

Multifaceted

William Mizer



Artist Statement

I use transparent film and lighting to investigate the complex layers of masks and identities we use to protect ourselves from being hurt. Using these layers, I explore the disconnect between inner voice and the various personas we all present to the world. As children, we don't realize how traumatic experiences affect us, nor are we taught how to communicate and heal from them. Little wounds become invisible scars, affecting us in monumental ways. Hidden behind a mask. My work reflects my journey towards healing and self-acceptance.

Through my art, I seek to embrace vulnerability and honor the full spectrum of emotion, especially when I feel most threatened or exposed. By shedding light on these layers, I hope to encourage others to let down their guards, to peel back their own layers of defense to reveal their truest selves. By celebrating our inner-uniqueness and embracing our vulnerabilities, we can find strength and resilience in the face of adversity. We are not broken, and it is through our scars that we find beauty, authenticity, and the capacity to love.

Final Exhibition





Contextualization

Art-Inspired Research Sources

Artist, Terry Sullivan, shared his experience of using art to get through a traumatic event. Sullivan had been on a train, when a shooter killed 6 people and injured 19 others. Sullivan got out unharmed physically, but the event certainly affected him. After months of therapy sessions and conversations with professors, he began to explore using fine arts as a form of expression to heal from the shooting. He painted and drew many different images that came to mind from the event. Eventually, he realized the calmness that came from this expression.

Sullivan's doctor informed him a lot about how post-traumatic stress is a "forgetting disorder," and how forgetting is a very important thing in general for the brain. This stuck with me, because the idea of forgetting as a sign of healing never crossed my mind. How much power does my trauma have over me? Takeaways from Sullivan's artwork led me to thinking about exploring my own trauma and the visuals in my head. Was there pain I was forgetting? Or something I needed to forget?

A feeling I noticed showing up a lot was overwhelming sluggishness. I had such apathy towards making and art. Yet, I had so many thoughts, ideas and voices in my head. After reflecting on Sullivan's paintings, I began to step forward in adversity and just start playing. Playing with markers and paints, while taking the pressure of obligation away from me. I began to realize the level of pressure I put on myself due to my past traumas. This pressure affects my character, my authenticity, and my play. This feeling made me start to question my intentions;

“What do I want viewers to see when they look at the core of me behind the layers?” It made me think about the person behind the artwork, and how we can spot the artist behind the artwork.

Another artistic source/inspiration I used as reference was a connection between Adbusters graphic design and Adela Lia Rusu’s transparent imagery. Part of my struggle with this project has been the safety and fears around the career decisions of the two characters I felt within me (mask and authentic self). It would feel safe to head into a high-paying marketing role as a designer and work for the corporate world, but that seems to cross a boundary of my truest self. I want to create a life where my work can take a stand and represent my inner voice with a playful process. Existing design work that does this is Adbusters. They advocate for changes in social structures through the forms that typically advertise. One image is of a beat up pair of shoes and says, “Balenciaga, we sell you shit to call you ugly to sell you shit.” These designs get viewers thinking on the methodology of big corporate companies and capitalism.

Reflecting this into my work, I want my graphics to break out of the advertisement look, and fall into the style that pulls at heartstrings. My current graphics include layers of faces representing inner-authentic feelings related to identity. How do I, like Adbusters, flip the ad on its head? A social structure that sells identity is social media. Instagram shows us everyone’s perfect lives and perfect face. How do we get to see the real person rather than their projection? The answer here must break the infrastructure of the phone and its flat screen. To dig into the vulnerability, the layers and depth must be physical. I found that I wanted to have different layers of graphics representing the authentic self behind the screen.

The work that showed me how I wanted to communicate was Adela Lia Rusu’s transparent imagery. Rusu’s work showed the fragility and softness of the human body. The way

the light pushed and pulled different layers back and forth communicated dramatic meanings from the combination of two images. There was movement and contrast with the figures. The front image falls back onto the other image depending on angle and light. Taking inspiration from this execution shows me the level of focus that is required.

Reflecting on this style and my topic, this is where I learned that I wanted to play with multiple layers and lighting. It made me think about how I could use composition as a tool to show protection and fear. Because of this, I chose to use light with transparencies.



Research Sources

In psychotherapist Whitney Goodman's book; *Toxic Positivity: Keeping It Real in a World Obsessed with Being Happy*, she touches on the toxic norms in our society related to happiness and positivity. Goodman sheds light on the commonality of toxic positivity and how it affects us personally, and especially in our relationships with others. Her writing made me understand my struggles with crossing my own boundaries; allowing people to walk over me without voicing how I feel. Goodman touches on how we have subconsciously developed the idea that negative emotions make you "annoying and unlovable." Goodman's writing helped me discover my own toxic positivity, and a lack of honoring my own voice.

Psychiatrist Carl Jung's research touches on similar feelings through the relationship between trauma, your shadow and the unconscious mind. Jung coined the term "shadow" which relates to Goodman's writing on feeling unlovable. The shadow has to do with the sides of ourselves that we hide, or feel shameful of. If we were ever scolded for expressing a "negative" emotion like anger or disappointment, then we label that emotion as bad and tell ourselves that we are unlovable for expressing it. This causes your mind to stay in a battlefield, and struggle with control. The shadow is the "dark side" of our personality. Yet, if we don't face it, it may drive our unconscious mind into certain lives or relationships that don't serve us. As Carl Jung says, "Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate." This informed my work because it made me realize that there was a big deal of protection over my truest self. Through this work, I sought to discover these masks of protection and learn to heal and love through reflection and forward motion.

Creative Process



During this stage of creation, I was exploring, looking for my core as an artist, discovering the variety of play available in the world. While I was struggling to find what it was that I was talking about, I felt a disconnect between identities. A money-hungry scarcity filled kid who wanted to make designs for comfort, and a loving patient person who enjoyed creating without justification. In this photo, I fell into making and surrendered to the energy of creativity and play. I was having a blast without any pressure or weights of tasks and checkmarks.

This made me think about Rick Rubin's quote; "Art isn't what the artist makes, art is how the artist moves throughout the world." This process photo made me think about my methodology when struggling. When in need of inspiration, or seeking discovery, I turn on music

and throw paint, words, and emotion at the wall. I go to all mediums. This is how I slow down, and find presence. Rubin's quote makes me think about that pressure mentioned earlier, and how overwhelming obligation can steal your presence, joy and play.

Conclusion

This journey has helped me discover my truest self and allow myself to honor the whole spectrum of emotions. I feel less stagnant, less numb. I feel like I can move forward with more freedom, and excitement while releasing control. I can choose patience and play, over stress and pressure. I can choose authentic positivity, rather than crossing my own boundaries. This work reminded me of how much I love to create. For creating's sake, not for any outcome. My work has gained mystery and become more colorful. Also, I learned how to iterate, and how to grow a project over time through constant feedback and reevaluation. Overall, I am blessed to learn to let my guard down and how I want to express my creativity.