BEING HEARD

Empathetic Artistic Interpretations of Young People Living with Serious Medical Conditions

THE INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATIVE HEALTH
Is there a role for artists in creating a more compassionate and empathetic environment, an environment that helps patients feel understood and cared for?

A multidisciplinary research team, consisting of a nurse researcher/The Institute for Integrative Health Scholar, an art therapist/social worker, and two professional artists, sought to answer this question.

We began by asking each child to write an “I am From” poem. To gain a deep understanding of the children’s experiences, artists conducted one-on-one interviews. They then returned to their studios to create a painting and accompanying narrative based on what they heard.

Upon completion, the nurse researcher and art therapist revealed the painting to the child, asking for his or her thoughts and feelings about the personal painting and narrative, while creating a watercolor print.

This exhibition presents the eight paintings, poems, and children’s responses. After traveling, the paintings will be reunited with the young people. Meanwhile, we gave each child a fleecy blanket with the image of their painting to wrap up in their stories or to display in their homes.

— Judy Rollins, December 2018
Shimmer Beach Dawn
(What You See)

Child’s Thoughts About the Painting

“It feels good. I like that she put what I talked about in the painting. The painting lets me identify things I said and reflect on them.”
—Ajeé, a 19-year-old African-American girl. Diagnosed with acute myeloblastic leukemia two months prior to the study.

Lori Anne Boocks
Acrylics/Mixed Media
WHERE I’M FROM

I am from District Heights Maryland
I am from a loving family who all raised me
I am from Chitterlings, bbq ribs, pulled pork, vanilla bean milkshakes and fries
I am from a huge family with lots of cousins, uncles and aunts
I am from basketball games at family reunions and board games at home w/ family
I am from joning sessions that develop my wit outside of home
I am from 4th of July explosions of fireworks in the sky and the smells of food on the grill all hours of the day
I am from an area where the capital of the United States of America is just another hangout spot w/ friends and family
I am from where hurtful things happen and effect but my views on life aren’t affected

ARTIST STATEMENT

I began this painting in my usual way: starting first with a title. During my interaction with Ajeé, she talked about wanting to visit a black sand beach one day and named some regions that had such beaches. She also mentioned that one of her favorite colors was rose gold. Throughout our conversation, her optimism and resiliency would shine through no matter the topic. That’s not to say she wasn’t a realist or didn’t share some negative aspects of her condition and treatment, but overall her tone was future-forward.

I added “(what you see)” to the title to hint at “what you see is what you get” because Ajeé made it clear early on in our conversation that she is straightforward, no-nonsense, and headstrong. One of her favorite phrases is “no llama drama,” and she shared that friends feel she gives great advice. But throughout the encounter, she kept coming back to her sense of wonder about all kinds of things: chakras, projected art she’d seen, the mysteries of the brain, different cultures, fun facts, the adolescent brain, psychoanalysis, etc. So I felt “what you see” played on both the straightforwardness of her demeanor as well as her curiosity about things we cannot always see or know.
Using metal flakes in a painting was new for me, so I felt they represented not only her love of the rose gold color but ideas that shine through the noise of everyday routines, or the spark of “what if” and “how does that work” questions that pop into our heads.

She said a huge influence on her life is a book entitled *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz and how the guidance from the author was all about being your best self, staying true to your word, not worrying about the intentions of others, and avoiding making assumptions. She said it has been transformative for her. At the upper third of the painting, I added four vertical lines to represent that influence. If you look carefully, you can see them as firm stakes in the sky (if you read the painting as an abstracted landscape). The stakes are holding strong even though streams of water (washes of light blue pigment) run through three of them. One can even read them as holding firm against any upswell that the abstract black sand beach below might bring.

When asked if she could give a gift to any child in the world that would fit in her hand, she answered that she would give them a copy of the book by Ruiz and a deck of cards to play gin rummy, which she loves playing with her family. In the upper right are four faint diamond shapes that represent these pretend gifts to the world.

Words in charcoal are mostly hidden by pigment but they are shared below, somewhat of a response to her “I am from” poem:

What you see is what I am
I am feet on a black sand beach
I am light and sun and rose gold shimmer
I am swept up
But I am no llama drama
I am gin rummy
Full of wonder
All the chakras
I am what you see is what you get and more

In the upper left, somewhat more visible are lyrics from one of my favorite songs that came on the radio as I drove home from our meeting:
This is what she is
This is what she does
I felt those lines were very fitting for both Ajeé and myself.

