



Yellowbrick Art Show By Emerging Adults

A Retrospective

Introduction

On the road of life, there are many obstacles to overcome. For the emerging adult, these challenges can be especially trying. Some struggle to put one foot in front of the other. Many have a hard time creating a home for themselves – not a physical place, but a feeling...a sense of safety, comfort and strength that they can take with them no matter where they go. And as the road approaches the horizon, some lose sight of their hopes and dreams, while a few forget they ever had any in the first place. It is for these young men and women that we have created Yellowbrick. It is to these individuals and their families that we offer hope. Yellowbrick recognizes and addresses the unique challenges of the emerging adult population through programs that emphasize multi-specialty evaluation, therapeutic residences, research-based strategies and life-skills interventions.

Yellowbrick is a private, physician-owned and -operated psychiatric healthcare organization whose mission is to provide a full-spectrum, specialized approach to the emotional, psychological and developmental challenges of emerging adults. Our treatment philosophy is guided by research findings that show that enduring success is facilitated by working alongside emerging adults who are coping with actual life experiences in “real time,” with a professional presence supporting the development of skills required to navigate the challenges of life.

By combining treatment with active participation in the community, Yellowbrick sustains and strengthens personal confidence and familial support systems, and establishes educational and vocational accomplishments that anchor the emerging adult. Our community of peers and professionals, along with the neighboring community of Evanston, unite in a commitment to assist individuals in discovering their inner strengths, motivations and goals on which the foundation for a productive and satisfying life can be built. Yellowbrick offers emerging adults the opportunity to better understand themselves, access their strengths, develop necessary competence and actualize life goals.

The Emerging Adult Art Show is one of the many Yellowbrick activities that combine treatment with community participation. Self-expression through involvement in the creative process, self-observation facilitated through the writing of an artist statement, and self-fulfillment experienced through the presentation of artistic creations combine with collaborative participation in a community of emerging adults, family members, treatment professionals, and for this activity, a local art gallery. The words and images on the pages of this publication are testament to the power of providing emerging adults an opportunity to access their strengths, develop competence and actualize goals.

Jesse Viner, MD
Founder and Executive Medical Director
Yellowbrick

Foreword

Antique tablecloths dyed in shades of plum and orange drape the tables laden with flowers, cheeses, fruits, dips and my friend Ilene's famous brownies and lemon bars. It is the opening of the Yellowbrick Art Show. I await the arrival of our emerging adults. As with any tradition each experience builds upon itself to become even richer. The YB art show has become such a tradition. It is an event not to be missed and always takes place on Parents As Partners weekends. Parents fly in from all over the country once a month to attend workshops, multifamily groups and family rounds with their children. Once a year this includes an art show. It is a chance for the artists to have a voice in their community. The show is the culmination of a year's work. The emerging adult assists me in choosing, matting, framing and hanging of the art. The artists are asked to provide a statement, perhaps illuminating their piece and sometimes their relationship to art therapy. They are beginning to arrive and as they do they gravitate to their own individual pieces often finding them to have taken on a new and professional quality in their new setting. I see a new sense of pride on their faces. Even those who originally claimed they could not draw have been urged to develop what I see as their own unique skill or vision. They compliment and support each other as the other guests arrive.

There have been four art shows since the printing of our first Yellowbrick Art Book. Bitter Creations took place in a neighborhood yoga studio, Silhouettes of the Mind opened in a community teen center. The last two, Behind the Curtain and A Different Mirror both hung on the walls of a small coffee shop called Perla Café. This book is a compilation of work from all four shows. It is our pleasure to share them with you.

The music is starting now. I turn to face my young artists. I feel so happy and proud of their accomplishments. I only wish that those of you viewing this book could share that same experience.

Betty Wolff MA ATR
Curator



A sort of energy exudes from this painting. It may seem different to others, but to me it's all very dark and tempestuous. Honestly the process in which the colors and textures of this painting settled into place was a long and strange one. It began as a used canvas, left over from some forgotten project. It had bits of magazine cut outs and paper glued in the shape of a guitar covering most of the lower half. One day during my regular session with Betty, when we began to sand the remaining pieces off the canvas, both Betty and I realized that the cloud like texture that the magazine cut outs left behind could act as the basic motif for the painting. This was also conducive to the "natural process" she had been explaining with some of her recent work, which I was interested in exploring.

