

ARETHA LAVERNE | AUREL TCHOUMO-TSAFACK KELSEY HOLZLI | MATTHEW STEWART

Aurel Ichoumo-Isafack Lux Bami, 2024 (detail) Mixed media on canvas 12in x 24 in Collection of the Artist



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We acknowledge that we are located on Treaty 8 territory—the ancestral Land of the sovereign Dane-zaa, Nehiyawak, Dene, and Otipemisiwak Nations. We acknowledge the many Indigenous Peoples who have lived and cared for these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude.

The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie also recognizes that Land Acknowledgments are not enough. Through our actions we commit to truth, reconciliation, decolonization, and allyship in support of Indigenous lifeways and wellbeing.

Funded By:





Program Sponsor:









Alberta Foundation for the Arts

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION PROGRAM

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial travelling exhibition program since 1981. The mandate of the AFA Travelling Exhibition Program is to provide every Albertan with the opportunity to enjoy visual art exhibitions in their community. Three regional galleries and one arts organization coordinate the program for the AFA:

Northwest Region:

The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie

Northeast and North Central Region: The Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

Southwest Region:

The Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary

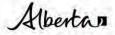
Southeast Region:

The Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat

Each year, more than 600,000 Albertans enjoy many exhibitions in communities ranging from High Level in the north to Milk River in the south and virtually everywhere in between. The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program also offers educational support material to help educators integrate the visual arts into the school curriculum.

Exhibitions for the TREX program are curated from a variety of sources, including private and public collections. A major part of the program assists in making the AFA's extensive art collection available to Albertans. This growing art collection consists of over 9,000 artworks showcasing the creative talents of more than 1700 artists. The AFA art collection reflects the development of the vibrant visual arts community in the province and has become an important cultural legacy for all Albertans.











ESPLANADE Arts & Heritage Centre

The AFA and TREX partners respectfully acknowledge that the artistic activity we support takes place on the territories of Treaty 6, 7 and 8: lands of First Nations and Métis peoples.







Curated by Jamie-Lee Cormier

Identity is the set of qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance, and/or expressions that characterize a person or a group. Identity emerges during childhood as children start to comprehend their self-concept and it remains a consistent aspect throughout different stages of life! When you view a piece of artwork, you are being exposed to a part of the artist's identity. The piece is a creation of memory, experience, feeling and more as the artist brings you into their world.

The four artists in *Self Reflection* employ unique ways of expressing their identities in the works on display while allowing the viewer to reflect and even relate them to their own identity. Kelsey Holzli's artistic identity is composed of personal and collective experiences, using a vibrant colour pallet and small details to draw the viewer in. As Kelsey writes, "My artistic identity is composed of personal and collective experiences in relation to trauma, healing, gender expression, and nature."

Some artists have a reoccurring imagery or theme in their works, for Matthew Stewart it is fire. You will notice his artistic identity is an amalgamation of his experiences with place, memory, and trauma while using a narrative painterly style. Aretha Lavern also has a reoccurring image in her work, the Sankofa Bird, it is depicted in *Sankofa: Red Horizon* as a symbol of a maternal figure, reflecting themes of heritage and nurturing. Aurel Tchoumo-Tsafack and Aretha Laverne both bring their cultural identities into their vibrant paintings, referencing artifacts, design, pattern and stories from their African heritage.

1 Wikipedia contributors. (2024, April 21). Identity (social science). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_(social_science)#References



ARTIST STATEMENTS



ARETHA

I am a mixed media artist who employs various paint and ink mediums to construct narratives often associated with folk art traditions. My artistic journey revolves around crafting and sharing images that tell stories, enriching the cultural landscape of the art world. Drawing inspiration from African motifs and patterns, such as the 'Sankofa' bird, I explore moments of vulnerability in the pursuit of self-discovery.

In each painted background, my process is experimental—a subtle interplay of layers between paints and glosses, inviting viewers into a dreamlike realm. This complexity mirrors the intricate decisions made during experiences that shape individual identity. While my artistic intentions may not be immediately apparent, they choreograph a dance of perception, encouraging viewers to follow my lead while interpreting the two-dimensional imagery through their own unique lens.

