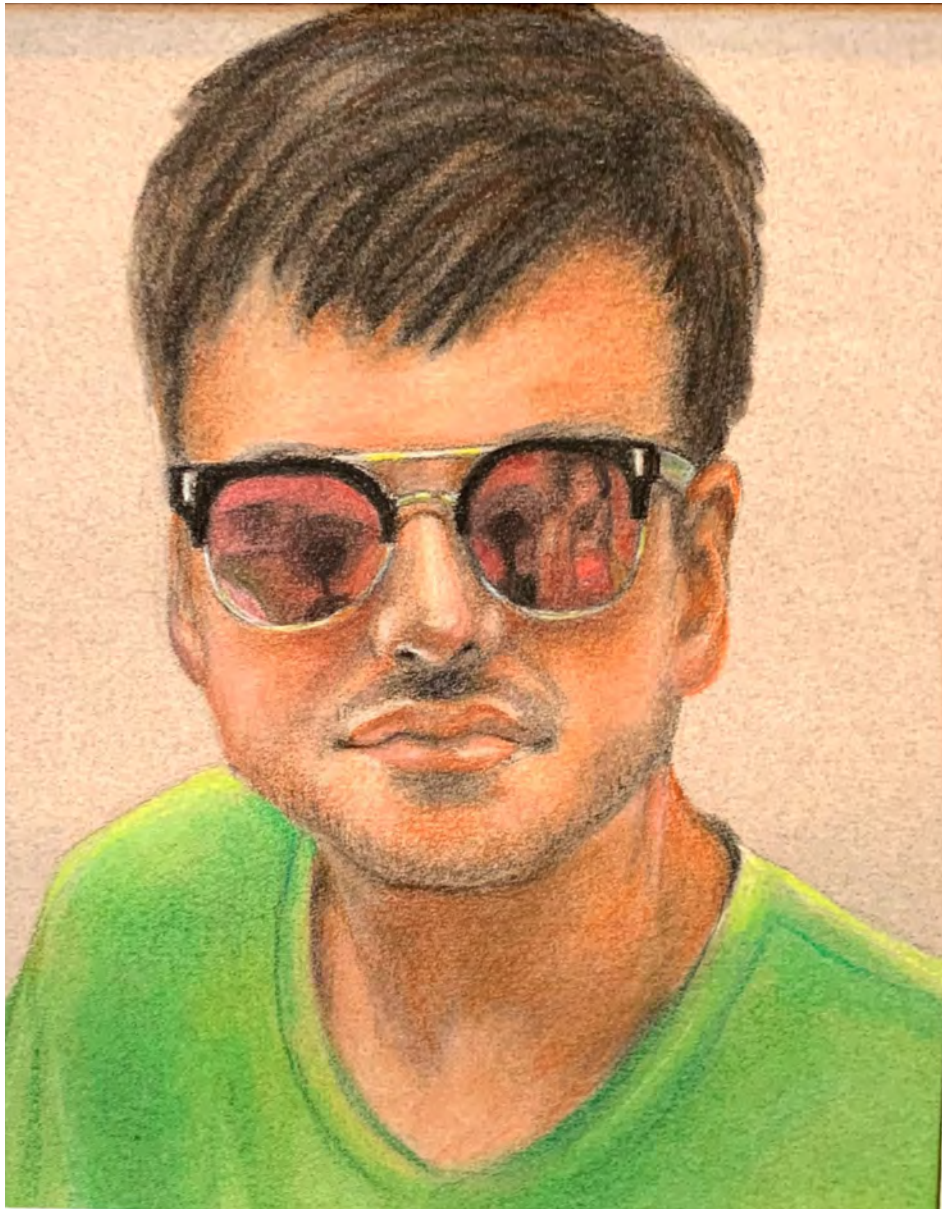
Describe Yourself in 10 words/visuals, 2020

11 x 17 inch

paper collagejournal/pen/acrylic paint



As coordinator and content creator for NAMI NJ's (National Alliance on Mental Illness New Jersey) Expressive Arts Cafe, I designed an art-journaling exercise from prompts relating to the spiritual dimension of wellness. This is one of my examples.



RENEE PELLETIER EGAN
Glasses Give Comfort, 2020

12 x 9 inch
Pastel

*A wonderful Autistic student of mine that conforms
and feels comfort by the use of glasses,
music, or pacing.*



As a protection and response to the trauma of unexpected loss the bereaved metaphorically constructs their own armour, in this case, the “Blinder Collar”. Wearing the “Blinder Collar” can allow the wearer to shut out the outside world. The wearer becomes unaware of their periphery and therefore cannot be disturbed by it. Having blinders on allows the wearer/ participant to explore or experience the unexpected qualities of their grief. How grief can be misleading, because it brings up other emotions. It can also trap the wearer from experiencing the outside world. The armour is a method of coping with moving forward while processing a void, absence, loss.

Having blinders on can allow the wearer to shut out the outside world. The wearer becomes unaware of their periphery and therefore cannot be disturbed by it. The blinders allow the wearer/ participant to explore or experience the unexpected qualities of grief, how it can mislead you, how it can not feel like grief, how you are trapped by it.

It can also trap the wearer from experiencing the world around them. As a protection and response to the trauma of grief the bereaved metaphorically constructs their own armour. The collar extending upward to shield the head, and blinders covering the eyes. The armour is a method of coping with moving forward while processing a void, absence, loss.

KAT COPE

Blinder Collar, 2020

11.5 x 13 x 8 inch

kozo paper, banana paper, watercolour, coloured
pencil, glue, wood, acrylic matte medium,
acrylic gel, medium acrylic varnish, thread

Over the past few years I have lost, in quick succession, the matriarchs and patriarchs of my family. Through creating quilted works with the fabric remnants of their lives I am better able to process my grief and the restructuring of my familial relationships.