Near the end of our talk, I asked if there was any particular phrase she wanted incorporated into the painting, and right away she said, “No llama drama.” She also asked if I could put a llama in the work as it was her favorite animal, and she showed me her llama stuffed animal. At about midlevel at the very right of the painting is her line drawing llama, very abstract, in charcoal.

Ajeé is a most inspiring person. She described her diagnosis and treatment objectively like the straightforward individual she is. She emphasized that cancer, like any other challenge in life, is a mental game. “Stay in sync,” she shared. Keep your focus, and find the drive to get better.

—Lori Anne Boocks

![Painting of Four Red Dots by Ajeé]
CHILD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PAINTING

“The painting is for me, it’s not for anybody else. It’s made for me. Everything on it symbolizes me. It’s pretty cool.”
—Anastasia, a 13-year-old White girl. Diagnosed with aplastic anemia two years prior to study.
WHERE I’M FROM

I am from Maryland
I am from a loving family with mom, dad, 2 sets of grandparents and 5 cousins
I am from friends, sleepovers and snapchat
I am from paintings, sculptures and jewelry
I am from swimming, basketball and soccer
I am from the country with a dog, a cat and 4 chickens
I am from nature with flowers, bumblebees and fireflies
I am from wild animals with birds, chipmunks, deer, skunks and snakes

ARTIST STATEMENT

Celebrating strong women in my art is a passion. When the (young) woman is 13—wow-za.

I met Anastasia following her weekly treatment for aplastic anemia—two years from her diagnosis. Our meeting was a chance to know her so I could create art reflective of her and her patient experience—a chance to understand and be inspired. She did not disappoint.

I quickly learned what a rock star she is, putting herself in the thick of uncertainty and taking charge. She plays sweeper and striker on her soccer team. Is the main rebounder for basketball. The joker with her friends. She has presence.

Anastasia is an animal-loving country girl. Her household includes a cat, a dog, all the beauty that comes with living in a rural area—and 4 pet chickens. Who knew chickens could have such adorable and distinct personalities—Anastasia was lit as she described them.

Her connection to nature is a wonder-filled part of who she is and at the same time therapeutic. When intense headaches present and meds haven’t kicked in, she soothes herself by watching fireflies in her back yard. Picking flowers. Playing with the chickens.
She captured my heart with her solid sense of herself.

And she continued to bowl me over as she shared her life perspective: don’t judge something good or bad—you never know how things will turn out—including the potential for something good. It took me decades to come to the idea of reserving judgment and being open to all possibilities. At 13, she gets it.

Serendipitously, I learned we both love the music of Imagine Dragons. Anastasia especially likes their song, “Believer”—about struggling through pain as a child and then finding beauty. It could be her theme song.

There was so much about Anastasia’s spirit I wanted to capture in my painting.

After weeks of channeling Anastasia, chickens, and all that she inspired in me, Of Chickens & Fireflies (Believer) emerged.

Not surprisingly, the painting exploded with color, a sense of wonder, and yet quiet wisdom, a bit of quirky.

And many layers of paint and up-cycled collaged materials—some obvious and others hidden—an invitation to explore and connect with the painting and a nod to the complexity of being in treatment.

The inclusion of an abstract chicken was a given. And flowers. And fireflies. Important, simple pleasures for Anastasia and nods to much of what she embodies.

Flowers resonate with symbolism in both their fragility and strength—springing from the dirt and remaining strong against the elements. They weather a storm.

Chickens, too, have that resiliency—fighting their way out of the confines of tough shells to enter the world. And as symbols of nurturance—mother hens: self-sacrificing, protective and comforting—a nod to Anastasia’s strong relationship and support from both her parents and grandparents.
May the sharing of Anastasia through this painting inspire others to embrace the world with a heart open to the potential of every situation—not judging it but seeing what is really there and where it can lead.

Note: Some, but not all inclusions in this mixed media painting: fabric including quilt and clothing remnants, paper, grocery/take out bags from DC metro shops, coffee carryout/cardboard, diary from 1929 farm woman, vintage egg carton, vintage flash cards, vintage sewing patterns, vintage text including poetry and children’s verse, ink drawings, shopping bag, fabric, wax pastels, child’s handwritten poetry from the 1950s.

