

# EINFÜHLUNG

by

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**Ein·fühl·ung** (/ˈɪnf̩o̯,loo̯NG/), *n.* empathy. [German] **Ein** – into **Fühlung** – feeling

I believe in the practice of empathy. Einfühlung is the ability to put oneself in the shoes of another and is the inspiration for this thesis exhibition. My work elicits emotion through sculptural representations of realistic facial expression, body language, and various contextual clues. My pieces are based on individuals I know personally and inspired by emotional states they have experienced viscerally. Through sharing these figures, which stand in for the people we meet in our everyday lives, my thesis offers a chance for reflection on the ways in which we empathically interact and coexist as members of the human race.



# EINFÜHLUNG

A Thesis

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East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Art

by

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## DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to Abigail Cochran, whose fierce loyalty and dedication to my success in life is unrivaled. To Hannah Georgas, for the inspiration and support that taught me the truest meaning of imparting generosity and kindness to a stranger. To Indigo Bradsher, for the warmth at my feet and the constant reminder that love need not only be found in other humans.

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## INTRODUCTION

“How can one artist express their own struggle or truth while being aware of other artists who have struggled more? How can one justify indulging in the creative process when they could be helping others, numbing themselves or even embarking on a more “responsible” career path? Art forces us to stay present—emotionally, empathetically and politically—but how do we know if our truth is one that is worth amplifying?” –Leah Fay Goldstein of July Talk

My interest in empathy as a valued practice extends back to my childhood. Noticing the emotional states of others has always come naturally to me. Reading facial expressions, body posture, tone of voice, and many other contextual clues helps me to discern the disposition of whomever I meet. This allows me to react sensitively to the emotions presented by individuals, which can be fulfilling. Whether my propensity for empathy was born through nature or nurture, I have been overwhelmingly drawn to live my life with this valued ability at my center.

As I grew older, I began to research the topic and practice my emotion reading, immersion, and response more intentionally. At some point, I realized I naturally recognize empathic ability in other people, especially in people who hold it mindfully within their personal values. In considering ways of sharing my intense empathic experiences with others through my work, I decided that it was possible to create a sampling of emotional states through proxy individuals. In each work, I display aesthetic detail that leads to readable nuance and undercurrent in order to elicit the experience of empathizing in the gallery. I have chosen to honor the essence of my selection of individuals in my group through life casting and realistic painting, offering a grouping of stand-ins for the humans we all may meet in everyday life.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPATHY

“Einführung” was a term that was first developed in the eighteenth century to address the idea of empathy for other humans. Eventually adapted for fine art aesthetics in 1872, it was used to describe how “observers project their own sensibilities onto an object of adoration or contemplation (Rifkin 12).” Later, the German word was translated into English as “empathy,” and the concept was accepted and rejected by different theorists. Now, as a society, we primarily associate the word with human sympathy and compassion. This concept was established to encompass the thoughtful, emotional consideration of all things: humans, animals, or even objects. It is often the fuel behind kindness, generosity, and honoring our fellow living beings.

The study of feelings in general has been diminished and greatly harmed by the lack of weight it has been assigned by western culture, even as it extends to literary vocabulary developed for the topic. “Empathic” is a term that is not widely used or accepted as an adjective, but I believe it is an important word to use when discussing the topic of empathizing. My preferred definition of empathy comes from the book, *The Art of Empathy*, by Karla McLaren. She deems it as “a social and emotional skill that helps us feel and understand the emotions, circumstances, intentions, thoughts, and needs of others, such that we can offer sensitive, perceptive and appropriate communication and support” (McLaren 4). As with all skills, practicing will improve ability.

Through research, I have identified the ways I would like to help viewers of my work to become more mindful of the benefits of empathy, a skill that I believe can repair some of the discord that exists in our nation and the world at large. Although the benefits are innumerable, we seem to lack empathy as a society. Almost everyone possesses empathic ability, but not everyone chooses to intentionally practice or value the skills. That said, even for people like

myself who consider themselves empathic, there is room for growth. Everyone should take the opportunity to improve on this skill. Institutionally, our society can choose to include the sharpening of empathic skills as a focus. Those who have become known as empathy advocates, myself included, believe that to make the world a better place, “we have to become intentional empaths: emotionally awakened, well-regulated, healthy, happy and perceptive” (McLaren 279).

Anyone can exercise their empathic skills and improve upon them. But how does someone become highly empathic naturally? It turns out that many empaths who develop at a young age start their journey in adverse circumstances. I happen to fit into this mold. Growing up in a household with a mentally abusive father, I was often punished for misunderstanding him before I learned to anticipate his mood and actions. My childhood was characterized by the inane, impossible choices he would set before my mother, my siblings, and myself. What he did not know was that he was inadvertently training us to read and anticipate emotion.

For me, what began as self-preservation became a gift. I found that many times in my adolescence and early adulthood, I could not only read my father’s emotions, intentions, and preferences, but those of the people around me. When I applied this skill in my other relationships, I found I could bring people to tears with thoughtful gifts or letters. I enjoyed making these people feel seen and understood in deep and meaningful ways. Practicing my emotion reading and immersion skills became very important in my daily routine. Utilizing the emotional information I could pick up for kind and thoughtful acts in service to others was preferable to the forced practice of pleasing my father. I later learned to control and focus my constant empathic urges.

My experiences and observations have led me to believe in the importance of empathy as an intentional practice. I have thought deeply about the lack of empathic training emphasized in

the institutional systems we rely on, as well as in the media. In seeking out artists who are empathy advocates, I have found that my own work has been greatly influenced by a Canadian Indie music community based out of Toronto. Following their example, I have questioned the plausibility of fighting fiercely for empathy through creation. These artists make it their goal to encourage the practice through thought provoking music, lyrics, and performances. I have seen the impact of their work first hand. My sculptures resound in the mind as their music similarly works for this cause. My viewers are led to ask: Do we practice empathizing intentionally and frequently enough? What if we held this concept mentally present in more everyday interactions? Could our relationships become more compassionate?



