



**FALLING AWAKE:
AN EPISODIC
EXPLORATION OF
NEURODIVERGENCE
AND COMFORT**

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Artist Statement

Through my project, I look to traverse the complicated relationship between reality and fiction in my own neurodivergent mind; using my Guiding Questions, I create my digital illustrations through a process of verbal discussion and selection of “key phrases”. Then, those illustrations will be used to create the final iteration of a series of 5 woodblock prints. I would like this work to allow a neurotypical introspection into some of the hardest difficulties in my life, iterated as fragments of narrative that are inspired by anime and other fictions that I found comfort in throughout my life. By communicating my anguish in the world as an autistic person, I can inspire change in the ways that our society is harmful to neurodivergent and disabled individuals.



1. Episode I
2. Episode II

These are the final woodblock prints. They are 40 inches x 24 inches, and are displayed seated inside white matboard frames. The medium is Birch woodblocks, printed on BFK Rives Printmaking paper with reduction printmaking ink. They are displayed in order from Episode I to Episode V.

FINAL WORK - WOODBLOCK PRINTS



3



4



5

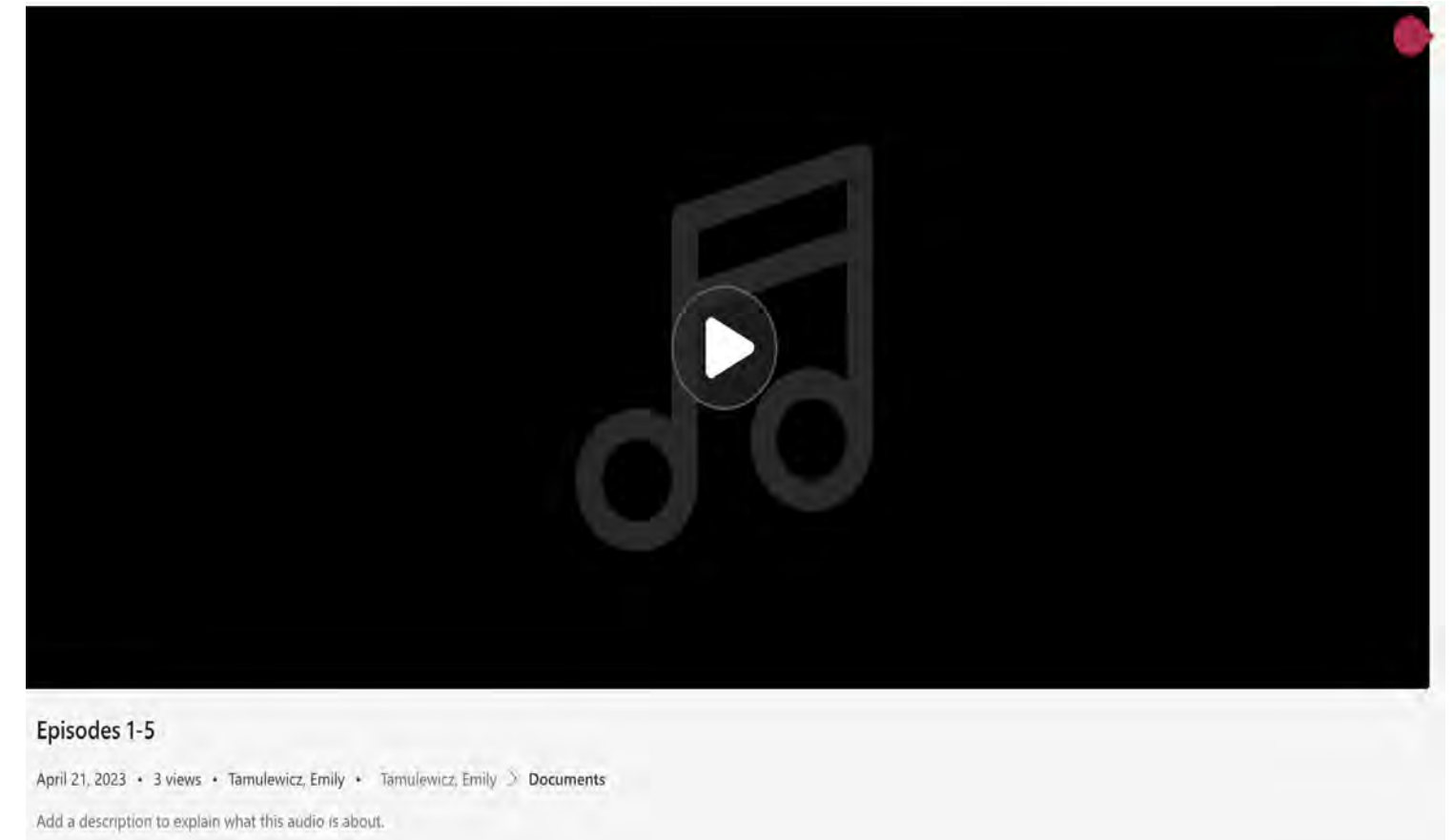
- 3. Episode III
- 4. Episode IV
- 5. Episode V