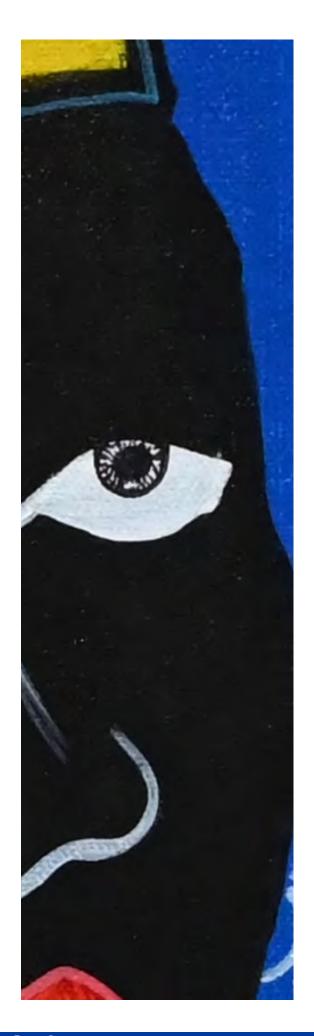
Aretha Laverne

Sankofa: Red Horizon (detail), 2023

Mixed media on birch panel

16 in x 16 in

Collection of the Artist



AUREL TCHOUMO-TSAFACK

My artwork is a contemplation, a research on my African cultural identity, which is gradually being wiped out by technology, pollution, and abusive exploitation of my birth land. It is also a questioning on the colonial education imposed on my childhood and that of many other youths in Africa by the colonial masters.

To express these ideas, I chose mixed media because it allows me more freedom to navigate through these complex ideas of mine. More so, when I assemble different found objects it usually paves the paths to other ideas hence making found objects a great source of inspiration for my art. It is sometimes during the assembly process that my creativity expands just like an orchestra playing and building on different notes which ends up producing soothing auditory jazz sounds.

Vibrant colors have always been one of the major ways by which African culture is expressed. In my work colors inherently have a symbolic nature in many areas as they represent a variety of emotions, traditions, spirituality and victories. For example, Yellow and gold represent wealth, spirituality, wisdom, fertility and beauty. Black stands for royalty, maturity, spiritual energy and death. Blue on its part, is love, abundance, harmony and togetherness. Similarly, I use vibrant colors to give life to my paintings despite the fact that they depict the dark stories of colonialism, economic exploitation, and slavery, which are systematically hidden today.

In addition, I reinterpret old masters artworks using "black" figures and african symbols to captivate my audience and engage them in a discussion with the piece. Doing so is also a means for me to revive black art which was for centuries underlooked and not given its right value. For centuries, Africa has experienced turmoil which has led to the loss of a big portion of her culture leaving many African youth today like me in search for their lost identity.

Aurel Tchoumo-Tsafack

Negro et beau, 2024 (detail)

Mixed media on canvas

20 in x 20 in

Collection of the Artist



KELSEY

Kelsey Holzli is a queer artist born in Calgary, Alberta, who currently resides in Grande Prairie, Alberta. They have a foundation in painting with oil and acrylic that has evolved to incorporate mixed media sculpture. Living in and near rural communities has influenced themes of nature, death, identity, and trauma found in their work. Kelsey graduated from Northwestern Polytechnic from the Visual Arts and Design program in 2017, and they continue their studies as part of the Special Projects in Studio Disciplines course.

My work depicts the human body with animalistic and supernatural qualities. I am inspired by folklore, death positivity and reclamation of nature. The darker themes in my work invite the viewer to contemplate their own mortality and connections to their inner and outer world. My work explores connections between the self, spiritual and natural world. I invite the viewer to engage in introspection as healing the self can help in healing the collective.

I combine painting and sculpture with found materials, exploring texture through adding and subtracting. Mediums I use are paper clay, polymer clay, acrylic, oil, watercolour, gouache. My work can be described as emotionally expressive, whimsical, with an ethereal atmosphere. I use an intuitive approach to my work while delving into emotions and themes I am wanting to express. My work is an outlet for my own past trauma, gender and sexual identity as a late-diagnosed neurodivergent, non-binary person.

Kelsey Holzli

Heart Protector, 2024 (detail)

Acrylic on birch wood panel

18 in x 24 in

Collection of the artist



MATTHEW

I am drawn to the cyclic relationship between memory, trauma, and place. I find myself drawn to the way these relationships inform identity; how one can translate a collection of personal impressions into their own symbolic language. I've begun to focus on the impact that the past can have on personal identity. Like a stain, the past permanently alters the fabric of our memory.