ELIZABETH GRACE BLEYNAT

Circles, 2017

17 x 21.5 inch

Fabric from my grandmother's scrap bag, cotton batting and hand quilting



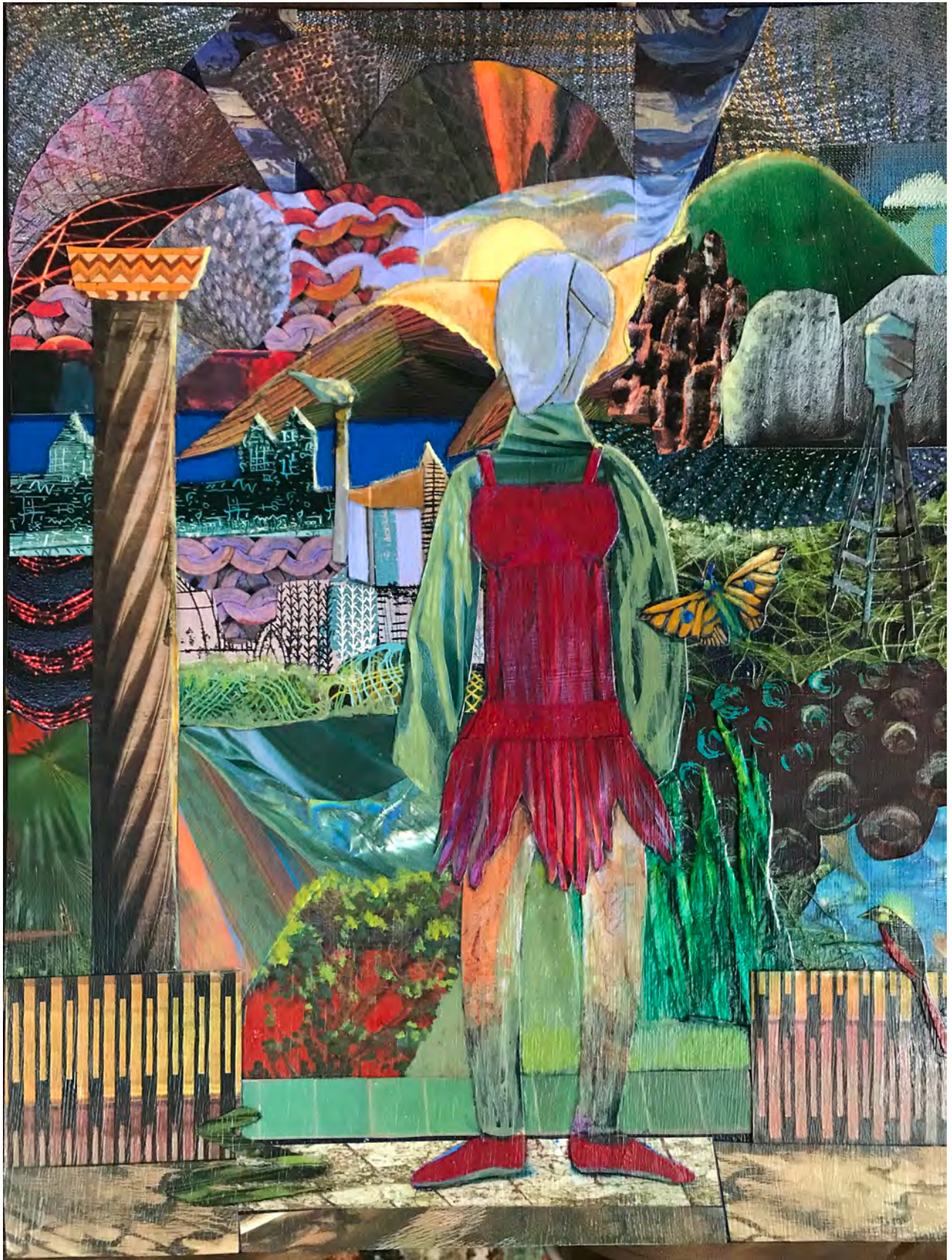
SPRIHA GUPTA

The Gate, 2017

20 x 20 inch

Wood, Burlap Paper, Straws, Roses with Acrylics On Canvas

Mental Health is related to the well being or rather the state our of the mind, body and soul at any given point of time. All these parts are interconnected and my work focuses on different aspects of life..how we relate to it and how it affects us. I create to express what I feel strongly about and my hands start weaving their own stories on the canvas as it flows from my soul. I want my art to create a space for conversation and a look within, exploring the various layers of the world we inhabit. The well taken paths need to be questioned and new detours created to understand that really nothing is black and white. "Gate" focuses on opening up the doors of your mind and body to new experiences and dreams...there's a place for everyone and you need to just feel the moment and dream the dream.



JILL LECLAIR

Landscape of Acceptance, 2020

14 x 11 inch

paper collage and acrylic

Be brave to reveal yourself in the harsh but beautiful landscape. Acceptance of self and of others who may be afraid and guarded. Despite the “cover”, the individual’s stance is grounded. The butterfly represents the coming transformation in the individual’s life.

JILL LECLAIR

Isolation, 2018

12 x 16 inch

paper collage and acrylic

This reflects the isolation and despair of the elderly, especially, now during Covid times. May they see light and nature and breathe fresh air.





MONICA NASK

Yellow Sky No 1, 2020

20 x 16 inch

Acrylic on canvas

“Golden Days” is a series I have been working on during and in response to time spent during Covid-19. The lighter colors used convey happiness, creativity. Metallic gold paint represents the sunshine and reflection.



MONICA NASK
Lavender Sky No 1, 2020
20 x 16 inch
Acrylic on canvas

The sunset, which happens everyday and is recognizable to everyone is stability. I call these Golden Days because they are about a time when the world slowed down and as hard as it is it can also be a time to appreciate and reflect on what is important.



REGINA MCILVAIN

Desert Stones, 2017

24 x 36 inch

Digital Photography

One of the best tonics for the mind is a complete break from humanity. These images, taken in the desert in winter, offer to cleanse the palate of the mind with their expansive purity. Desert air is different: breathe in the pristine essence of millennia of windswept landscapes.



REGINA MCILVAIN
Desert Canyon, 2017
24 x 36 inch
Digital Photography



BETH JARVIE
Look up Moments, 2020
18 x 9 inch
Digital Photography



BETH JARVIE

Look up Moments, 2020

9 x 18 inch

Digital Photography

Taking the time each day to look up and see the beauty all around us is a simple but powerful component to a peaceful heart and a clear mind.



MARCIA SHIFFMAN

Unthinkable, 2020

11 x 17 inch

Pigmented Print. Edition of 10 Prints.

This time of the covid pandemic has caused both physical and mental anguish to many. It is also a time of personal introspection. This image uses two overlain images to reflect these conditions through the use of water as “infinity” and a drawing based upon a cemetery sculpture to epitomise grief.



INDRA BHARANIDHAVRAN

Depression, 2020

20 x 16 inch

Mixed media

Mental Health matters. It is very important in every stages of life. We need to find our connection from mind to our soul. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.

Without the ability to actualize an idea or concept, art would not exist. My work is a constant search for the best way to interpret the ideas that I have about myself and the world I live in. I do not limit myself to one medium, style or concept. Different mediums allow me to express different ideas. I would like to repurpose found objects and give them a second life in most of my pieces.