Fig. 1. Bill Woodcock, *July Talk - Ready To Take Over Hometown Venue This Week*, The Rock Source, 19 Dec. 2017, [rocksourcemagazine.com/2017/12/19/july-talk-ready-take-home-town-venue-week/](http://rocksourcemagazine.com/2017/12/19/july-talk-ready-take-home-town-venue-week/)

“When we’re content with the status quo, being afraid of truths that contradict our own is understandable. But when this fear makes us unwilling to examine how our own race, gender identity, body’s ability, appearance, sexual preference, age and class have either benefited or inhibited us, we exclude ourselves from the entire human race. No one has the right to do that (Goldstein).”

When we lack mental presence, we can be quick to villainize people around us. This is an effect of “othering.” The verb form of “other” is used in the field of sociology to describe the treatment of separate individuals, cultures, and subcultures as inherently different from the groups or people who are drawing the lines of separation. Evidence of the human need to group ourselves is overwhelming. In Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs,” belonging is established as one of the categories in which our drives are rooted. Along with belonging comes its darker side: exclusion. In order to feel closer to individuals, we establish opposite attributes that are meant to show how differences set us apart (Rifkin 411). We have probably all experienced how we can be separated by race, gender, or other obvious visual differences. We can also recognize that the same set of individuals rearranged, with few adjustments, will elicit different grouping results. If we realize the role that circumstances play in establishing divisions, we can start to see the fragility of the lines that exist between us, and perhaps surpass “othering” as a practice on a regular basis. It seems that divisions and barriers between people are perceived by American culture as strong, rigid, and unbreakable. Empathizing quickly shows us that this sentiment is untrue.

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election season affirmed the need for me to bring the practice of empathy to the forefront of viewers’ minds. Like many others, I struggled to defend and fight for my own beliefs while honoring those of people I disagreed with. I believe that our lack of empathic training as a nation contributes to the division of the country. If we understand and value the different mindsets and interests of our brothers and sisters, then we may not inflict so

much damage upon one another. “If we (as individuals, as societies, as a species) haven’t in fact made our best efforts to stimulate and educate our empathic capacities for concern with people we don’t know, then we presumably don’t know how far those capacities can or eventually will take us” (Slote 33).

Disagreements between families and friends have seemed insurmountable in recent years. I have seen many people avoid topics altogether in order to keep some of the peace and love that was more easily found before this heightened divisiveness. Seeking empathy and understanding can ensure that we do not readily accept media manipulation and think more deeply about each subject before repeating verbatim what we hear on our chosen news networks. At first, I wondered hopelessly about what an answer could be to the state of our world while riding the tumultuous wave that led us to where we are. Empathy was an answer that I realized I had always known and believed in.

I am not alone in the art world when it comes to spreading empathy. The beauty of artists as empathy advocates is the varied approaches we utilize when we attempt to communicate our messages. I find the work of Andrew Myers, a sculptor who also uses casting to bring awareness to the practice of empathy, incredibly relatable. He conducts interviews, as I do, to inform his imagery. His portraiture is surreal and composed carefully to express his models’ stories. I believe that his sculptures elicit emotion in an incredibly imaginative way.

*Recycling Tears* is a work meant to communicate an emotional state. In this case it is the sadness felt by a friend of Andrew Myers as he is experiencing separation from his partner through divorce. Like my sculptures, this piece shares the nuance of a broader issue experienced by one individual. Viewers can identify whether or not they have personal experience with

divorce. They are visually given the perspective of one person to consider and empathize with. They can choose to engage with their thoughts or walk away from the work.



Fig. 2. Andrew Myers, *Recycling Tears*, My Modern Met, 16 June 2016, [mymodernmet.com/andrew-myers-surreal-bronze-sculptures/](http://mymodernmet.com/andrew-myers-surreal-bronze-sculptures/)

The entirety of my thesis work is meant to represent an entry point for the consideration and investigation of viewers' own empathic skills. It begs the question of importance placed upon the value of this skill individually. The topic may seem at first thought like a familiar subject because the capacity to empathize exists within all of us. "It seems the most natural thing in the world to attempt to put oneself - emotionally or mentally - in the place of another person, to try to imagine what the other is feeling or thinking" (Nickerson 52). However, there is more to be discovered when we depart from the training we have received within society about emotion. My thesis works are designed to encourage thoughtful and intentional use of empathy. Those who are already highly emotionally present and engaged may leave the gallery with the concept that reading this sort of information from individuals before us is not only human, but natural and helpful. Even someone who encounters these sculptures without any former interest in investigating this skill may be inspired to do so. Empathy can and should be used more liberally for the good of others, especially in the case of individuals different from ourselves. As I designed my thesis, I realized that I was interested in facilitating an empathetic experience and opportunities for the viewer to develop their empathic skill set.

## EMOTION READING

In my *Emotion Reading* series, I have created four figurative sculptures using a life casting process. These works allow viewers to identify with the emotions represented and simply take note that they are capable of absorbing emotional information. On any given day, the way we feel emotions changes. Our experiences are fluid, and so are our neighbors'. This is what makes the practice of empathy vital. If we don't reach out to understand someone else in the moment, we can operate on incorrect assumptions. I utilized the gallery to create a space that felt safe to practice this, where the interaction is with representations of individuals rather than living breathing souls. Therefore, reactions will likely not be judged by the subjects of the works.

Each work presents an emotive state to encourage emotion reading by viewers. Inferring emotions and the cues that lead us to understand how different people may experience them in specific ways is the first step in the practice of empathy. All four of these figures possess lifelike facial expression, telling posture, and visual details embedded within the work to engage viewers empathically.

Created using life casting techniques, these pieces offer a human face to elicit a human response. The idea for this effect came from my study of George Segal, a 20<sup>th</sup> century American artist who was known for his figurative sculptures. His *Holocaust Memorial* and *Gay Liberation* are highly recognized pieces because of the significance of the concepts he addressed. I was moved by these works when I first learned of them as I was entering into the field of sculpture in 2009. Since then I have often researched his works and achievements because of my fascination with his technique of replicating the human figure.



Fig. 3. David W. Major, *Men at Work*, Rutgers Magazine, 2015, [magazine.rutgers.edu/the-arts/men-at-work](http://magazine.rutgers.edu/the-arts/men-at-work).