As a critical analysis, I often find myself considering the symbolic structure of my identity during the creation of my work, as well as being forced to confront the rationalization of my own trauma. In choosing specific personal experiences, I have allowed them to continue to inform my creative path, like a dog chasing its own tail in an endless pursuit of a tangible and understood part of the self.

I keep a myriad of supplies on hand, and attempt to let intuition inform the development of any given work; a process that may appear erratic from an observer's point of view, but for me functions as a process of introspection. Acrylic, charcoal, and pastels are my usual materials of choice, which I supplement with handmade pigments sourced from a variety of local and personal sources. My surfaces vary from traditional canvas, to discarded plywood and old fabric. These surfaces have a life of their own, adding to the depth and meaning of the work. The subjects of my work are referenced from a combination of family photographs and personal memory, which are then transplanted into present-day landscapes and collages. Overall, my practice is a journey into my own symbolic language, of place and memory and yet, the more I articulate this language, the more I realize it may be speaking to the collective as much as the individual.

Matthew Stewart

My Mother's Daughter, 2024 (detail)

Mixed media on paper

12 in x 18 in

Collection of the Artist



IMAGE LIST



Aretha Laverne
Sankofa: Heaven & Earth, 2023
Mixed media on birch panel
16 in x 16 in
Collection of the Artist



Aretha Laverne
Sankofa: Blue Horizon, 2023
Mixed media on birch panel
16 in x 16 in
Collection of the Artist



Aretha Laverne
Sankofa: Red Horizon, 2023
Mixed media on birch panel
16 in x 16 in
Collection of the Artist



Aretha Laverne
Sankofa: Living Spaces, 2023
Mixed media on birch panel
16 in x 16 in
Collection of the Artist



Aretha Laverne
Sankofa: Heaven & Earth Encoded II, 2023
Mixed media on birch panel
16 in x 16 in
Collection of the Artist



Aurel Tchoumo-Tsafack Negro et beau, 2024 Mixed media on canvas 20 in x 20 in Collection of the Artist



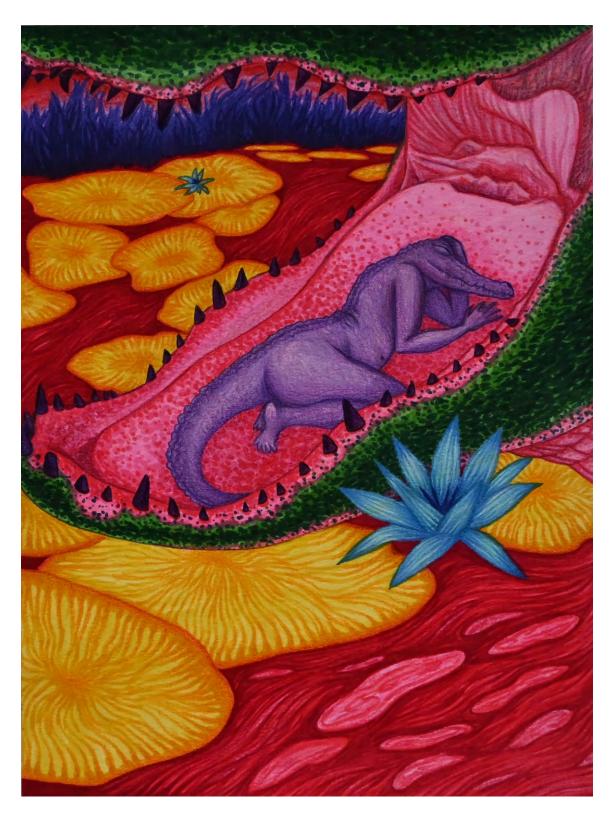
Aurel Tchoumo-Tsafack Maasai Askari, 2024 Mixed media on canvas 24 in x 36 in Collection of the Artist



Aurel Tchoumo-Tsafack *Lux Bami*, 2024 Mixed media on canvas 12in x 24 in Collection of the Artist



Kelsey Holzli
Heart Protector, 2024
Acrylic on birch wood panel
18 in x 24 in
Collection of the artist



