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Emotion and The Visual Arts

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Senior Honors Project

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements
of the Westover Honors Program**

Westover Honors Program

May, 2022

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Abstract

The emotional aspect of the visual arts has been researched and reviewed for decades, and many artists have completed work with the purpose to instill an emotional response in the viewer. How are emotions communicated and perceived through the visual arts? Utilizing knowledge from centuries of art theory, other emotion-focused artists, and the science behind the core emotions, I completed five multimedia pieces in complete isolation whilst triggering only one singular core emotion per piece. I used my understanding of myself and my emotional responses to center each piece around a different schedule, diet, look, and routine complimentary to the selected emotion. The emotions include five of the seven basic emotions identified by psychologist Paul Eckman; enjoyment, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. This research and performance piece will provide insight as to how emotions can be used as an artistic tool, as well as how emotions can be translated through the visual arts from the artist to the viewer. My media and medium for the series will be: acrylic paint, ink, charcoal, and graphite on canvas that is 5'6" (my height) by 2 feet. I reviewed each piece on how well it communicates the selected emotion by evaluating art theories in relation to how they are implicated in my series, and also by providing insight to the experience of isolation and emotion in this manner.

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Literature Review

“Emotions are a process, a particular kind of automatic appraisal influenced by our evolutionary and personal past, in which we sense that something important to our welfare is occurring, and a set of psychological changes and emotional behaviors begins to deal with the situation.” (Ekman, 2022, para. 1) Every human experiences emotion, alongside several other species. While there are differing views among experts, most emotion scientists agree that there are at least five core emotions. However, Dr. Ekman’s research shows the strongest evidence to date of seven universal facial expressions of emotions. These are the most basic emotions said to be experienced by all humans regardless of sex, culture, or age. The seven emotions include: Anger, contempt, fear, enjoyment, sadness, disgust, and surprise. I will be focusing on anger, fear, enjoyment (happiness), sadness, and disgust for my performance piece.

The Philosophy of Art by Steven Davies and Philip Alperson discusses the nature of emotions and how they are triggered, and state that “the cognitive elements of emotion typically include characteristic beliefs and desires.” For example, for someone to experience fear, they must believe they are in danger; or for someone to experience enjoyment they must have a reason for being happy. Davies and Alperson continue to discuss how people’s reactions from emotions, such as crying or blushing, are justified by natural responses. They do also elaborate on other emotions rather than the basic five to seven emotions and state that certain emotions can be brought up by several different beliefs, and also be shown in several different ways. One such emotion is patriotism, which could vary widely depending on the person and their background. The emotion of patriotism would, also, not really show any type of physical reaction and could have various different reactions from person to person. These types of emotions become far too

complicated and abstract to try and utilize in my process, in comparison to the basic core emotions that every human experiences in relatively the same way (Davies, Alperson, 2016).

Emotions are usually brought about by natural associations, yes, but how did those associations lead to those emotions like patriotism, stage fright, happy tears, or other confusing emotional experiences? Three ways have been identified in which the viewer is instilled with emotion, in regards to the relationship between an object and the person. These include: *infection, communication, and articulation*. The experience of *infection* is when the viewer is infected by the same emotion as the perceived object. The experience of *communication* is when the viewer's emotions are responsive to emotions of the perceived object. And the experience of *articulation* is when the viewer's emotion is comprehended from the perceived object (Freeman, 2014).

“The distinction is not merely concerned with whether the perceiver's emotion and the perceived emotion are the same or different. What is important about the difference between infection, communication and articulation is a difference in how the emotional condition of the perceived object is related to the emotional condition of the perceiving agent. When my experience of the world involves an emotion infecting me, something about the object of the experience causes me to feel a particular emotion; the perceived emotion dictates the perceiver's emotion. When my experience of the world involves the communication of an emotion, I respond to my perception of the object's emotion with my own emotional response towards the object. In this case the object does not dictate the emotional aspect of my experience: I do not share in the emotion that has been communicated to me, but I have another emotion, one that is directed towards the person who communicated with me, and which seems an appropriate response to the emotion communicated to me. When my experience of the world involves an articulation of emotion, I am doing for myself something that the perception has prompted or encouraged me to do: rather than changing how I feel, perceiving the emotion is the occasion for crystallizing my own emotion. We might observe the way in which the significance of the object changes. In infection, the object did all the work and I did none. In communication, we are partners in my experience: the object poses the question that I must work out how to answer. In articulation, the object prompts me to do something for myself: it puts me in mind of engaging with some aspect of my own emotions, but it does not do this for me,” (Freeman, 2014)

