



Echoes of Empathy—Artist's Statements

whatsyourelephant.org/echoesofempathy

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Presented alphabetically by artist's first name

Andy Ruffner

One late 1970's Saturday afternoon when I was in 7th grade, I was knocking tennis balls against the garage wall when my dad came outside and hugged me.

"I need to tell you that when you go inside and see your mom--she's cut off all her hair. We've got to take her to the hospital. I think you and I can do it on our own without calling an ambulance. I need you to go get ready."

We knew she was on her way downhill again, but we could never stop it—it always came to some moment like this, forcing her to go the psych hospital, and us hoping they'd keep her after the evaluation. She would talk about voices she'd heard, and how she knew we were all against her.

Most of the time, she would snap back to "normal" in the evaluation and it would be a fight to keep her in, even for the 72-hour hold. Because we

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knew, even if the staff didn't, that she wasn't okay—and it would take a long while until she was okay.

Before we got out of the house, two girls from my class came to the door selling something for their cheerleader squad. My mom answered the door, her hair all ragged and hacked, bags under her eyes like coals, her skin slack on her face as I came behind her and told the girls “It’s not a good time.” I closed the door, wondering if they would say something, or if I would say something, when I saw them at school Monday.

I got in the car with Mom in the middle, between Dad driving and me by the door so she couldn't jump out on the ride to the hospital, starting another episode, and hoping for a different outcome. This time.

Ariel Collins

This piece explores how dehumanization can be traumatizing, while also highlighting community support systems that can create powerful, significant changes for those who have been institutionalized. This piece depicts four hands—two menacing and controlling, and two smaller yet strong—symbolizing feelings of impending doom and entrapment associated with mental illness. Set within the white matter of the brain, the work delves into how individuals cope with anxiety, isolation, and challenges that are difficult to heal from. Though we may view the outcomes of institutionalization as inevitable, this piece suggests that positive change in unjust systems is possible, no matter how small the efforts may seem.

Carla Acosta

Humano. A veces es necesario mirarnos dentro para poder mirar al otro. Sentir y hacer que nuestras emociones sean válidas es un deber. Sentir es hacernos más humanos y ser “humanos” es darnos con el corazón, hacernos el uno con el otro, y es la única manera de ser y trascender. En este mundo, en este momento, no dejes de ser “humano.”

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Human. Sometimes it is necessary to look inside to be able to look at the other. Feeling and making our emotions valid is a duty. To feel is to make us more human and to be human is to give with the heart, to make us one with each other, and is the only way to be and transcend. In this world, at this moment, don't stop being "human."

## **Halyna Shaw**

This piece was painted in pain and isolation. Feeling trapped and afraid of what could happen next. Unable to grasp at all going on around me and in the world. Trying to catch a breath to be safe enough to come back out to smell the sweet flowers of hope.

## **Harper Prato**

*What got me here*

This artwork was made when I was a freshman in high school during quarantine. I was baker acted for simply expressing the

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inner turmoil I was feeling as a depressed youth. We were asked to put a song lyric we really liked into art. Pink cage with blue heart meant to represent my ongoing battle with dysphoria as a trans person and feeling like my own body was my prison. Blue jay and sparrow show parts of myself that looked for hope for a better tomorrow without depression.

### *Flesh*

A piece relating to my personal experience as a victim of sexual assault. Bugs are meant to represent the level of discomfort and danger one feels after being sexually assaulted and feeling unsafe in your own skin/body.

### *Pills pills pills*

This piece is meant to show the impact of baker acts both negative and positive. Pill bottle meant to show the negative impact of sedatives given to folks inside hospital and how being sedated can leave a patient worse as it's not addressing the root issue. However, they hold positive messages inside showing that it can still hold a positive impact on the person.

## **Holly Forbes**

'Self-Love's Silhouette,' invites you to explore the depths of self-affection. At the center of the composition, a bold black silhouette is filled with textured hearts. These hearts symbolize the importance of self-love and nurturing one's own identity. The message, 'make sure you love yourself,' encircles the silhouette, serving as a constant reminder of the significance of self-compassion and acceptance. This painting is a visual

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testament to the idea that self-love is at the heart of personal growth and well-being, encouraging viewers to embrace the journey of self-discovery and appreciate the beauty of self-acceptance.

## **Loui Davis**

I was 13 years old when I first smelled teargas... and my life as a social activist commenced.

My activism first expressed itself through writing and speaking but photography soon captured my spirit and became my primary medium. Jamaica is a community country and therefore my activism addressed the disparities in our political, economic, racial and religious systems. My major show was “Incongruity and Decomposition”, and in South Florida, I was one of the winners in the South Florida Cultural Consortium Fellowship representing Broward County, in 2006.

In 2010, as a member of the Sailboat Bend Artist Lofts, I produced “Art as Activist”, which drew from several local activist artists.

I returned from teaching in China in 2020, and this is the first showing of my art since 2013.

## **Louiveste Lacroix**

"Echoes of Empathy" explores the emotional trauma and psychological depths of the Baker Act process through mixed

media compositions using gouache, watercolor, acrylic, and Posca markers.

One portrait honors a friend who expressed her ordeal through poetry, likening her experience to drowning in a sea of toxins. Another piece delves into the intense psychological effects of a 72-hour hold, capturing the chaos and vulnerability felt within an asylum's confines.

The final painting depicts a woman undergoing healing through the alignment of her seven chakras, symbolizing the journey toward spiritual restoration.

This body of work seeks to illuminate the mental and emotional impacts of the Baker Act while offering a path to holistic and spiritual healing.