Kelsey Holzli

Transmutation, 2024

Alcohol ink, coloured pencil on watercolor paper

17 in x 14 in

Collection of the artist



Kelsey Holzli

Treacherous Embrace, 2024

Alcohol ink, coloured pencil on watercolour paper
17 in x 14 in

Collection of the artist



Matthew Stewart

My Father's Son, 2024

Mixed media on paper
12 in x 18 in

Collection of the Artist



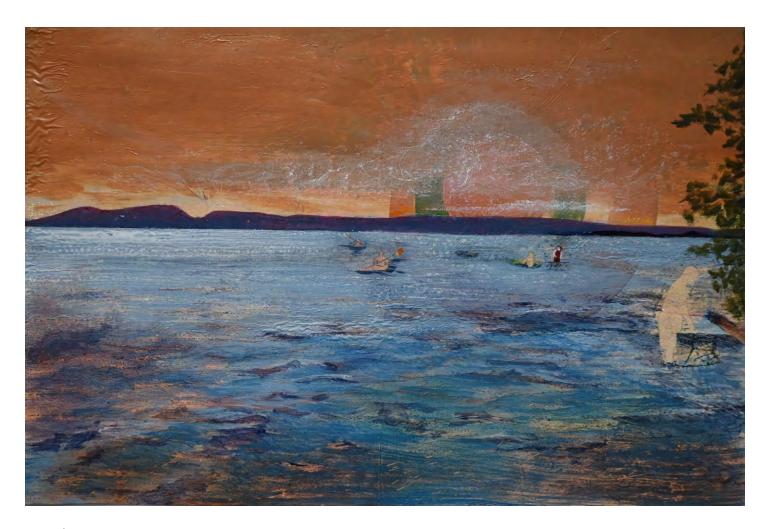
Matthew Stewart

My Father's Daughter, 2024

Mixed media on paper

12 in x 18 in

Collection of the Artist



Matthew Stewart

My Mother's Son, 2024

Mixed media on paper
12 in x 18 in

Collection of the Artist



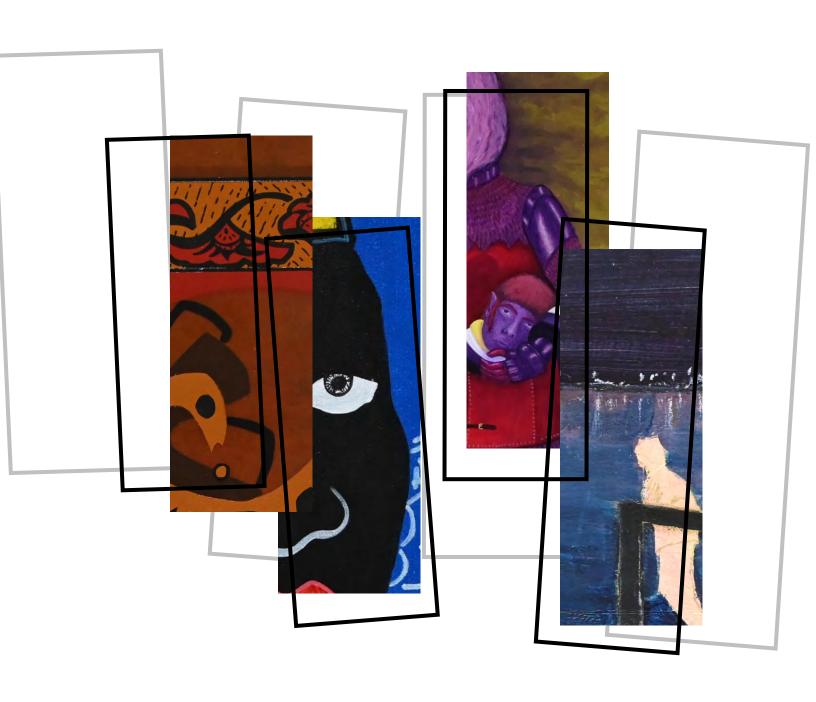
Matthew Stewart

My Mother's Daughter, 2024

Mixed media on paper

12 in x 18 in

Collection of the Artist



ARTIST Q&A

SELF REFLECTION Q&A - ARETHA LAVERNE

What makes up your artistic identity? (Is it place, family, experiences, other artists influences, heritage, etc.)

My artistic identity is a blend of the diverse communities I've been part of, whether ethnic, familial, or within sports culture. I've always believed in the bonds that unite us, transcending the lines that divide. As such, my art reflects a hope for harmony and serves as a record of our shared humanity.

Q What experiences play a major influence on your practice?

