

CBD, VOCAL IMPAIRMENT, AND HEALING

by

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by

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Healing is holistic, elusive as it is ever-present. It is a cycle, like that of life. There are seasons in which we feel full and seasons in which our wings don't lift to take us where our mind already rests. In my college path, I have found that my healing and my restoration comes from combining science, which my mentor refers to as the "art of ideas," and art. In these series I based conceptual art on healing around the research that I am conducting that centers around vocal impairment and zebra finches, along with the ability of Cannabidiol to mitigate this damage. By doing so, I am recreating my healing space in the cycle created by these five pieces themselves. Healing comes at times in the physical form via pharmacological advances, as we are dealing with in our lab; it also can come from the things that allow us to be our most true inner selves, like art and being able to paint are for me. In that multidisciplinary framework, I created these pieces to speak to what it means to bring healing in its cycle, illustrated by the white line increasingly outlining the zebra finch bird, raising wings as in flight, until the fifth piece of the series is completely outlined in its wholeness. What brings art and science together, in my experience, is not their actual practice, but the ability they have to touch people's lives, to increase quality of life, and to heal minds and bodies in their very nature.

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

During my time at East Carolina University, I have found myself at a crossroads between art and science. At the time that I entered as a Freshman, I had chosen to pursue science through a degree in Neuroscience and largely gave up art as something

that I would be able to do, thinking that it was something that I had to release in order to progress in a career field that would be best for my future. Early in this endeavor, I began doing research in the Pharmacology and Toxicology department under Dr. Soderstrom at the Brody School of Medicine. Since then, I have been studying the effects of Cannabidiol on vocal impairment in zebra finches.

Zebra finches are one of the few animals in a lab setting that can be used to study vocal behavior that mimics human vocal learning in that their song behavior is learned, providing a great model by which we can study human vocal behavior. In the lab, we do a twenty-day experiment with each bird. On day 10, each of the birds is given a lesion in the song region of their brain and we see if there is a difference between birds who are injected with CBD from day 3 on, those injected with vehicle fluid, and those injected with nothing at all. What we found in the research, in general terms, is that CBD did help in reducing the amount of days it took for the bird's ability to sing to recover. The potential applications for this research in the future, if able to be transferred to a human model, would be for patients who suffered from speech impairment issues after a stroke. It could possibly help in their vocal recovery as we are seeing it does in the case of the zebra finches.

In doing this project, the artist in me began to form concepts centering around what wholeness means in terms of recovery, healing, and being oneself. I had an intimate discussion with one of my friends who has a grandparent currently suffering from Alzheimer's and we discussed the power that the brain has in controlling not only how a person acts and perceives themselves, but how that action in the external world affects and impacts the lives of those who love them as well.

In order to illustrate these concepts I was discussing in lab and in my personal life as well, I wanted to create art to link that bridge between my two passions. In doing so, I called upon one of my friends in the art department who makes textiles to make me canvases. I wanted the pieces to feel collaborative because the brain itself is such a collaborative thing—communicating between itself, the body, and everything surrounding and external to it. Additionally, I didn't want the canvases to be plain white, but made out of Neuroscience textbooks as well. It came to be five total canvases and each was made of strips of textbooks and little images that highlighted different portions of the healing process and what it means to be on that journey to restore wholeness.

To illustrate these concepts, I painted zebra finches on the canvases, in various states of flight. The first bird was not in flight and with each progressing piece, the wings of the bird were higher as in flight so that by the fifth piece, the bird was fully in flight. I painted the different stages so that when the five pieces were hung in a circular formation, the bird appeared to be flying around the circle, as healing is a cycle. Another illustration of the healing process that I used throughout the five pieces was the concept of a white line. I outlined the bird in white, with the first piece only being outlined for a small portion. Each bird had increasingly more of it outlined in white until the final bird was all the way outlined in white. As white is the color of purity, goodness, and wholeness, I wanted to use it to further the metaphor and solidify the concept that healing is a circular process.

At any stage of life, we are at some point of the healing and impairment process, whether that be mentally, physically, or spiritually. It is not a linear process,

as we see in the lab. It can involve many factors, and sometimes many disciplines as it does for me. My wholeness is bound to the inextricable bond I have with both art and science; in concert they bring healing to me every day. Restoration is a process we continually evolve through and learn from, attached to many facets of our life. Sometimes we even learn, as I did in the lab, that impairment or damage must happen before we can learn what it is that can bring us to the beautiful zone that is healing. And in one experiencing damage, we find that the healing that comes can not only help us but can help those suffering from the same things that we are.