—Terry Sitz

Whirlwind of Colors
Anastasia
Liquid Watercolor and Shaving Cream
CHILD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PAINTING

“Looking at it makes me really happy. I like that she used the colors of Miami and Ecuador.”

—Eddie, a 13-year-old Latino boy. Diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia three years prior to study.
WHERE I’M FROM

I am from aquí, here
I am from Maryland
I am from rice, chicken, and my mom’s chipotle, with rice, chicken, beef, avocado, lettuce, and sour cream
I am from playing Xbox after school and sometimes soccer and basketball
I am from seeing the TV for sports, for soccer
I am from visiting a special place, Miami, where I swim on the beach and the pool
I am from a family that goes to Rios to see people and listen to them sing, and then we go have ice cream
I am from art, drawing, painting, and other stuff

ARTIST STATEMENT

“It is what you do with the gift of life that determines who you are.”—Mewtwo, from Pokémon: The First Movie

Though I started this painting in my usual way, with a title in mind, I decided not to use my usual style. The earnest, concrete manner in which Eddie described his interests and experiences really pushed me to open up to new possibilities about how to make a painting. Eddie is a teen of few words, but what he says holds such weight; he doesn’t need to use elaborate, flowery descriptions to communicate. When I asked him a question, he either expressed himself immediately or told me very quickly he wasn’t sure how to answer. Even though his responses were quick, you could tell from his facial expressions that they were thoughtful and from the heart.

During my interaction with Eddie, it was obvious he was a very caring child and one who loved superheroes and art. He said his friends would describe him as joyful, caring, and artistic. He enjoys English, writing, soccer, funny movies, his family, and playing Xbox games. He is curious about many things and would like be a doctor one day, an aspiration influenced by his illness.
He spoke about his illness at some length. Being sick made him feel very sad, and he had a lot of trouble eating. His family and nurses were very helpful during this time. One thing that really cheered him up was a video his friends had made.

As we talked, I began to worry that my normal abstract style would not ring true as a representation of his spirit. Since this entire project is about empathy, I decided to rethink how my art projects my perception of the participant. Setting aside my text-based atmospheric style, I concentrated on key words in our conversations. Blue was his favorite color. He liked Miami and the beach, and would like to visit Ecuador one day, the place where he was born. He is grateful for God and Christmas.

Later in the interview, he shared his notebook filled with meticulous pencil drawings of superheroes and Pokémon balls. His treatment of line and labeling for each page reinforced his careful, caring nature. He had created a robust catalog requiring passion and much patience. It is an amazing collection.

Originating in Japan in 1995, Pokémon continues to be an international phenomenon that encompasses video games, animated movies/TV shows, trading cards, and the recent wildly popular Pokémon Go app game. (1) The basic concept is that players/protagonists collect Pokémon creatures using skills and a cataloging method, train them to evolve into fighting species, and then use them to do relatively non-violent battle in special spaces called gyms. The animated stories share the adventures of a young trainer and his Pokémon friend as they visit exotic places, meet new people and Pokémon, and have grand adventures. In the stories, lessons about teamwork, friendship, and fair play are promoted. (2)

I decided the painting would represent a gym battle, filled with energy and vibrant colors (his favorite color blue and also vivid hues that could be associated with Miami and Ecuador). Instead of just my hands, I used a brush to create a lot of decisive lines that reminded me of Eddie’s strong drawing style. Clusters of colors reminded me of the bloodstream and cells, maybe even cancer.
The spheres in blue are winning this battle, powering through the air, changing the course of the air flow... allowing the spirit to triumph over illness.

Notes

—Lori Anne Boocks

The Greatest Man
Eddie
Liquid Watercolor and Shaving Cream
CHILD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PAINTING

“I like all of the painting. It’s pretty. I love the colors. It makes me happy.”
—Camille, a 14-year-old African-American girl.
Diagnosed with a brain tumor two years prior to study.
WHERE I’M FROM

I am from all kinds of food, chicken, tortillas, burritos, Tex-Mex
I am from jewelry, especially bracelets
I am from my favorite room, my bedroom, with its comfortable bed
I am from perfume with the scent of flowers
I am from any kind of art that is relaxing and peaceful
I am from clothes that match together
I am from shopping at the mall
I am from relaxing at the beach
I am from pottery—pots, bowls, all things pottery
I am from a big family that likes to play around the house

ARTIST STATEMENT

On meeting 14-year-old Camille, she greeted me with a big, open smile and her sparkling eyes. We soon bonded as we introduced ourselves by sharing our mutual love for creating art. For Camille, making art takes her away from difficult times to a more peaceful place—I have found that same solace in my work.