Most of my work focuses on single or multiple boys or men, and this was no exception. I began to cut out many shirtless, sometimes fully naked men to paste onto the canvas, and then sanded them off leaving the cloud like texture and whispers of skin, like floating torsos. The original idea was to incorporate the skin tones and the texture into a painting using a very light painting technique (using mostly oil). Again there was a change in direction.

Slowly the painting became a storm, the bodies became almost completely covered by thick strokes of paint and black became the prominent color.

One explanation for this was the period in my treatment and in my life that this painting was being done. In the middle of its completion I went to Madrid to visit my best friend. The trip was a big turn in my treatment. In Madrid I relapsed. There was also a night that we spent at a Club where I was literally scared for my life. A shooting in the club caused all the doors but one to be locked while the police searched every person who left. When I came back to Chicago and worked more on my painting, Betty suggested that there was a certain eerie, premonitory sense to the piece. The men, covered in darkness mirrored, quite literally, the men that night in the club. I began painting streaks of light that, to me, represented the club, and the shooting. Although this piece does, in some ways, represent my time in Spain; it also has great meaning in my treatment, and in exploring sexuality. The men are covered, kept secret from the viewer like my sexuality was kept from the world. But in the end, the painting means many things. Whatever the case is, it goes great in my living room.

I am a perfectionist. That not only affects my daily life but comes out in my art as well. All of my creations are highly detailed and take me eons to finish. So you can imagine when Betty handed me only a palette knife and said, “go” what I must have been thinking. I was terrified. I didn’t know where to start...just slapping some paint on the canvas with a giant palette knife was a foreign idea. I had to start somewhere though and I did. I found it to be the most peaceful thing I had done in ages. For once I didn’t care where my paint was going and it looked better that way. Instead of spending my time worrying about the latest detail I was trying to perfect I was just painting. For once I didn’t care about the outcome of the piece was going to be I was just having fun during the process. It is something I wish I could do in my life a little more often.





Water

This piece is made with pen, marker and watercolor. It represents losing oneself in the presence of pressure. The pressures put on one by the external world causes internal conflict. This conflict is uncomfortable and causes one to seek "The End" in a variety of ways, including yearning for the simplicity of childhood and distraction in all forms.

When I was making this piece I was feeling very torn. Torn between living a happy, fulfilling life, as depicted on the left, or on the other hand, going down a path towards despair and possibly even suicide, as shown on the right.

I had the central figure walking on a balance beam because I felt my life was always in danger of being thrown off course, and that it was an effort and an act to even stay in between the worlds of joy and death.





“A Body at Rest stays at Rest”

dissociation

Noun: The disconnection or separation of something from something else or the state of being disconnected.

A body I don't recognize, in a painting I can't remember creating. This is the image that lies in the uncharted recesses of my mind. I'll let you know when I figure out what it means.

I don't like going out of my comfort zone – when things start feeling uncomfortable or scary, I usually back off and avoid. This lovely diorama represents a shift for me in a couple ways. It depicts a rafting trip that I went on at Yellowbrick, and if there's one thing bound to make me uneasy, it's flying down rapids in the middle-of-nowhere Wisconsin with a group of people that I've only known a short while. Instead of being in a constant state of terror, however, the trip was actually amazingly fun. I got to joke around, make friends, and take on some pretty intense rapids – we even encountered some elusive water bears, but thankfully they were friendly. The process of making the diorama also reflects this experience, as I am typically intimidated by making art. I started playing around with clay and made a raft, and from there I just had a lot of fun making the scene. It's still hard for me to keep in mind that the things I'm scared of can provide amazing experiences, but my art serves as a playful reminder.