The experiences of being raised by a single mother, as well as being a former single mother myself for nine years, have profoundly shaped my artistic journey. Raised with the belief that I could achieve anything after obtaining a college diploma, fate led me to become a single parent, prompting me to temporarily set aside my pursuits in art and business to enter early childhood education while caring for my children.

Q What/Who has influenced you the most as an artist?

Developing early childhood workshops centered around art has had the most significant and enduring influence on my artistic practice.

- Q Looking at the works in your exhibition, is there a particular one which speaks to your identity the most?
 - Among the pieces in this collection, 'Sankofa: Red Horizon' resonates most deeply with my identity. The Sankofa bird depicted in this piece symbolizes a maternal figure, reflecting themes of heritage and nurturing.
- Q Do you have a common theme, object or memory that appears often in your work? If so, what is the significance of it?
 - Community serves as a central theme in all of my artwork. In this collection, Afro-futurism is the focal point, blending history with fantasy to explore the African and diasporic experience, connecting us with our ancestral roots.
- Q What is your most treasured memory?
 - Some of my most cherished memories revolve around witnessing my children's exploration of their creativity and the moment I realized the power of art as a means of communication, capable of transcending words.
- Q If you were to give a young artist advise on how to express themselves in their work, what would that be?

To young artists seeking to express themselves through their work, my advice is to select tools and materials that excite you and offer the most enjoyment in the creative process.

А

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SELF REFLECTION Q&A - AUREL TCHOUMO-TSAFACK

What makes up your artistic identity? (Is it place, family, experiences, other artists influences, heritage, etc.)

Family, artistic influences, experiences, cultural heritage etc

What experiences play a major influence on your practice?

As a kid watching parents and peers appreciating and practice art. As an adult learning about my history, art history and the experience of being in a foreign

Q What/Who has influenced you the most as an artist?

Rauschenberg, Jean David Nkot, Basquiat just to name a few.

Α

Looking at the works in your exhibition, is there a particular one which speaks to your identity the most?

"Lux Bami" a cultural elephant mask put on by royalties of the BAMILEKE people in cultural events.

Α

Q Do you have a common theme, object or memory that appears often in your work? If so, what is the significance of it?

Black people/African imagery. Traveling to Canada made me experience racism and a feeling of not belonging for the first time in my life. In addition been the only Black student in the intire department of Art during my time as a student, intensified the trauma. As a result, painting also become a healing process and I mostly use black figures and African imagery to remind myself of my worth and be proud of my cultural heritage.

Α

What is your most treasured memory?

My first major exhibition in Cameroon with the city council executives awarding young artists. It was an outdoor exhibition with about 600-1000 people attending. there was a live concert happening as well with dozens of famous musicians performing. I Was about 17yrs old and that was the day i realized i am an artist

Α

Q If you were to give a young artist advise on how to express themselves in their work, what would that be?

Do what your hearts says, listen to your instinct and most importantly as an artist, please yourself first, enjoy the process and the work.

A

SELF REFLECTION Q&A-KELSEYHOLZLI

What makes up your artistic identity? (Is it place, family, experiences, other artists influences, heritage, etc.)

My artistic identity is composed of personal and collective experiences in relation to trauma, healing, gender expression, and nature. I am inspired by folklore/mythology and its pagan roots. Growing up in small rural communities has influenced my work with natural wetlands and surrounding environments. I am drawn to macabre and horror amongst many other influences from film, anime, manga and other artists' work.

Α

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What experiences play a major influence on your practice?

My personal trauma and healing journey is a source of inspiration and I feel a great connection to our natural world. I have found solace in nature as I was often left to entertain myself in childhood. Art was a way out of my circumstances of being an introverted outcast in Slave Lake, Alberta. Learning about how my ADHD brain works has given me insight into why I am all over the place artistically and find wonder in trying new approaches to my work.I went to a catholic high school even though I wasn't part of the religious community. Being forced to participate in religious practices as a requirement has subconsciously influenced my work.

My friends and I became interested in pagan religions and the occult in grade 10 and were into metal music and videogames. I feel this has continued to influence my work, and the introduction to paganism has aided in my own spiritual growth. I was fortunate to travel to Italy and Japan in high school. During my time in both countries my school felt the students would benefit most from seeing religious locations mainly. The experiences of seeing Shinto shrines/temples and Catholic churches along with Easter Mass at the Vatican will forever leave its mark.