Diagnosed with a brain tumor at age 2, Camille currently faces challenges with unexpected headaches and seizures that sometimes require she use a wheelchair while she recoups. Every day she totes her wheelchair to school in case she needs to surrender when her tumor throws her an unexpected curve.

Being a teen facing the challenges a brain tumor presents is something Camille has accepted. She tries to relax and not resist whatever might sideline her. She approaches her life with calm and a wonderful positivity. She has a grace about her, although she admits the seizures sometimes make her sad.

In all of this, Camille relishes her artistic nature. Her hair and clothing express a wonderful style and she loves to design dresses when she draws, and create drawings of flowers—some with faces. As we talked about her journey, she created one such drawing for me.
Not surprising, Camille loves action movies with super-heroes… Superman, Batman…Wonder Woman. And those heroes are kind of like Camille and how she approaches her health. She feels her challenges have given her an inner strength. And while she doesn’t always ask for help—she likes to be independent—she admits it’s nice when someone is there for her. Her mom is someone who stands with her and she looks up to in her mother and her amazing ability to care for her entire family—another “super hero” in her world.

Camille has a dream to be a famous artist or fashion designer, maybe in New York. She would love to inspire people with her art and says, “I love to be there for other people.”

In creating a painting for Camille, she wanted to be sure it was colorful (lots of colors: her favorites are black and red, although pink and purple are high on the list). And she emphasized something I created should convey happiness and joy.

So in creating this painting, “Lifted,” I was inspired by how gently, but obviously, Camille lifts herself and those around her. She has a sweet, loveliness in her demeanor—someone you want to know and understand.

Including abstracted flowers in the work was a must. Camille loves them. And I love the symbol they have for me: both in strength and fragility… how flowers may appear vulnerable, but they possess an unwavering ability to crack through the hard earth and to weather a storm: A “super hero” of nature.

While this work is painted in acrylics, there are many inclusions that create a deeper, richer presentation of the work including paper, paper bags, fabric, ink drawings, wax pastels, children’s handwriting, text from an old Grimm’s fairy tale book and parking receipts—A nod to how even the most mundane materials can become part of a beautiful tapestry—a metaphor for how the difficulties in life weave into what makes us more interesting and even more beautiful as people.
Camille’s sharing of how she approaches her challenges with such calm and faith were a wonderful inspiration in my creative process and made for a lovely collaboration.

— Terry Sitz

A Bird
Camille
Liquid Watercolor and Shaving Cream
CHILD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PAINTING

“I never had anyone paint a picture for me before. I’m happy that all the things I talked about are in the painting.”
—Mia, 17-year-old Pacific Islander girl. Diagnosed with autoimmune hepatitis nine years prior to study and has undergone a liver transplant.
WHERE I'M FROM

I am from Hawaii
I am from chicken wings
I am from playing soccer
I am from happy
I am from screaming
I am from I broke my toe
I am from wishing for more puppies
I am from more of a talker
I am from wishing to go to Paris and San Francisco
I am from hanging out with friends at the park or the grocery store

ARTIST STATEMENT

Over her 17 years, Mia has journeyed thousands of miles and many challenges to the solid place that is her home today. Her early life was with her grandfather on an island in the South Pacific. At five, she moved many thousands of miles to live with other family members. A few years later, Mia began having seizures and doctors determined she needed a new liver. At eight she travelled alone to the States for her transplant.

Navigating these health issues in a new place and among strangers would be a challenge for anyone. As a child in this situation, Mia mustered impressive strength: becoming a quiet, resilient fighter.

After her transplant, it became clear Mia needed more than her home situation could offer. At age nine, Mia and her adoptive parents found each other and the stability and love of this new family hastened her healing and offered her a wonderful foundation. With her parents’ support, she is doing well in managing her liver health and diabetes.

Her family is everything to her—Mia beams as she talks about watching college football with her father, family hikes, and sharing the excitement of her newly adopted baby brother.

In creating art around Mia’s experience, I was very taken by her resilience. Set backs in her health and family circumstances only
girded her and added to her solid sense of self. She lives life with an open heart and a positive spirit—this sense of her and her family was a guide in creating Journey of the Heart.