JOACHIM SPRUCH

Inferno, 2020

12 x 12 inch

Acrylic on canvas board

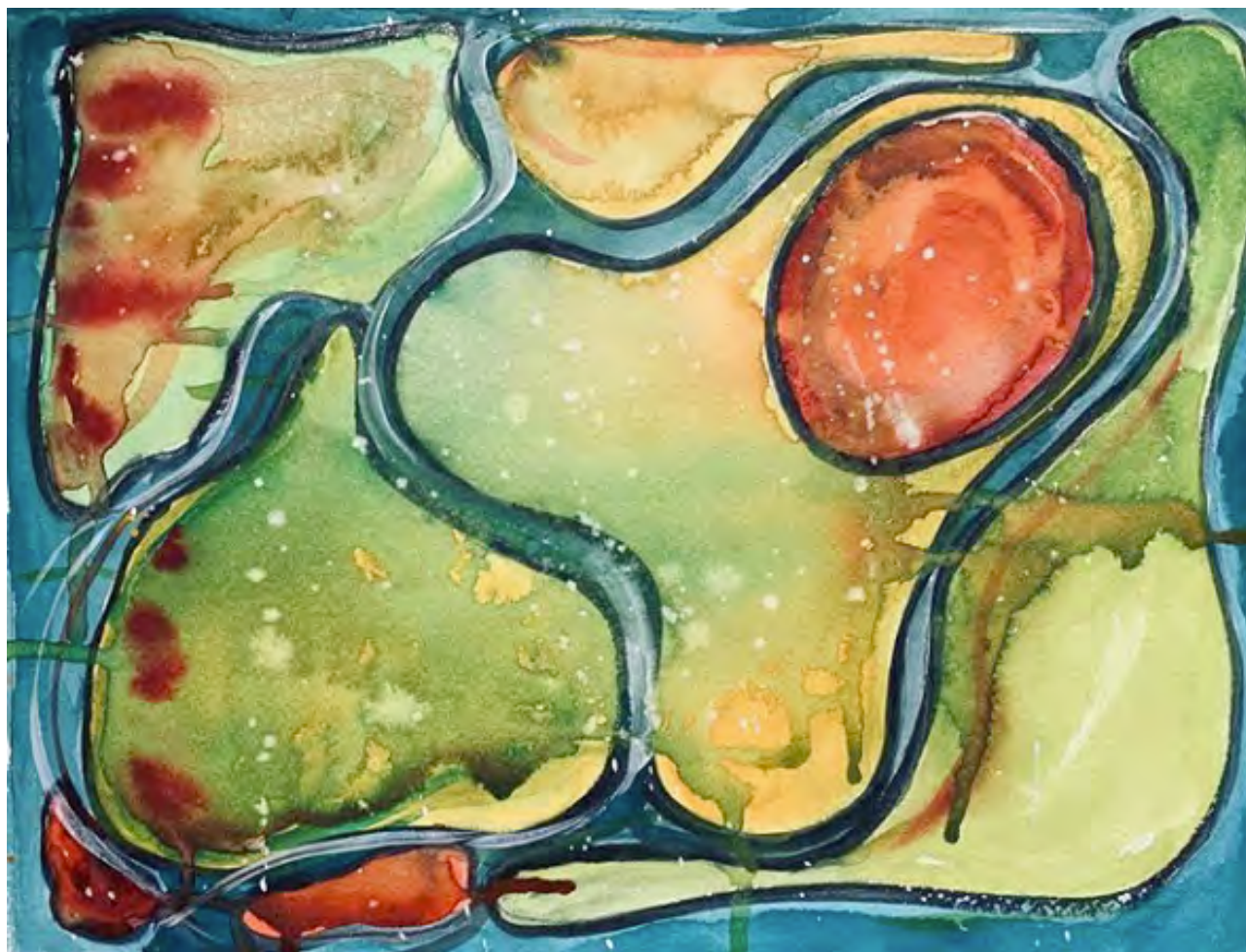
I see myself as a mentally stable person but do to the worldwide pandemic and local political developments in just the past 6 month I started questioning myself more and more. I mean what does the future hold for all of us? I feel like we are all living in a jail without the bars on the window.

JOACHIM SPRUCH

Living in a Bubble, 2020

11 x 14 inch

Watercolor on paper





ISABEL LU

Solace, 2020

16 x 20 inch

Oil on Panel

Art offers peace and comfort in difficult times (and good times). Isabel who is 13 years old has been learning art for a couple of years. During the pandemic, art has been an outlet for her family to treasure life with common objects and small moments.

CATHERINE GOWEN
Prospect Gardens Princeton Pansies in a Pandemic, 2020
5 x 9 inch
Watercolor on paper



These pansies were blooming in Prospect Gardens on the Princeton University campus in April and May 2020. Beautiful brilliant orange, and the purple pansies, like black velvet. Prospect Gardens is a jewel of a garden, just big enough to walk for 15 minutes on the way across campus and back, long enough to refresh one's mind. The smell of the Eastern Hemlock, the feel of its needles giving way gently under foot, and the profusion of flower blossoms for the eye and nose unburdens the mind. Connecting with nature in this place revives the spirit.



ANANDI RAMANATHAN

Live in the Moment, 2019

10 x 8 inch

Watercolor on paper

*Living in the present with no memories to past or anxieties
to the future can improve anyone's mental health*



ANANDI RAMANATHAN

Happy Together, 2019

6 x 4 inch

Watercolor on paper

Hold hands and stay happy together.

SARAH MARIE BRUNO

Paper Dolls, 2020

14 x 20 inch

Poetry

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Sometimes I close my eyes and take a stroll
Through the ghost towns in my mind
Places that used to be filled
with the clatter of movement,
Teeming with the sticky, mildewed funk of life,
Now sit still and dusty and evaporated;
I walk into an empty room
Where I once found something blackened and horrible
Like the gunk in my drain
Slimy, dark hair wrapped around my wrists
Dragging me into the mud,
But all that's left is a dark stain on the floorboards.
The blood has dried
Leaving behind a dull ache
Where a sharp pain used to be;
It's strange how rusted rakes and rhymes
Have been transformed into paper
Crumbling in my hands,
Igniting in the friction of dry air.
But it's me who has changed
I am no longer a paper doll
And paper weapons can only leave a paper cut,
I'll sting and bleed
Because I am alive
But the wound will close
And this paper skeleton town
Is kindling for my fire.

This poem is about my experience recovering from OCD, reflecting on how obsessions that used to drag me down into a pit of darkness no longer have power over me and only remain as a "ghost town" in my mind. I think this could equally apply to recovery from trauma and how the visceral effect of memories of past experiences change over time. The process of recovery is long and complicated and involves many different, sometimes conflicting, emotions.

Angry Bees

I have a brain full of angry bees,
I don't know why they're angry
It must have been something I did
To fill my head with a
Monotone, stabbing static,



Stinging every nerve and sinew,
Centrally nervous
In my hive mind of self destruction,
I can barely hear my own thoughts
Over the white-hot noise of busy buzzing,



Some days I can think a little louder,
Shout over the background,
I'm used to it;





Until I can taste the honey

But instead
I release the tension
Through my ears
With music and poetry

Other days the burning is too much to bear,
I'd peel away the skin and open my skull
Just to let out the swarm.

SARAH MARIE BRUNO
Angry Bees, 2020
Poetry

DESOLATION WAITING GAME

the days crawl by at a pace so slow
it makes watching paint dry
seem like a high intensity sport
the hours, minutes, seconds
are kept by a Dalí clock
dripping like the paint
dripping like my eyes
floods keep bursting through
the dams of their lids
before evacuation notices
have time to post
on the wall of my chest

SARA ZIEGELBAUM

Desolation Waiting Game, 2017

Poetry

DEPRESSION CREEPS IN

darkness raps upon my shuttered door
fog fingers ooze through the cracks
wisps wrap around my skull
seeping deftly through the bone
dancing shadows on my mind
spin pirouettes in dimming light

SARA ZIEGELBAUM

Depression Creeps In, 2017

Poetry

*Poetry has been the most cathartic way for me to
express my mental health struggles.*



