Anxiety and Depression: A Visual Representation

Heidi M. Schickel
University of Iowa

Anxiety is the darker painting with the circle-like swirl.
Depression is the lighter, blueish painting with other faded colored blended in.
ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION: A VISUAL REPRESENTATION

by

Heidi M. Schickel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in the Art, Studio

John Dilg
Thesis Mentor

Fall 2016

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the Art, Studio have been completed.

Kee-Ho Yuen
Art, Studio Honors Advisor

This honors thesis is available at Iowa Research Online: http://ir.uiowa.edu/honors_theses/
I have struggled with both anxiety and depression since I was in my teens. Though it has been a huge struggle in my life, I have begun to understand how both of these mental illnesses affect me. My goal for this project is to try to help others understand, through my paintings and poetry, what it’s like to experience anxiety and depression.

I chose painting over other media because I feel I can express myself the most by painting, and I decided to make them abstract because that seems to be the best way to express pure emotion. My first step towards this project was writing down what I was thinking and feeling while depressed and while having anxiety. This was important because it helped me imagine what I am trying to depict in my paintings. I didn’t just want to paint a picture of someone who looked depressed or anxious. I want whoever looks at these paintings to have some sort of insight into how people feel when they experience these mental illnesses, and I want someone who is feeling depressed or anxious to be able to look at the paintings and see them as a reflection of how they are feeling. Next, I began to work on the actual paintings. While painting, I decided it would be best if I was in a state of depression or anxiety (depending on which one I was working on). I started with depression. The biggest challenge of this painting was that I was trying to paint an emotion that is mostly a lack of emotion. After a few nights of working on the painting, I finally felt it accomplished what I was looking for. Anxiety was a bit more difficult for me to paint. I usually feel anxious when I’m in a crowd of people or overwhelmed with stressed, but when I had time to work on this painting, I was not in a situation where I would normally have anxiety. I decided to try to trigger my anxiety, instead. By doing a few things that I would normally avoid (drinking a lot of caffeine and listening to specific noises), I was able to put myself into an anxious state. I was able to create an image that I felt represented anxiety, and from there, I could build it up and give it more depth without having to be in an anxious state. In between creating paintings and writing down what was going through my head, I formed some loose poems to go along with the paintings. Though I don’t want to force people to think of anything too specific while looking at my paintings, I think the poems help the viewer better understand what someone is going through while battling with these mental illnesses.

I think my paintings will help viewers understand the day-to-day struggle for someone diagnosed with anxiety or depression. I also hope that these will bring awareness that depression isn’t just “feeling sad,” and anxiety isn’t just “worrying.” They are very complex emotions that can take a huge toll on someone’s professional and personal life. I plan to create more paintings when I am feeling these and other emotions, and I hope they will help me better understand my own feelings as well as be a way for me to cope with them.