As I reflected on how I wanted to pay homage to Mia’s healing spirit in my art, I found myself painting abstracted buildings—something very different for me. But in abstracting buildings and ultimately a village, I was capturing the sense of Mia finding home. Finding heart. Growing a solid foundation. And being a part of something bigger—where each part strengthens the whole. The symbol of a building was perfection for me in the way that each piece, while strong, is ultimately stronger together.

And the suggestion of the Eiffel Tower? Mia shared her longing to visit Paris—her bedroom is scattered with Eiffel Tower replicas and I included a nod to her dream in this painting. There are many nods to her in the piece and one of my favorites: I found a vintage map in my studio that included Mia’s birthplace, subsequent home and current home. Pieces of these maps are collaged into the windows of the pink house.

Mia’s grace inspired me and I plan to continue to explore the concept of home and heart in a future series of paintings.

—Terry Sitz
The Animal Shape
Mia
Liquid Watercolor and Shaving Cream
CHILD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PAINTING

“It’s awesome! I see everything. It makes me feel excited and happy.”

—Ammar, a 10-year-old Saudi boy. Diagnosed with liver and kidney disease at birth and has undergone two transplants.
WHERE I’M FROM

I am from Saudi Arabia
I am from Play Station, different powers and weapons
I am from always playing Prototype 2 first
I am from games with Alex Mercer, The Prototype, hands turning into swords or claws
I am from the smell of crayons
I am from the sound of a harmonica
I am from Halloween, with pumpkins, and dressed as the Black Panther
I am from sharing a birthday with my twin brother

ARTIST STATEMENT

Upon our meeting, 10-year-old Ammar greeted me with a warm smile and lots to share. Within the first 30 seconds of chatting, he invited me into a new world of super heroes, video games and complex characters—he is an expert guide.

This world of superheroes was unknown to me, but with Ammar’s guidance I quickly got it. The characters are complex—some even battle serious illness and yet, they have powers that allow them to heal and gifts/weapons that bring them strength. With names like Deadpool and Dante and arms that turn into shields or hands that become blades and hammers—it’s easy to see the appeal.

As Ammar shares his love of these games and heroes, his face lights up—he is animated in bringing me along for the ride. It is amazing. Ammar can create his own characters or he can be one of those that he follows. It’s a world where you can put on a cape or cloak yourself in super powers and change your fate… Muster incredible strength and have powers beyond imagination. What a great place to hang out for anyone and especially when you are figuring out how to be your bravest self.

A few days after Ammar was born, doctors learned he needed two transplants. Eventually Ammar had the transplants and his ongoing medical care is a big part of his life. The medical side of
things is not something he likes to talk about. He does share he is happy, doesn’t feel scared or sad and that his twin brother would describe Ammar as being brave.

No doubt he is brave. And smart and as he also offered, “cool.” In creating art that reflects my experience of Ammar, I knew superheroes needed to be a part of it—both because they have inspired and supported him and because in many ways, he is one.

In the fierce figure I painted, I included collage from comic books of some of Ammar’s favorite superheroes. Symbolically it’s the incorporation of all the powers and strength he carries within, along with his cape—he is cloaked in the support, inspiration and strength that all these superheroes embody. I included references to the magical glove with infinity stones and hands with blades that resonates for Ammar. But with all the references to the comic characters my most powerful reference is to the Fierceness of Ammar in navigating with such bravery and strength on his path to healing.

Note: The titling of this painting is a collaboration. My choice for a title is Fierce as I see the work as a reflection of Ammar’s spirit. When I asked Ammar what he would title a painting about his experience, he quickly answered, “I will break your bone.” At first I paused and then as I processed his words they were so equally right. Ammar is a warrior, ready to take on what is put in front of him. His words are fair warning to any adversary who dares to take him on.