These three interactions can be used to understand *how* exactly viewers get emotional when viewing an art piece, as in, how much communicating must be done between the piece and

the viewer to invoke a desired emotion. An artist can consider the desired emotion that they wish to convey, but also consider the way in which they want the viewer to interact with the emotions. These relationships also demonstrate how people can get multiple emotions, depending on how they interact with an art piece. If the artist had not considered all of the interactions of emotion while creating the piece, then the message could easily get misconstrued. For example, if the viewer is looking at a piece and having a communicative interaction with the emotions of the piece, it may leave more room for the viewer to create their own emotions, rather than the ones the artist was trying to convey. It is not wrong for this to happen, of course, because this is the end goal for many visual artists, but, I believe this is an important aspect to the creative process, especially for artists who specialize in emotions. I wanted my series to communicate each emotion as accurately as possible, so I opted for my series to utilize the *infection* interaction because this puts the emotional control more on the artist's side rather than the viewer's.

Communication and *Articulation* feel as though it would give the viewer too much control over their own emotions, leading to an influx of many different emotions; perhaps leading to feeling emotions more elaborate than the basic five to seven. I also feel as though if articulation were to be the desired interaction with my series, it would need to be abstract and completely accurate to the rules of visual communication in order to correctly emulate each emotion.

Art has been known for centuries to create emotional responses in the viewer, and it has even been shown now to be able to produce a variety of different mental and behavioral consequences (outputs). *Affect*, when specific emotions are evoked from the act of viewing. *Physiology*, when physical changes happen to the body such as increased heart rate or skin conductivity. *Action*, such as gestures, eye movements, and physical movement. *Appraisals*, when someone likes or finds beauty in something. *Meaning-making*, such as finding connections,

learning, and challenging ourselves. *Novelty*, when art impacts one's visual or perceptual experience. *Transcendence*, feelings of sudden change or epiphany. *Aesthetic mode*, when someone experiences an emotion involving a state of detachment from everyday life perceptions. *Negative effect*, when art creates a negative emotional association with the viewer. And, *Self-adjustment*, changes made to one's personality or worldview because of art (Pelowski, M., 2015).

This is a wide variety of outputs that can occur simply from viewing a piece of art, however some (such as *transcendence*) suggest a longer exposure to the art be necessary. I was attempting to achieve the outputs of affect and negative affect when creating my pieces, however I am also hoping some people have a physiology output as well (like sweating, anxiety, temperature change). Because art can have such a strong effect on people to the point of epiphany, health, and self-adjustment, it is perspicuous that visual art and psychology are connected.

“Image is in painting, and is an effect of painting. We cannot understand the concepts separately.” This was stated by Jaqueline Lichenstien at a seminar that was featured in the book *What is an Image?* by James Elkins and Maja Naef while discussing the nature of viewing art as an image or as a painting. Many interesting topics were brought up, such as how when viewing a still life painting, there isn't much to talk about in regards to the actual image - it's usually just a plain scene. Although most will talk about the quality of the painting - the strokes, the style - many viewers lose focus of the overall image. However, when looking at a more abstract image, it becomes more about the image itself, rather than the quality of the paint. As Lichtenstein stated, we cannot separate the image and painting when viewing art. I feel as though this is because a lot of the overall piece is lost when only considering the image itself, as most of the

painterly marks add even more depth to the quality of an image. Such as, when a painting features intense texture, this changes the overall image due to the now three-dimensional aspect of the piece, as well as the highlights and shadows caused by the texture. Not only this, but many artists use emotionally charged marks that are meant to be viewed as the action of painting - action painting. Jackson Pollock is a painter known for his splattered, colorful paintings in which he captured the essence of the moment in which he created the painting. It's important to see the image, but also consider the actions taken to create the image, as well as the process of creating the piece; this adds to the overall experience of viewing art.

