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EXPLORING MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH ARTWORK

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors
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APPROVED

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ABSTRACT

Art is incredibly powerful. It touches us emotionally while deeply stimulating the deep unconscious to that end. It can be a tool to potentially influence our culture, our relationships, our lives, and our mind. Artwork and psychiatric disorders are often linked with each other as the artist expresses themselves, their feelings, and their emotional anguish through their works, hoping to help themselves as well as their audience cope with them. I plan to present a series of digital works of art that highlight the mental turmoil I have grappled with for so many years, as well as ones I have witnessed certain members of my family fight against. It is seemingly a form of visual psychodrama, and it would be used to help end the stigma and provide a viewing outlet for those who have experienced mental health problems. Paintings, movies, plays, and music serve as a point of embarkation for therapy sessions, with the goal of assisting an individual's experience and journey of recovery. Performances, psychodramas, and theater all serve as thorough inspiration for the respective artist. I will be creating between three and four works of art that portray the human experience of psychiatric disorders. Some of my works are inspired by different playwrights and artists; I hope to create a final project that combines theater, visual art, and art therapy to explore mental health awareness. It is quite cathartic for the artist to put their feelings onto the canvas to invoke change and inspiration.

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To my family, who gave me the freedom in the world to express my imaginative ideas and all the confidence to act upon them. I am beyond grateful for you guys. I love you all tremendously.

And lastly, to me.

Thank you for staying here.

Because, *I am, I am, I am.*

INTRODUCTION

I like to think that the depth of our subconscious is a grotto: primordial and bare within our physical body. We are constantly bombarded with adverts, self-love blogs, and little aphorisms that all flourish the bold message that a healthy mind, body, and soul leads to the ‘best version of you. So, is this ultimate trifecta the end all be all? Will I attract positivity and certainty if I follow the rudiments from my untouched copy of *Being Happy for Dummies*? These are the grand questions that remain unanswered, but still, we continue to wonder. And wonder. And wonder some more. And suddenly, our wonderment leads us to a standstill: this brooding bastion of blank obscurity that transcends into a frenzy of frustration, doubt, and uncertainty. But we are so quick to forge a brazen smile and fake ‘being happy’ which becomes the ultimate conviction over our vulnerability, anguish, and anger. Sylvia Plath once wrote the words “*I took a deep breath and listened to the old bray of my heart. I am, I am, I am*” (Plath, 1963). The bray of my heart. A cry of desperation. Thrashing and kicking for air as you drown. The agony of simply *being* because you have no idea how to *be*. And the only thing left alive is myself, where I barely feel like living. But hey, it will all work out, because tomorrow is a brand-new day, right? A clean slate.

I have grappled with these lingering emotions for what seems like an eternity. Depression has been the ultimate calamity in my personal life and has thwarted my social, physical, and emotional well-being. It’s this bizarre feeling of ‘*unfeeling*’, and oftentimes, I feel lost, alienated, and solitary. You lose the ability to give voice to your pain as depression, in many ways, is a commander of destruction – the destruction of your emotional range, your overall functionality, of *you*. Whether someone is an artist, writer, actor, or musician, there always seems to be a dark side to the creative and imaginative whim that seems to flow out so effortlessly. And often, these

artists rely on pain as a source of inspiration. There's a reason why the myth of 'the tortured artist' exists and I experienced the dichotomy between emotional suffering and creative beauty within my own artwork. It is quite an inspiring process, and one may even say cathartic. Paintings, movies, plays, and music have served as a point of embarkation for therapy sessions, with the goal of clarifying and assisting the individual's experience and journey of recovery. These various vessels of artistic expression serve as inspiration for the artist, prompting further revelation and creativity. Art encourages us to experience the freedom and release of repressed emotions by the creation of our own original work or by the witness/pseudo-experience of what we see before us (whether it be a piece of artwork, a movie, or a play). The redemptive power of art is unmatched: it can be a tool to vastly influence our culture, relationships, lives, and our mind. It touches us emotionally while deeply stimulating the deep unconscious to that end. For artists are dreamers – dreamers who express themselves, their feelings, and their emotional anguish through their works in hopes of not only guiding themselves, but their audience as well.