Pressure/ Release

When I began this work, I thought of the pressures that weigh down people, especially me, and how that can be crippling. It is purposely abstractly drawn – You can see it as an arch being pushed down by force, teetering on the breaking point; you may see a bird failing to fly due to a high downward thrust; there are infinite ways to interpret what's in front of you now. Speaking on my behalf, I know that shame, family troubles, loss of a constructive sense of self, and failing to determine a satisfying direction in life drag at my very essence. The colors are chaotic, blended, and vague for a specific reason. It is trying to convey the sense that what troubles all of us most is usually hard to perceive with a high degree of clarity. I know that this is the case for myself. Maybe you, the audience, can relate to this phenomena. Yet, when I was close to finishing the piece, my interpretation formed another point of view. Rather than seeing crippling pressure against an object, I began to form the image of a book being opened and a release of thoughts, emotions, hopes, dreams, fears, worries, et al exploding from it in a beautifully violent yet healthy deliverance. For myself, it is painfully difficult to let this very event take place. I like to wear a mask, seep into the woodwork, and fade into obscurity whenever it is time to seek relief of the pressures that debilitate me. Perhaps you are familiar with the term of a negative feedback loop, I know that my very fear of a cathartic purge allows the instability inside me to become all the more potent which results in it growing more and more difficult – reaching to the point of impossibility – for the steps to become content to even take place. Again, it is not only hard to approach this point of profound vulnerability – showing the very demons that haunt you, the cross you bear – but also it is hard to even define them eloquently. The stormy, chaotic quality of this piece tries to showcase that very idea. I hope that you appreciate the duality at work here.

I could not tell you how many times I have tried to write and re-write this very statement you are reading. It is hard for me to just let myself write what I am thinking and be finished with it. I seek some sort of perfection that does not even really exist. It drives me crazy. If it is not exactly how I think it should be, I simply will not move on.

It's funny that I have found the most comfort with using gouache on Yupo paper. Basically, it is like trying to control water on a sheet of plastic so nothing can ever be that precise. Yes, I find peace in it. I know the colors will run together, and I will probably end up with something completely different than the idea I started with. It is somewhat like my life to me. Things happen that I cannot change, lines are blurred, and I don't have any idea what the results will be.

When I feel as if I lose control of my life, I start to panic. I was in that state when I made this piece. I could not just let things be. I am not exactly sure why I ended up painting this scene, but in that moment of panic, I was able to just let it go. I do not have a better explanation to give. It is what it is.





Rough, frayed edges. The artistic reassembly of destroyed pieces of my life. This process allows me to breathe creativity into my darker, broken parts. The series was made during a tumultuous period of my life. I was searching for a new way to see my problems, and found great satisfaction in the actual process of tearing up the paper. I was then able to take control and assemble the torn pieces in an aesthetically interesting way.

A heart is four chambers, four pumps. Mine has sworn to be hollow, and I seem to be empty and desperate.

Love is a separate story. Love is a different part of me. He invited me to his parents' wedding and I wanted to make a dress. I went with Betty to the fabric store. I was excited, excited to make something beautiful. Of course, after I started the dress I needed a dress form. I decided to make one. Of course, the process was quite hysterical.

It became apparent that I would never be able to wear this dress. The fabric itself – shades of deep purple laced with gray – had too many feelings attached to it. Feelings of anger and hurt and sadness. I hated that mannequin and the idea of the dress. This dress had a purpose – I was to wear it for him, to his parents' wedding. And since that plan didn't end up following through, I decided to sew the dress directly on the mannequin, the exact form of my body.



This dress and the form it is draped over symbolizes an array of emotions for me: anger, hurt, shame, and sadness – an empty vessel trapped in a pretty container. Half of her is at her fingertips: courage, strength, joy and the thriving potential to be something great. The other half dominates and consumes her, a raging beast of bloodlust for carnage. The beast feeds off her loneliness – the empty vessel wrapped in a pretty container. And she can't stop feeding the one that's killing her. How can she be so beautiful yet so horribly disgusting at once?

She wants power, power to stop something horrific from happening. The power would bring a rush of a temporary high, right before it happens. Afterwards she would be left irreversibly vacant. Empty, utterly alone. She is always searching, lurking, trying to fix.

She owes her beauty to everyone. And yet she hates the idea of it all ending, everything stopping, time standing still. Not a single thing moves and the breath terminates mid-exhale. It brings a strange sense of peace, of calmness.