I am not very familiar with action painting, nor do I utilize texture that often in my pieces, however after reading through this seminar I considered brandishing each piece with more than just the image. I personally had only thought about the outcome of my 'image' when creating a piece, but after, I was considering the way in which I would go about these images and how different painterly marks could change the image, or bring about other associations with the piece itself (changing the emotional association). There are several aspects to a completed piece that often go unnoticed to the untrained eye, but altogether create a piece that is more than just the image itself.

Several visual artists throughout history have utilized emotion as subject matter in their work. One such artist is Mark Rothko, who was very well known for the emotions people felt while viewing his paintings - large, abstract, and colorful rectangular shapes. This style was a technique called "Colour Field" which was closely related to abstract expressionism. At one point of his career, he had a personal endeavor where he tried to replicate the 'religious experience' within the viewer that he had also felt whilst making the piece. James Elkins stated about Rothko's shows:

“... If they stick it out and keep looking, they begin to feel much stronger emotions. They are the ones most likely to cry. Their entries in the visitor’s books are usually short— a line or two. “It is a visually and viscerally stunning experience,” one writes, and another says, “I can’t help but leave this place with tears in my eyes.” The books have dozens of similar entries: “Was moved to tears, but feel like some change in a good direction will happen.” “My first visit moved me to tears of sadness.” “Thank you for creating a place for my heart to cry.” “Probably the most moving experience I have had with art.” A few are very brief, and I wondered if the visitors were still crying as they wrote: “This makes me fall down.” “The silence pierces deeply, to the heart.” “Once more I am moved— to tears.” “A religious experience that moves one to tears.” “Tears, a liquid embrace.” And the saddest one: “I wish I could cry,” (Elkins, J. and Naef, M. 2011).

As many other people in the art world have thought - what is it about giant squares with varying colors that gives viewers this extreme emotional experience? As Elkins mentioned, it was the people who chose to sit and look at the pieces for a long time, as if the people who did not look long enough did not get the same effect that the others did. This can be related back to the different interactions between the piece and the viewer discussed earlier, as perhaps this is a form of articulation taking place between the work and the viewers. Since they must view the pieces for a long amount of time, perhaps that is the time it takes to respond to the emotions within themselves that the pieces extract. Rothko utilized layering colors in his pieces to attempt to achieve the perfect color relationships through using several different shades and tints of the same color. Perhaps the layers add a dimension to the piece that takes a long time for the eyes to digest; to actually see all the layers showing through.

Considering the experiences he reproduced in his work, Rothko showed that art pieces need not be explicitly representative of anything in order to produce an emotional output. This isn’t just chance, either, because he deliberately tried to recreate these experiences that he had, and he did so successfully a majority of the time. There is also scientific evidence of abstract art engaging many different aspects of the brain, suggesting that it engages with the distributed brain networks involved with aesthetic experience. “These networks interact at the interface of perceptual (visual association cortical), emotional and evaluative (insula, orbitofrontal cortical,

subcortical) and semantic (antero-lateral and medial temporal) processing,” (Cohen, et al. 2016). This ensures that abstraction and conceptualism are viable styles of work for art therapy, communicating emotions, and further psychological investigation. Color is such a large part of conceptual and abstract art, and so this leads into thinking how color can affect a person’s emotions, and how it could be utilized correctly during the artistic process. It has been proven that colors can affect peoples’ opinions; such as how the color red changes how men view women.

“In 5 experiments, the authors demonstrate a parallel effect in humans: Red, relative to other achromatic and chromatic colors, leads men to view women as more attractive and more sexually desirable. Men seem unaware of this red effect, and red does not influence women’s perceptions of the attractiveness of other women, nor men’s perceptions of women’s overall likeability, kindness, or intelligence,” (Elliot, A., Niesta, D., 2008)

Red has also been proven to enhance concentration, compared to blue which can enhance creativity.

“We demonstrate that red (versus blue) color induces primarily an avoidance (versus approach) motivation (study 1, $n = 69$) and that red enhances performance on a detail-oriented task, whereas blue enhances performance on a creative task (studies 2 and 3, $n = 208$ and 118),” (Meta, R., Zhu, R., 2009).

