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## Maybe a Walk Will Help

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# Maybe a Walk Will Help

ELLENA ISABELLE RUIZ

Art & Art History 323 (Advanced Painting)

Mentor: Debra Drexler

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*I investigate the way emotions shape perception through abstract art by bringing them out of the body and into paint. My canvases are life-size or larger to encapsulate the overwhelmingness of emotions. The size is also to allow marks to be intimate and the ability to manipulate my canvas with my whole body. Abstract work, personally, is the best way to express both scenes and emotions by allowing large color play and the freedom to create different scenarios or images based on the viewers' perception. Using water and tar gel to get vastly different results that have similar transparent tendencies, I compare these to the different sexualities within the LGBTQ+ community. Paint handling allows for different characteristics to come from the color and I relate this to the inclusiveness that I want LGBTQ+ kids to feel. I create not only for myself, but for those young, queer, brown artists who want to create and have space for their art in the professional world and not have to fight for it.*

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**M**y work revolves around the human body through intimacy and violence from my queer POC perspective. I draw on my own experience and those of others when being cat-called and sexually assaulted in public spaces. This series encapsulates this fear and the feeling of being on edge. There was a point where I was talking to my general practitioner, and while I was expressing my concern for my safety, they simply said, “No matter what, men will be men, and they will always do what they want.” Not only was I filled with rage after that statement, but had a catastrophic amount of fear. One day, it occurred to me that this might be me, and it has been, from time to time. However, I have always regained the anger to fight back against this hopelessness.

I aim for each piece to invoke a physical and emotional

response in the way that I apply the paint both delicately and with areas of impasto, to highlight the softness of love and the harshness that it can bring from others. I will use different applications of the paint and brightly pigmented color to create a sense of tension and put the viewer on edge. I bounce back and forth between the rectilinear figure referencing the women who have been victims of sexual assault but also representing the men as well. The tendrils of the figure are reaching for safety or connection with something that helps me ground myself. They are also referring to the yearn of community, trying to join these different parts of myself. On the other hand, the figure is the perpetrator, lurking and watching all of my moves. In this instance, the long tendrils are the control he has, the knowledge that if things ever got bad that his word



Ellena Ruiz is a chicana painter amongst other things. She is finishing up her bachelor's degree of fine art at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a certificate in Women's Studies. She has had her work in a handful of establishments in Northern California and the Wailoa Center in Hilo. When she is not creating, she is reading poetry by queer women of color and making niche playlists.



is truer than mine, and the greediness of his hands if he ever got within arm's reach of me. Working with transparencies allows the painting to have a sense of space but also showing the under workings of society, like heteronormativity, the patriarchal hierarchy of power, and standards set by media of how we should perceive women.

My process with this series has started with gouache or pencil sketch compositions with little space and depth to them. This is meant to replicate my episodes of panic when it feels as if there is not enough space, and everything within my body is compressing. For example, the congested shapes piling and pressing against each other because of the barrage of news reports of women being murdered by men who could not handle rejection.

While creating, I think about all of the queer people before and during my lifetime who were beaten or killed because of who they were. Many times I've heard, "fucking faggots," "you need to be with a real man like me," and "you kiss girls? That's hot wanna have a threesome? Can I watch." The objectification I feel from these statements and diminishing my relationships to fetishes for heterosexual consumption is dehumanizing. It also gives me strength that heteronormativity was never part of indigenous life, it is tangled up in the patriarchy and mixed in with those is the gender binary that Westerners have forced upon indigenous people. I also think about the indigenous people who struggle to find their land and their sense of belonging in this settler colonized region and the feeling of detachment and solitude felt by dwindling communities. Because indigenous voices are gaining more traction, I'm inspired by seeing more people revolt against colonial ideals, thus growing my urgency to represent my own intersectional perspective.

My personal experience with being half Mexican and half white is comparable to being queer but straight-passing. I have the privilege of being lighter in skin color and not presenting as a stereotypical queer woman. When I mention queer women, there is an association of being more masculine presenting in the LGBT community because of the visibility they have had in the movement due to their non-conforming gender performance. With these privileges, I am disconnected from both of these communities to an extent because I have experienced more microaggressions than blatant bigotry. I would also like to add that the blatant bigotry is more common when I'm with my genderqueer partner, who presents more masculine. This has ties to patriarchal standards and viewing more masculine individuals as "the reason" I am queer and needing to insert their masculinity to prove something. So partially, my paintings represent some of this frustration and yearning for the sense of community.

The other representation of my paintings is the use of pink and how it is also in this sort of limbo where it's a vibrant color, but also having punk connotations with being powerful, and I relate to the compartmentalization across fields. Pink has

had a storied and complex history in art, with varied meanings depending on the era and location. These following examples drive my usage of the color pink. Mexican pink was a hue that gained popularity and was coined in 1949 by a Ramón Valdósera, a painter, fashion designer, writer, and more. When he had a show in a New York Hotel, journalists asked about his use of the color, and he simply replied that it is part of Mexican culture. Since 1949s, the shade of pink that we know as "Mexican Pink" has been an essential symbol of Mexico because, together with other elements of their culture, it helped to create an identity for the Mexican people that is still present today.<sup>1</sup> By World War II, pink was associated with bigotry: in Germany, the pink upside-down triangle marked the gay men in concentration camps to show that they could not reproduce for the Reich. During the height of the AIDS crisis in the mid-1980s, queer people reclaimed this symbol, flipped the triangle right-side-up, and marched for their lives.<sup>2</sup> "Silence=Death" was a six-person collective, also in the 1980s who made a poster with their collective name on it, to urge those who were not in the LGBTQ+ community to act because their silence leads to our death. At this same time, punks were clinging to pink as this hue of revolution and going against the mainstream. A member of The Clash said, "pink is punk." It showed up everywhere for punk bands, photos, vinyl, album art, posters for a tour; it completely encompassed this genre who wanted anything but to be tied down, much like this color.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Post, "The True Story of How Mexican Pink Was Born."

2 Jensen, "The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness"; Mullen, "The Pink Triangle."

3 "Riot Grrrl: The Story of Women in Punk Rock—KCPR"; Steele, *Pink: The History of a Punk, Pretty, Powerful Color*.