I don't want this peace because without it, there would be no justice. I want to be alive, for once. I want to live. She symbolizes something new! A new chapter of my life – hope, compassion for my own being, self-discovery and the thriving potential to be something great.



“Missing”

This scene came from one of my most recent lucid dreams, about halfway through. It displays the brink of the apocalypse, the machines versus the humans. There were characters in this scene, two human adults and one child, along with two machines - only one of those machines is present in the piece. I felt the urge not to include the humans or the machine that wanders around in the background. I decided that it would distract the viewer from seeing the setting of my dream. The junkyard and hills of trash are where the machines have broken through into the human Suburbia - modeled after modern “nuke towns” but actually used and lived in. In this view, I chose to leave the dumpster empty because it was an interesting contrast in front of and behind the junkyard gate. I felt compelled to stay with only a dirt colored, dark brown oil pastel - it seemed to capture the sense that this was only a dream.



Torn Torso

This picture I have drawn is to represent how in my life and the life of many others we go against our judgments. Even when we know in our hearts what is best and tear the things away from ourselves which keeps us stable, grounded and sound of mind.

Lost in the Crowd

I walk down the sidewalk,
Side by side with my peers.
I wear a Loyola sweatshirt
And noise-canceling headphones.

I carry a navy blue backpack
And drink a steaming vanilla latte.
I am just another student.
I don't stand out in any way.

I enter the appropriate classroom
And sit down in the front row.
Nobody notices me
Or even looks up.

On the outside, I look pretty normal.
I can walk on two feet and my face isn't scarred.
I can speak with my voice and see with my
eyes.
I don't have a disability for others to see; I am
exactly the same.

But I am invisibly different.
My insides constantly shake with anxiety.
My thoughts are rarely happy
And ADHD makes me bounce in my chair.

The rest of my class spent 45 minutes on the
midterm.
It took me 3 hours.
But nobody noticed - I wasn't there.
I am invisible.

I really am invisible at Loyola.
I don't have a single friend here.
I sit alone in my apartment at night.
Being invisible gets lonely.

Sometimes I wish I had a visible disability
Because then people might see me.
Maybe they would ask if I needed help.
At least they would realize I existed -

And then I wouldn't be invisible!

November 11, 2010





Watercolors did not come naturally to me. I have always been most comfortable with lines and numbers and tightly defined categories.

So watching the paint flow away from my first brushstroke with no regard for my intentions was (mildly) infuriating. Sometimes it still is.

Sometimes, though, that very infuriating randomness creates images I couldn't have imagined on my own. That golden figure, straining to pull himself free of the screen, was initially meant to be chained to it. But as his arm crossed into the blue, it struck a patch of still-wet paint, and the colors dissolved into each other. It wasn't what I intended, but it worked. It is hard enough to pull that great weight along. Harder still to pull yourself free when your burdens are merged into your very flesh.

In the second painting, I played further with literal and figural dissolution. I tried to capture the feeling (on my bad days, anyway) that people will fail me, or leave me, or that I will do the same to them, until I can see them fade to nothingness before my eyes.

Now, because I don't want to end on such a melancholy note, and to give you some idea of how far I've come, I present my first haiku (written in second grade).

All ants have 6 legs.
There are many ants on earth.

My progress as an artist mirrors my progress during my time at Yellowbrick. When I first made art, I did not exactly enjoy it. I only used pens and pencils, making jagged, abstract sketches that had “great line quality” according to Betty. To be honest, I still have no idea what that means. Betty and I had a rocky relationship in the beginning. I wanted to avoid anything that had to do with expressing my true self. As I opened up a bit more, art became a way to connect to myself, something I now recognize as extremely important for my recovery. Now, I am not afraid to express my anger, my sadness or my joy through different artistic processes. I am very proud of the work I have done here, and my paintings are a representation of how far I have come.

