

I'm Fine

June 5 – July 28, 2017

In response to cultural dialogues surrounding mental health and self-care, *I'm Fine* investigates art as a means of catharsis. Through painting, sculpture, photography, video, and performance, the exhibition's seven artists explore varied narratives of personality, process, and release. Because art can both mitigate and amplify emotion, *I'm Fine* considers how the practice of art-making participates in (or disrupts) the evolution of personal development. While each artist examines different aspects of the mind and body in flux, their works also operate in conversation, scrutinizing the particular ways art might participate in self-care. Ultimately, the exhibition calls into question notions of memory, power, permanence, love, the physical body, and the relationship between the individual and the collective.

I'm Fine includes work by Brandon Chambers, Rachael Carruthers, Dana Hollister, Tam-anh Nguyen, Nicole Osborne, Emma Brand, and Susannah Ward.

Curated by Tasia Paolisso and Sarah Schurman

Brandon Chambers

UMCP '17

Artist Statement

Impermanence is a driving force in the carrying out of our lives. Our sense of self is in a constant flux, with different parts of ourselves gaining and losing prominence over time. Parts of our identities that we found most important in the past fall away. Oftentimes, things that fall away reveal aspects of us that were previously obscured. In my work, I try to represent the tapestry of identities that form and fall away over time in a context of personal growth and allow the viewer to reconcile the idea that aspects of themselves that have fallen away are integral and definitive parts of their current identity.

"Endless Impermanence"
Laser-cut paper, mixed media
2017

In the sea of seared paper, different materials work to create a complex system of visual data for the viewer to contemplate. The final work is presented as a set of portals for the mind to wander through while contemplating the demolition and construction of identity, the permanence and impermanence of traits, and the ability and inability to see past certain aspects of a thing.

"Reviling of Pleasing Corruptions"
Recorded Performance
2017

In my performance, I ritually drink dyed corn syrup from a Pepsi bottle, while seated in the center of a white cloth. In the process of drinking the mixture, my body rejects the viscous liquid and I expel the black sludge onto the white cloth. I repeat this action until the entire bottle has been emptied. By the end, my body as well as the cloth are marred by the experience and visually represent the damage done to the internal body by the corn syrup found in the soda. The round cloth is a remnant of the performance and is presented in conjunction with the video.

Rachael Carruthers

UMCP '17

Artist Statement

I am a sculptor and performance-based artist who explores how violence is used to enforce conformity and the ways in which people resist under oppressive systems. I employ two main methods of production, process-based works and body-based works. For my process-based works, I am often using rather violent means of production, deconstructing works to reconstruct them. I find that this reflects the necessity of examining one's foundational beliefs and self-perception through a lens that considers the white-supremacist-hetero-patriarchy of which we are all a part, as well as giving myself the space and physical labor to come to terms with the violence that has been done against me and those I love. I often tear up old works and reconstruct new ones from the debris. The reconstructed works resemble tectonic plates, as I consider collective trauma, memory, and the connection between the degradation of people and degradation of the earth.

My body process works revolves around the ideas of comfort and societally enforced impulses to seek comfort in unsustainable places. I create these works by applying materials directly to my body and removing them in often painful ways. The works embody a history of repeated trauma in a way that allows me to extract myself from the pattern of violence and allow the works to carry the weight of trauma for me. One series of works in this vein are my cast pillow works in which I cast the negative space of my relaxing body into various heavy materials. The pillows allow for comfort and support in only one position and in any other are simply a burden to hold. This resembles the way violence is done against any deviation from the societal norm.

The processes with which I make my sculpture and the art objects themselves provide me with the space to re-contextualize my lived experience enabling forgiveness and self-care.

"Cold Comfort"
Cast Aluminum and Flocking
2016

Cold Comfort is a negative space cast of my body. The surface has been buffed almost to a mirror shine so that the viewer finds themselves reflected in the work. *Cold Comfort* is the first of my pillow series in which I cuddled a pillow full of resin bonded sand and cast the resulting object in Aluminum.

"Dirty Laundry"
Performance/Video Installation
2017

Dirty Laundry is the performative aspect to *Cold Comfort* in which I cuddle *Cold Comfort* in the center of a room for the duration of 30 minutes (originally on top of salt).