ART THERAPY

Artistic expression is arguably one of the most integral facets of the human experience. It is the only medium through which boundaries may be crossed, divisions are blurred, and novel impressions may be freely shared and contrasted. Empiricism within the philosophy of science heavily emphasizes evidence (especially during experimental discovery) while simultaneously explaining the operative realms of life; however, there is no true scientific discipline that effectively allows for the sharing of different emotions and perceptions as the arts do. A printed book can be shared between a vast array of people, allowing individuals to travel without using their feet, but with their imagination. A painting shares a visual idea to which a speech could do no justice and music expresses emotion in ways that transcend language. The arts are a pivotal

aspect of the human experience because they allow us to express, translate, and comprehend the unfathomable concepts that dwell within the subconscious. The artistic realm encourages us to celebrate our intuition, uncertainty, and creativity while constantly searching for new ideas.

It may surprise some people that art is in fact an effective tool in mental health treatment, and in my own experience, it has proved to be wholly transformative. In their research article titled, “The Connection between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature”, authors Nobel and Stuckey argued and emphasized that “*creative expression can make a powerful contribution to the psychological healing process [and] has been embraced in many different cultures*” (Nobel, Par. 14). Art therapy truly leads to an incredible healing process and positive trajectory for the patients. The goal of art therapy is to incorporate the creative process to truly help people explore their self-expression while discovering novel ways to achieve personal insight and develop effective coping skills.

Art has only recently joined the fray of evidence-based counseling, even though artists of all kinds have acknowledged the therapeutic value of artistic output. People experiencing depression have been given a greater language of rehabilitation, setting new possibilities for healing, as art therapy has evolved as a genuine discipline of therapeutic intervention. Art therapy is primarily rooted in the idea that creative expression can foster mental well-being and healing. Art, whether creating it or viewing others' artwork, is used to aid in exploring people's emotions, develop self-awareness, cope with stress, and develop new skills. Some of the important techniques used in art therapy can include painting, drawing, sculpting, or collage. According to the article “How Art Therapy is Used to Make People Heal”, “*as the patients create their art, they may analyze what they have made and how it makes them feel. Through exploring their art, people can look for themes and conflicts that may be affecting their thoughts,*

emotions, and behaviors” (Cherry, Par. 4). People often wonder how an art therapy session varies from the average art class. While an art class is typically focused on teaching a certain technique or developing a specific finished product, art therapy places a striking emphasis on allowing their clients to focus on their inner experience. When creating art, people can focus on their own imagination, perception, and feelings. Clients and patients are encouraged to find inspiration to “*create art that expresses their inner world more than making something that is an expression of the outer world*” (Cherry, Par. 7). Additionally, in the American Journal of Public Health, the author, Jeremy Nobel, describes in detail the vital relationship between mental health and the vast realm of creative arts. Throughout the article, he argues how this apparent relationship and its impact on the enhancement of health status remains largely unknown. The research conducted, is in part, a continued investigation upon that subject and to help aid in further research. The engagement of the complexities within health sciences and art does not contradict science, but rather helps to benefit it. The focus of the potential of these creative areas is to help promote healing. There was a compulsive argument that stood out to me, which highlighted how incorporating arts in an individual’s healing process does not contradict any foundational medical/empirical standpoint. Rather, it complements the biomedical gospel with a warmer, and more holistic lens. Through imagination and creativity, human beings can rekindle and discover a reservoir of healing and love.