SHARON SLEEZER

Cry, 2019

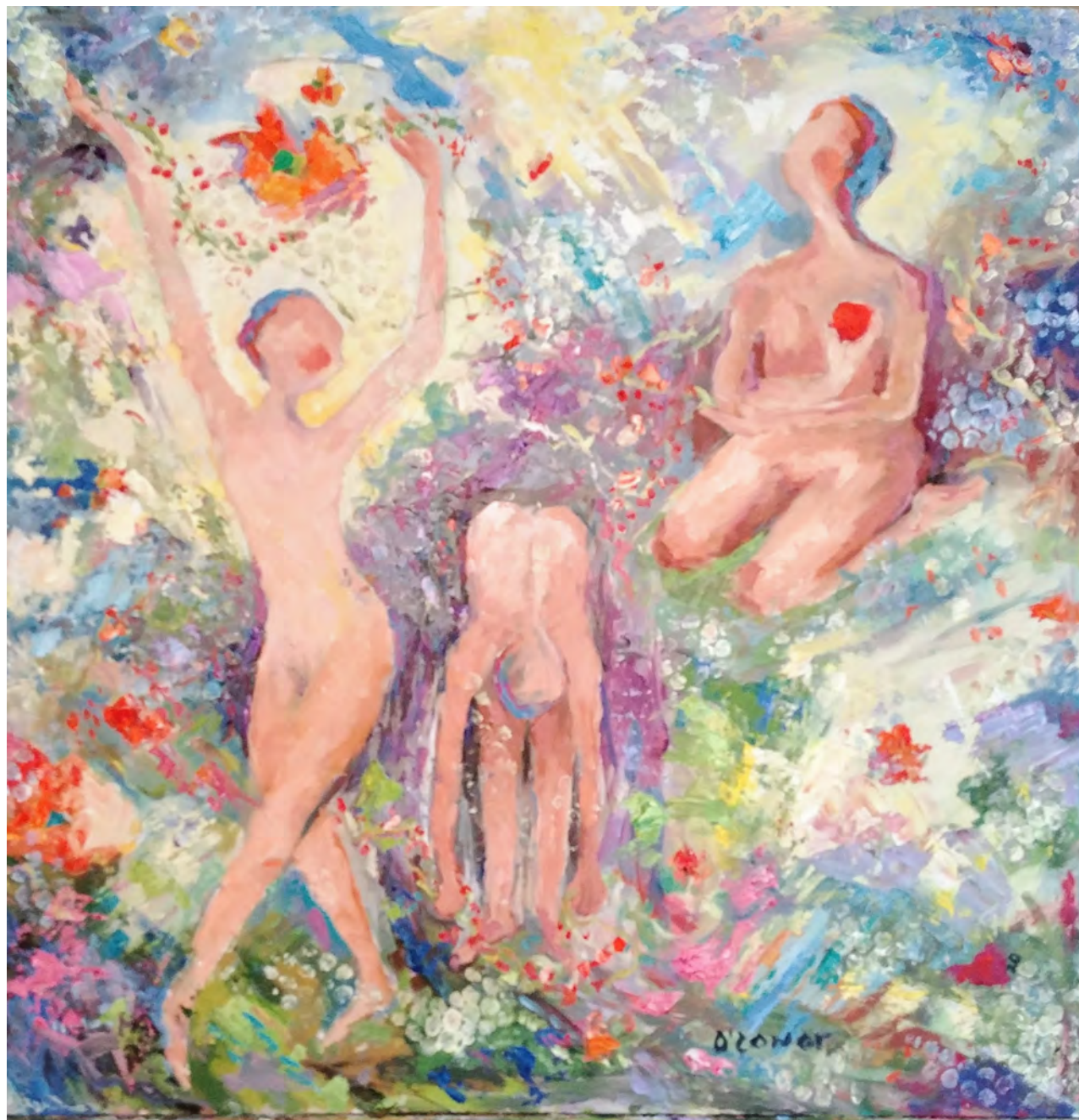
24 x 24 inch

Oil on board

My work tries to capture the depths of despair.

SHARON SLEEZER
Grief, The Journey, 2020
24 x 24 inch
Oil on board

*My piece reflects the emotional transformation that grief has
upon our being.*



MEDITATIONS

This is the lookout with so many trees and a crown of hills.
Mother, we've made it.

This is the ending of the first movement of Mahler 6.
And now the Andante.

A bird flies sunward. My mom is doing her stretches.
Mahler is all calm, all beauty, changing only in shapes of goodness
for a moment.

I know it's headed for change. While she eats dried cranberries

my mom confesses that she's read my journals. I don't mind.
My thoughts beg to be seen.

When I don't think Mahler could be more beautiful
it is. And I tell my mom all I've ever known is to keep writing.

Then the harmony changes and I wonder if Mahler 6
is frightening or frightened, like

if the Andante were a person
what would her face look like?

Would I call her friend, auntie, sister?
Flipping through my journal, I am thinking

you can't tell, with my messy cursive,
between the words *lonely* and *lovely*. Do we need to?

These days, Isaac's begun writing poems.
I'm talking to or about God again.

I am falling in love with someone, something, a place,
but I don't know what. It's a sensation of becoming.

I have always been like this and it makes my family laugh.
Did you know —Isaac told me this a few times—*that I have*

the same birthday as Yo-Yo Ma?

I make fun of him, the way he tells me this, but here I am

sitting way up on a hill considering it. Mounted upon the suspended
wideness of the world

and a good suffering in the heat. I am momentarily aware
of the stories that have touched this dusty altar.

Perhaps we cannot change others but we can
rub up next to them at a lookout,

people-watch, tree-watch, witnesses of this moment.
And head back down.

SABRINA KIM
Meditations, 2020
Poetry

During the pandemic, I've found myself grasping for a sense of grounding through indulging in simple truths: relationships, sound, images. These poems have held my hand in the pursuit of equilibrium.



SPRIHA GUPTA

Estranged, 2018

24 x 18 inch

Cheesecloth and Wood on Canvas

I create to express what I feel strongly about and my hands start weaving their own stories on the canvas as it flows from my soul. I want my art to create a space for conversation and a look within, exploring the various layers of the world we inhabit. The well taken paths need to be questioned and new detours created to understand that really nothing is black and white. There are shades of grey and we add our own colors to life as we move along. We need to be protective of those who struggle with Mental Health issues and direct them towards ways of healing be it through simple conversations, meditation or the arts. My art seeks to provide a path of celebrating life in as many ways possible. "Estranged" talks about the feeling of being left behind ...reaching out for a kind hand to hold or a word of endearment is the hope that hands looks out to. A reminder that in the new age don't forget what really matters...loved ones.

Everyone experiences barriers in some form. The mind often challenges us with these barriers including those of doubt and fear. This piece challenges the viewer to consider their own barriers.

A long list of aesthetic experiences has defined my life. Being acutely aware of value contrast, asymmetrical balance, negative space and color are of constant fascination and challenge. Conceptually, through my printmaking I continue to investigate women's issues through the ages, the impact of time and a fascination with converging experiences. Rather than working in a linear fashion, I find myself juggling numerous series concepts at once, recently working to express the loss of loved ones and turning points in my life. The piece in this show investigates personal barriers.



LEOKADIA STANIK
Barriers Explored and Surmounted, 2019
20 x 11 inch
Medium: hand made paperpulp painting and silkscreen



ADAM PITT

I wish my desk would catch on fire, 2020

12 x 18 inch

Woodcut print on paper

My woodcuts are about the pressures, complications and anxiety of being a worker.

I spent many years working in a large corporation and hiding my identity as an Artist. The corporate environment is fascinating. While working as a part of it, as a visual artist I find myself separated from it. I see the businessman as an icon. His power, fear, demands, weaknesses, identity, stoicism and lack of self-awareness give me my artistic material. He is the product of our culture and time and is our symbol of man. The dynamics of his relationships with his fellow workers is our model of society. There is horror, humor, humanism, and irony surrounding all I do.

ADAM PITT
Nervous, 2020
17.5 x 24 inch
Woodcut print on paper





TERRANCE CUMMINGS

Mental Illness 2, 2009

13 x 10 inch

Ink and Charcoal on Paper



TERRANCE CUMMINGS

Mental Illness 1, 2009

13 x 8 inch

Ink and Charcoal on Paper



MAIA REIM
Disturbance, 2020

13 x 11 inch

Digital photographic Giclee print (on archival paper)

These two images originated from my own photographic response to the secret space within a bronze sculpture by Kate Graves. I digitally altered my photographs to inspire a mood or perception that I visualized in my mind's eye. The vocabulary of interior architectural space is appropriated to serve as a metaphor for the body and mind. The titles, "Quarantine" and "Disturbance," are not descriptions but rather suggestive springboards to launch the viewer's own interpretation.