## **Maria Angelica Ramirez Barrera**

In this poem, I share my lived experience of the Baker Act process – presenting a pointed, yet hopeful criticism of the institutions that receive state and federal dollars to protect the lives of youth during their most vulnerable moments.

## **Niki Lopez**

**“Art allows me to voice an opinion, challenge a perspective, and inspire change.” - Niki Lopez**

My mixed-media reliefs incorporate masks and mask elements symbolic self-portraits, reflecting my journey towards mindfulness, African spirituality, self-discovery, and healing. By connecting with my ancestors and inner being, I explore stories, symbols, and concepts from ancient cultures and address provocative subjects such as trauma and abuse. Using various media, colors, and intuitive mark-making, my work evokes movement and energy.

As a social practitioner and survivor of multiple traumas, I founded ***What's Your Elephant™*** to create safe spaces for dialogue on unspoken issues like mental health, place-making, and social justice. My art and social practice aim to demonstrate how creative expression can foster self-healing, raise awareness, and strengthen communities.

The piece in ***Echoes of Empathy, A Hero's Journey***, symbolizes the healing process from voicelessness and anxiety to self-love and resilience. Inspired by a group therapy activity at Nancy J. Cotterman Center, it embodies the struggle and triumph of embracing one's true power and growth.

“To that piece in each of us that refuses to be silent.” - Audre Lorde

## **Rob Stone**

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**\*Submerged\*** is a poignant painting by artist Rob Stone, capturing the harrowing experience of being Baker Acted. The artwork depicts a child, whose gender is indistinguishable, being pulled down by demons. The child's tears and the use of different shades of blue convey deep emotion. Above, a swirl of water mingles with bright colors—glimpses of hope amidst struggle. Through this piece, Rob aims to bring attention to the struggles faced by those who have been Baker Acted, reflecting a powerful blend of fear and resilience.

**\*Trifecta\*** is a profound painting by artist Rob Stone, uniting Christ, a lion, and a lamb into a single, powerful figure. This artwork reflects the journey of facing adversity, especially through the lens of the Baker Act experience, symbolizing courage, sacrifice, and struggle. The lion embodies strength, the lamb represents vulnerability, and Christ offers hope and unity. The deep dark colors, contrasted with metallic gold accents, enhance the dramatic tension and highlight the interplay of power and grace, capturing the essence of spiritual and emotional reconciliation

## **Ronnie Greenspan**

The collages "The Road Ahead" and "Exposure 13" tackle the challenging theme of mental health while simultaneously providing levity with the whimsical use of rhinestones, surreal and animated imagery. A small picture of the former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and the wording "how to win" references the passing of the Affordable Care Act and is meant to convey its importance in making mental healthcare more accessible to

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people in the United States. The musical artist Kurt Cobain's iconic image is incorporated into both artworks alluding to his struggles with mental illness, suicide and the inspirational power of his music. Exposure of the inner self and Treiskaideka or fear of the number 13 is addressed in "Exposure 13".

## **Shanna Woods**

Reflecting life experiences through storytelling, play and movement, while healing and inspiring others invigorates juicy artistry. I strive for transparency while resting in my brilliance. Embracing my mermaid dragon spirit I seek wisdom, dive in, remain curious, and take up space. "How can my choreographic work, process, rituals and practices support people in living purpose-filled, restful, liberated lives?"

## **Shawna Moulton**

In "Echoes of Empathy," my contribution uses the delicate medium of paper figures, fragmented text, and glitter to explore the impact of the Baker Act on youth mental health. This work embodies the tension between fragility and resilience as it seeks to visualize the often-overlooked emotional and psychological experiences of young people subjected to this legislation.

The paper figures represent the vulnerability and individuality of each youth, while the broken text scattered across them symbolizes the disruption and fragmentation that can occur in their lives. The glittered background, shimmering yet elusive,

reflects the complex interplay between the harsh realities and the moments of hope that exist within these experiences.

By juxtaposing these elements, my work invites viewers to engage with the data in a way that transcends numbers and charts, instead connecting on a visceral, emotional level. The glitter may catch your eye, but it's the fractured words and delicate forms that tell the deeper story—one of struggle, resilience, and the urgent need for empathy in addressing youth mental health.

Through my art I aim to create a space where the voices and experiences of these young individuals are both seen and felt, urging us all to reflect on the impact of the Baker Act and to advocate for more compassionate approaches to mental health.

## **William Quigley**

### ***The Center of the Storm***

This piece makes external what is felt internally as someone is in the midst of the nightmare of a mental health crisis.

Caught. In a swirling mist. Bent. Broken. Not fully them. Not fully there. Trying to find something, a center, a place of calm and yet all you feel is the storm.

The piece is in black and white to depict how all joy, hope and color have been drained from the world. Those moments when all is lost and we are adrift, alone, isolated, caught in trauma so often not of our own making. It feels like there is no roadmap, no

road, no way back to ourselves and so on we stagger and strain, fumble and fall doing the best to keep ourselves upright as the wind howls, as the world goes on and we do our best to not fully and completely fall to pieces.

***Trying to find a way to let it ALL go***

Just

Let

Go

Of the pain. The trauma. The isolation. The fear. The loneliness. The hurt. The nagging debilitating thought that it is always always always going to feel and be like this. To let it all just float away. The dream that something will stop it all from feeling so wrong. And in that moment of letting go, you let hope in, joy in, love in, peace in, happiness in, for the world to be in bright technicolor beauty, to become what can and should be.

A place where everything is possible.

If we could somehow

Just

Let

Go

If you are interested in viewing the works of art and what may be for collection(sale), Click the link below or go to:

<https://bit.ly/EchoesofEmpathyArtList>