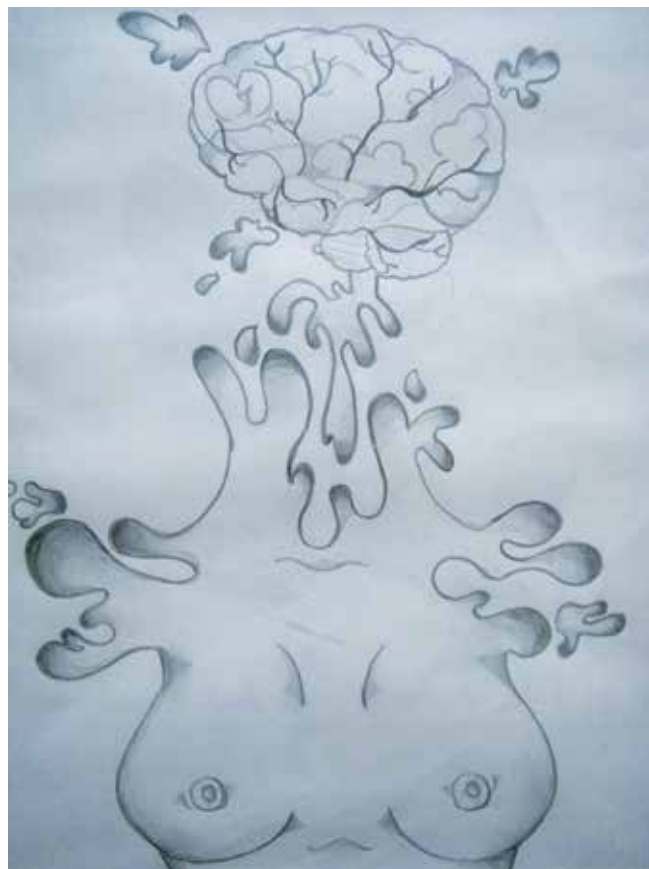




When I first came to Yellowbrick the concept of art therapy seemed ridiculous to me. I had never excelled in art to say the least and my knowledge of the subject did not exceed a single art history class that was a requirement my sophomore year of college. I struggled through that class and many art museums over the years never stopping to think about the pieces and only sometimes appreciating the pretty colors. So when I first began art therapy I sat quietly writing my name over and over with different combinations of colors. As time progressed and my confidence grew I began exploring different simple images such as sailboats. My creativity began to expand when we started art therapy in the Trauma Recovery Program. The work we were doing in that group helped me connect to my feelings and with Betty's support I was able to transform these feelings into art. One Monday Betty brought oil pastels for us to work with and I was instantly fascinated. I was enamored with the ability to blend the various colors and create a spectrum which represented my feelings. I drew this as simply as possible with the emphasis on colors. Before I knew it I was engrossed in my creation and for the first time I was proud of my work. At first I was not aware how the piece connected to me. I was impressed with my drawing. I immediately photographed the image and sent it to everyone I knew. Most people responded with alarm. They wanted to know what message I was trying to convey. At this point I looked at the piece in order to analyze the content. My feelings of despair and isolation emanated from the image. My feelings were evident and clearly represented in the art. I began to enjoy the release that came as I continued to draw. This experience ultimately opened my mind to art therapy.

Sometimes I Lose Things

This drawing was in a representation of my life in dealing with addiction and the trials that come along with the journey. It focuses on the question “what have I lost in my personal battle with addiction.” Many things have been lost but when I lost the sense to protect myself and to care for my life or how I ended up I realized somewhere out I must have lost my mind and this is a depiction of how I see that.