In the context of color theory, warm colors (red-based colors) are considered to be active and dynamic, while cool colors (blue-based colors) are generally considered calming and dependable. Aris Sherin states, however, that science in this field of study is very underdeveloped and therefore, very difficult to truly induce a certain emotion or action based on color alone. However undeveloped the science is, color is extremely important to my practice because even though it can be hard to create a mood based on color alone, the use of color theory alongside subject matter, line, shape, etc. is extremely influential over the conversation of the piece.

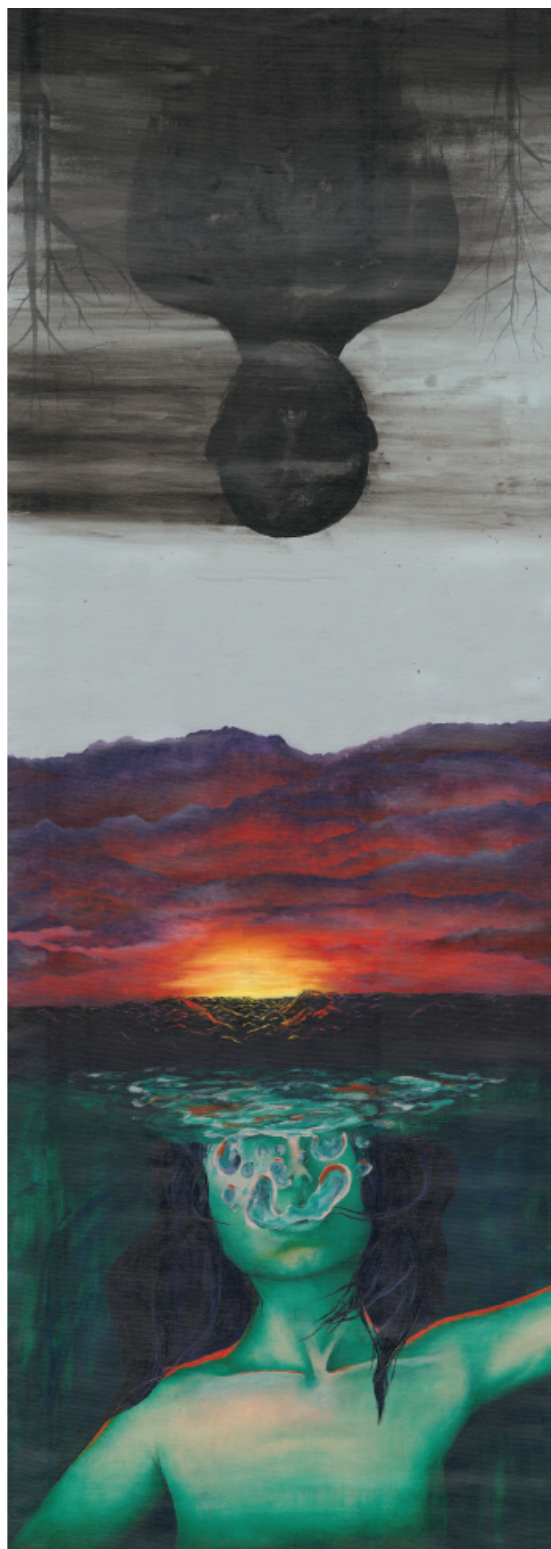
Process

My process for completing the series included deciding many restrictions to my daily life in an attempt to best control the emotional state I was in for that piece. I first developed rules that would be the same for each piece regardless of the emotion I was focusing on:

I cannot leave my apartment, I cannot communicate with others, I must spend five days in succession working on the piece, and I must complete the piece by the end of day five.

These rules were standard for each piece, however, they were not followed perfectly due to a few interruptions in my process that could not have been avoided. Though, they were followed through the majority of my process. I developed most of the restrictions for each piece depending on which emotion I was working on by using knowledge of my emotions, my emotional responses, and my typical schedule. I also utilized research-backed techniques in my schedule according to the emotion I was trying to induce. I also generally avoided using any type of social media, but I used Pinterest and Google for reference photos as well as a few others as needed depending on my process for that piece¹. These rules vary widely and appear random, but they are curated to me personally and may not have the same effect on others as they did to me. Developing the perfect routine for each emotion was the most difficult task of this project due to the instability of emotions as well as the fact that there was no guarantee that these changes would instill that emotion within me. I also kept a journal throughout each piece in order to record my exact feelings and thoughts, and I will be referencing that often.