I practice his mold-making method in every life casting session I hold. His works have been described as “haunting” due to the realism of his reproduction of the human likeness. I have found that using his techniques gives my work the same ability to bring a convincing portrait to life. I depart from his process when I pour a wax positive into the hardened form of the mold and then further manipulate the shape and surface.

Additional technological elements, like video and embedded lighting add immersive clues to some of the works and are meant to stimulate the viewer to encourage emotional reading. Material has been carefully selected to contribute to the specific concept of each sculpture. The form of the hair in every piece is fabricated with the feeling of the work in mind.

The line quality, direction, and design is meant to visually assist each three-dimensional illustration, while also functioning as a physical support structure. All four works in this series possess a triangular piercing that acts as an entryway into their experience. I selected areas on the body to cut out based upon where the model most believed their emotion resided.

### Nostalgia



Fig. 4. Jessica Bradsher, *Nostalgia*, 2017

In considering the selection of individuals to represent emotional states in my sculptures, I first asked myself if I knew anyone close to me who would embody a complex feeling. The choice for *Nostalgia* could not have been more apparent. All who know my mother well, know

of her tendency to look back upon the past fondly and endlessly. She can easily lose herself in an emotional reflection on memories, especially when related to her children in their youngest years. Thoughts of past holidays are especially captivating to her.

I began by making a mold of my mother in plaster and then using that mold to create a wax positive that would eventually become metal. I made *Nostalgia* in aluminum, which I decided would be fitting for a model of older age in reference to greying hair. As my mother sat for this life casting session, I coached her to channel her best facial expression in portrayal of looking back on a past memory with joyful longing.

The sculpture's hair is made of polished steel, appearing short around the face, and continuing around the form to root her to the floor. The rods end abruptly, seemingly growing from the ground up, as a living being often does. Additional clues to the specific emotional state of this figure lie in the video portrayed in the back of the head. The nostalgia presents as a dwelling in memories. Dreamlike imagery and sound fill the room and showcase the early years of my mother with her children around Christmas time. I achieved this by digitizing and combining a selection of homemade movies. With some editing, I arranged the selected clips to revolve around a central theme of the holidays as experienced by my mother. The final cut plays on a small device encased by copper and bolted in to a plate behind the aluminum face.

## Loss

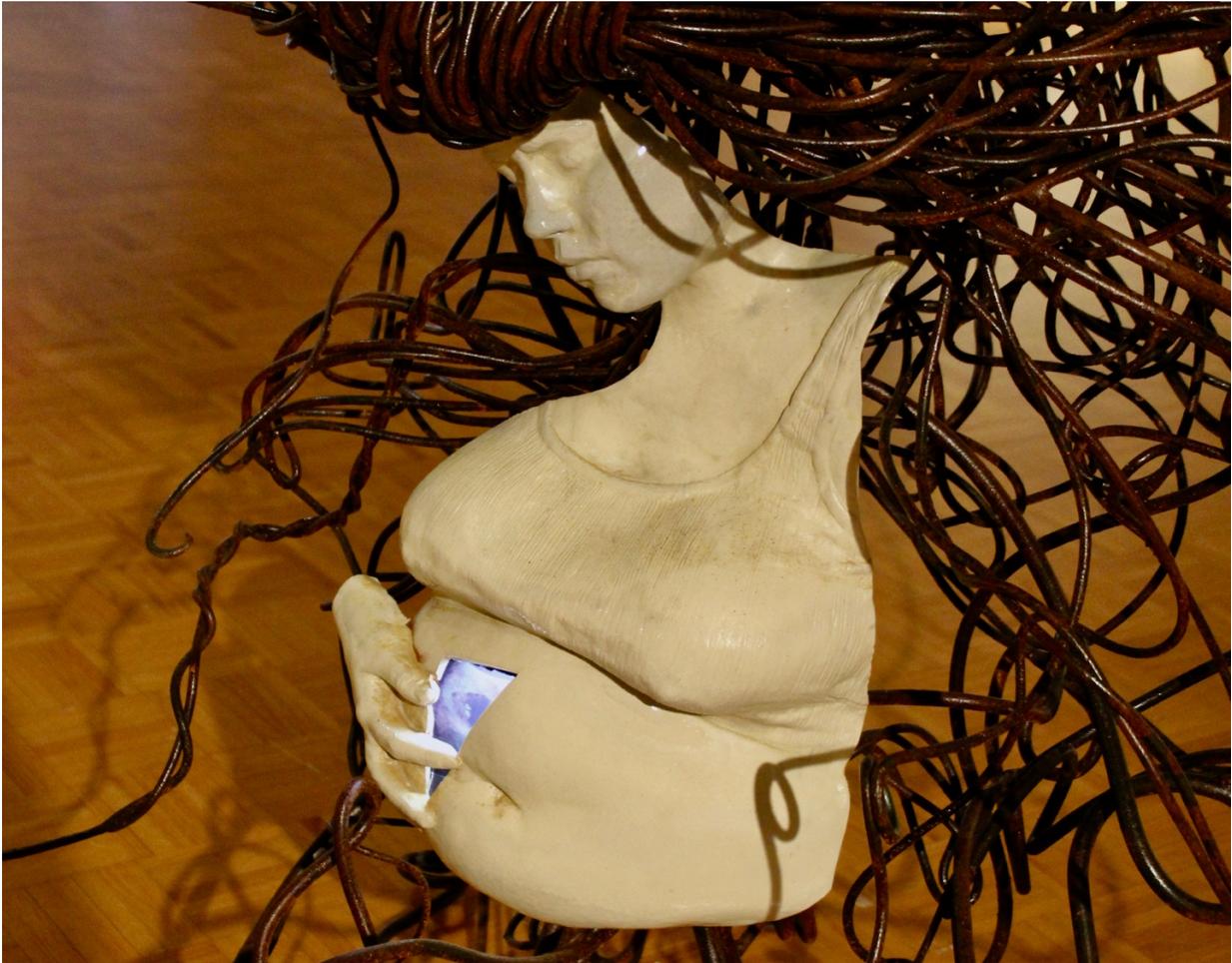


Fig. 5. Jessica Bradsher, *Loss*, 2018

The importance of balance in my presentation of emotional states led me to select a range of complex feelings that fall at different points between happiness and sadness. This allows the gallery space to reflect life more truthfully, which offers a complex combination of all types of feelings. A miscarriage is an event that typically evokes sorrow, because it is a physical and emotional trauma. Not everyone has experienced this specific type of occurrence in their life, but most people can identify with loss in general. I feel that in staying true to each of my models, I

more accurately present their stories and emotional states and offer reflective viewers a chance to practice empathy with these stand-in strangers.