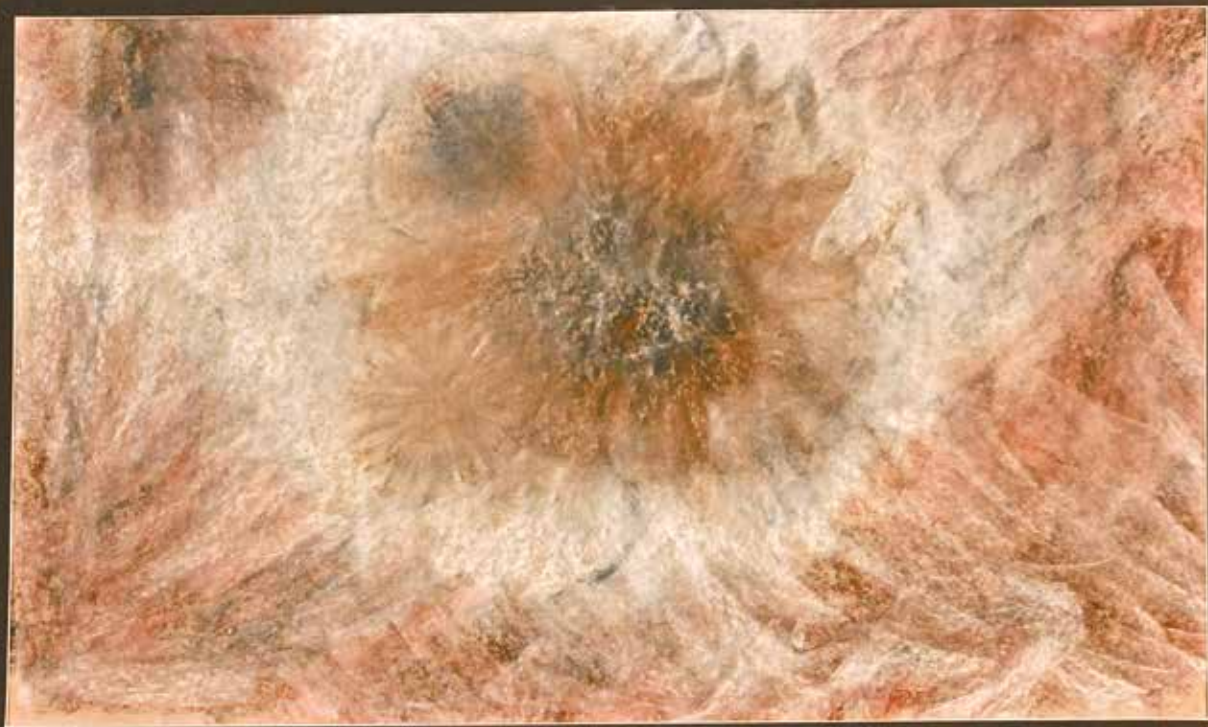




It would be disingenuous to pretend that this piece expressed any essential insight into my own struggles or the predicaments that lead me to Yellowbrick instead of simply (awfully severe) technical limitations. It does harbor personal significance, however, and is therefore more than just a bunch of pretty lines. My uncle Russell Steinke, who passed away from AIDS-related causes in September 2010, was a painter, and this piece was inspired by a work of his that was simple enough to be imitated without too much effort. His painting was done from acrylics on an actual canvas and the colors alternated in repeating patterns while his lines uniformly went to the bottom without any white space. The colors in his paintings were always bright, as mine try to be. His paintings were mostly about colors in that they rarely represented concrete objects and used little fading of one shade into another. They were rather relations between colors much the way music is composed of relations among pitches but taken as an end in itself rather than a means of depiction. This may have been an indication of his own limitations but in spite of this he established himself in his paintings, which is the only real prerequisite for calling oneself an artist.

Another might be that of sharing one's art, which was never a failing of his. I made a lot of pictures like this in the arts and crafts room at the Menninger Clinic where I was a patient from June to August of this year. After I made the first one another patient asked me to make one for her and I did. I think I made 8 or 9 more for various people who asked me for them. (One of who even offered to pay me \$20, which I jokingly asked for. I refused to take it.) That people would take them and hang them in their rooms directly relates to sudden increases in my own confidence in sharing myself that occurred during that same time. In my Uncle's case he was able to give generously of his self – which was much larger than his work – in a way that meant so much to everyone who knew him. The love that so many people felt for him is good evidence of the true value of such a gift, and though my picture is hopelessly derivative, my willingness to share maybe indicates where I am artistically in this piece; unestablished yet generous.