FINAL WORK - WOODBLOCK PRINTS

The final poems are displayed in the following pages. They were printed on Espom Luster Photo Paper, and displayed in an 8.5 inch x 8.5 inch format.

The spoken word version of the poems are available online, at this link:

https://umich-my.sharepoint.com/:u:/g/personal/etamul_umich_edu/EUJg1uPYtQ1PlFjSK-xVYMkByJtKp6SD7SftkLxQ8hRdaQ?e=mdtdev



FINAL WORK - POETRY AND PERFORMANCE

episode I

eyelashes to eyelashes. blinking down at a screen.

WikiHow: How to Keep and Maintain Eye Contact. i prefer to liken my gaze with an animal's; the threat that eye contact bears.

do not run.

the panic, the fear, the feeling of being hunted.

an allistic, all-encompassing experience that i want nothing to do with.

blink, feel the comfort of the blank space behind my eyes.

do not run.

hands and legs pooling with blood, i am disagreeably aware of my lungs and my throat. they constrict, but i still force myself to look.

opposite of an animal.

create a show, ruffle feathers.

i am just like you.

i feel that gap where i'm missing something that

everybody else in the world seems to have,

something they were born with.

locked up because i am contagious.

a poor creature to be prayed upon. a poor creature to be preyed upon.

1

episode II

there is something

profoundly

wrong with me

people interlace on a side of the glass that i am not on.

glaring through. yearning.

i think it is one way glass. i can stare clearly through,

but maybe my image is misfigured.

maybe it is a

reflection of themselves. their figures ridicule mine, dancing and

gliding over it in endless apparitions.

i press against it, trying to lean through, trying to listen.

i only hear my own breathing, blood pumps in my ears.

someone walks to the glass in curiosity,

glaring at a strange amalgam of limbs and reflections,

it shimmers

and moves

in artificial sunlight,

it is not me.

when they come closer, the illusion dissipates.

the shock racks their face in a way that i have grown accustomed to, like the ones before.

2

1. Episode I

2. Episode II

FINAL WORK - POETRY AND PERFORMANCE

episode III

i wish i were comfortable with being alone
the way i used to be

an inherent feeling of wishing i was doing things
that everybody else was.
finding connections, understanding the world.

there is no longer the feeling of being observed. now, i am
a watcher.

i partake in fictional stories like they are my own.
allowing myself experiences that i have always
wanted, but never had. i become a singer,
a painter, a fighter.
living infinite lives, comforted
by the guarantee of presence that no
person could ever have.

i fall in love countless times,
over and over again, with reckless abandon.
at the very least, i can bury myself
in the warmth of a love
i'll never have.

3

episode IV

sometimes, the barrier that splits me and the rest of the world thins
just enough to get through, if only for a moment. once in a while, i will feel
normal.

maybe someone will talk to me in a way that isn't patronizing, as if i
am like them. also normal, not afraid. connecting and speaking in a way
that is natural, un-googled. the simple bliss of a blank search history.

How to act like everybody else.

exercising the birthright of understanding what to
do when you meet somebody new.

How can I mask my autistic tendencies?

carrying yourself in a way that
is kind, approachable.

How to not be exhausted after speaking

understanding the unfeasible language,
taught from birth but impossible to learn.

Why does nobody want to talk to me?

sometimes, someone does. a stranger allows me to also feel, if just
for a second, the euphoria of mindless conversation.

4

episode V

human nature is cruel and arduous; small specks in my brain drive me
wild, forcing me to yearn for connection.

my poor heart
is endlessly optimistic.
it is so painful to see those around you
so successful in naturally doing the one thing
you are supposed to do.

my brain begs to give up
for my heart to let it go
to give up on the possibility
of ever being understood
but i cannot

i try endlessly to unlearn it,
my brain and my heart in constant opposition to each other.
somewhere in the middle,
i am torn apart.

i am still as hesitant as i was years ago.
but now, i am getting closer to feeling whole.
slowly, carefully, trudging
forwards.