Fig. 6. Jessica Bradsher, *Loss (process image)*, 2017

During the creation of *Loss*, I relied heavily upon my model, my sister Alex, to inform the overall presentation of the work. She chose to honor the lost child through her participation in this activity and mimicked the sadness she felt by her loss beautifully during the life casting process. I took a mold of her body at a similar stage in her next pregnancy. I asked where she felt the emotional state of loss resided in her body when the miscarriage occurred and she pointed to her belly. This informed my decision about where to cut the triangular portal on the sculpture. Upon completion of the construction of the work, I added a transparent version of her ultrasound

to the void. This allowed me to shine a light through the back of the piece to achieve a glowing effect. The imagery of the baby is a focal point that draws attention to the missing part of the figure and provides the necessary information to understand the overall concept.

*Loss* is ceramic and is physically fragile by nature, but it is also fragile conceptually. The clay casting is attached to a brown rust stained mass of hair that coils at the end. The twists in the rods that replicate hair are representative of the nervousness and anxiety which accompanied my sister's pain caused by her miscarriage. I used a rust patina to symbolize the neglect that Alex had for herself while moving through the emotional state of loss.

### **Apathy**

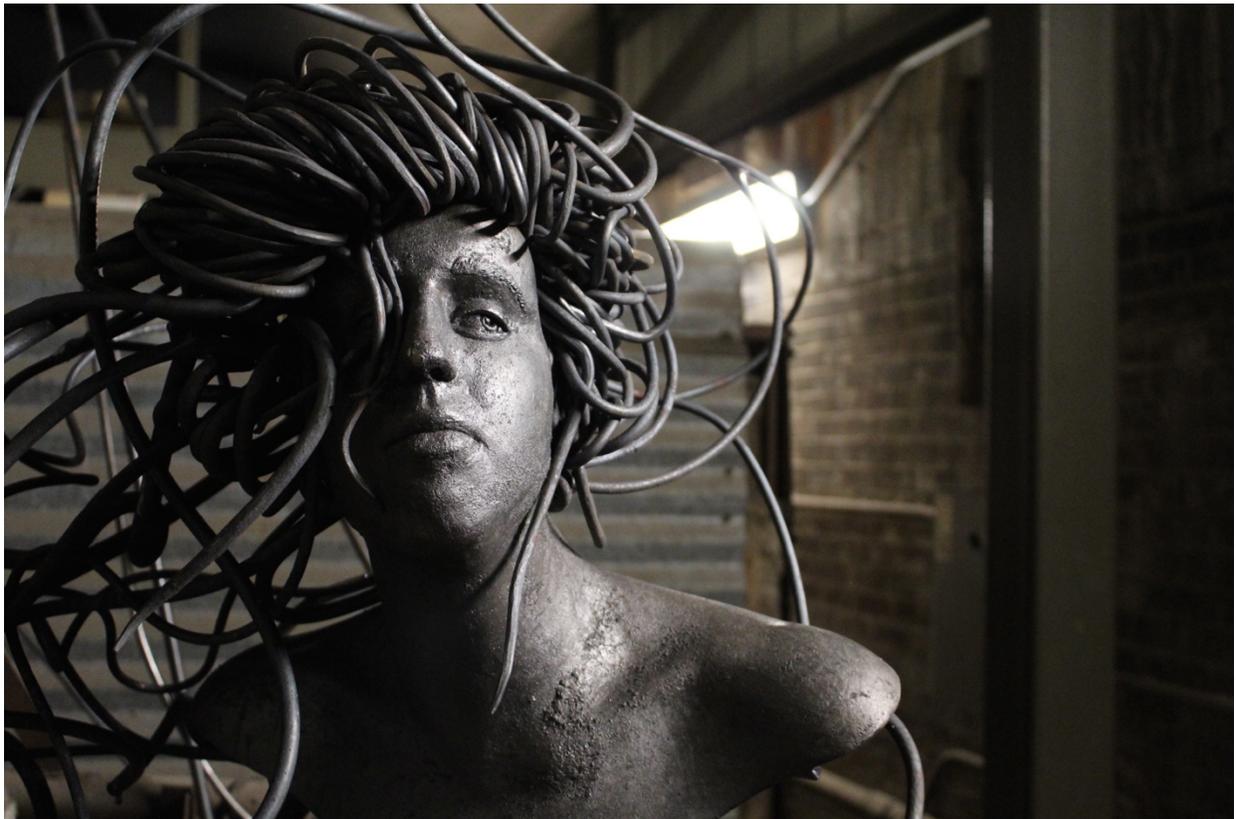


Fig. 7. Jessica Bradsher, *Apathy*, 2017

People do not tend to think of apathy as an emotion to be empathized with because by definition it is a lack of feeling. However, even this state deserves an empathic response. Pushing someone to seek emotion where there is not feeling can lead to anger and resentment. Someone who does not care or possess interest in a topic still needs those who interact with them to identify and respect their emotional state.

When my model Laura experiences apathy, she is emotionally absent. She asks those around her to be mindful and respectful of this. Eventually, an overabundance of indifference in anyone could lead them to depression, but this emotional state can also protect people from an unnatural involvement in an experience. It is a perfectly healthy emotional state to feel, if the experience is not overwhelming one's everyday life.

*Apathy* wards off intruders with an expression sculpted to appear as a side glance and javelin-like hair endings. I cast the figurative piece in iron, which is a dark and brittle metal with grey coloring that contributes conceptually to the absence of feeling. Laura's bust possesses an embellishment around this work's triangular void which is made of copper. The green patina is a detail meant to highlight the void's importance. Residing on the back of the figure, far away from the head or the chest, this placement provides clues to the concept of apathy.

