

March 2, 2022

Faculty Statement of Mentorship of Research/Creative Activity:

As a faculty mentor to Elizabeth Boccabello, it was important to me that I encouraged and supported her ideas to create artwork about her experience with chronic illness. For her painting, *Chronic*, Elizabeth proposed the creation of a work that would show “the realit[y] of having a chronic illness through bright and expressive color.” In addition to painting, she expressed interest in wanting to integrate knitted yarn with the painting, because knitting is a practice that she uses to help her through her chronic illness. Her painting, then, would become an abstract, visual documentation representative of not only her own physical discomfort with her chronic illness, but also how she copes with that illness.

I supported Elizabeth in her idea to fuse the traditional practices of oil painting with more contemporary practices in symbolic color and hard-edge abstraction. I also encouraged her to figure out how to combine the two-dimensional painting methodologies with three-dimensional sculptural applications of knit yarn. She first created an abstraction of flesh-colored “squiggles” on canvas. It is important to note that the “squiggles” are unique to Elizabeth’s visual language as a painter. In her work, the marks become symbols for space and body, as well as metaphors for internal and external emotion. As a mentor, I have encouraged her to pursue and cater to her natural instincts; to listen to her automatic impulses as an artist. I also want to note that painting in her style, hard-edge abstraction, is exceptionally difficult with oil paint, and demands the highest level of technical skill and expertise from the painter. Throughout her development of the painting, I offered constructive feedback to help strengthen her technique. I reminded her to be mindful of the direction of the brushstrokes, and suggested the use of a continuous, contour, almost topographical stroke that would reinforce the direction and shape of each “squiggle”. This type of mark-making is a tremendously tedious task, and can be physically taxing pulling a long, consistent stroke through thick, sticky paint. I also urged Elizabeth to strive for clean, crisp edges in her forms, which only heightens the craft and overall impact of her work.

To visually communicate the pain of her illness, Elizabeth chose to rip into the canvas, splicing it to be able to include “guts” tumbling out of the open wound. The “guts,” the knitted additions, pour out from the ripped canvas, and serve as a symbol of organs spilling out from the body. At first, the additions were only light pink in color, and were arranged in a neat, organized way, which drew attention to each carefully-knit loop. The knitting read as soft, passive material, instead of “guts,” and did not translate her intention to show the physical pain of the illness. Along with her classmates, I suggested that she find ways to push her intention through tearing into and disrupting the material, and adding darker pinks that might call back to internal organs more than light pink. Together, the combination of media visualizes the pain of her chronic illness, as well as the calming action that she uses to relax during an episode. *Chronic* is a painting that encapsulates both pain and peace, opening a dialogue about illness, treatment, and awareness.

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