5

3. Episode III

4. Episode IV

5. Episode V

FINAL WORK - POETRY AND PERFORMANCE

PROCESS AND PARADIGM

Research in Autistic Adults

From my research on autism in adults, I found that a majority of them suffer from other mental health issues that are related to living with autism. However, these mental health issues are less likely to be noticed or treated, even though autistic adults are amongst the most susceptible to these illnesses. I believe my personal struggles with mental health are a huge reason for my affinity to fiction; my overall dissatisfaction with my life was a large proponent for me to indulge in stories, where I could escape the pain of my own reality.



The screenshot shows the top portion of a research article page. At the top, the journal title 'Autism' is displayed in a red header. Below this, the National Autistic Society logo is visible on the left, and the journal's Impact Factor (6.684) and 5-Year Impact Factor (7.525) are shown on the right. The article title is "'Something needs to change': Mental health experiences of young autistic adults in England" by Laura Crane, Fern Adams, and Elizabeth Pellicano. The page includes navigation options such as 'Available access', 'Research article', and 'First published online February 7, 2018'. There are also links for 'Contents', 'PDF / ePub', 'Cite article', 'Share options', and 'Information, rights and permissions'. The abstract text is visible below the article title.

Abstract

There is a high incidence and prevalence of mental health problems among young people, with several barriers to help-seeking noted in this group. High rates of mental health problems have also been reported in children and adults on the autism spectrum. Taken together, young autistic people may be a particularly vulnerable group when it comes to mental health. Yet, there has been remarkably little work on the mental health needs and experiences of young autistic adults (16–25 years). Adopting a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach – in which academic researchers and young autistic adults collaborated in an equitable research partnership – we explored young autistic people's experiences of mental health problems and their perspectives on the support they sought, if any, for these problems. A total of 130 young autistic adults took part in the research: 109 completed an online survey and 21 took part in detailed interviews. The results highlight how young autistic people find it difficult to evaluate their mental health, experience high levels of stigma and often face severe obstacles when trying to access mental health support. The findings also demonstrate how listening to – and learning from – young autistic people is crucial in ensuring that their mental health needs are met.

Crane, Laura; Adams, Fern; Harper, Georgia; Welch, Jack; Pellicano, Elizabeth. "'Something Needs to Change': Mental Health Experiences of Young Autistic Adults in England." *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*. London, England: SAGE Publications, n.d. doi:10.1177/1362361318757048.

In this article, researchers look towards the autistic young adults in England and identify trends in what they experience. From the research, we learn that autistic young adults have some of the least-researched overall mental health, despite being particularly at risk for these issues to develop. Therefore, the researchers sent out surveys and interviewed autistic young adults to get their perspective on the help that is available to them.

The article speaks about how autistic people struggle to communicate their health needs, and face a large amount of stigma and obstacles when looking for help. Additionally, listening to autistic young adults about their struggles ensures that those mental health needs are met. My project is involved so closely with my identity as an autistic person, and learning more about what I am affected by, how it impacts me, similar occurrences, and how it impacts other people is greatly important.

PROCESS AND PARADIGM

This source mainly explores circumstances of need for intervention services for autistic adults. This work also explores what causes a need for intervention, and what issues impact the autistic adult community in the EU. There is also discussion about methods of intervention, and implies certain symptoms or scenarios that may necessitate an intervention. This study is more so an informative piece that discusses the logistics of mental health realities in autistic adults, and what may cause emotional emergencies to be needed.

This source is a reflection on the overall mental health of the autistic community in the EU, and additionally informs my own personal experiences. This includes the way I choose to depict myself in the work, and help myself recognize tendencies and habits that may show up in my daily life to present myself as accurately as possible in my work.