Before I embarked on my personal artistic journey, I decided to dip my toes and explore the data collected from various art therapy studies. In a research article titled: *Effectiveness of Art Therapy with Adult Clients in 2018 - What Progress Has Been Made?* the two authors, Regev and Yatziv, focused on twenty-seven detailed research studies that examined the effectiveness of art therapy on adult clients. The individuals who conducted this study divided the participants

into seven different categories: “*mental health clients, clients who are grappling trauma, prison inmates, clients who do not have a specific diagnosis but face daily challenges, the elderly, clients coping with many medical conditions, and cancer patients*” (Regev, Par. 1). The entire research paper was truly intriguing; however, the initial abstract really stood out to me. I really appreciated how the authors sought to recommend the expansion of art therapy for future research in the medical field. Art therapy is something that has not been explored in grandeur and detail; however, it was undoubtedly impressive to see how the authors were dedicated to take further strides forward to implement this healing practice into the realms of science and empiricism. It exemplifies the beauty behind this research as no pharmaceuticals were involved, and instead, the researchers focused on a gradual, safer, and natural approach.

MY ARTISTIC ENDEAVOR

My creative capstone endeavor ultimately revolved around the creation of a variety of art pieces that describe the human experience of mental health recovery. For years I have grappled with severe anxiety, eating disorders, hospitalization, and severe depression and art quickly became my recourse. Over the years, sketching evolved from something I did for fun in my free time, to something I did to impress people, to something that has now unveiled a channel to my inner self. Besides a typical talking therapy session, my personal therapy undertaking through doing art has been the only thing to help me heal the internal turmoil and emotional distress I experienced. I want to preface though, that I’m still a human being and frankly, one hell of a work in progress.

Every time I sit down to draw in my sketchbook, what ends up coming out is a direct reflection of how I am feeling at that moment, which outlines the goals of art therapy. The

sketchbook becomes a visual diary that illuminates feelings we never really realized we had. I have experienced art therapy in my own mental health journey, and my sketchbook has changed my life for the better. Along with the historical research I am conducting upon artists, playwrights, and authors - all of whom have suffered from mental illness - I created a final artistic portfolio of several artistic works that portray these feelings of mental turmoil that I have experienced first-hand. I dove into an abundance of phenomenal works by playwrights and artists alike, all of whom withstood the testament of trauma, isolation, and fear to name a few.

SARAH KANE

Sarah Kane's play, *4.48 Psychosis*, was the first piece of literature I read within my creative capstone timeline. And to put it simply, I had never read anything like it before. *4.48 Psychosis* was dark, distressing, and morbid, but true, inexplicable genius. Her work is not for the faint of heart as her sharp and caustic tongue, focused heavily on physical and psychological suffering. The play, which was originally performed in London a year after her death in 1999, is a collection of elliptical fragments, shattered and impassioned moments that appear to depict a mind in the throes of a major mental breakdown, ranting against everyone who does not understand. There are no names or locations given, prompting some critics to question whether it can even be classified as a play. Her previous work has been lauded and acclaimed, but *4.48 Psychosis*, her most recent piece of literature, has been shrouded in the shadows of what happened to its creator. But it's more than a plea for rescue from the depths; her writing has a stunning immediacy and accuracy to it, a building of tension that intensifies as you read on. Even if it harbored death due to a wounded mind, it was nevertheless brimming with vitality and life.

"Embrace beautiful lies - the chronic insanity of the sane"

— Sarah Kane, 4.48 Psychosis

Even amidst her darkest moments, when nothing was clear to her, Kane still managed to speak in a beautifully somber prose that was characterized with utmost eloquence and clarity. The cadence of her words complimented the string of images we couldn't help but create in our mind. Whether she sought direction or symbolism within her prose, *4.48 Psychosis* was the remnants of her heart and soul, radiating across a page, and it was brutal and vengeful, yet forgiving at the same. And frankly, I don't think Sarah was pleading for empathy either. For her final piece was an ode, a declaration of love and hate, a farewell.

Built to be lonely

to love the absent.

Find me

Free me

from this

corrosive doubt

futile despair

horror in repose.

I can fill my space

fill my time

but nothing can fill this void in my heart.