The expression of self through art has been a learning process in the acceptance of many parts of myself that have remained hidden. I have never thought of myself as an angry person, or even, in any respects, an artist. Through the experience of drawing, either abstract or otherwise, I have discovered a wonderful side of myself by drawing without inhibition. While in the moment I might not see the bigger picture, and even at times wonder if I am doing this right, I have felt the power of my art. In the end it is a true expression of myself, all parts included, in a way that words could never do justice. Allowing myself to feel and take away any reservations of criticism while the process is at work has helped me find solace and connect to what, to me, is so unspeakable. There is a type of excitement that comes with this newly found freedom in that an hour a week, there is no right or wrong, it just is. It is a process. The enlightenment that I have gained by working through that process is what makes me who I am today, and the acceptance of all parts has led me to acquire perspective on not only my relationship to myself but those who are important to me. To deny that I am an angry person or that I struggle with anger denies my being that I have begun to express through art.





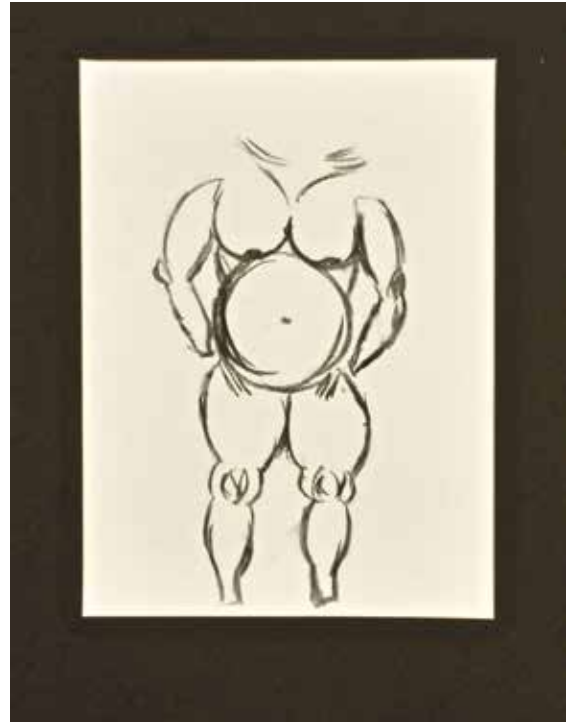
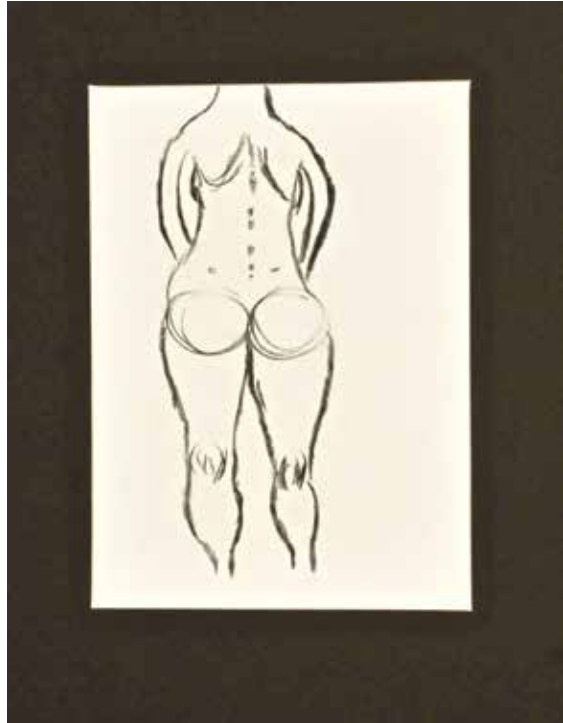
The process for the small watercolor was progressive and unfolding. I started out very hesitant to paint much of anything, finding that the paper bled too much and the colors were too disconnected. After a while though, the various layers came together to form a nice effect in the sky and ripples and reflections in the water. The boat was much more defined and sticks out nicely against the softer background. This was my first watercolor painting and I am very pleased with it. Watching it take place I was hesitant up to the last minute. At a certain point, I just knew it was finished. This painting process reflects the way I hope to start approaching other aspects of my life. Working hard through difficulty and finding just the right time to call it a day.