—Terry Sitz
Best Fighter
Ammar
Liquid Watercolor and Shaving Cream
CHILD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PAINTING

“I love it! It feels familiar, so perfect. It makes me feel happier. Looking at it takes a weight off my shoulders.”
—Katelyn, a 17-year-old White girl. Diagnosed with ulcerative colitis three years prior to the study.
WHERE I’M FROM

I am from mom and dad who never give up on us
I am from Mexico Tacos and French silk pie
I am from the military and supporting brothers
I am from books and movie nights
I am from really old yearbooks
I am from cutting Christmas trees and camping trips
I am from it’s OK to fail
I am from moms perfume and dads cologne
I am from Codys TV at night
I am from the Washington monument

ARTIST STATEMENT

Unlike my normal process, I started this painting without a title first. Several ideas came to me, but they seemed cliché, like they were trying too hard to be uplifting in the face of adversity. Katelyn’s openness about her life was refreshing, and I really enjoyed getting to know her. She loves to read, thinks the world of her family, and is curious about many things. Her favorite colors are lighter shades of purple, blue, and green. She likes sci-fi, crime TV, and would like to be a doctor, perhaps an ob-gyn, for her career. These things, coupled with other aspects of the interview, made me put color and gesture at the forefront of the piece.

She mentioned she liked theatre, so I envisioned the painting to be a backdrop for the stage of her life, filled with movement (even when she doesn’t feel like moving) and conveying a sense of time unfolding, not just the timeline of her illness, but for what is yet to be as her true self continues to evolve in the years to come. Although she would like to be up and about, working out and doing things around the house, her mind is moving, reading fast, trying to satisfy her insatiable curiosity about the world around her.

The blue streak across the horizon of the painting represents time moving forward, not staying stagnant when her health is poor. Though the highs and lows of her illness are there, life carries
her through, just like her phenomenally supportive family does. The soft purple shapes represent her family members, always by her side, like footsteps moving forward too, but matching her pace. She mentioned how she gets concerned that her parents worry about her all the time, but I feel her perseverance can be a comfort to them as well. These shapes can also stand for great nurses and doctors who provided care for her.

Katelyn said that friends would describe her as funny, happy, and nice, so I wanted the colors to show her vibrant personality in addition to being her favorite hues. She also said she felt she wasn’t good at explaining pain with words. I decided to make the painting hazy with blurred gestures to get at the idea of feeling, not speaking. I did put text deep in the painting but decided to hide it to keep the focus on abstract feeling:

Down to the bone
Family by your side
No words are needed
To see all the places in your mind

While finishing the paintings, I thought of Monet’s water lily paintings, Katelyn’s love of sci-fi, and the dominant blue color. I imagined looking up, into a newly discovered galaxy, full of mystery and wonder. Hence the name Sky Lilies.

—Lori Anne Boocks
Opposites
Katelyn
Liquid Watercolor and Shaving Cream
CHILD’S THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PAINTING

“I like it. It feels true. I am not what my chart says. It feels like me.”

—Truu, a 17-year-old African-American boy. Diagnosed with multiple organ diseases at birth and has undergone multiple organ transplants.
WHERE I’M FROM

I am from Richmond, Virginia
I am from cooking
I am from soul food
I am from video games
I am from basketball
I am from school and math
I am from a huge family, multiple siblings, one sister
I am from the hospital

ARTIST STATEMENT

Since I almost always know the title of my paintings before I start, Truu’s choice to name his painting Untitled was a challenge for me. But after I looked over my interview notes, it was clear that this title was perfect for him. During the interview, I asked what he would want other people or doctors and nurses to know about him, and he shared, “I’m not what my chart says.” Early on in our conversation, it quickly became obvious that Truu is a complex thinker—a mix of down-to-earth common sense, deep thoughts, and focus on the future.

No matter what topic I asked him about, he gave it his full attention and thoughtful answers. His favorite colors are red and black. He likes math and science.

So I knew this painting should be about focus and persistence and drive. But numbers needed to be part of the composition too. He wants to join the basketball team and wear the number 11. His longest surgery never made him reach 10 on the pain scale. He has a couple thousand followers on Instagram.

The red circle in the middle of the painting is Truu’s vibrant life, ever resilient.

The circle is the hot burner of a stove where he perfects his love of cooking. Or maybe it’s an aerial view of his future food truck where he’ll start his dream of being a chef, and the red dot is
a pin in a map of downtown Richmond, where people swarm his truck for his original, delicious food.

Or perhaps the circle is a nucleus of an atom, of cells and a body rebuilding and healing again and again and again. A body able to withstand a transplant, STEP procedures, and many other things.

And then the circle might be music, one beat in a swirling composition by Truu’s favorite artist, complicated rhymes to make the head swirl with the lyrical poetry of rap.

Or the circle is his phone, bringing him answers and knowledge, movies, and social connections. Keeping him informed about his procedures and meds. Making time pass when he wants to get through something quicker.