— Sarah Kane, 4.48 Psychosis

She invented a lyrical masterpiece of modern theatre: a deeply sensed and tremendously haunting evocation of inconsolable mental suffering. Kane would be dead by the time *4.48 Psychosis* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London. She took her own life at King's College Hospital in South London in February 1999 three days after attempting suicide. And looking back now, the play itself seemed to accurately foretell events. It appeared to depict the

psyche in the throes of collapse, roaring against physicians who do not (or would not) comprehend, as a series of elliptical shards, shattered and emotionally lacerating. Sarah Kane built venues in which counter-institutional tales might thrive. In my journey of discovering and connecting to *4.48 Psychosis*, I traced my own history of defiance, endurance, heartbreak, and of course, loss.

“I know. I’m angry because I understand, not because I don’t.”
— Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis*



Lone Shelter, Spring 2020.

I hope that the purpose behind my artwork will aid in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and to inspire people who are afraid to seek help to do so. My first piece is a graphic representation of my innermost feelings – the simultaneous experience of anxiety and

depression contorted into this suffocating miasma. I would also like to preface that completing my digital artwork helped guide me through personal ailment, leading me to pursue deeper reflection. And that to me, is one of the greatest gifts of art. It's vastly difficult to properly accumulate my creative thoughts with my working mind, as the two sometimes act as separate halves of me. My passion for creativity and art guides my eagerness within the empirical realm, and vice versa. The two can bounce off each other or detract from one another in a matter of an instant. Therefore, our mind, the deep and hollow grotto, we as humans possess, is stunningly fragmented. It is forever worn and tattered yet revived and constantly growing.

Oftentimes in the past, I had convinced myself I was 'brainsick' incapable of ever healing. There are still times I experience such a feeling, and Lone Shelter marks itself as an ode to my personal navigation of my own mental health, the darker side of it albeit. I felt imprisoned in my own brain, a seemingly guilty victim of my own past, present, and future. Art therapy does not have to mark itself as an activity in which you're *only* allowed to draw rainbows and butterflies and all things happy. You are the creator. And the last thing you want to do is pursue an artistic endeavor – whether it's a simple sketch design or voluminous oil painting – that isn't from within *you*. I told myself that it's okay I had a gloomier start with my first piece, because it was right for *me*. My current state during that time of brainstorming and internal exploration was not something grand or miraculous, but the exhilaration began the moment I pressed the pen onto the surface.

ANTON CHEKHOV

To this day, Anton Chekhov is renowned as one of the world's greatest playwrights and storytellers. But of course, the sanctity of his genius came with a massive toll: he was forced to

contend with the truth of human misery throughout his life. His opinions on pain and the degradation in society were affected by his family's bankruptcy and existence in poverty in Moscow, and his brief stint of medical practice in Moscow supplied him with enough insight to compose over one hundred and fifty short stories. His perceptions of the consequences of pain on persons he encountered profoundly affected these stories. His visit to the Russian penal settlement of Sakhalin inspired *Ward No. 6*, a short story that explores the notion that anguish is an unavoidable part of life. Anton Chekhov had a brilliant mind and he somehow managed to synthesize a stunning mastery of the human condition. Oftentimes, he satirizes the idea that pain is inextricably linked to human life and should be regarded as unavoidable and ignored, depicting the stoic attitude of pain and misery as a way for certain individuals to overlook or disregard the misfortune of others.

“Life’s all done, just as if I never even lived it ...”

— Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*

Over the course of my creative capstone journey, I had the privilege of dutifully analyzing some of Chekhov’s greatest works of literature. Prior to my second introduction to him, my initial engagement with some of Chekhov's works was seemingly ephemeral, as it was for many American readers who first met him in their undergraduate career. I was twenty-one when I first read him, and I hadn’t the slightest notion of what his works focused on. And, despite their seeming simplicity, accessibility, and consistency, Chekhov's stories—especially the best ones—do not appear to be easily accessible to the unexciting youth. Chekhov, on the other hand, appears to me to be a storyteller for adults, whose work becomes useful and beautiful by calling attention to seasoned feelings, complex and challenging responses, and narrow moral issues within greater, unifying conundrums, any aspect of which – if we experienced them in our

dynamic, swift time on earth – may very well allude to an even more refined recognition. Chekhov's stories appear completely in sync with life, and we can appreciate them in a rather domestic manner. He never makes us feel like life isn't worth living, completely helpless, or even wholly dependent upon his intellect. Instead, he compares his creativity to ours, centered on what we can interpret as an act of compassion, with the message that reality is much as we know it in our struggles to accept, embrace and move along. His precise prose of convoluted human conscience and reaction, his perspective on what's hilarious and tragic, and his transparent observation of life embraced, all seem to mirror our own. We believe his tales might be written today, published in *The New Yorker*, and read with zeal and joy for their insight—with no changes or footnotes to accommodate for periodicity or global traceability.

This refreshing aptness underlines not only the creative impulse's continuity and preservation of life, but it also informs us that we, too, are continuous and are everlasting. How we feel about a dying wife, our wedded lover, our ill-suited suitor, our allegiances to our tattered community, about the overpowering sense in which life is just too dense with objective truth and much too lacking in perception of the actual truth – all of this was exactly how Russians felt long ago, when a story was evaluated to be a rescuing response, just as it is now. Chekhov helps people feel validated, protected inside our human weakness, and perhaps a sliver of optimism in our ability to cope, organize, and achieve golden clarity.

This man is without a doubt, a true, literary genius. After indulging in his works, I believe that it is only natural to express Chekhov's candor about humanity's absolute existence. We share the resolve that almost all our individual dynamics could be lifted into direct, vivid language. We share a belief that life (especially in our existence with one another) is a surface just under the tangible turmoil in our field of view, that we must aspire to craft a compelling nuance so we can

release our desperation. And finally, we share a promising instinct that more of ourselves – especially those parts we feel ostracized from – can be elevated and filled into the primordial grotto or our mind through expressive and clear language.

“Perhaps man has a hundred senses, and when he dies only the five senses that we know perish with him, and the other ninety-five remain alive.”

— Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*

Chekhov truly believed in the significance of attempting to alleviate human suffering. His short tales provide several illustrations of the impact of pain on individuals as well as human responses to other people's suffering. Additionally, he gained immense knowledge on human misery – whether it was depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or schizophrenia – while stationed as a physician on the Sakhalin military outpost. He understood the vitality of empathy in fostering patient-doctor trust. Compassion on the part of the doctor is an essential element of the process of healing, benefiting both the patient and the physician.

First and foremost, I advise anyone to read these beautiful stories for enjoyment, and to avoid consuming them hastily. The longer you dwell, the more you revisit and reread, the more you'll feel touched by this brilliant mind who, despite time and distance, shared a universe we understand and recognize as his utmost privilege to heal it through his language. I'm not exactly sure what it is about Chekhov that I admire, however if I had to pinpoint it, I'd say it would be some of his most pitiful protagonists, such as Lubov Andreyevna or the anxious and vulnerable Treplev from *The Seagull*. Or, to put it another way, his storylines have a subtle quality to them that brings his pieces to light in a manner that is frequently unequaled. His four major works are also linked by recurring themes. Like the siblings in *Three Sisters*, the characters in *Uncle Vanya* debate the harmful consequences of inaction in detail. Chekhov was always about devoting one's

personal existence to one's profession and, to a certain extent, making themselves valuable. His words from afar seem so deceptively simple at times, but undeniably masterful pieces of prose.

“Do you see that tree? It is dead but it still sways in the wind with the others. I think it would be like that with me. That if I died, I would still be part of life in one way or another.”