MAIA REIM
Quarantine, 2020

19 x 14 inch

Digital photographic Giclee print (on archival paper)

The process of exploring and interpreting my environment through camera work serves me well in promoting my own state of mental health. Creative self-expression is a serious outlet for me—enabling me to add purpose, connection, discovery and play to my life. In this digitally altered photograph, I explore the emotions that the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered for me—foreboding, isolation, anxiety.

ANNA MARLEY VERNICK

An Imperfect Equation, 2020

Essay

My submissions are related to my battles with mental illness starting when I was twelve. "An Imperfect Equation" is a love story about my late dog-- although that's the main idea, my battle with mental illness is at its core.

After experiencing the utter and profound unexpectedness, a piece of my heart broke off and fell into the pit of unadulterated agony that lay in my now-numb body. I squeezed Mom's hand tighter and tighter until my knuckles turned white and our sweat became intertwined. I looked at Hootie, longing for her euphoric ignorance.

"Probably a few months," the veterinarian said when I asked how much longer Hootie had to live. I hadn't known what it felt like to have the wind knocked out of me until I heard those four words: probably a few months. Hootie is only seven, I reasoned. That's too young to die. She's not ready. I'm not ready.

I'd lost a dog before, but he was fifteen when he died. Rookie was the coolest, most laid back dog I'd ever met and getting to grow up with him was a gift. Although it hurt to lose him, I was ready to say goodbye, and, honestly, I think he was too. He was kind of a dick to us when he was near the end. He'd always do this thing where he'd go to a room and bark until we came into the room, and then he'd go into another room and do the same thing all over again. So yeah, kind of a dick.

With Hootie, though, things were different. She never became old and cranky because she never got the chance. She'd only lived half the life she was meant to; we were supposed to have more time together.

When we first adopted Hootie, she was incredibly sick; the vet said she had about a 10% chance of survival. Hootie was a fighter though. She kicked her illness's ass and was discharged after ten days in the animal hospital. When she finally came home, she was extremely apprehensive and fearful. As the days went on, she eventually started moving around and became more willing to interact with us. She only got better as the months went on. I, however, was starting to shrink. Kids at school started noticing cuts on my wrists. My already majorlyfucked-up sleep patterns got worse. I became fearful of my own thoughts. My undiagnosed anxiety and depression were chewing up my insides, spitting them out, and taking a massive, stinky dump on them. I didn't think that I was like Hootie: I didn't think that I was a fighter.

Just a couple of years after getting Hootie, when I was fourteen, my mental health plummeted, and I was officially diagnosed with clinical depression.

When a person deals with depression, all of the things they love become... nothing. A musician doesn't get enjoyment from playing guitar; a writer feels nothing when they put pen to paper. In my times of major depression, I don't want to bake, sing, write, or do crafts. I don't want to clean my room, shower, or brush my teeth. I don't want to do anything. All I feel capable of is lying in bed, and sometimes, that's all I do. During those times, my body feels so spent and exhausted, yet my brain is running at full speed. I'll cry, then scream, then go silent, wondering if things will get better-- wondering if I'll manage to not kill myself before I get to see that day. That feeling of hopelessness is overwhelming, debilitating, and fucking cruel.

When I was fourteen, I stayed in my bed a lot, sometimes missing school and always feeling alone. One of the days where I had remained balled up in my bed for most of the day, Mom marched into my room and put Hootie up on the bed with me. This may sound normal, but dogs, under no circumstances, are allowed on furniture in the Vernick household. When Hootie plopped down on my twin bed next to me, I became giddy with laughter, which felt nothing short of a miracle. In that awful, brutal depression, where my world felt like it was shattering around me, Hootie made me smile and laugh. She gave me kisses and looked into my eyes, and I knew she saw me a way that no one else could. When she was with me, all those feelings of loneliness and hopelessness vanished, if only for a few minutes.

She didn't cure my depression--only weekly therapy and a crazy cocktail of drugs could do that--but she could make me smile in an unrelenting tornado of hopelessness, helplessness, and impossibility. Things in my life were always changing: my medication regimen, my social situation, my school life, my psychological treatments, but Hootie was a constant. No matter how hard my day, I could always come home to silver fur, deep brown eyes, and a wagging tail.

Then suddenly, in that moment of utter and profound unexpectedness, I learned that I was losing my constant. I was losing the string that tied me to the ground when I felt like I was about to float away. I was losing my best friend.

Then suddenly, in that moment of utter and profound unexpectedness, I learned that I was losing my constant. I was losing the string that tied me to the ground when I felt like I was about to float away. I was losing my best friend.

On the day my parents took Hootie to be put down, my day began like any other. I showered. I got dressed. I left the house. I was okay. When I came back home, however, it felt like the wind had been knocked right out of me, just as it had when the veterinarian said those four words. I pulled into the driveway, but when I looked to the living room window, expecting to see a silver head poking out, I only saw glass. When I opened the door, it was silent: no paws on the wood floor and no tail hitting the hallway walls making that familiar "thunk thunk" noise. The house felt as empty as my heart. I didn't know how to live without Hootie.

I cried a lot in my room at night. Mom seemed even worse off than me, though, so I decided to be strong for her. The last thing I wanted was Mom worrying that my sadness would spiral into depression, as it had so frequently done before. The worst thing was that if I did spiral into another depression, that time I wouldn't have Hootie to help me through it.

When I lost Hootie, I surprised myself at how quickly I began pushing for my family to get a new dog. How could I allow myself to replace Hootie, a dog that I so deeply, unconditionally loved, so soon? Was I filling the hole in my heart that Hootie left?

I eventually got to the point where I realized the hole in my heart would never be whole again, but I could find a new place in my heart for a new dog. A few months after losing Hootie, Mom and I drove to Pittsburgh and got Winnie, a rambunctious miniature labradoodle who, in the weeks after we got her, was utterly terrifying. As adorable as she was, we were legitimately afraid of her. She was known to bare her teeth and jump up at my family's and my crotches.

How was I going to find that new space in my heart for a dog that was, well, awful? She was awful. After losing the perfect, angelic dog that Hootie was, how was I going to learn to love the devil?

Eventually, after spending a great amount of time training her, Winnie finally became a normal dog. She became loveable. I finally got to hear the “thunk thunk” of a wagging tail when I came home. I finally had a dog to snuggle with and a dog to play with without the fear of losing my crotch. I finally had a dog to love again.

Love is anything but a perfect equation. Sometimes after a breakup, I promise myself I’ll never date again because the pain was far greater than any of the love, if any, I received. With Hootie, though, the unmitigated devastation I experienced when she died was minuscule in comparison to the amount of brown-eyed love I received. Perhaps nothing shows this more than my willingness to go through this same exact experience with Winnie. I know she won’t live much longer than fourteen years, and I pray to Labradoodle Jesus that she’ll live longer than seven, but I know that all of the kisses and snuggles make that inevitable, eventual suffering completely worth it.

JAYME WAGNER

Anxiety, 2020

Essay

It is an effort to explain that anxiety is a disability to people who have never experienced it as a constant way of life.

What is anxiety? It's the feeling I get when I read the news and see that nothing is bipartisan – everyone is divided along party lines so it's difficult to know what to believe anymore. It's the feeling I get when someone asks me a question I should know the answer to, especially if there are experts around or there's a restricted amount of time allowed to respond.

