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On the Cover: Artist's Statement for *Portrait of Mental Illness*

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On the Cover

Artist's Statement for *A Portrait of Mental Illness*

KRISTIN DONATO

Mental illness is a reality for many people in our society, but there is little discussion about it. There is a stigma associated with it, partially due to the lack of communication regarding what mental illness entails. My current work is a vehicle to open the dialog of what mental illness means. The intention is to visually represent the perspectives of those who have a direct connection with mental illness.

I started exploring the idea of mental illness through my artwork while providing support to a loved one who is dealing with it. Due to the confusion and frustration that I experienced with the situation, I used my art as an outlet to help me process my thoughts. As I investigated the topic further, I expanded the viewpoint of my work to reflect and communicate the experiences of a variety of people who have either lived with or supported someone living with mental illness. I wanted to examine the full scope of how mental illness impacts people. I researched a range of perspectives through readings, conversations, and an anonymous survey. In addition to those who suffer from the various diagnoses that fall under the heading of “mental illness,” there is a

ripple effect that extends outward through the network of people who provide support.

Interestingly, people with a diagnosis, and those who are caregivers described the experiences in similar ways. These parallel, yet diverse experiences are mirrored in the grayscale color palette of the work. The shades of gray reflect how the reported experiences are related, yet each is unique from the next. This is also depicted sculpturally. Cast ceramic and plastic heads characterize my personal reactions to the situation. As I came to terms with the reality of the experience, I progressed through a series of emotions including confusion, frustration, grief, and optimism. I illustrated these different points through these sculptures, yet I found that many people were also able to read those works as visualizations of mental illness.

The use of the figure extends to the artist books as well. Two-dimensional silhouettes depict the emotions often conveyed in the text of the artist books. These act as vessels, a space for the viewers to insert their own connections and experiences in order to add their own meaning to the pieces. The treatments applied to the figures, whether cracked, written on, or blurred with ink washes, symbolizing the complex reactions to the varying situations.

Many of the artist books employ layering and opacity in communicating these stories, as they relate to the confusion and ambiguity often described in mental illness. The use of semi-transparent and translucent materials obscure information that encourages the

viewer to examine the work more closely and gain a full understanding of the information being conveyed, mirroring the often private nature of coping with mental illness. It is my hope that these works provoke discussion and ultimately empathy towards the hidden reality that so many people face.

Editor's Note

Throughout this volume of *The Graduate Review* are additional artistic interpretations of mental illness by Kristin Donato. These include Artist Notebook sketches and cast ceramic and plastic heads.

About the Artist

As an artist and a teacher, Kristin Donato is passionate about exploring new mediums. This passion drove her studies while she pursued her BA in Art Education from Salem State University in 2007. She is enrolled in the MAT in Creative Arts program at Bridgewater State University and has continued to expand her experience with a variety of media. Kristin currently works as an art educator at Annie Sullivan Middle School in Franklin, MA.