## Inspiration



Fig. 8. Jessica Bradsher, *Inspiration*, 2018

Musicians have been my greatest form of inspiration in recent years. I was interested in finding a singer to sit for the life casting session for “Inspiration.” A friend of mine volunteered to model just before she left to start a career in music in New York City. When Emily sings, she feels as though her thoughts are in harmony with her performance. I asked that she channel her emotional state on stage throughout the molding process, and I played music that would assist her in evoking a transcendent look.

Inspiration is the state that I value the most as an artist, and why I have chosen to represent this concept in bronze. The golden color of the metal represents great worth. I forged

hair and polished the edges of the pieces in order to finish the work with a heat patina. Boiled linseed oil brings the accentuated edges to a matching gold shine. The facial expression of the figure gazes upwards and seems to ignore the world all around as a human would if enveloped in this state. The void placement for this figure is resting on the throat to signify Emily's idea of where inspiration lives on her body when she is humming or singing.



Fig. 9. Jessica Bradsher (at Penland School of Crafts), *Inspiration (process image)*, 2018

## EMOTION IMMERSION

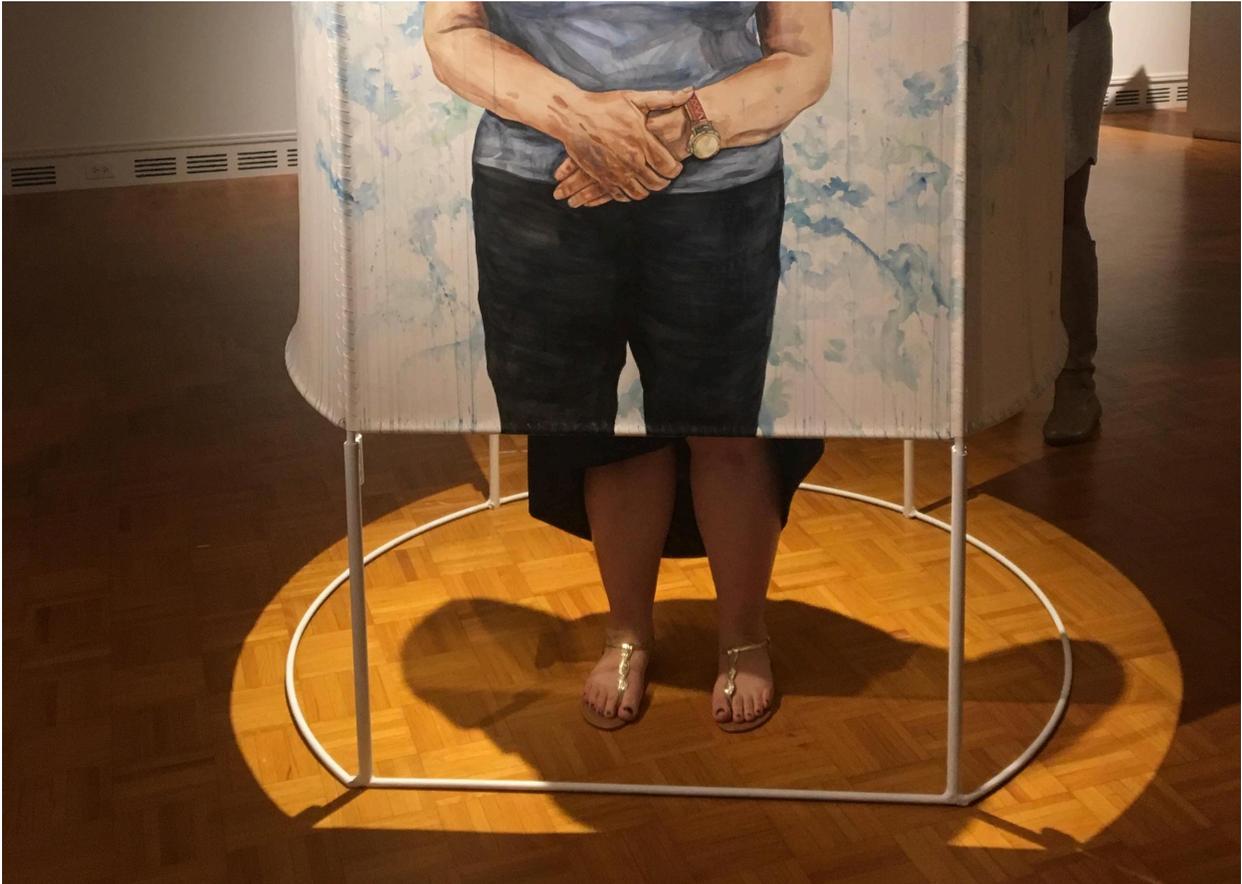


Fig. 10. Jessica Bradsher, *Einfühlung (opening reception)*, 2018

*Emotion Immersion* is the other series of work in my thesis exhibition. It consists of four painted chambers, which are meant to physically take viewers inside the psychology of other individuals through a portrait and a representation of their personal living spaces. Viewers standing outside the chambers looking at the painted figures are able to see the feet of the engaged people on the inside in the position of the model's lower quarter.

This interactive activity mirrors the sentiment of placing oneself inside another's shoes and encourages seeking of understanding that does not occur when we mentally remain firmly inside our own interests and desires. Looking at these works, opening the doors of the structures,

making the choice to go inside, and interacting with objects specific to the model is symbolic of the empathic process.

Each of my models makes a statement through their original pose and what is found within the chambers. In this way, I am offering gallery visitors a chance to empathize with a representative and a first-hand source. Through interviews I perused a deep understanding of how each person represented in this series experiences an emotional state. I am sharing their very specific and personal emotional experiences with issues that are also broader and at times political. Viewers may relate to the issues present through formed opinions about the general topics on display, but may not be in the very unique position of being personally impacted by them.

