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# Mental Illnesses Expressed in Visual Art

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Candidate for the degree

Bachelor of Arts

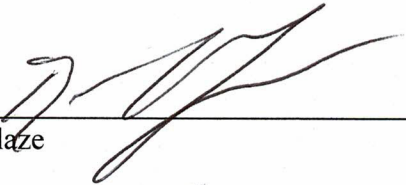
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Departmental Distinction in Art



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Kristen Woodward



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Brain Glaze



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Keith Feigenson

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## Mental Illnesses Expressed in Visual Art – Kristen DePalma

### Artist Statement:

I have always been intrigued with how people think and why they do the things they do, but it wasn't really until I went to college that I became very interested in psychology and specifically mental illnesses. It surprised me that even though we're all human and supposedly have the same physiology, some of our brains are scientifically different which forces us to view the world uniquely.

Over 20% of young adults have a mental illness. This is almost one fourth of the population from the ages 18- late twenties. The series I have presented was inspired by how people with mental illnesses view the world differently. Each piece gives insight into the everyday lives of people that live with that specific disorder. I explore several mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, etc.

When looking at these paintings, I want the viewer to have the same kind of emotions as the illness it is conveying. For this reason, I plan to work more expressively and slightly surrealistic rather than representational. Through expressive abstraction, each piece resembles an emotion rather than an actual representation of the disorder.

Painting and color pencils are my favorite media because it is easy to manipulate into what I want. After exploring many different techniques, I learned that my style of artwork is not realistic. It is much more expressionistic. I would rather the viewer feel something from my work rather than admire how much it looks like a photograph. The majority of my pieces use the medium of acrylic paint on all different surfaces.



*Addiction*, 38 x 47.5 inches

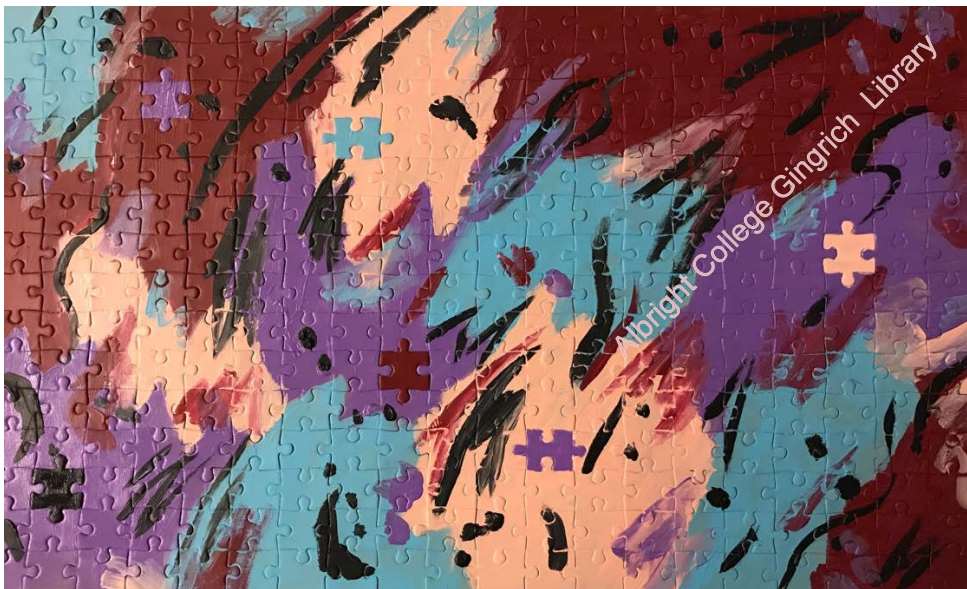
Spray paint, coffee lids on Styrofoam

This piece represents addiction by the repetition of the lids. I wanted to get across the feeling of obsession to an item. The work was inspired by average American's addition to caffeine.