The circle is his mind—sharp, curious, paying attention to the world around him… even if it doesn’t seem like he’s watching and listening.

The circle is the center of a complex, one-of-a-kind life surrounded by supportive family members, like his hero, his mom. The numbers might be gratitude for all she’s done for him and his family. But the circle isn’t just about himself. Maybe the number 5 represents his sister of the same age, who he gets to school and back every day. Maybe another number stands for a brother. All interconnected, the red dot of “self” shifts to that person to make the web of relationships even more dense.

But most importantly, the circle represents his strength. He knows he’s strong, both physically and mentally. Truu is self-reliant and independent. He’d like to write a book about his life one day, or maybe be a public speaker, but not necessarily about the topic of his condition.

He chose his title well, Untitled, because he has a lot more story to tell. It’s hard to name a work in progress. I added a number to it, like many artists using untitled do, to differentiate the paintings in a series. And to show this is just a starting point for wherever his story takes him next.

—Lori Anne Boocks
Untitled
Truu
Liquid Watercolor and Shaving Cream
ABOUT THE TEAM

**Lori Anne Boocks** earned a BFA from Old Dominion University in 1992. In her painting, text serves as both subject matter and the basis for mark-making. Texture for her work comes from painting with her hands and a subtractive process of adding thin layers of pigment to the surface, then partially removing them with cloth. Storytelling and the natural world are reflected in her abstract work. Her influences include Cy Twombly, Anselm Kiefer, Nancy Spero, and Chinese calligraphy. A native of Virginia, she now lives in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC.

**Judy Rollins**, president of Rollins & Associates Research and Consulting, brings nearly 40-years-experience in arts in health. Judy is a registered nurse with a BFA in the visual arts, an MS in child development and family studies, and a PhD in health and community studies. She is adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Family Medicine and the Department of Pediatrics at Georgetown University School of Medicine, and adjunct lecturer at the Center for Arts in Medicine at the University of Florida. She has developed arts in health programming in hospitals, hospice care, military settings, and the community. Judy is editor of *Pediatric Nursing*, North America regional editor of *Arts & Health*, and a Scholar at The Institute for Integrative Health, Baltimore, Maryland, where she is conducting research on hospital artwork. She consults, writes, and researches on healthcare issues nationally and internationally, with special interests in psychosocial care of children and arts-informed research.

**Christine Rollins** holds an undergraduate degree in Studio Art and masters’ degrees in Art Therapy, Social Work, and Public Health. She is trained in Translational Research through the Institute for Translational Research in Adolescent Behavioral Health, with a research focus on Implementation factors of evidence-based practice. Christine has worked in a variety of settings including schools, hospitals, community nonprofit, and private practice. She served as an adjunct instructor at the University of South Florida’s Department of Public Health where she developed and taught a course exploring the use of Arts in Public Health. She is currently employed as a School Social
Worker with Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia providing individual and school-based supports. Christine has a special interest in the unique role that arts can play in creating healthier lives.

**Terry Sitz** is a native Washingtonian and 3rd generation artist. Her work is an excavation of self that is enhanced by a dedicated yoga practice and a commitment to sharing in a vulnerable and authentic way. While having studied with a number of artists, she credits her DNA for her strong sense of composition and eye for looking at things differently. Terry’s paintings are layered with mixed media—vintage and recycled objects—strong colors and abstracted forms. She approaches her art with shades of rebellion and takes inspiration from artists who pushed the envelope including Matisse, Picasso, Modigliani, and Basquiat.
Images of their paintings on fleecy blankets let children wrap up in their stories.
“When the gusty winds blow and shake our lives, if we know that people care about us, we may bend with the wind...but we won’t break.”

—Fred Rogers
The Institute for Integrative Health is a non-profit organization headquartered in the repurposed, historic Broom Corn building in Baltimore. Founded in 2007 by Brian Berman, MD, the Institute provides an environment for innovative thinking and action to help reverse our nation’s soaring rate of chronic disease. We aim to create a wellness and medical model to shift our society’s focus from managing disease to promoting lifelong health.

Valuing the power of interdisciplinary collaboration, the Institute pursues bold ideas that challenge the status quo and uses cutting-edge science to understand the dynamic processes that affect our well-being. We incorporate this insight into actionable programs for health and medical professionals, individuals and communities.

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