Folklore and pagan religions influence my work through symbolism. I take inspiration from my interests in film, anime, art, books and the many creatures and living organisms in nature. The artists I pull the most inspiration from is, Edvard Munch, Frida Kahlo, Lauren Ys, Atelierbetriebe R. Allison W. Sommers, and Aleksandra Waliszeweska. My love of folklore and pagan religions explores how narrative helps humans process our experiences and emotions. I like the concept of taking your personal and collective experiences and creating your own visual narrative.

Looking at the works in your exhibition, is there a particular one which speaks to your identity the most?

The work that reflects my identity and its current state the most is 'Transmutation'. This piece reflects my current state of transformation during my spiritual/healing journey. I am shedding and releasing who I was and planting seeds for my future self.

Q Do you have a common theme, object or memory that appears often in your work? If so, what is the significance of it?

I use my art to express my emotions and to process my experiences. I often have themes of death as I feel acceptance of death and its existence helps aid the human experience. Death comes in many forms, and nothing is permanent. Understanding and accepting this has aided my ability to be present and focus on what I can control. Also to enjoy the moments I have on this plane of existence as they are temporary. I seem to have bodies of water and swamp like creatures in my work. I feel this is another way to represent my own transformation as a person and embracing the dark to receive the blessings of the light. I feel working on the balance of my internal world will have a ripple effect on my outer world and those around me.

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The is a time when I was in a state of pure wonder and without worry. It was during a family vacation to Vancouver and Queen Charlotte Islands as a child, I was around 9 or 10. Just before puberty when I was my authentic self. The memories from this trip feel like a cluster of jellyfish intertwined in kelp, calmly floating in the sea. I have flashes of me wading in the sea surrounded by jellyfish and my dad getting stung while I was safe. At one point I'm holding a sea cucumber, and it is ejecting water at my dad like nature's water gun. I remember during this trip my cousins hijacked our vacation and ate all our cereal (cinnamon toast crunch). I was on vacation with my cousins Cait and Maddy, but my Auntie Bobbi and uncle Earl caught wind of our parents' plans and showed up in there RV with my other 4 cousins. These cousins are high energy and always up for an adventure. We went on many excursions and hiking through the old growth forests which was a spiritual experience I wasn't aware of. I get images of the man-made wood platforms that weave through the trees. I was a clumsy child and trying to catch up, I would often fall and scrape my knees. I also attempted to keep a pet clam, and I lead it to its death. This experience was well rounded, and I feel it gave me a strong spiritual connection to nature and the sea that has influenced my art practice.

Q

If you were to give a young artist advise on how to express themselves in their work, what would that be?

ou're A

Don't let your mind get overworked with finding meaning in the work you're doing. I will often come out intuitively. Having a general idea and willingness to play and experiment with what you have access to helps make the work more dynamic and people notice when an artist is enjoying what they're doing.

SELF REFLECTION Q&A - MATTHEW STEWART

What makes up your artistic identity? (Is it place, family, experiences, other artists influences, heritage, etc.)

My artistic identity is an amalgamation of my experiences with place, memory, and trauma. My work addresses the cycle of trauma; more specifically how our experiences as children can stain the rest of our lives and have permanent consequences.

What experiences play a major influence on your practice?

I'm heavily influenced by my childhood and the lasting physical and mental impacts it had on me. Specific traumas are things I prefer to keep private, both for myself and to ensure that the imagery is vague enough that a viewer with completely different experiences can still relate. I felt very lonely and overly responsible until my late teens. The focus of my work is the specific emotions that arise from these events, more so than the events themselves.

Α

I'm enthralled with German Romantics, specifically Caspar David Friedrich.
Their work makes you simultaneously feel so grand and so minuscule. That sort of general but powerful interpretation coupled with the remarkable imagery is something that will always inspire me.

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The work and story of Francis Bacon continually exist in my periphery as well. His subject matter, colour use, and expressive manner of painting are things I am consistently drawn towards.

Looking at the works in your exhibition, is there a particular one which speaks to your identity the most?

"My Mother's Daughter" probably resonates with me the most. Despite the warmth represented by the colour palette, there's something melancholic and isolating about the lone figure. My relationship with my mother was complicated as a child and teen; I was the eldest daughter who grew up far too quickly due to circumstance. I look at my mother and my heart breaks, as I know she grew up the same.