— Anton Chekhov, *The Three Sisters*

Anton Chekhov celebrated these mixed states of being. While his works may alternatively be interpreted as tragic social commentaries, I tend to steer toward the other direction. Because Chekhov was neither existentialist nor a nihilist, I see his piece as a melodrama aimed at awakening his audience to the moment and making a genuine pledge to love and discover that spark within you. He maintains the perfect synchronicities between empiricism and empathy, and although he was a keen proponent of emotional tangibility, he never let his emotion ‘over-sway’ his logistical perspective.

DREAMS

A Dream Play, by August Strindberg was a key component to my creative capstone project. It was a courageous take and a bold work of art that reflects the multi-layered struggles of life. To begin, I dare to say that I comprehended everything that unfolded in August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. Strindberg's work maintains the novel perspective on dreams turning into our reality, which ultimately challenges the audience and their understanding of the complete narrative. The story revolves around Agnes, a goddess's daughter who wishes to visit Earth to gain a better understanding of humanity.

*“Every moment of enjoyment
Brings to someone else a sorrow,
But your sorrow gladdens no one,*

For from sorrow naught but sorrow springs. ”

— August Strindberg, *A Dream Play*

A *Dream Play*, in my eyes, is one of the first harbingers of surreal actuality and dreams in which the reader can view practically anything in evocative ways. I like how it's written in the style of a dream, with the same nonsensical reasoning. The plot moves through one event to the next swiftly, so it's not dulled at all. This section from the prologue puts it all rather brilliantly:

“Time and space do not exist, and the consciousness is above everything. And above all is the consciousness of the dreamer...”

— August Strindberg, *A Dream Play*

A *Dream Play* was August Strindberg's most beloved work, but it was also "*the child of my heaviest anguish*," according to him. Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, like Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, is not only one of the artist's most notable achievements, but also one with dreamy and surrealist and fantastically nightmarish elements that resulted from a traumatic event. Is it necessary to be insane and/or to experience madness to make great art? It appears to triumph over the latter often. The nameless poet, who strives to recreate the very first moments humanity was created from clay, will forever ingrain itself as my favorite moment from this respective piece. During the nebulous – the dreamy and celestial process of generation – which flows from one fragmented connection with clay to another, the speaker's mind shifts from euphoria to cynicism, satire, mockery, and back to bliss and rapture again. This sheds light upon the dichotomy between our corporeal self, a hollowed, desolate grotto.

“ . . . And since dreams are more often painful than happy, a tone of melancholy, and of compassion for all living things, runs through the swaying narrative. Sleep, supposedly a liberator, is often a torturer, but when torment is at its worst, an awakening reconciles the sufferer with reality. No matter how agonizing reality can be, at this moment, compared with a tormenting dream it is a pleasure.

— August Strindberg, *A Dream Play*



Slumbrous Descent, Fall 2021.

Strindberg's dementia had increased as he grew more recognized and established his legacy. He transitioned from writing linear plays that placated all spectators within his audience in creating works that test the bounds of space, acting technique, and especially the public's psyche. Strindberg decided to convert his feelings into a superb performance after going through a series of particularly acute psychotic episodes. And even after analyzing his rhetoric for months, I have still yet to decode the hidden meaning. *But was there even one?* That is the beauty of dreams. His play was written as a jumbled contemplation on how we see our visions and his endeavor to decipher their essence. Jumbled. Visions. Sleep. That marks the trifecta of dreams as we escape into a void, or perhaps an Edenic existence. While the play intentionally

defies theatrical conventions, the outcome is nothing short of stunning. Each set comprises recurring interpretive motifs and individual set pieces, just as one's dream is rich with artifacts and thoughts from their past. One of most conspicuous recurrent items is a mystery door, in which many people are fascinated. The protagonists' fascination reached the audience, with every individual demanding to investigate and realize the truth and hidden meaning. When explored on a profound level, the recurrent thematic elements of different periods in the performance mimic a person's dreams, ethereal fascinations, and nightmares too. The mysticism that emerges from them, leads us to a state of bewilderment. But it's the perplexity that our dreams provide that leave us with something even more magnificent than we could have ever dreamed of.