Even when we subscribe to the same political party or religious sect, we may have opinions about issues that set us apart from others. Though we all experience general sadness, happiness, anger, and a wide range of feelings that others also possess, each of us feels these emotions differently. Therefore, I acknowledge that these sculptures are my interpretations of the emotional states of the individuals on display. Secondly, these models are a personal voice of experience, but not the only authorities on the topics at hand. They each have something unique to share, as do the people we encounter in everyday life.

In selecting individuals to represent within this series, I decided to let the models drive the emotional states that I am portraying. This felt preferential to imposing my own ideas of what they should be feeling, especially in the case of displaying a range of race, sexual orientation, weight, and gender.

**Brenna: Me Too**



Fig. 11. Jessica Bradsher, *Brenna: Me Too*, 2017

A model in her early twenties, Brenna is constantly present on social media platforms sharing her journey. She is photographed by peers and professionals, tagged in photos, and contacted regularly by both desired and undesired potential connections. She sets ground rules for communication which are often violated online. Out in the world she hears comments that are inappropriate or simply unwanted. Sharing Brenna's story is a step I decided to take to address her experience and the broader issue of sexual harassment and the devaluing of women in our society. With awareness, exposure, and education, this part of our culture can change.

The current "Me too" movement is spreading awareness about issues that contribute to environments where women are treated as less than men. Unwanted comments of a sexual or inappropriate nature are facing resistance, where before there was broader passive acceptance. The inadvertent support of culture that some cases these comments precede violence.

"There is no guarantee that any particular response will prevent escalation. It can happen if you ignore it and if you speak up.

Of course, street harassment does not always — or even often — result in physical violence or death. But the fear that it could underlies many street harassment interactions. It reminds women of their second-class status in our society. It reminds them that some men are predators and that women and girls are prey (Kearl)."



Fig. 12. Jessica Bradsher, *Brenna: Me Too (interior)*, 2017



Fig. 13. Jessica Bradsher, *Brenna: Me Too (interior)*, 2017

I constructed a steel frame that would allow viewers to enter into the painting from behind. I worked with Brenna to capture a photograph of her reaction to the unwanted commentary directed towards her. Brenna's image is painted as a realistic copy of the photo I selected for the front of the steel structure that I began to call a chamber. Her likeness is displayed as dressed for a shoot, made up, hair curled, but her body posture is the first clue viewers get to understand that she is not comfortable in this moment. The arm is crossed which communicates a closed off nature and is intended to be uninviting.

As a viewer enters her chamber, they experience what it is like to walk into her closet. On this particular occasion, the unpleasant phrases are present in the mind as the viewer stands in Brenna's place and is presented with choices of dresses to wear. What should be a routine or a confidence filled activity can feel overwhelming and evoke fearful and unpleasant memories for viewers who have experienced similar commentary. Some viewers may not have personal experience with this type of harassment, but through exposure to Brenna's story, can develop greater understanding.

## **Eliana: La Historia de una Inmigrante**



Fig. 14. Jessica Bradsher, *Eliana: La Historia de una Inmigrante*, 2018

Immigration is on the minds of so many in 2018. The stories that fill the news are usually moving. Our shifting position as a country makes life uncertain and sometimes scary for those

who were not born in the United States and their families. I have personal experience with my own grandmother who moved here from Chile in 1964. She spent twenty-four years in this country without getting her citizenship. Her children were young adults when she separated from her husband in 1988 and she decided to stay in eastern North Carolina to be near them.

She has experienced unkind treatment throughout her time as an immigrant, but she has not felt as fearful as in the last few years due to the shifting political climate. Anxiety and uncertainty center around her documentation and separation from members of her family in both countries. Her citizenship certificate has been lost through years of moving and she relies on her passports for security. With her current book expiring, she feels great trepidation about sending it in for renewal. Much of her family is aging in Chile, and she intends to travel there for anyone who is ill or in need. However, if she goes without her updated document, she could be denied re-entry to the United States, where her children and grandchildren reside. Her family fears mistreatment and struggle related to her situation, but also knows that it is mild in comparison to the plight of some families in our community. Eliana spent many years in the United States feeling safe and free to be with those she loved. The information that is becoming increasingly available, re-affirms that a dark turn in this country has taken place.

“Under President Trump, the passport denials and revocations appear to be surging, becoming part of a broader interrogation into the citizenship of people who have lived, voted and worked in the United States for their entire lives (Sieff).”



Fig. 15. Jessica Bradsher, *Eliana: La Historia de una Inmigrante (interior)*, 2018

Documentation being a central theme in my grandmother's struggle, I decided to treat the interior of her chamber as a hallway with framed paper objects. In the center, I hung original, tattered photographs of her parents who passed away in Chile after she moved to the United States. She references them and their car accident in a letter to her brother, which I present in both Spanish and English in matching frames to honor the bilingualism of Eliana and many other immigrants. Beside the letters I hung two final frames with her Chilean and American passports centered inside. I made sure to replicate these documents with changes so as not to share her personal information to gallery-goers.

## Wallace: An American Incarceration



Fig. 16. Jessica Bradsher, *Wallace: An American Incarceration*, 2018

In a very public trial, Wallace Bradsher, my father, was convicted of five out seven charges. He was sentenced to a minimum of four months in prison. The case was very unusual because he was a former prosecutor and he sat in the defendant's chair, being prosecuted by another district attorney. Though the charges were related to theft of state funds, Wallace was never accused of taking the money himself. The person who collected the funds was an employee of his who was proven to have stopped performing duties in exchange for her salary.

In this way, he was on trial for his part in the four month negligence that led to her receiving of unearned benefits and funds. It was stated that this trial was about public trust. I noted that as I sat in the courtroom and watched the proceedings. Anyone who followed the live stream might sum up the opposing arguments as very different interpretations of fulfilling the public trust.

"If I were, in fact, guilty, I would agree with everything Mr. Latour said. However, you know that I have contested that and contend I am not guilty," Bradsher told Ridgeway.

"However, I'm part of the system where I respect each phase of the system. The jury has spoken, and I accept that judgment (Wallace Bradsher – Burns)."

Through witness testimony, my father argued his defense and in the end, accepted the findings. Opening and closing arguments were intense. I was personally and deeply moved by this experience with the justice system, though in many ways I have been in proximity to the system throughout my life.