It's the feeling I get when I arrive at work a couple of minutes late and wonder if my boss will be upset about it. It's going in to our weekly meeting after something hasn't gone smoothly and wondering if this is the week she decides to take issue with anything I've done or haven't done or did incorrectly – will she want an explanation this time? Or will she imply she does when she really doesn't?

It's the feeling I get when I consider reaching out to past professors to tell them what happened with my PhD program. It's wondering if I am really not good enough and this will confirm it for them. It's how I feel when I consider sending a message to friends about it. Or when acquaintances ask about it and seem to expect an explanation or answer for what the next step will be.

It's the feeling I get when I try to consider what the next step will be. Anxiety is different from, but related to, fear. Fear is the terror of looking someone in the eye after any awkward or uncomfortable experience. It's the feeling that accompanies anxiety when seeing someone again for the first time in a long time.

It's also the excitement and anticipation of a new experience or new love or new job prospect that is perfect. The excitement and anticipation may take over for a while, but the fear boils underneath with the knowledge that I've been down this path before. Afraid to be hopeful or positive or negative or really to feel anything at all.

The fear combined with anticipation can lead to excitement – a dream realized, the perfect job acquired, a new friendship, or finding something that makes you smile.

The fear and anticipation can also lead to depression – the up of hope to the down of despair. Is it better to experience that rollercoaster? Or to attempt a more level and even emotional state? And if you go with the rollercoaster, either by choice or not, how do you know when you'll get to the next plain or peak? Will you recognize it? If it's a plain, is it lower than the last one or higher?

At what point does it become a pit with small hills instead of a rollercoaster? And does depression guarantee anxiety or is the opposite true? Or neither? How do you remember what hope feels like?

Hope is the feeling you get when things start to get better. Or are about to get better. Or you think they will get better. It lifts the spirit and encourages friendly interaction with others. Hope even lets you talk about past experiences, knowing that they are in the past. It encourages you to move on from whatever happened, good or bad, toward something better.

Hope is the opposite of fear/depression/anxiety. Hope is steady. Hope is an action – that you can control what happens next. Hope is the sun that rises every morning whether or not the sky allows you to see it. Hope is the belief that things can and/or will get better.

It's difficult to hope when you're anxious – imagining worse case scenarios, unable to sleep as you relive experiences that didn't actually happen or ones that probably won't happen. When one does, the anxiety makes it worse. Tears, snotty nose, and trying to get it under control while berating yourself for not being able to control it.

It's difficult to explain to people who have hope or those who have never felt anxious/depressed/afraid. They tell you to get over it or just stop thinking about it. They tell you to bite your cheek or look at the ceiling or drink water to avoid the tears, not understanding when they are told the tears are uncontrollable. Not understanding the difference between momentary depression from a sad event versus being an everyday part of life.

We are told that mental illness needs to be talked about more – that there shouldn't be a stigma, but how can those suffering still talk about it when there is still a stigma? When you don't want to be disadvantaged at work? When others won't let you talk about it? When your anxiety is so overwhelming that the idea of talking about it, even with others in the same situation, brings you to tears?

What if you think it is normal? How can you tell someone about it if you don't know it isn't normal? Everyone is laughing at you or talking about you, even if you are really imagining it. You can't do your best because it might draw attention to you, even though you also don't want to disappoint yourself/teacher/friend/parent/sibling. The list goes on.

So what is anxiety? It's a disability. A form of mental illness. Something that shouldn't be played down or ignored or made fun of. It's something you usually can't see on the outside but something that defines you. It's something that you can deal with if you have the proper medical care. It's something that can be mitigated with medication.

And when the internal dialogue stops, you can feel hope.

ALEXI RASHAN
**Distance Learning Art & AAC Alternative Augmentative
Communication , 2020**

11 x 17 inch

Graphic documentation of creative process

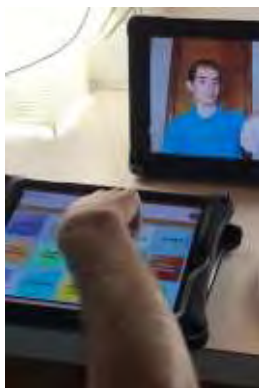
I have global apraxia and use Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) with a Voice Output Device (VOD) to communicate. It is hard for me but I keep trying. Art gives me something fun to talk about and learn.

Distance Learning

Art &

AAC

Alternative Augmentative Communication



Alexi Rashaan

"Hi my name is Alexi. I have multiple disabilities and global apraxia so I use an iPad with Apps to talk. I did Distance Learning artwork during my 2020 school program. This is my last year of public school."

"My classes were a half to one hour on Zoom. I made a PowerPoint presentation of each picture with words using text from my daily journal. I use the TouchChat (TC) App with pages customized for me on my iPad. I do a combination of selecting and typing that is then saved in other formats."

"Other students join the class on Zoom with 1:1 support from a family member. I also have speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy and relationship development intervention (RDI) classes"



"These are some pictures of me and my work. There was a theme for the art project each week. I did collage and printmaking. I describe what is happening for each project."

"I am making a campfire. I staple brown paper strips for logs. I tear red and yellow tissue paper for fire. I used staples and glue stick to hold it. The image is a teepee. It is a sun catcher that I printed. Mom cut it out with scissors and I stapled it. I inked and printed an iguana on pink paper too."



"I made 100 prints recently for kids at school to decorate. It looks like a pumpkin patch! Next the stencil for the skeleton was a rubbing with wax crayon. I also screen printed 100 haunted houses to share. I used a name stamp to sign and Mom numbered them."

Distance Learning Art and AAC by Alexi Rashan continued

"I will do a silkscreen shark too. Mom cut a stencil out of tracing paper. She traced the shark collage we made. The silkscreen ink held the stencil on the screen when I used the squeegee. The shark design was printed on map paper. I did squeegee twelve prints total."

"Printmaking is something extra my Mom helped me learn. There was a paper and powder stencil. I used a squeegee for silkscreen printing ... an ink roller, plate and small press for relief printing. The plates used were foam stickers, laser cut wood ornaments and plastic sun catchers."



"I like to keep busy, learn new things and be able to talk about them with Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) and my Voice Output Device (VOD)."

ALVARO TARRAGO

Angst, 2020

18 x 24 inch

mixed media (acrylics wax pencil on newsprint paper)

This piece is about a person coping with the present world: uncertainty, anxiety, and fear about the present and the future.



SELF-EXORCISM

I'd rather wrestle
with my demons
on the yoga mat
then face them
within
my internal landscape
where they
may hide
among crevasses
carved out
upon
my emotional terrain
waiting to ambush
my psychic persona
at every turn
like a tiger
silently stalking
as I cut and slash
my way
through the thick jungle
of daily life
wandering
aimlessly
amid ancient ruins
of days past...
there, I traverse
the safari venture
through parched savannahs
of dealing with
failed relationships
personal losses
societal upheaval
that can knock me
into a steep chasm
where...
the climb out
is difficult
yet, enlivening
fortifying
and not impossible

HARA L. ROLA

Self-Exorcism, 2017

Poetry

I composed "Self-Exorcism" in 2017 as a way to express the mental and emotional difficulties that I was experiencing at the time of its conception. So, not only do I wrestle my demons on the yoga mat, as I say in the beginning of the poem, but also on paper through my writing.

My poem reveals how mental health issues are an inherent part of life. It indicates how those issues can be faced and channeled into a positive outcome. This poem continues to be relevant to my life.

