

FURSCA End of Summer Report

What I chose to do for my FURSCA Project is a series of oil paintings that presents how the condition of Autism Spectrum Disorder affects me in several aspects of life, and with research into the condition, how this condition affects others. The goal of these eight self portraits is to not only speak on how autism has affected my life, but to also speak to other's experience with the condition by commenting on the universal aspects of the condition, aspects of the condition that were learned through the books I have read on the condition. There was another goal for this project, which was to improve my skills as a painter. This project is an extension of a series of oil paintings that were made in the spring semester I took before FURSCA, a body of work that was flawed in retrospect, and with this body of work that I sought to improve past those flaws. For example, I showed a preference for an illustrative style to my work, which is to say that I paint closely represents life, problem is that some of my best work according to my mentors wasn't these paintings, it was the paintings where I was allowed a fraction of the time, but gave me the ability to "wing it" and create more expressive work. Everyone seemed to respond more to the expressive work than the ones which were more illustrative, and therefore I had to learn how to bridge the gap between the two. I also needed to read on the subject of Autism, the chosen books changed over the course of the project, however I landed on *Autism* by Stuart Murray, *Autism and the Myth of the Person Alone*, written by several autistic authors, and *Ethics of Autism: Among Them, but Not of Them* by Deborah R. Barnbaum. These works served the purpose of giving me a basic understanding of the condition, giving me a different perspective on the condition, and giving me an understanding of the condition via a philosophical perspective. If I were to have Autism involved in my goals, I should be more knowledgeable on the subject.

Unfortunately, despite the listed goals I have listed, I did not finish them in the allotted eight weeks. Fortunately, I can say where I went wrong, and can tell how this project has affected me for the better.

Out of the eight self portraits that I sought out to make, I have finished seven, where the majority were able to be finished over the course of two weeks minimum. The reason why these paintings weren't finished on time was two fold, not enough time, and my bad habits when it came to painting. The last painting was created on the eighth week, where by Friday I was already gone. If given the rest of the week, finishing it would've been completely plausible. Reason why I say plausible rather than certain was because of my worst habits appearing during the painting process, namely my lack of time management, where although I spent the vast majority of my time in the painting room, I did not spend a majority of that time painting. There were often times where I stayed up late to finish my work, however the reason why was because I did not use the time allotted wisely. For an hour where I spent painting, there was around thirty minutes I spent doing nothing. Keep in mind that I rarely left the building during that 30 minutes, I simply often sat down and stayed there an extended time. This problem was alleviated slightly by learning new painting techniques, and overall learning to be more efficient over time, however this does not change the fact that I did not spend my time well. Simply put, I was not nearly as disciplined as I should have been, and that fact came back to bite me.

Despite the mistakes I described, I would stop short of saying that this experience was ultimately not worthwhile, not only because these were opportunities to recognise these mistakes, but also because I feel quite proud of what I could do with the time given. Amongst my favorite of these series was "*A self portrait of the artist and his ineffective mask*" for its ability to showcase what I have learned up to that point about myself. You see, there is a concept associated with autism known as "masking", where you, for whatever reason, try to hide the fact one is autistic by a change of behavior one wouldn't engage otherwise. In retrospect, I have been doing so long before I knew the term, however I do not believe that I have successfully fooled anyone that I have met. This is why I wear such a mask, a cheap halloween mask that is both terrifying and unconvincing, despite such an appearance, however, it is quite clear that I am trying to be at least cordial, ergo the raised waving hand. The harsh contrast between light and dark, tenebrism, is there to serve a sense of pathos, presented here is someone who is present in a dark room, lit

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by a light directed to the face he is hiding under a poor mask he wears to hide a condition that is shunned by a large portion of society.

Another which I consider an accomplishment was "*Overwhelmed senses by my mentors.*" You see, a universal aspect of the condition is that you are quite a bit more sensitive to stimuli, touch, smell, etc. It is for this reason why autistics can be overwhelmed, because the received stimuli can become too much for one to handle. In the instance that I had painted here, not only am I surrounded by touch, but by the two people I heavily respect. It was during that day, my professor Michael Dixon brought his mentor in for a studio visit, the famous painter



Beverly McIver. You could imagine how overwhelmed one could be in this situation, as not only one in close contact with somebody who has taught you, but the person who taught your teacher. It was for that reason why I wished to encapsulate that moment with this painting. Beyond the reasons I mentioned, the reason why this painting in particular is a highlight was not only because of how much was painted but how it was painted. One can imagine that a diptych required twice the amount of work that a typical painting required, however I also had to paint out the most faces I ever had within one painting, it was those faces which the most work was placed, specifically of Micheal Dixon on the left and Beverly McIver on the right, it was with their faces where I had decided to paint in a far more expressive style than I had done so previously. Given the fact that Dixon had left a painting in the room I was working in, and Dixon was a professional on the subject, I decided to replicate what I could from observation, and what I achieved from that was the best showcase of expressive brushwork I have ever shown up to that

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point. It is this painting, I believe, that showcases the best way that I can adopt expression within my work going forward.

Although the execution of this project was flawed, I do believe that this project overall to be invaluable, not only to my artmaking experience, but to my sense of self. I haven't addressed my experiences with the condition beforehand, let alone shown it to any degree within my work. Now I have not only created a body of work doing just that, but I am able now to create more before I present for Elkin Isaac. It was through this project that I was able to understand more about myself than I could beforehand, however I believe that I can do more than that through my work, as I am also able to reach others through my work, either people with autism or those simply unfamiliar with the condition.