Dana Hollister
UMCP '17

Artist Statement

How do we experience something that we, ourselves have only experienced from a distance? There are many sources of information to explain to us, in words, how it feels to have a stigmatized illness or disorder. Without actually experiencing the mental and physical distress that having a mental disorder causes, humans tend to believe they understand what certain people are going through.

My content varies from topics of mental illnesses and getting the viewer to empathize with the unknown, to using techniques that will influence the emotions of the viewers so that, they too, can experience the effects that those with cognitive differences experience daily. My art is meant to bring awareness to mental disorders and cognitive differences. I strive to express that feeling or experience with which many people have never had to come in contact before, as well as to embody the process of coping with one's illness or disorder.

"I'm Fine"
Re-purposed wood
2017

When one is within a depressive state, it is hard to break out of our comfort zone and allow others into our mind. In many ways the depressed want help, but seeking that help is the hardest part. "I'm Fine" speaks to that moment when a friend asks, "Are you okay?", and we respond with an, "I'm fine", even though on the inside we are screaming for help. This piece represents the nest that people with depression build for themselves, as well as the pointed and poisonous thoughts that come along with it.

"Living with ADHD"
Screen Print
2016

These screen prints express what it is like to have ADHD. Having ADHD myself, these prints embody how my brain works, jumping from one area to another, never finishing a thought, but actually concluding a thought that was from three hours ago. It is utterly frustrating and confusing and my hope is to allow others a window into the mind of someone who deals with ADHD.

"Resilience"
Plywood and metal
2016

This is a representation of the process of overcoming a mental disorder or stigmatization. The road to acceptance of one's mental difference is not an easy one. It starts with the desire to start the ascent of a challenging and painful climb to acceptance. Even after one accepts their issues, there will still be bumps in the road because nothing is ever perfect. The hardest part is getting to the summit of one's problems and then, finally realizing the decent will be much easier. Having depression myself and knowing many others who have it, as well as other disorders like it, this is a process that everyone goes through.

Tam-anh Nguyen

UMCP '17

Artist Statement

Tam-anh Nguyen is a filmmaker and multi-media artist. Her recent works explore ideas of production and perception in relation to themes of identity, transcultural interactions, trauma, and popular culture, occasionally combining humor with societal critique. When viewers are confronted with her video installations, there is a tension that is created between the familiar and the surreal elements. The images are repetitive and durational, calling for a kind of exhaustive engagement with the image and a continual re-encounter with one's self through the self-reflexive lens of the artist.

"Everyone who knows you, hates you"

A trilogy, featuring a series of three videos titled, "In a dream I peeled off my own skin and ate it," "I am real, and you are not" and "Are you better off alone?" featuring the song "Better off Alone" by Alice Dj. The works center the viewer within their own gaze, pushing them to question ways in which we have been conditioned to initiate intimacy with ourselves and consequently with others in our interpersonal relationships, to acknowledge the inextricable link between trauma and self-love for women of color, to confront the root of social anxieties associated with loneliness, and ultimately urging the viewer to consider solitude as an unlikely means of catharsis.

Nicole Osborne
MFA GWU '18

Artist Statement

My curiosity about the tandem childhood cycling that we do through remembering is prominent within my work. Currently I am focusing on this constant absorption into my earlier years of life after losing almost everything materialistically related to my youth in the 2016 firestorm in Gatlinburg, TN, creating a trauma transference where I translate my experiences to the artwork that I create.

My separation of my current adult self from the memories of childhood is an attempt to transfer my tribulation to these creations that instigate a cycle back to adolescence by remembering places that instigate thoughts of childhood isolation, commentary on our society's treatment on the classification of other, and the overarching conflict between the belief that there is no original thought and the people in my society who live in the hope that we are each unique.

The mediums used correlate with the assortment of materials that my society uses to communicate to children how to be children through the art of storytelling, which utilizes screens, books, toys, and games as well as using things that we find within our public school systems. These components are triggers to youthful memories and enable a viewer to cycle along with me.