I compose poetry to share with other persons what is in my heart and soul. It is my wish that my work will resonate within their own hearts and souls. From there, I hope that they will find comfort in my poetic messages and not feel alone with whatever negative circumstances they are dealing with. Ultimately, it is my goal to convey hope to those persons whom have a great need for mental and emotional support.



NANCIE GUNKELMAN
 Infecting Mind and Body, 2020
 40 x 30 inch
 Collage

*Visualizing pandemic anxieties.
Art attempts to exorcize the demons.*

NANCIE GUNKELMAN

Flare-up, 2020

30 x 30 inch

Collage





JENNIFER CABRAL
Membranes (series) 1, 2020
13 x 19 inch
Pigment print. Archival fiber based paper

The coronavirus is thought to spread from person-to-person mainly among those who are in close contact with one another within 6 feet. This negative space where no interaction is permitted is here represented as circumferences over a series of family photos. As an immune-deficient individual, I am impeded of having contact with my family, separated by state mandates of no travel, and the fear of mutual contamination. To subdue my loneliness, I carry the mandated 6ft social distancing as a solace: "even if we were together, we would be apart". The isolation intensifying our inner states is what I try to portray in this series of photographs called "Membranes".



JENNIFER CABRAL
Membranes (series) 2, 2020
13 x 19 inch
Pigment print. Archival fiber based paper

An invisible sphere separates within from without. Like a cell membrane. It is a permeable space where a lack of trust of our immediate surrounding - "Is it contaminated?" - is alternated with the fear of that which is beyond our immediate circle. Household spaces, surfaces and objects become possible vectors. I photographed my immediate environment which was once comforting and familiar and now became a foreign body. The circles serve as warnings when over objects within my reach, while when over photographs I've taken over the years of my family becomes an evocation for protection. These spheres are reminders of the cellular connection between all matter and a symbolic shield of immunity, a sort of geometric spell so nothing penetrates our membranes.

LOUISE HERMAN

The Idea of George, 2017

Essay

In quiet times, when I think about my path along the way, I see how I have arrived at this moment in time, and cherish it. This essay speaks to an obsession with a loved one after they have passed, when you can't get an idea or a person out of your mind, and when that idea or person informs your behavior for the better.

A book jumped out at me from the shelves at the Faith Farm resale store. The title —My Summer With George, by Marilyn French— quickened my heart, as I had met my lifelong love when his family, escaping New York City summer heat, rented the upstairs apartment of a house next to mine in Long Beach. That first summer, he was just 15 to my 13, and as he delivered my family's newspaper and rode his bike all over town, turning up on the beach, boardwalk, and at my part time job at the library, he became, to me, everything. He was European—his father German, and mother Polish, and having to uproot at the age of seven speaking only French and German, his family emigrated by boat, escaping a previously comfortable life in Germany.

In the book, which I first put back, then grabbed again . . . 'just to see how it starts,' the narrator has an imaginary summer with her George. From an initial meeting with this man who says he 'will call,' she spends her summer waiting and dreaming, imagining how this relationship might play out over time. In my life, I dated my George off and on till I was 19, when, frustrated with the distance between us—he seemingly endlessly away at college, and me—anxious to get away from my overprotective parents, I ended up impulsively marrying a man who was nice at the time. Looking back, I did not see the options available to me, and often I dreamed of the life I might have had.

Thirty-nine years later, with two grown children, I separated amicably from my husband who actually would remain family, as he was my step-cousin. It was serendipity that George came back into my life, divorced two years, and living only a half hour from my new rental apartment in Florida. And then my life became my dream, as we established a home together and lived like two teenagers, unencumbered by watchful parental eyes.

Dreams have a way of being perfect. Both of us realizing this, worked to make it so. Yet real life personalities are what they are, and along with the addicting attraction, some of the same issues we'd had as teens stayed present. I had to be tolerant of his need for independence, restlessness, and somewhat controlling, yet caring nature. Like Sheherazade, I wanted to be all things to him, to interest him and entice him with variety so he wouldn't leave. And then, when we had been together ten years, living out this tale that I had imagined, but uneasy as I never could really relax and take it for granted, he got sick—terminally ill, and passed.

I thought the dream had ended, and in some way I was free, but more than three years later, 'the idea of George' is present still. When I go about my day, I feel him advising me, helping me through things, reprimanding me in his own unique but caring way that I had resisted, but gradually came to understand. The self- assurance, the stubborn independence, the intolerance of people who didn't 'get him' like I did, the sexy way he said: "Young Lady!" when he wanted attention in a store, the insistence on shorts, even under his gown at his Magna Cum Laud graduation with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture at age 67—all of this melds into the wider brush of George that is the Idea. After having lived practically my whole life with this man, either actually near, or hoping and dreaming about him, will he always be beside me, real or imagined? It helps to feel his presence still, but it's also curious that in this whole world, I have yet to find anyone to eclipse or even measure up.

One day, while driving—which, incidentally, was George's favorite thing to do—I realized that the best parts of George will always remain. While his physical presence is so missed, it is somehow easy to live with this idea of George—not stressed by the anxiety of hoping to please, look alluring, keep him interested and not restless with our 'conventional' lifestyle. I can wrap myself in the intense memories of our very intimate life and know that in this way he will never get bored or leave. He will always be with me in this current form, to be exactly what I need, and never to be walking alone. Have I fallen into the story, or have I emerged from the other side?

NOTE:

*George and I were browsing at Faith Farm some years back, when I found the book *My Summer With George*. On the title page is written this inscription by Marilyn French in marker: "For Louise—a wonderful painter!" (I am an artist), and signed : Marilyn French.*

THE ER

We walk in and hear our teen
screaming, threatening to kill
every single police officer
the lieutenant stops us, checks
our ID, explains what happened
why our son is here and yes
we can speak with him, maybe
we can calm him.

He's screaming, strapped on a
gurney, yanking at restraints as if
life depends on escaping. He says
they brought him in handcuffed,
pepper sprayed four times, the
nurse nods yes, tells us he wants
to wash it out of our son's eyes
but the kid won't stay still and let

him, so, I try speaking softly, urge
my son to calm long enough to
get his eyes washed out as my
husband goes over to the police,
I assume to ask something.
The nurse does the eye wash, telling
me he's never seen anyone come
in with so much pepper spray.

Four times!

Twelve policemen stand all around,
all eyes on us, all hands on sidearms,
faces weighty with suspicion, and I
realize they watch us too. The nurse
is nearly finished as our son insists I
tell the cops they're wrong, that they
need to let him go, which I know,
without asking, will never happen.