[Home](#) > [Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders](#) > [Article](#)

Original Paper | [Open Access](#) | [Published: 08 May 2021](#)

Intervention Services for Autistic Adults: An ASDEU Study of Autistic Adults, Carers, and Professionals' Experiences

[Martina Micai](#), [Antonio Ciaramella](#), [Tommaso Salvitti](#), [Francesca Fulceri](#), [Laura Maria Fatta](#), [Luise Poustka](#), [Robert Diehm](#), [Georgi Iskrov](#), [Rumen Stefanov](#), [Quentin Guillon](#), [Bernadette Rogé](#), [Anthony Staines](#), [Mary Rose Sweeney](#), [Andrew Martin Boilson](#), [Thora Leósdóttir](#), [Evald Saemundsen](#), [Irma Moilanen](#), [Hanna Ebeling](#), [Anneli Yliherva](#), [Mika Gissler](#), [Tarja Parviainen](#), [Pekka Tani](#), [Rafal Kawa](#), [Astrid Vicente](#), ... [Diana Schendel](#) + Show authors

[Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders](#) **52**, 1623–1639 (2022) | [Cite this article](#)

2775 Accesses | 5 Citations | 2 Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

Abstract

The Autism Spectrum Disorders in the European Union (ASDEU) survey investigated local services' use experiences of autistic adults, carers and professionals with interventions for autistic adults. The majority of the 697 participants experienced recommended considerations prior to deciding on intervention and during the intervention plan and implementation. Psychosocial interventions were the most commonly experienced interventions, while pharmacological interventions NOT recommended for core autistic symptoms were reported

Micai, Martina; Ciaramella, Antonio; Salvitti, Tommaso; Fulceri, Francesca; Fatta, Laura Maria; Poustka, Luise; Diehm, Robert; Iskrov, Georgi. "Intervention Services for Autistic Adults: An ASDEU Study of Autistic Adults, Carers, and Professionals' Experiences." *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. New York: Springer US, n.d. doi:10.1007/s10803-021-05038-0.

PROCESS AND PARADIGM



1



2



3

The artists that attract the most attention are those that work in a similar vein to me. I am most inspired by surrealism, and being able to garner a familiar feeling from content that is alien or somewhat confusing to a viewer. Aya Takano (figure 1), Hirohiko Araki (figure 2) and Fuco Ueda (figure 3) all work in this surrealist format to a certain degree. They all use a very specific style to represent their subjects, and exhibit mastery of their specific style. These are all attributes that I was inspired by when creating my illustrations. Their use of selective color, a unique figure, symbolism, and surrealism are all aspects that can be seen in my work as well.

1. *Jolyne Cujoh*, Hirohiko Araki, 2012
2. *Odd Eye*, Fuco Ueda, 2016
3. *On the Night of Departure, Black Hair Flows*, Aya Takano, 2003

PROCESS AND PARADIGM

Writing Poetry, Recording Spoken Word

To accompany my final prints, I decided to create accompanying pieces of poetry that aid the reading of my pieces. My feelings around my work are complicated and multi-faceted, and for my audience to be able to get a better understanding of the work from my perspective, I worked to create five poems that accompany each individual piece, named in the same episodic format that my prints are named in. These writings were created from brainstorming and writing about my daily life, and reflecting about a lot of my negative and painful experiences that I experienced as a result of my condition. After reading these works in class, my professor suggested for me to record audio of performing the works as spoken word, noting that they had a significantly better impact when spoken aloud. That night, I recorded and edited the pieces, and compiled them into a tape. I wanted them to have an immersive feeling, and to aid this, I added background sounds in between each Episode. They can be accessed here:

https://umich-my.sharepoint.com/:u:/g/personal/etamul_umich_edu/EUJg1uPYtQ1PlFjSK-xVYMkByJtKp6SD7SftkLxQ8hRdaQ?e=mdtdev

PROCESS AND PARADIGM

Design Ideation

In my project, I am aiming to tell a narrative in 5 “episodes” as a series of illustrations, which will then be laser engraved on a woodblock matrix and printed as reduction prints. This form of final iteration is inspired by Korean and Japanese screens, *byeongpung* and *byōbu*, respectively; the former being a category of work that I was heavily intrigued by and studied extensively in my study abroad experience in Seoul, South Korea. This form of iteration is imperative to the success of my project, as the tactility aspects, as well as the narrative aspects of my project are designed to be best represented in a printmaking medium.



Pictured above: Work samples, original drafts of Episodes I-V, Keywords and possible titles

My creation process begins with verbal discussion and brainstorm of basic themes for each piece. This discussion can and often incorporates multiple discussions from peers, professors, and mentors. Throughout this discussion, I reference my primary narrative and use the portion of the narrative that corresponds with the work I am discussing. Additionally, I take extensive notes throughout this discussion. After the discussion, I go through the notes from my discussions, and select strong points, which I call my “key phrases”. I typically use notes from two or three discussions with various sources, and select 5 or more key phrases to focus on. These key phrases can also be created from discussion about a source that I have read and discussed with others.