Emma Brand

Skidmore College '17

Artist Statement

My work attempts to reflect the psychological dictatorship that has pervaded throughout human history to support an exclusive superiority complex. I hope to tackle and bring to light many of the death sentences we have ascribed to people on arbitrary bases of gender, sexuality, race, class, and religion. I have begun two series, one centered on Modern Colonizers and one inspired by a great range of existentialists and Vanitas Paintings. I hope to motivate my audience to ponder life and death: why do some feel justified to dictate the way one lives their life? Who gets to determine whose life is of more value, and who can die? Why do they do this, and how are they profiting from it?

I would like my paintings to serve as both a *momento mori*, a reminder of our imminent death, but also a reminder of the restrictions on our free will during life. By juxtaposing the popular and socialized values of money and power to these *momento mori*'s I hope to stimulate some catharsis on part of the audience on why they value the things they do. Why have humans chosen to determine validity of life along these terms? By working on these topics, I hope to divulge the darker side of humanity to those who are willing to ignore it, but I also hope to get people to question the "inevitability" of this dark side. I hope that I too will come to a better consensus on how to deal with the malicious and selfish disposition of some, while simultaneously reinventing my faith and hope in humanity.

I ultimately, through the presentation of both series, hope viewers will critically think about their values, think about how they have come to be, and who the real enemy is. It is not the man walking on the street beside you, it is the man attempting to undermine our autonomy, your psyche, and ultimately your life.

"God Blessed America"

Oil on canvas

2017

With works intended to provoke, Brand questions how the historical origins of political systems affect society today. She writes, "I want the viewer to question how their personal freedom is dictated and manipulated by those in power. I am particularly concerned with the arbitrary means by which the powerful elite acquire and perpetuate power." Using imagery reminiscent of Vanitas and Renaissance paintings, viewers are asked to reconsider an analysis of their own values in relation to long-standing power structures.

Susannah Ward
Catholic University '17

Artist Statement

the day was bright, joyful even; it mocked me as I drove the winding rural roads on the outskirts of town, searching for a place to bury my father. the tall, handsome, and able-bodied man I had known my entire life now lay shrunken, weak, and older than I could have ever imagined. his ailments of Parkinson's disease, dementia, and pneumonia strengthened with each day, while he did the opposite. the days slid by in silence, seconds bleeding into minutes, and minutes to hours, as we as a family waited, all of us hovering anxiously around his crowded hospice room. as I drove a song crackled through the old radio, "I wanna get better", by the indie rock group bleachers, and with its words came the inspiration for this project.

my work is focused in the area of photography, more specifically portraiture; it is through this chosen medium that I strive to shed light on the more arresting and unexplored side of human nature. my subject matter is simple, myself, and through my creative process I further delve into and explore the inner machinations of my mind and the inner self. I further examine and gather inspiration from my personal journey over the years with mental health obstacles, through the act of self-portraiture and previously specified medium of digital photography. I share my personal struggle of contesting with various mental illnesses, specifically anorexia and OCD, which often in diagnoses exist simultaneously. I then attempt to draw out, generate and embody this tale through digital photographic compositions. I believe my photography draws attention to and illuminates social issues concerning mental health, with extreme attention and effort paid to preserving honesty and truth.

by delving into the depths of the human psyche my work's emotive, and haunting style serves to captivate, and draw in my audience. visually a heavy focus on high contrast with pale palettes, and minimal color serve to focus attention on the structural human forms on which my work is focused. the effect is one of haunting resonate beauty.

I chose my title "better." as a tribute to the lyrics I went home and scrawled into my journal that cold and fateful November afternoon. Along with a few pages laying out what I hoped would become my art degree thesis project years later. my goal was to not only broadcast to the public the prevalence of mental illness in this country's adult population, but also to use my own face as a means of de-stigmatization. because if one in five of all United States adults have experienced mental illness within the past year the time has most definitely come for us to redefine the perceptions of mental health, and begin to actually get "better."

"Hollow"
Digital photography
2017

The focus within the confines of this image was to convey the feeling of intense vulnerability through the naked human body's form. The extreme vulnerability being expressed in this image stems from the internal emotions Anorexia Nervosa creates inside of my body and the depths of my mind. The extreme and seeming eternal frustration with my imperfection, the all-encompassing feeling of slowly wasting away, and the way that extreme weakness and frailty slowly take over my being.