My husband says they want to know
if our son does drugs, which as far as
we know he doesn't, but he is deeply
depressed, currently enraged. I urge
him to stop cursing and threatening

and then, maybe, he'll be able to come
home. He screams they didn't need to
arrest him because all he did was shove

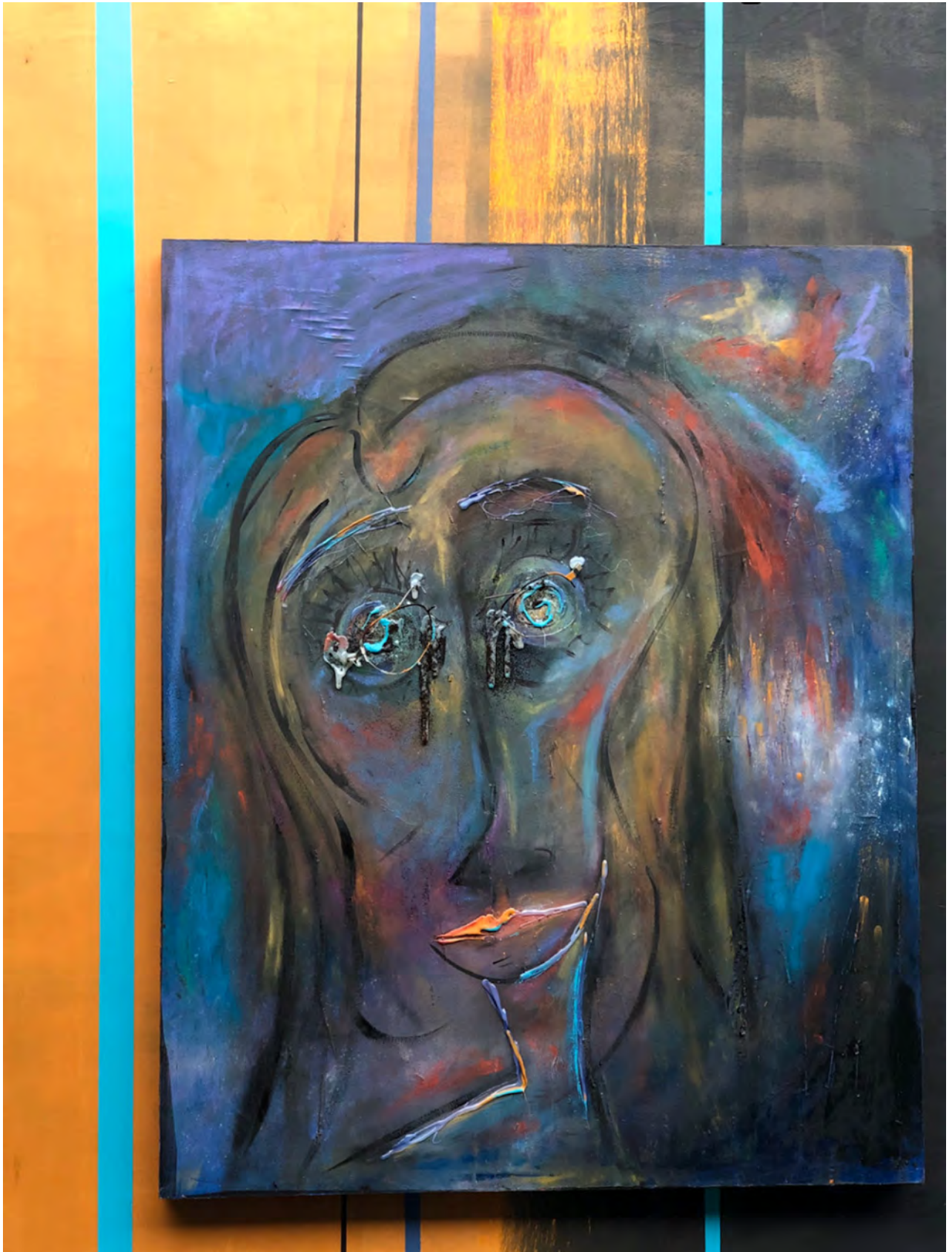
one officer and only because he grabbed
his arm -- he's off again, an automatic
rage machine, threatening, screaming.
They're going to take him now. I kiss him
and leave. I can't bear to watch as they put
him in a squad car. My husband wants to
wait; he watches. But my eyes are closed,
as I listen to screams I'll never forget.

SUSAN WAGNER

The ER, 2020

Poetry

*It has always been my hope to connect with real
people through poetry. This poem is for those
parents who struggle with the mental health issues
of their children with such grace and hope.*



JANE ZAMOST

It's Just the Feel of the Day, 2020

42 x 32 inch

Mixed media: Oil Stick, Cold Wax, Eye Glasses, Wood, Glue

I acknowledge my fears, my tears. The layers peel. It is my hope and prayer that our bodies, nation and world heal. By way of making art, I nourish my soul... May my wishes for good health, kindness and peace be felt by all.

I am continually amazed at the restorative impact that art holds for both its maker and audience. The heart slows, the mind focuses, the room transforms. I am fortunate to work in two worlds – one as a painter/mixed media artist and the second as a healing art instructor. The music playing is often my guide as are my sunrise walks and life's joys and hardships, both grand and small. My artwork speaks of life's layers nestled with hope.

COMPOSITIONAL NIHILISM

One set of footprints in the snow as we walk to swings in the park.
We sit and talk of things that will never be anything but a thought of what might be considered reality.

Relatively, it doesn't feel good to have our thoughts this free, as I kick off and swing into the inevitably of entropy, the other swing stays silent beside me.

The pendulum-like metronome clicks back and forth as if to track time that doesn't exist.

We swing between the fixed point of the present to the unclarity of the future then back to the past.

My thoughts unhinged, to begin with, my thoughts wrought by compositional nihilism.

Head-Arm-Leg-Leg-Arm-Body

I'm not a being made of parts but a concept made of complex thoughts, crafted by the calculated melody of life's lessons taught.

I am an amalgamation of how people view me through a scope of their own experiences. Hardships they have faced have shaped my form to them.

I feel like the person I have come to know as me exists to nobody

No matter which way I try to rationalize

My words still come off as modified Celtic runes, telling you that a tree is a tree.

Yet Cryptically telling you that the tree exists as something else entirely

Every truth feels like a half-truth.

but

What use does it do for me to be overthinking anxiously out loud to myself when
none of my thoughts matter
I speak into the silence that grips my heels, grounding me to the present moment.
Slowly the metronome clicks to a stop and I drop my hands from the swing, letting
go of things I have no control over.
My conscious intent is to stand into the void of silence that snow creates
and begin to take steps into the unknown, still one set of footprints in the snow.

Stuck looking at beautiful distortions in the distance
Trying not to get wrapped up in the distractions of what is or what maybe reality.

PHILLIP MCCONNELL

compositional nihilism, 2020

Poetry

As an artist, so much of my work is centered around self. whether it is how I am feeling or what I am thinking. I am a reporter of self, my highs my lows, and everything in between.

The first piece David is an exploration of self and my self-image. I don't always feel like myself or I am the pilot in my own body. I try very hard not to be swallowed by depression. Among the chaos in my mind, I try and remain as solid as possible and remain me.



VALERIA MARCUS

Abused Women, 2020

20 x 16 inch

Oil on canvas

I'm a survivor of child abuse and domestic violence. I witnessed my dad abuse my sister, mom and myself for many years. It took a toll on everyone. The abuse and violence made me frightened, depressed and nervous. It affected my emotional and mental health; therapy from age 17 to 29. My poor mom had to endure much pain despite she was also physically ill. The faces of the women in my painting reflects great anxiety, depression and hopeless because of domestic violence from their spouse/partner. And they have no where to turn, because of dependency on their spouse/ partner.



LENORA OBED
Wichita Gothika, 2017

39 x 29 inch
Oil painting on linen

The “Wicked” witch finds a home in Kansas, where resides her former “nemesis” Dorothy, but the state welcomes her when she buys a farm and raises miniature donkeys, finding community and stability in agriculture and nature. This painting depicts the integration of our “dark” side with our persona, and the healing power of work and simple pleasures to ground us in the beauty of daily life and ordinary blessings.



Published by the Graduate Student Government Mental Health Initiative.
mentalhealth.princeton.edu
graduatementalhealth@gmail.com

Catalogue Designer: Mira Nancheva