Q Do you have a common theme, object or memory that appears often in your work? If so, what is the significance of it?

Fire is a recurring image in a lot of my work. It represents destruction, anxiety, and death. I remember waking up in the middle of the night in elementary school to patrol the house and ensure all of the candles were blown out once everyone was asleep. I remember standing at the base of a bonfire as part of the first funeral I ever attended (I wasn't older than 7) and being dwarfed by the flames.

Fire is also family, connection, and freedom. I remember late nights spent around the campfire, watching the stars with my family and friends. I remember running through damp grass with a makeshift torch at family reunions. I remember the burning against my shins when I stood too close for too long. I always feel very alive around fire.

Q What is your most treasured memory?

My sister and I used to build huge forts in our basement on Christmas Eve. We'd blow up an air mattress to leave on the ground, then push the couches close enough together to drape blankets over for our roof. We'd steal spare strands of Christmas lights to light our new room. We would spend all night giggling and cuddling with our dogs, and we'd open stockings first thing in the morning. We often spent the night of Christmas Day in the fort as well, sharing our spoils and relaxing.

Q If you were to give a young artist advise on how to express themselves in their work, what would that be?

Stop worrying about how others will perceive your work, and stop worrying about trying to make your work "appealing". Part of being human is being disgusting, repulsive, and uncomfortable. Art isn't the same without those emotions. That's not to say that your work needs to be gross, but you'll need to get comfortable with the sludgy parts of your own soul to make work that moves you. You can put these imperfections on display, or acknowledge them and move on. But fully exploring your psyche and understanding what motivates you is the key to figuring out who you are as an artist.

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ACTIVITIES

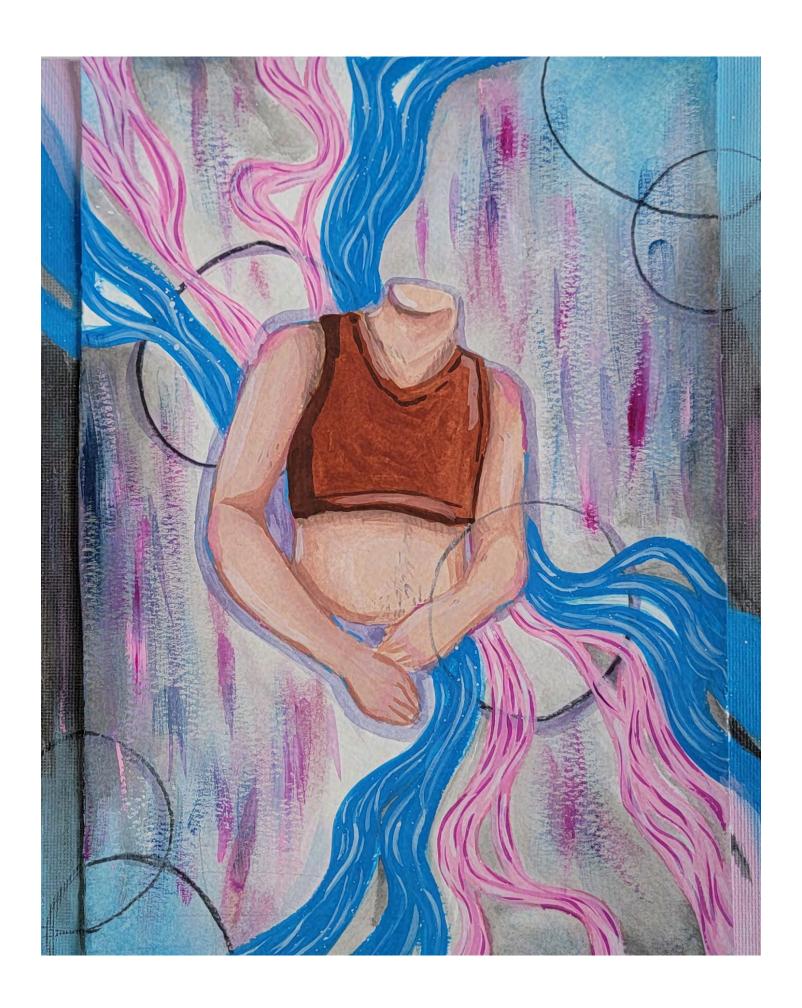
SELF EXPRESSION

Self-Expression Painting By Mason Telford

I spent a lot of my life reflecting on who I was, and who I wanted to be. A huge part of that was exploring my gender identity, I wanted my painting to reflect the moment I fully accepted my identity as a transgender person. I incorporated the colours of the trans flag, blue, pink, and white. Each colour represents something, blue for those who align with masculine identity, pink for those who align with feminine identity, and white for anyone who identifies somewhere in the in-between of masculine and feminine. The colours emerging from behind the subject is to represent how it feels to know who you are for the first time, the joy that cannot be contained and not wanting to hold that part of who you are in anymore, complete freedom.