¹ Tumblr for *Sadness*, Youtube as needed for references or information, and Instagram for references of other art



Sadness, 2021

I began with Sadness, as I had already been experiencing a depressive episode, so it seemed like the most fitting piece to begin with. Sadness is an emotion I am very familiar with, so it was not difficult at all to trigger myself while in isolation. The rules for Sadness were as follows:

I followed a schedule similar to that of a person struggling with depression. I set no alarm and woke up whenever I did, and I went to sleep whenever I felt like it. I did not take any breaks from working on my piece except for bathroom breaks, food breaks, and sleeping. I only ate “unhealthy” foods, such as ramen and microwavable meals. I only wore the color black and I only changed my clothes once on day three. I brushed my teeth once every other day. I let my room be messy (by my standards) which included an unmade bed, clothes on the floor, and dirty dishes. I added personally triggering photos to my wall to view everyday, placed specifically so that they would be some of the first items I saw in the morning. And, I only listened to music from a playlist on Spotify that I curated for sadness. This schedule was inspired by the things that I personally do when I am in a depressive episode, as well as some other behaviors that are commonly associated with sadness.

The actual completion of Sadness was absolute agony. The fact that I knew I was trapped in this environment for five straight days made my sadness even more intense. On day one at 3:47 p.m., from my journal, I stated, “Probably won’t start on canvas until tomorrow, need to spend time in this mindset to truly capture how I feel. So, so bad.” And, by day two, I had stated, “It’s difficult to get out of bed. I am depressed - or, more like, in a depressive BPD (borderline personality disorder) episode.”

The most difficult part of creating Sadness was trying to pinpoint my emotion into a concise and clear message through my painting. When I am sad, I feel as though I am scattered in every direction, and it took several sketches to combine my personal experiences with a visually appealing layout that would also communicate sadness effectively. Even after finalizing my sketch, the actual piece turned out very different - which was a common theme amongst several of my emotions. By day two I had begun on the painting, and the majority of my time from this point forward was spent painting until I was finished. Painting in isolation for the first time was a surreal experience in itself; time lost meaning, thoughts became concentrated, and I lost myself in the process of creating this painting. I remember finishing this piece and feeling as though I had no sadness left to feel, but I was numb.

Sadness includes an image of myself at the bottom, drowning underwater. There is a beautiful sunset in the middle, which then fades into a gray sky. And, at the very top, is another version of myself, except as a shadow. The bottom version of myself is a person who is succumbing to the stress of trying to not fall into sadness; drowning. I included the sunset and vivid colors because of the calmness before the dark; I wanted to have the essence of falling into a depressive episode.

I feel as though the emotion of sadness conveyed through this piece may not be as explicit as I had wanted it to be. This could be due to the color relationships I used, as usually a vibrant, colorful palette is associated with more energetic emotions such as happiness or anger. However, I utilized the grayscale color scheme at the top half of the painting in an attempt to balance the color composition, as well as try and create a sense of conflict between the two versions of myself. Regardless of my intentions, an inexperienced viewer may feel different emotions whilst viewing Sadness, such as contempt or fear. However, a majority of the viewers

who have seen Sadness without context responded solemnly to the piece; this is my personal critique of the piece.



Anger, 2021

Following Sadness was Anger, which also happened to be scheduled during a period of mania I was experiencing; It was fairly easy to trigger the feeling of anger, similarly to sadness. The rules for Anger were as follows:

I set no alarm and woke up whenever I did, and I went to sleep whenever I felt like it. I did not take any breaks from working on my piece except for bathroom breaks, food breaks, and sleeping. I only ate unseasoned grilled cheese sandwiches, ramen, broccoli, rice, and oatmeal and I could only drink coffee until 5 p.m.². I did not change my clothes at all, and I did not brush my teeth at all. I let my room be messy for Anger as well. I only listened to music from a playlist on Spotify that I curated for anger. And, I had to journal everyday about my anger, with no restrictions. This schedule was inspired by things that I know will annoy or bother me.