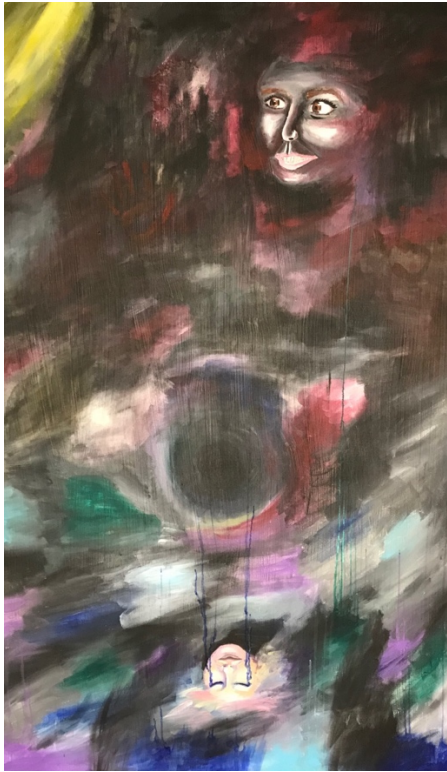
*Depression*, 24 x 48 inches  
Acrylic and gel on a table

Some of the symptoms of depression include social isolation, sadness, mood swings, loss of interest and lack of concentration. The posture of the figure gives off the hint of isolation and the dark cloud around her suggests the sadness that surrounds her. The dull colors of the figure suggest that the girl's emotions are not as vibrant as they should be.



*OCD*, 18x11  
Acrylic on puzzle

This piece is inspired by the chaos of the world by the colors, the randomness, and the lines or dots. However, people with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder try to have some order which is symbolized by the puzzle that this work is painted on.



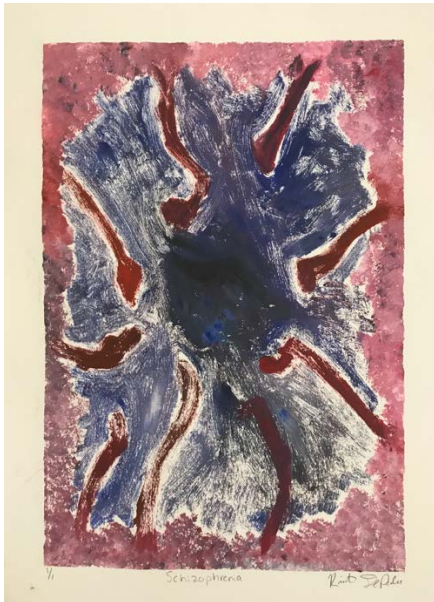
*Bipolar*, 42.5 x 67 inches  
Acrylic paint

A person with bipolar, has two different sides – the hyper and depressive. The hyper side, is the one with where the energy is very high, and all over the place. The depressive side, the face at the bottom, is when it can be very hard to care about anything or even get out of bed.



*Panic Disorder*, 20 x 32 inches  
Acrylic and acrostic wax

A panic disorder is a combination of palpitations, sweating, trembling or shaking, shortness of breath, and feelings of choking, that quickly escalates within minutes. This structure is like a tree because it is sturdy on the outside, but the inside is where everything is slowly flowing downwards until it all builds up at the bottom, like a panic attack, it is building up.



*Schizophrenia*, 8x11

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## Monotype

The symptoms of schizophrenia include hallucinations, paranoia, and hearing voices that are not there. In this image the red lines, represent the hands of voices that may not be there and the hallucinations. The reddish border is suppose to be the paranoia that can surround the person.



*Eating Disorder*, 20 x 16 inches

Acrylic paint

This image reflects eating disorders. The words “not skinny enough” suggest that these people struggle with their body image, and it greatly affects their mindsets. They can still be skinny enough to see their bones and it doesn’t matter.





*Dissociative identity disorder*, 14 x 11 inches

Acrylic

There are multiple circles that each represent a certain personality. All of the circles are also surrounded by an overall circle of pink and brown, representing the one body that all these personalities are in.

## Reflection:

Wanting to work with patients at either a hospital or in jail as an art therapist is what mainly started me on this project. The field of work I want to pursue is working with people with mental illnesses. This series of art pieces portrays people with mental illnesses and how they view the world differently from the rest of us.

When looking at these paintings, I want the viewer to have the same kind of emotions as the piece is conveying. My art shows the inner works of individual's minds with mental illness and I want the viewer to feel similar things that a person with the specific disorder usually feels. I want more people to be able to understand where these individuals are coming from and be able to respect each other more knowing that our brains work differently. I had an overall idea of the direction I wanted this project to go in. At the beginning, I was more concentrated on the disorder, but as I did more research and the pieces evolved, I decided on focusing more on portraying the emotion of each mental illness. Having pieces that expressively represent the disorder seemed more effective of the outcome I wanted. Viewers' responses overall have been quite positive towards the work. The favorite seems to be *Bipolar*. Most people are drawn towards that piece, whether it is for the big size or the dark colors.