

PAINTING PERFECTION

by

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A Signature Honors Project Presented to the

Honors College

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for

Graduation with Honors

by

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December, 2024

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i. Abstract:

In our modern society there is increased pressure to be perfect. This idea is perpetuated by conversations with our peers, familial expectations and/or images seen on social media. At an age where their self identity is simultaneously being discovered along with new found responsibility for oneself, those in their late teens and early twenties are arguably the most affected by this. Some challenges faced by those in this age range include, but are not limited to: academic success, financial support, addiction, mental health standing, body dysmorphia, material culture, etc. This population can be afflicted by one, some or all of these issues at once. Despite the greater majority experiencing one or more ailments, these issues are swept under the rug. In this new era of social media, young adults today should be made aware that everyone projects an image of perfection. What we see online is not reality. Through realization that we as a society apply pressure to achieve excellence at a young age, dialogue can begin on how to restructure our mindsets to embrace the more challenging areas of our lives as well. I have completed a creative endeavor with ambition to begin this discussion amongst young adults - consisting of eleven mixed media pieces.

ii. Background

One's early adulthood is a difficult time. There are expectations to move from your childhood home. Apply to and be successful in university settings or directly enter the workforce. Being able to financially support yourself, made even more difficult if one has any dependents. Placed in these new settings, one is supposed to make connections with new individuals. For the majority of early adults, this is the first time they've ever experienced all of these responsibilities at once. An added, and new to this generation, pressure to this population is social media. At this age, it is almost impossible to escape. Of the entire population of social media users, those in their twenties make up one third of total users (Lin.) According to Ph.D professor of psychological sciences and licensed psychologist Aleix Bachik, "college age adults are deeply affected by social-media use and experience depression, lower self esteem, lower

confidence, appearance anxiety, body dissatisfaction, loneliness, and fear of missing out as a result of social media use.”

iii. Discussion of Works Created

In order to address the wide variety of topics affecting young adults today I created eleven pieces of art to compose my series “Painting Perfection.” Topics addressed through these pieces include: body dysmorphia, addiction, material culture, grief, academia, mental illness and financial pressure. Each ailment has been represented by at least one piece. Artwork created for this project were made from a variety of media forms intending to represent the variety of issues young adults face today. All works discussed may be viewed through my upload of a supplemental file containing them.

The introductory piece of the set of art I created addresses grief. I created two art scans using household objects and a digital scanner. I scanned family photos, heirlooms and foliage to create this diptych. When using a flatbed scanner to create art one may move objects on a scan bed and create a blurred or moving. I did this in the second piece created for this diptych, utilizing this movement to acting as if this imagery is being wiped from existence. This effect was used with intention to communicate those seen in the family photos are no longer with us.

The second piece I created addresses body dysmorphia using charcoal and colored pencil. It consists of a female body reflecting unattainable body standards, seen through the extreme hourglass figure of the woman drawn. This body type is praised on social media as “body goals.” These ideals are enabled by celebrities, such as the Kardashians, publication of images of themselves with this body type. This online depiction of oneself with an idealized body is achieved most commonly through plastic surgery or photo editing. The presentation and praise of unattainable body standards is harmful for all viewers, but is recognized as most harmful to young women. Audiences exposed to this content question their own self worth and practice dangerous eating habits in attempts to achieve the body types glamorized online. It is

my hope this piece serves as reminder these depictions are unreal. This drawing is faceless, unattached from an icon, aiding in this communication.

Another topic addressed through my project is addiction. Often paired with shame, one struggling with addiction can continue harmful habits while hiding them from the entire world. I created two pieces to highlight the illness of addiction with two intentions. The first is to remind those struggling they are not alone. The second is to remind those viewing this is a serious subject we as society need to create dialogue about in order to better assist those who are ill. The first piece I created is relief print depicting a set of lungs. It was created using two linoleum carvings, the first being the lungs themselves. The second carving is representative of a germ molecule. It is repeatedly printed over half the set of lungs to show how addiction - specifically that of smoking - is harmful to the body. The lungs are printed in blue and the germ molecule is printed in yellow. This was done intentionally, for when overlapping they mix to create green. This color is often associated with illness, aiding in communication of this pieces message. The second piece I created in relation to addiction is a mixed media sculpture. It is composed of pill bottles, gems and paint. They are arranged with one pill bottle spilling. Instead of pills, gems spill from the fallen pill bottle. This piece intends to show the glamorization of substance abuse, specifically within our popular media sources. An example of a media source that does this is the TV show *Euphoria*. Addiction is unhealthy, but has become normalized as an outlet for struggling young adults through the dialogue that exists today surrounding substance abuse.

To address the areas of material culture and financial stress I created mixed media collages. The collage addressing financial stress was created from book pages, magazine clippings and a color pencil drawing. The book pages act as a background for this piece with quotes about stress within them highlighted. The color pencil drawing depicts a piggybank with a mischievous expression. The magazine clippings spell out the phrase "feed me," referring to money one would put into a piggybank. The collage addressing material culture was created from solely magazine clippings. Its background was created from a nature scene, depicting an upwards view of the sky including trees. Clippings included for context are animals (a tiger,

panda, dolphin, and bats) known as facing endangerment. In addition to animals I including material items and text indicating their purpose being for purchase. I used text clippings to spell out “Good buy,” indicating participation in material culture and overconsumption is harmful to the environment and species I depicted.

Addressing mental health I painted a mirror. I did this with the intention of viewers looking within it to see how mental health can affect oneself. This mirror has mushroom/fungi painted to represent the growth one in a good state of mind can do. I then dripped contrasting red paint that semi-skews viewers appearance when viewing this piece, representing topics negative to ones mental health (such as depression or anxiety.) These elements together work to tell the story of how one can have the desire to do well but that can be overtaken by negative mental health. I continued to use this method to create a piece addressing academia. Inspired by my work as an art student I painted an artist palette in order to address this topic. It has the quote “Why not just make it?” painted on. Like the mental health piece I created, I included red paint dripping down for contrast. This in tandem with the quote communicate the struggle one may experience in order to complete work for academic purposes.

The final pieces I created for “Painting Perfection” are intended to be concluding and hope inspiring works. They both address the feeling of being alone/how strength can be found in kindness and community. The first is a collage. It has a group of young adults posing happily for a picture as its background. Overlapping this is a clipping of a baby giraffe struggling to stand and clipping of blueberries growing. These elements working together represent ones struggles lead to individual growth and ultimately healing. This collage also includes a clipping of the quote “Slay, queens!” This is a bit cheeky, paying respect to phrases used in popular culture applauding ones success. In addition to this I created a photography piece alluding to community and kindness. It includes a picture I took of two young adults enjoying themselves at a party with the quote “Everybody you meet is fighting a battle” overlapping my image. This piece serves as a final reminder that perfection is perceived. Through recognition of this, and

the many other topics addressed in my work, my hope is we as a society can restructure our understanding of success.

iv. Bibliography

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