Anger was actually one of my favorite periods of isolation because even though I was experiencing this intense amount of anger and stress, I was painting and able to express these feelings. I kept up with my journal very frequently throughout *Anger*, but it was mostly notes on my painting process with hardly any commentary to my actual emotions. I was very focused on my painting and the process, and out of the series I spent the most time completing this piece. Similar to Sadness, I spent the first day conceptualizing the painting; but unlike Sadness, the completed piece was very similar to the sketch created on day one. I feel as though this can be attributed to how I feel when I am angry, because when I am in a situation where I experience anger I feel as though there is only one path to take; in other words my viewpoint becomes very narrow and close-minded. It wasn't very difficult to create a sketch, either, because I had several outside factors contributing to my anger from before I began my isolation for this piece.

I utilized a monochromatic red color scheme for this piece for a few reasons; To simplify the color palette in order to create a more direct 'mood' to the piece, and for the properties of

² In order to induce anxiety.

aggression and violence often associated with the color red. This, I feel, was a strong factor in building the overall emotion of anger. I also included the element of fire in this painting, for its obvious wild, raging nature. In addition to the fire, I included a forest fire raging across the mountains for the symbolism of uncontrollable mass destruction. There are also several personal references in this piece, but altogether, I believe this piece entirely captures the emotion I was feeling during this period of isolation, and even that this piece communicates its emotion the clearest of all of the paintings in this series.



Happiness, 2021

The next piece was Happiness (enjoyment), and unfortunately the isolation for this piece was scheduled one day after I finished Anger; Which meant that I didn't have adequate time to recover and recuperate before beginning another period of isolation. Feeling burnt out, happiness was a difficult emotion to try and keep consistent throughout the five days. This piece, however, is my personal favorite piece out of the entire series. The rules for Happiness were as follows:

I woke up before 10 a.m. in the morning, and completed some form of light exercise after waking up. I went to sleep before 12 a.m. in the evening. I took breaks from working as needed. I ate three nutritious meals per day that I prepared myself, as well as drank eight cups of water per day. I completed all basic hygienic needs everyday, and changed my clothes everyday. I kept my room clean throughout the isolation period. I only listened to a Spotify playlist curated for happiness while I worked, as well as allowed myself to watch the cartoon *Total Drama Island*³ while I wasn't working. This schedule contains a lot of activities and lifestyle choices that are backed by science to improve a person's mood⁴.

Despite the scheduling issues and my lack of motivation, I was able to effectively create happiness within myself, and also communicate that feeling visually in a way that's understandable. The breaks that I allowed myself to take were the most crucial part of this piece, because when I felt I started lacking happiness I would take a break to gather my thoughts or meditate, and that allowed me to prevent any outlier emotions from affecting the piece. I actually spent about two days conceptualizing Happiness; I had a difficult time deciding between different subject matters, which I felt may speak towards my own emotional health considering how easily I conceptualized *Sadness* and *Anger*. However, once I finalized my sketch, I was very

³ Due to personally knowing that this show would not affect my mood, and that not having any entertainment throughout the other periods of isolation negatively affect my emotions.

⁴ Pross, N., et al. (2014). Effects of changes in water intake on mood of high and low drinkers. PloS one, 9(4), e94754. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094754>

satisfied with the composition and did not stray away from the original idea very much. I acknowledged the length of time it took before I started painting in my journal; “The reason I didn’t do much today (day one) was because I needed to make sure I was happy, and wanted today to be like a ‘self-care’ day.”

The composition of Happiness heavily utilizes symmetry because humans search for symmetry everywhere, and human beauty is even dictated by symmetry⁵. I wanted to make this piece feel peaceful and balanced, because, to me, that is the basis of happiness. I used a highly saturated color palette containing many greens, blues, and golds, and also included glitter and iridescent paints in this piece as well. Utilizing some natural symbolism, I included a bright, sunny day over an oasis within the Blue Ridge Mountains; these elements obviously include some influence from my personal life, but I feel as though the elements are strong and vague enough to create a feeling of happy nostalgia.