The process:

I started with a rough sketch of a body in the center of the canvas, followed by a light wash of watercolour paint. Slowly I layer colour, building up as I go, after the watercolour I use gouache paint to help deepen the colours. Then I used a dry brushing technique to build up the background. To finish the artwork off I used some dry pastels on the corners and edges.



SELF PORTRAIT

Create a self-portrait as the world sees you and as you see yourself. This activity is meant to be a fun and playful way to express yourself.

Material:

- 8.5 x 11 piece of paper
- Pencil
- Coloured crayons or markers

Instructions:

Step 1



Step 2



Step 1

Fold your paper into half lengthwise, then wide wise to create guidelines for your face.

Step 2

Using your pencil, draw half of your face starting with the shape. Use the folded guidelines to position your face in the centre of the paper. Then draw your ear, mouth, nose, eye and eyebrow.

Step 3



Step 4



Step 3

Add in your hair, neckline and shoulder.

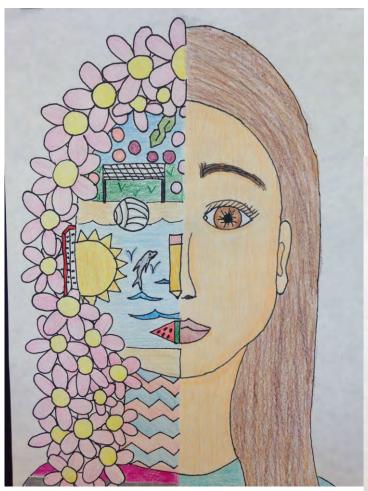
Step 4

Moving to the other side of your face, lightly sketch in the outline of you head, neck and shoulders for guidelines.



Step 5Start drawing in what you are made up of and how you see yourself.
What are your favourite things to do? What are your favourite colours and patterns? What is do you see in you future?

Step 6Once you are done with the drawing, start adding colour! Have fun!





SELF REFLECTION

This is a calming activity great for all ages. Its good to have a way to express your feelings and creating art is a wonderful avenue for that. Listen to the video as you get your group to think about what has been on their mind or what they have experience in their life lately, whether it be good, bad, exciting or traumatic.

Materials:

- 2 pieces of 8.5 x 11inch paper
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Glue
- Pencil crayons or markers

Instructions:

Step 1

Take one piece of paper and cut out a door to glue down to the full piece of 8.5 x 11 paper.

Step 2

Using your pencil, draw what your feel your background should express. Think about your outer world and what you have experienced lately at home or when your out and about.

Step 3

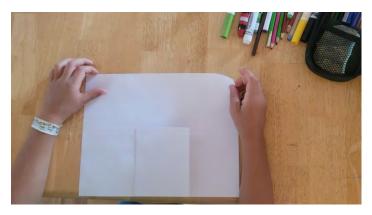
Once you have finished you background, create your door. What is your door made from? What kind of door handle is on your door? What is behind your door? Express what is indie you behind your door, express what's happening in your inner world.

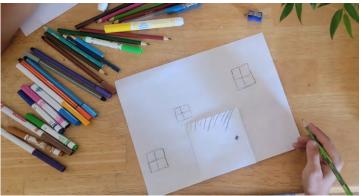
Step 4

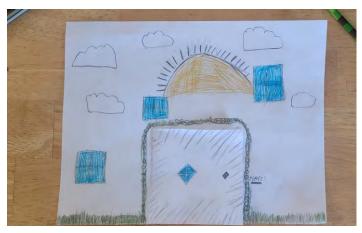
Use your colouring tool to add colour to your drawing.

Step 5

Share your work with friends or bring it home as a reflection piece to relate back to how you are feeling and give yourself time to enjoy the piece.













SELF REFLECTION

ARETHA LAVERNE | AUREL TCHOUMO-TSAFACK KELSEY HOLZLI | MATTHEW STEWART