Selecting my father as a subject was a heavy undertaking that I set before myself. In order to honor his emotional state as accurately as possible, I emotionally invested myself in his recent journey. Throughout his trial and subsequent incarceration, I experienced the emotions of someone who was once an abuser in my life, supported him for the good of his mental state, and faced the difficulty of holding true to my conviction regardless of our differences. If it is possible to empathize with a natural enemy, we can certainly reach across party lines on so many fronts.

Extending my empathic ability to him has helped our relationship. I felt for him as he cried holding his wife's hand before he was taken into custody. I put myself in his shoes as he looked his children in the eyes with apologies for the disappointment he believed he had caused. I imagined what it was like for him as he experienced two heart attacks while he was being held

in solitary confinement. I think constantly about what he must be going through now as he sits alone recovering in a cell. I also think deeply about all who are incarcerated, especially because I now have so much more first-hand information about how prisoners are treated from someone who is there. As I have considered my opinions on our criminal justice system, I have shredded my own complacency on the topic of prisoners' rights.

At this time the information available to myself and his family places his release date a month later than we were expecting. We have not been informed as to why his time has been extended beyond the minimum, just as we were not informed of where he was transferred when his heart problems began. His uniform from the Person County facility was shipped to our family's home and an article was published in the Greensboro News & Record before they contacted us.

To depict his situation, I decided to place that uniform within his chamber and replicated cell in the gallery. It is folded carelessly on a table that I fabricated to fit just inside the small space. I changed the structural design of the chambers to accommodate a representation of a cell door which opens and closes freely. It is not painted white as the other steel is, but rather is left as raw metal. Visually, this addition is striking and brings obvious context to the work.



Fig. 17. Jessica Bradsher, *Wallace: An American Incarceration (interior)*, 2018

Also on the table inside the chamber, is a monitor that runs a looping video of our family members emotionally reading excerpts from the letters that Wallace has written from prison and their responses to him. I feel this achieves story-telling through a very personal lens. Though opinions on my father's experience are constantly formed by readers of the news articles written about the trial, a very different set of opinions might be reached by viewers of this work through empathy.

## Carter: I am



Fig. 18. Jessica Bradsher, *Carter: I am*, 2018

I met Carter at the local Unitarian Universalist Church this summer. At one of the services, he gave a speech that functioned as the message of the day. On that day, it was his birthday and he used that as inspiration to share his feelings about his own life expectancy. He proclaimed with joy that he was “still here” in spite of the adversity exacerbated by some of his identities. He elaborated on his adversity by sharing that he had been diagnosed with HIV and acknowledged that identifying as Queer, Muslim, and Black contribute to the prejudice and even micro aggressions he has experienced. His perspective throughout his speech was overwhelmingly positive, and he enthusiastically shared the multitude of reasons he has to celebrate his strength and resiliency.

Carter remarked on how trepidation often goes hand in hand with pride in the case of identities that are targets of violence. “Hate crime rates in the country’s largest cities have increased for the past four years; all against the backdrop of an overall crime rate that has been declining since the early 1990s (Hauslohner).” People who live in bodies or identities that are targeted because of sexual orientation, race, disability, religion, gender, gender identity, or ethnicity are protected under United States law. This is because crimes based on these classifications are considered hate crimes. Just because there is a special avenue for prosecution, however, does not mean these identities are any safer on the streets. Carter embodies several of these identities and therefore is more at risk for violence, especially when hate crime numbers are running high.

Labels are seen in various ways from different perspectives, but are never all-encompassing of a person. Fear does not define Carter, nor should it define anyone. He wears many of society’s labels proudly, but he adds to them with titles of his own choosing and creation. He expresses them openly, often on twitter, and uses hashtags to connect with others on many topics of social justice. When I heard him speak about his daily experience in life, I knew I wanted to share his story in my emotion immersion series. One important part of spreading empathy is the destruction of stereotypes. This can be accomplished through the sharing of personal stories. Listening to individuals like Carter is preferential to judging quickly based on one identity trait.