⁵ Grady, J., et al. (1998). Facial Symmetry and the Perception of Beauty.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225775645_Facial_Symmetry_and_the_Perception_of_Beauty



Fear, 2022

The fourth piece in this series was Fear, and during this period of isolation I experienced a disruption which resulted in breaking isolation for about three days. There had been an ice storm, which resulted in my apartment losing power for three days in the middle of winter. However, this interruption truly didn't have a negative effect on the piece, and I even feel as though this interruption may have contributed to feeling more fearful. Moving forward, the rules for Fear were as follows:

My roommate, Destiny Todd, assisted me by waking me up at random intervals throughout the five days. She would either scream, or play a song very loudly in order to startle me out of my sleep. In addition to this, she would also startle me at random times throughout each day by making a loud noise such as when she woke me up. I could eat what I wanted, but I could only drink coffee until 5 p.m. each day (to induce anxiety). I only listened to true crime podcasts while working rather than music. I removed all decorations from my bedroom walls. And, I watched a different horror film each evening before going to sleep that I had not seen before. Fear is an emotion that I feel is difficult to create by oneself, as that takes away the surprising element of fear.

Although I had to pause my process in the middle of my isolation, I feel as though the anxiety surrounding the electrical issue added onto the feeling of fear. I didn't mind fear, my anxiety was very high throughout the process, but it wasn't a dreadful experience. The true crime stories that I was listening to in combination with the power outage were actually very effective in keeping me generally fearful. My roommate scaring me was the most impactful part of my schedule, though, as those moments were filled with true, instinctual fear responses. Different statements I made about this included, "Des scared the (redacted) out of me this morning, she

screamed at the top of her lungs to wake me up,””Des doing good scaring me,” and, “Des woke me up by pounding my door, startled me.”

I completed a piece that, once again, contains a lot of personal symbolism, but I feel as though the imagery that I used can be relatable to everyone. I created an image featuring a nude, gory body in a shattered mirror, with a skeleton behind the mirror, in the middle of a snowy landscape. I attempted to create a cold-feeling ambiance to the piece and to keep the body appearing warm in order to create a simultaneous contrast between the two elements. This contrast adds tension to the piece that the viewer may or may not notice, but will influence the output of the viewer. I believe that overall this piece reads as fear, however, I do realize some of the elements present may have different connections for different people. Some people may feel more disgust while looking at gore, and others may feel fear. Overall, this isn't one of my stronger pieces in the series, but still communicates the emotion to an extent.



Disgust, 2022

The final piece of the Emotions series was *Disgust*. Knowing that the emotion of disgust may be one of the more difficult emotions to try and induce consistently for five days, I spent much time conceptualizing what changes I could make to my schedule that would disgust me. I landed on a few rules that I believed to be effective:

I did not take care of any hygienic needs throughout the five days. I let my room be messy. And, finally, I opted to break my personal diet of vegetarianism for this piece by eating one meal per day that contained meat.

Breaking my vegetarianism was the most effective rule of this piece in making me feel disgusted. My singular journal entry from day two states, “Meat been making me sick: bloated, cramps, lethargic. Haven’t started.” Personally, meat doesn’t bother me; however, because I have gone roughly eight years without eating meat, my body becomes sick if I eat meat. Because of this, I was only able to eat two meals that contained meat, on days one and two for lunch, because I had become so nauseated that it was difficult for me to do anything. Thus, I did spend less time on *Disgust* than the other pieces. I don’t see this as a failure, I see this as perfectly representational to the emotion I was feeling during these five days. I wouldn’t have expected *Disgust* to be a detailed, clean, neat painting - I actually expected less detail than I had included.