Life is complex, terrible, difficult, and wicked, but when we awaken from nightmares, we welcome it for a brief period to relieve the anguish of slumber. In the evenings, sleeping provides a respite from the stresses of living. For the brief instant when we switch from sleep to awake and conversely twice per day, we dodge the perpetual burden of rational and irrational suffering. The conscious and the subconscious. His outlook on life was grim. It was bleak yet empty, to say the least, and he understood and sensed that he too was human outside of his own dual interpretation of life itself. He effortlessly established the pendulum between the trenches of depression and utter rapture. A culpable sufferer who is both prey and predator, impassioned and proactive. Yet, we are creators of dread, a surreal entity.



A Tranquil Protest, Winter 2022.

A Dream Play all comes together, and as the story nears its conclusion, everything becomes increasingly evident. Readers, and the audience alike, realize that it is all a dream, and it all dies in flames, with the play's ethereal castle's crown of chrysanthemums – something you would see in a classic fairytale – finally ceases its blooming. For it has perished. You, as the reader, wake up abruptly. Strindberg's words seemingly placed me in a trance, and I could not help but feel as if I too, were living in a dream. It kept me centralized, utterly immersed in this hypnotic trance, and when I awoke, I found myself wanting to see even more.

A Tranquil Protest marks one of my final pieces created for my creative project. I wanted it to be an ode to not only myself – for prevailing and simply making it – but to Vincent Van

Gogh, one of the greatest artistic minds. My artwork gravitated inspiration from Van Gogh's color palette, particularly the warm and radiant beams of gold balanced by the deep azure tones. Cadmium yellow. Prussian blue. These were the colors I wanted to use to describe my dreams. I no longer was having nightmares – these brutal panic attacks that would suspend me from this looming puppet master called depression. I saw my grandfather in this dream I depicted onto paper. He was effervescent, ephemeral, and full of life. But that was only his presence. All I saw in front of me was this floating castle. A castle. Not some looming fortress or an illustrious bastion. It was a castle to me. In my dream, it had a run-down and rugged beauty, but I truly believe it personified my grandfather. I had never met him, but I know he was a kind soul. I purposefully incorporated my Korean heritage into this piece and distinguished his castle (I like to think of my own mind palace too) inspired by the small shacks he spent most of his childhood in rural Korea. This was the final stretch for me, but I embraced every waking and sleeping moment of it. I don't believe it was lucid dreaming, but the very fact I saw my grandfather in my dreams, was a true sign and reflection of my personal growth through artwork. I was feeling better. Closer to my dreams. Happier.

Art therapy combined with our own internal power poses imaginative possibilities. This was an endeavor I knew I was ready to embark on. And looking back, I'm grateful I did. Offering expression to difficult emotions, thoughts, or visions can be far less terrifying than a piece of clay or a blank piece of paper or canvas. Scribbling on paper may inevitably bring loneliness to light, spark debate, or provide a catharsis for a melancholy notion. Engaging in artwork, whether it's watching a movie, listening to your favorite song, reading a novel, or engaging in any drawing of sorts, provides the greatest emotional outlet. We saturate our daily lives with our own complex, beautiful thoughts, and sometimes it's hard to interpret them. But

just like we're told to 'write down your feelings' expressing our thoughts and emotions on the canvas has undeniable worth. Art therapy is an excellent method to symbolically portray any troubles you face, which is how the subconscious and dually, our unconscious communicate with us. Art therapy may be a strong instrument for healing when utilized in conjunction with the strength of the individual's deep subconscious to offer alternatives through their own creativity. artwork. If used in a manner, we can express the problem we face, and offer a solution at hand. We all have within us the innate consciousness and passion of a dreamer. The delusion we share. The beauty beholds. The love we give. Through this artistic and creative endeavor, I was able to simply *be, be, be*. I have all the confidence in the world that you *can*, and you *will*.

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