From there, I organize visual aspects from my key phrases. What phrases evoke imagery or pertain to imagery? From there, I sketch and create illustration(s) based on that information. When the illustrations are finished with this first iterative phase, I seek feedback from peers, professors, and mentors again. With this second feedback phase, I am ensuring that the themes from a fresh read of the work can align with the themes I want to communicate. From there, I revise, and continuously reference key phrases throughout my process. Sometimes, the key phrases shift as well throughout the creation process.

PROCESS AND PARADIGM

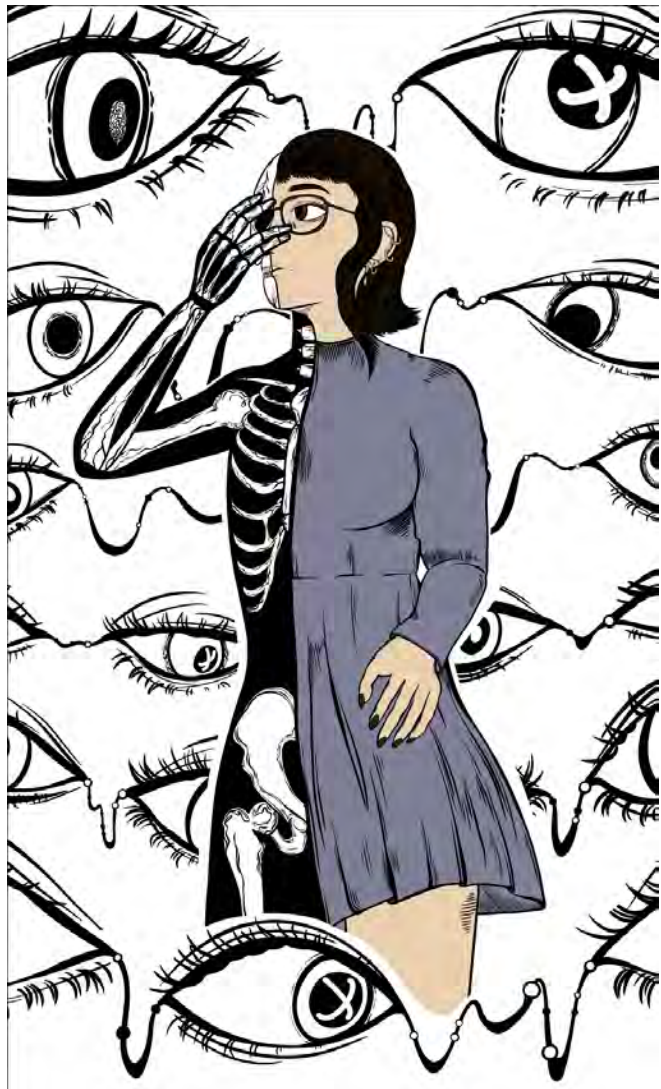
Laser Engraving and Physical Printing Process *-Finalized Illustrations*

The finalized illustrations are converted into grayscale, layer by layer, to raster engrave in a laser cutter. I organize the colors in each print by lightest to darkest; the lightest colors are printed first, while the darkest are saved for last. First, I cut out all of the wood on the block in the areas that I want to be white, or the color of the paper. After the laser removes that wood, I will ink the block in the lightest color of the illustration, place paper over it, and run it through the printing press. After that color is printed, I digitally remove the color that I just applied on the woodblock from the file. The laser will remove the colored areas that I just printed, and I apply the next color in the piece to print. I repeat this process with the next color until completed.



Pictured above: Chronologically pictured process of laser engraving Episode II

PROCESS AND PARADIGM



Pictured above: Chronologically pictured illustrations of Episode I, II, III, IV, and V

Finally, I feel like I have created work that I actually wanted to make.

I knew I wanted to feel a specific way about my work from the beginning of the process. I am incredibly proud of myself for being able to create this work, and speak as openly about it as I have. This is something that me two years ago would have never imagined; a work that represents someone who is secure and hopeful. That hope is something I never thought I would have, especially finishing college and feeling lost, and pushed out into the world with no safety net. I feel the opposite, honestly. This work has really taught me to value myself, and the strength and tenacity that I have.

To my family and friends and professors who have supported me throughout college, thank you so much. This time has been so difficult and amazing and beautiful, and I am actually so happy of the person I have become. I think I realized in school now, more than ever, that nobody is ever alone.

CONCLUSION