The colors I chose for this piece were honestly inspired by my lack of interest in them; I wanted to use a color palette that felt grotesque and random. So, I settled on yellows, reds, and blues and allowed the primary colors to mix together to create a muddiness to the piece. I used subject matter that I believe to be very general towards the emotion of disgust: Bugs, asymmetrical humans⁶, and unpredictability. The background is a random collection of colors, flies, lines, and shapes, with seemingly no reason. There is no reason; I just attempted to fill the

⁶ Grady, J., et al. (1998). Facial Symmetry and the Perception of Beauty.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225775645_Facial_Symmetry_and_the_Perception_of_Beauty

space as best as possible under the conditions I was facing. In the center stands a large, blue praying mantis-human hybrid with absurd proportions and bones peeking through the skin. I tried to let this piece truly flow from my mind, rather than plan it out as intensely as the previous pieces, in order to have that aspect of haphazardness that generally comes with the feeling of disgust. Overall, this piece is the most unique from the other pieces in my series, but, I feel as though the feeling of disgust is reflected back to the viewer in the same way that I felt it. Many viewers have told me that this piece is their least favorite, or that it looks underdeveloped, but I simply find those comments as evidence that my piece was effective in communicating the emotion of disgust to the viewer.

Conclusion

Overall, *Emotions* is an impactful example of how art and the viewer communicate, as well as how emotions as subject matter can be a universal experience. I believe that this series communicates the emotions effectively, but not perfectly. I attribute this to several factors, but mostly due to the state of isolation I was in; I feel as though since I was isolated, it was inevitable that these pieces would be a reflection of myself and contain many personal references. Especially considering my past work and how most of it contains personal subject matter. I don't see this as a negative per se, because making a piece that is representative of my experiences doesn't prevent others from connecting their experiences to the emotions I am replicating.

In my opinion, *Happiness* and *Anger* were my strongest pieces in the series as far as expressing the emotion associated with that piece. In summary, I utilized art theory as well as information from my literature review flawlessly for these pieces. I also feel as though on the emotional side of the pieces, the feelings of happiness and anger are more straightforward than the others I was replicating. As in, emotions such as these don't vary as much as the other emotions in terms of human experience. I think it's interesting how well *Happiness* turned out considering my experience during isolation. I want to reiterate that I believe this speaks to my personal emotional and mental health. I am someone who has experienced more negative emotions in my recent life, but was able to reproduce an image of happiness that is read clearly by most viewers. Does this represent the ability to mask emotions and create a false sense of enjoyment?

My weakest piece is *Sadness*, because overall I feel as though the emotion of sadness is very vague. It is a solemn piece, all in all, but I believe that this piece allows the viewer too

much control over what they get out of this painting. I have heard some people confuse this piece for my fear piece, which I feel is attributed to the figure drowning. Sadness, for me, is a confusing emotion to simply experience, let alone recreate, thus explaining why I struggled with conceptualizing a boldly sad image; I do not experience sadness in a bold fashion. I was conscious of the fact that I was having a difficult time turning my feelings into an image, and deliberately tried to avoid any typical sad-looking symbolism. I have seen many paintings about sadness, and there is a common theme amongst these pieces; hands over faces, tears, nighttime, and expressive brushstrokes. I attempted to include this imagery without *including* the imagery, thus the covered face, water, and bright sunset. However, this was a risk to take and I see now that there are changes I would definitely make in order to create a stronger piece.

The way I would change this performance piece if I were to complete another study would be to change many aspects of my isolation. I feel as though if I were able to truly isolate myself by being in a building completely alone in a more remote area, then the effects of being alone with these emotions would be stronger. I did share this apartment with a roommate who was always present in the building, not necessarily my room, but the fact that I knew she was there may have affected my feelings of being isolated. I could also always hear people outside throughout my experience, reminding me that there were hundreds of people surrounding me in my building. Being totally, *totally* isolated would produce a different outcome in terms of how intensely I experienced the emotions. I also completed these paintings on the floor of my bedroom - which had made it slightly difficult due to the size of the canvas as well as my preexisting spinal issues. So, having an open space I could turn into a makeshift studio would have a large effect simply on my quality of painting.

I would also change my process by allowing myself a full week rather than just five days to complete the pieces. I was under a lot of scheduling stress due to trying to complete all five pieces over winter break, and had originally planned to spend a week on each piece, but found that the only way to comfortably finish this series was to only spend five days on each. This would obviously affect the quality of my image because I would be able to add more detail and spend more time conceptualizing, but it would also allow me more time to take breaks or eat and give myself the time to escape from my piece. In my personal practice I often find myself needing to take time away from the piece to “let it breathe” so I can further conceptualize my image. During isolation, I was pressured under this strict deadline and didn’t have the time to take these breaks from working in order to elevate my piece.

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