

Johanna Falzone

## Artist Statement

My work comes from connections with popular culture and personal experience. These areas accelerate my artistic journey and use my voice in a renaissance fashion through painting, bookmaking, and drawing.

I strive to manipulate portraiture by combining images of people who are deeply rooted in the human condition; people are not alone, we all suffer, we all have success; and celebrities are not exceptions. We are all vulnerable; we are humanity.

These self-portrait hybrids represent emotional and cultural connections I have made with celebrities. Through the act of painting, I morph myself into these icons, an act which simultaneously memorializes them while connecting me with them visually. I put myself in this position to show there is no difference between these people and myself. I identify with writers, artists, and other celebrities who have struggled with physical and mental health. By creating these portraits I am reciprocating and validating both of our experiences.

In my practice I also, merge into combining my image with fictional characters in film. I chose moments in films when the protagonist and I connected at the deepest psychological level, and recreate this moment by painting myself into the scene. I focus on moments of contemplation, humility, and feelings of destruction.

I continue to explore how we are subconsciously attracted to people with similar facial features to ourselves and the comfort we feel in familiar faces through Comparison Paintings. These works feature myself juxtaposed to celebrities I am partial to. I allow the work to determine how similar and dissimilar we look. Sometimes we relate through colors and other times through shapes. This discovery forces me to reevaluate my visual association. Each painting delves into individual facial comparisons and background it also transforms from similar faces to faces who are significantly different. I discovered we are attracted to those who look like us, but it is emotional experiences that create a stronger bond between people.

The self-portrait paintings, Miss America Deconstructed shifts from concrete celebrity to the idea of celebrity, and the array of personalities that represent Miss America contestants. I explore personality through facial expressions and discover how they affect the viewers perception and emotions. We normally see such women on national television with their fancy dresses and big smiles shining in the spotlight accompanied by their perfectly crafted mini biographies; but what we don't see is what's behind the mask of dazzle. Are we to believe everything we read and see? No. Regardless, these images effect us deeply, but who are these women on the inside? This is what I explore in the work.

I pose as various Miss America personalities representing the layers that make up these women's hidden psyches and who they are within the competition arena. This series of work deconstructing the projected appearances of these women is a symbol of their imperfection;

they may be beautiful, but they can be sweet, seductive, sinister, and wickedly jealous; this is what makes them human, this is the internal face no amount of makeup can cover up.

These paintings are in constant evolution, with each new observation adding to a consistent flux representing multiple areas in which pop-culture icons affect relationships. There is no end to this stimulating content, only a multitude of never-ending possibilities to innovate.

The open-ended approach I execute in my paintings extends into my bookmaking. While the focus shifts from celebrities to solely the self, the relationship I form with the audience through the human experience remains. I delve into my health struggles, bringing the experience to life through symbolism. I sew and paint forming distorted images representing areas of a woman's body affected by the disease. I take this negatively emotional subject of illness, and beautify it with manipulated shapes and colors. I use a mending process allowing thread to show pain and metaphorical healing. This process gives me a sense of control over negative emotions connected to disease. Women seldom speak about the effects of disease, their bodies, and reproductive complications. I want my viewers to see my work in a way that mitigates the judgment society has taught us to use against disease, and invite women to no longer feel isolated and ashamed.

I also revert to my familial roots in bookmaking and drawing through extensive research on my Norwegian-Chicago heritage. I use stories passed on through generations along with personalities and mannerisms. These connections show a family who are immigrants, and the traits and traditions we pass on that enhance the diverse culture of the United States.

My paintings, drawings and books hold their own specific qualities, but each reinforces the complexities of the human condition.