When I first entered art therapy, I was too nervous to create anything of my own. I drew on top of magazine ads, copied other work, and even drew on the work of others. I simply avoided art therapy whenever possible. Betty, however, called me out on my not so subtle antics and promptly put me in individual art therapy sessions. Joy. Unfortunately, my avoidance continued. I would get sick, leave town, schedule other appointments during our sessions, or simply say, "I'm not in the mood." Betty was less than thrilled. Then, after months of avoidance, I finally had a breakthrough. We had been forced to have our session at the CTC, and Betty brought out a new media – pan pastels. The sponge slid smoothly across the page, leaving a streak of soft yet vibrant color behind it. That day, art became a sensual experience rather than a tortuous one. The sun over Lake Michigan came pouring out of me with a beautiful luminous quality. Not surprisingly, this breakthrough in art coincided with a breakthrough in my treatment as a whole. It has become my favorite media and will forever hold symbolic meaning.



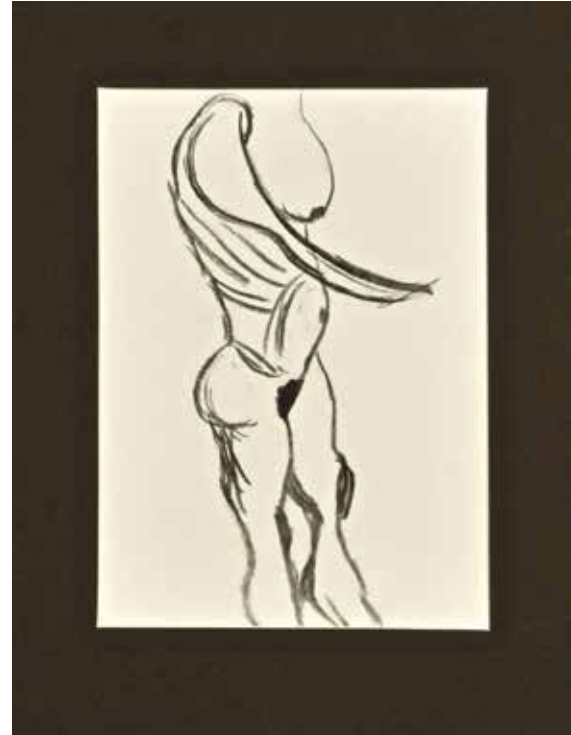


At the beginning of treatment I struggled with my participation in art therapy. I was not accustomed to doing art in front of other people. I also feared my art would not meet my high expectations. Once I allowed myself to be spontaneous and attempted to let go of inner judgments and fears of external criticism, I was able to enjoy art again and create more freely. My pieces reflect various values that I hold dearly. I wanted to express these ideas visually and explore my inner self in the process.



Mirrors

I have an eating disorder, and as such, mirrors have become strange objects for me. They are magnetically attractive to me and at the same time terrify and repel me. What for some provides a simple way of checking physical appearance or putting on make up is, for me, a lens through which to view my world. In any given day I encounter my reflection numerous times: in dressing rooms; in front of bathroom sinks; in the shiny sides of cars; appliances, and store front windows. From one encounter with my reflection to the next, it can change dramatically. All of these images have been my body at one point or another.



Someone told me once that you need to treat yourself like you are your own child. So I thought about that and I decided to paint what I felt like my mother-child relationship with myself would be.

I wanted the mother and child to look tranquil and holy at first, as if everything were fine, but then you look closer and the baby is a demon child. Mostly the baby represents the turmoil inside of me at the time.



The jagged nature of the rocks, the foam of the sea, and the cool blue of the water are all drawn directly from the process of this painting. The process itself was very sporadic and challenging. Initially thought to be a watercolor, Betty and I quickly learned how unforgiving the paper we had chosen was. We ran into difficulty with blending and pulling colors across the page. In an attempt to preserve white spots for the sea foam, we used resist on the page. However, this resist was, well... resistant to coming off and had to be painted over. After this, the painting stopped being as much of a Winslow Homer watercolor and more of a Sam Taylor original. I was very frustrated with the process, but it allowed me to loosen up and become more comfortable with the imperfections of the work that I am doing and to deal with situations as they arise.



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