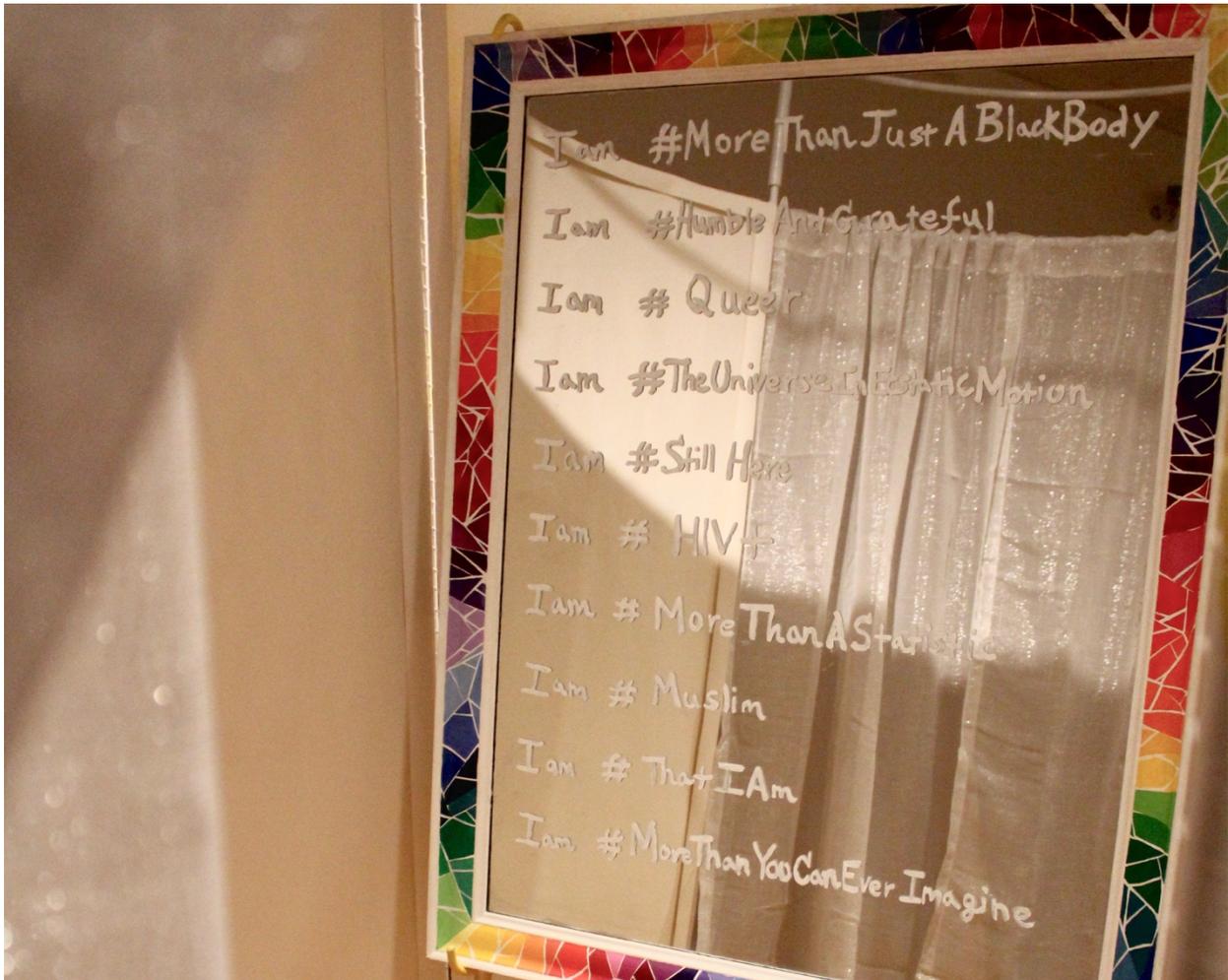


Fig. 19. Jessica Bradsher, *Carter: I am (interior)*, 2018

In order to continue to diverge from the formulaic construction of the chambers, I designed the top of *Carter: I am* to include a rounded rod over the entrance. I added a sparkling translucent curtain to the entryway which allows viewers to glimpse the inside even if they choose not to enter. Inside I added a hand-painted mirror, supported by a welded structure. I asked Carter to write a list of hashtags he would use on social media to summarize self-ascribed labels and I chose ten for him to paint on the surface of the mirror. This object literally reflects

the image of the viewer and simultaneously the identity of Carter. When gallery-goers stand before it, they have the opportunity to consider themselves in his place.

I positioned this work purposely near the exit of the gallery because even though this piece addresses a few heavy topics, Carter's experience is primarily positive due to his personality and outlook on life. Viewers leaving the space encounter a figurative painting that offers a smile. From the sparkle in the fabric of the curtain to the colored steel frame that holds the rainbow framed mirror, the visual elements in this work are meant to impart some of Carter's joy to whomever interacts with the work.

## CONCLUSION

As a body of work, *Einführung* brings the practice of empathy to the gallery and the mind. Viewers encounter eight pieces that emerge when approached, in the way that visions appear in our consciousness. The personal spaces of these human depictions are inviting and evoke reflection in a variety of ways. As this installation experience begs gallery visitors to immerse themselves in the spaces and consider their own empathic skills, I have challenged myself to do the same through my creative process. Though I hold empathy highly within my personal values, I contemplated how I might grow in the skills of the practice. I found that through the creation of the work about my father, I had a lot of room for personal growth. This allowed me to attempt what I also ask of my viewers... simply to work empathically and feel the power of the practice.

I labored mentally and physically to bring the essence of all eight of my selected individuals to the gallery to amass a body of work that would present a variety of emotional states. Making these pieces has sparked a deep personal reflection upon the value I place on empathy. My belief that it can repair divisiveness in our society has been strengthened through this consideration.

Because many of my friends and family were the subject matter of the show, they were exposed in their specific pieces in the gallery. However, they encountered other models at the opening reception who they did not previously know. Being showcased in works alongside each other put these different people in a very similar position. They showed great compassion for one another, though they were not all politically, religiously or otherwise aligned in identity. This was one successful effect of the work. My models may never have been in the same room

together, were it not for this show, and now they all have a bit of first-hand experience with the others' stories.

Members of the East Carolina University community had various reactions to the work. As the show was being installed, *Loss* was originally identified as a work would require a “trigger warning” on the door. The purpose of this was explained as a metaphorical barrier that would allow women and their partners who had experienced a miscarriage the opportunity to avoid coming upon a work of art that might cause an emotional reaction too difficult to face. In a meeting with some members of the administration of the school of art and design, I put forth my position:

Stating that the traumatic experience of (primarily cis-gendered) women who have been through the loss of an unborn child is any more or less important than the experience of a person who has been diagnosed with HIV, or a family who lost a member to prison, or an immigrant in fear of separation from family by identifying it as the only work that qualifies for a trigger warning is in contradiction to the belief that all people deserve empathy. I believe that not having any warning would achieve my goal of placing representatives of the humans we may meet in everyday life before viewers more accurately. I respect the authority of the administration, so if a “trigger warning” is to be posted, I would ask that it cover all of the work.

After our discussion the administration agreed to broaden the warning to include all of the concepts, but did insist that it be in place outside the gallery for the duration of *Einführung*. I share the personal with my sculptures in order to make a great impact, and this occurrence was evidence to me that I had begun the conversation I had intended. I encountered a professional situation where I was given the opportunity to advocate for empathy as the role models I have followed have done before me.

I learned that although I have elevated the topic of empathy in my work and in my life, I still have much to learn about the ways that others practice empathizing. Through my research and interviews with my models I learned about movements and perspectives beyond what has been discussed here. My eyes have opened wider on the topics of racial injustice and gender inequality since I began the investigations for my body of work. I also learned about my responsibilities as advocates for marginalized identities. I believe that my place in many of the battles occurring in the world is through the encouragement of empathy for all. I feel motivated to continue to expose perceived barriers for what they truly are. Dismantling stereotypes, showing kindness, and supporting love are all ways I wish to fight against divisiveness. *Einführung* is the beginning of my work to elicit empathy through creation. I will continue to advocate for empathy in both my work, and my life as I move forward.

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