"Visceral"
Digital photography
2017

The inspiration behind this piece was using my body in a very physical way to convey to the viewer the extreme emotions experienced within the context of my OCD and Anorexia Nervosa. Often times I would stay up into the depths of the night obsessively cleaning, and organizing my room and belongings. Through the extreme contortion, and distortion of my form the pain and suffering caused by this ritualistic cleansing becomes tangible to viewers

"Illuminate"
Digital photography
2017

This image is meant to express the relationship to food I have as a person who suffers from a restrictive eating disorder, Anorexia Nervosa. I often would go for hours, or even days without eating anything aside from an occasional glass of water to prevent dehydration. Then after this period of this self-starvation, I would often find myself in the kitchen staring blankly into the refrigerator at its seeming undesirable contents, trying to force myself to take in nutrients.

"Lungs"
Digital photography
2017

The intention behind this photograph was to shock and disturb the viewer into seeing the extreme thinness possessed by many of us romanticized by mainstream popular culture, and even desired as an ideal by many young girls and women. Perhaps if the ugly side of this beauty standard was revealed the extreme reverence and dedication to this unobtainable body type would dissolve, and that was my purpose in this image's creation.

"Exhaustion"
Digital photography
2017

The inspiration behind this particular shot was a disturbing event that I experienced within the past year. One night while climbing the staircase pictured in my home, I collapsed to the ground from extreme dehydration and lack of nutrition. Rendering me unable to call for help or to even get up again for another hour's time. Eventually I managed to crawl slowly and feebly to the upper story of the house. But my realization of my own mental illness' severity and intensity was beginning to be realized after that night's horrors.

"Insomnia"
Digital photography
2017

During my struggle with restrictive Anorexia Nervosa I realized that going days without food was much easier when I abused certain stimulant drugs. Specifically, strong high dosage stimulants used to treat extreme cases of ADD and ADHD. My drug of choice was 60 mg vyvanse, a pill so strong that often hunger would not strike for 12-14 hours after taking the pill orally. Additionally, this medication would also cause severe and extreme insomnia, causing me to go days without sleep and recovery time. That particular aspect of my drug abuse is expressed here in this photograph.

"Extend"
Digital photography
2017

Here the intended focus was not the mental illnesses I contend with, but rather what brought them on, meaning the events I have experienced which led me to develop an obsession with unattainable perfection, which manifested in the development of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Anorexia Nervosa. These traumatic events were multifaceted and intricate in their building off of one another. The death of my father in 2013 from Parkinson's disease took a great toll on me mentally and physically, and his absence led me to enter into a series of abusive and damaging romantic relationships. My outstretched hand in this photograph is meant to represent me reaching out desperately for a male figure with which to fill the void of my father's absence, regardless of the way they treated my mind or body.

"Stimulant"
Digital photography
2017

My addiction to the stimulant drug vyvanse, which is used to treat severe ADHD, was a desire that slowly took over my mind, body and eventually even my life. It became harder and harder to not take it every single day in hopes of escaping the extreme pain I was experiencing following the tragic loss of my father, while simultaneously hoping to boost my struggling academic grades through its mind-numbing and hyper-focused effects. I commonly experienced extreme paranoia and even severe delusions as I came down off of the drug, hearing sounds that weren't there and at times believing things that weren't reality. This picture is meant to express that disturbing and at times almost mind-breaking phenomenon.

"Delicate"
Digital Photography
2017

This photograph serves to represent the fragility of life when one is contending with a mental illness that causes diminishment of bodily needs and nutrition.

"Flickering"
Digital photography
2017

Inspiration behind the concept for this photograph was found in the feelings I experienced of losing complete control of many aspects of my social life through the intensifying of my mental illness and drug addiction. The horrors I was dealing with not only began to have a negative impact on myself, but on the ones I loved and our interwoven relationships. My family, my friends, my professors, and everyone else who were involved in my life's many spheres were also in a way experiencing the fallout of my mental struggles. My severe outbursts of extreme emotion such as sadness and anger confused them, my inability to be reliable and show up to events, classes, and gatherings disappointed them, and my extreme need to isolate myself drove them away confused and hurt. The tiny particles and fractions of light spread over my body here serves to represent those aspects of my life breaking into smaller and smaller seemingly un-repairable pieces.