emBODYed

Chloe D. Phipps
May 2025

Project Mentor: James Lambert, Teaching Professor of Art

This thesis is completed in partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Studio Art: Drawing

School of Art · Ball State University

Abstract

emBODYed explores the physical and mental impressions of how emotions are stored within the body. Drawing from influences such as Mark Rothko, Henri Matisse, and the Expressionist movement, this body of work is informed equally by personal experience and academic research. Color, texture, and form are used to show how complex feelings can be seen and felt. My approach is grounded in somatic research, specifically Nummenmaa's "Bodily Maps of Emotions," which shows how different emotions are associated with different parts of the body. Each piece in the collection aims to nurture a greater awareness of the ways we carry, suppress, or express our emotions, challenging black and white thinking about how feelings work, and encouraging deeper reflection. *emBODYed* is a way of intersecting art and psychology to express what words sometimes fail to do.

Influences

Every artist's work functions similarly to a diary; it is shaped by their diverse experiences and the countless influences that inspire and fuel them to create. Throughout my time as a student, I have learned about many artists whose work has left a lasting impression on how I approach making art. Some of those influences include Mark Rothko, Henri Matisse, and the avant-garde style of the Expressionism movement. Another important influence in my art is my interest in psychology, hence it being my second area of focus as an undergraduate. Psychology and art have long been intertwined disciplines since the early 20th century, as both deal heavily with the internal process of the mind. It is my hope to seamlessly blend the two and bridge the gap between what we think and what we see. In this section, I would like to explore and discuss these influences and draw connections between them and the work that I have made addressing the impressions of emotions on our bodies.

One of the most difficult tasks for the artist is accurately conveying the complex inner psyche of the human mind through art. Though it has been attempted numerous times, Mark Rothko is one notable artist who achieved what many consider to be next to impossible. His exploration of the conscious and unconscious mind in his color-field paintings has created a lasting impact on the world of art. Rothko's curator Peter Selz was once even quoted as describing his paintings as "mirrors of the soul"[1]. His painting *Orange and Yellow* (1956) (see fig. 1) is one such example of how he is able to convey deeper meanings of emotion even with its simple palette and visual information. Despite being a two-dimensional work, there is a mysterious inner glow to the painting that pulls the viewer in. When it comes to Rothko's color field series, specifically, there is an undeniable degree of emotional intrigue in the colors he carefully selects. His primary goal in these works was to elicit a specific psychological response in the viewer depending on the colors he used and how he layered them. The language of color can open the door to discussions of shared human experiences. In my own work, I select colors specific to the feeling I am trying to portray, and my application of color in how I layer and mix hues is representative of the nuanced and layered reality of emotions. I intentionally steered away from

[1] Sotheby's, 2019, 00:00:34

monochromatic palettes as they are oftentimes one-dimensional in storytelling, and I wanted to use colors that contradict one another, create subtle shifts in tone, and draw the viewer's eye into specific areas.

Figure 1. Mark Rothko, *Orange and Yellow*, 1956, Oil on canvas, 91 x 71 inches, Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

The relationship between art and psychology is a multifaceted one. With psychology only emerging as a scientific discipline towards the end of the nineteenth century, many of its discoveries have only existed for a comparatively short amount of time. Expressionism is one such modernist movement that inspires the psychological exploration of emotional subjectivity rather than objective reality. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's early ideas about the unconscious mind had a significant influence on the movement, influencing many well-known artists like Edvard Munch and Wassily Kandinsky. Munch's *The Scream* (1893) (see fig. 2) is easily one of the most recognizable artworks of the Expressionist style. Munch employs a striking palette of reds, oranges, and deep blues in the landscape, effectively evoking a sense of emotional unease in the viewer. This unsettling atmosphere is further heightened by the central figure's distorted proportions, which contribute to an impression of instability and chaos, mirroring its haunting expression of terror. The art that emerged from this period could best be characterized by the portrayal of the artist's emotional

responses and internal states through distortion and exaggeration of colors and shapes. What set this particular movement apart from other movements at this time was that it allowed for individual expression and subjective interpretation. The creative process behind these works involved a technique known as automatic drawing, which allowed artists to suppress their conscious control and access a more spontaneous and unfiltered mode of expression[2].

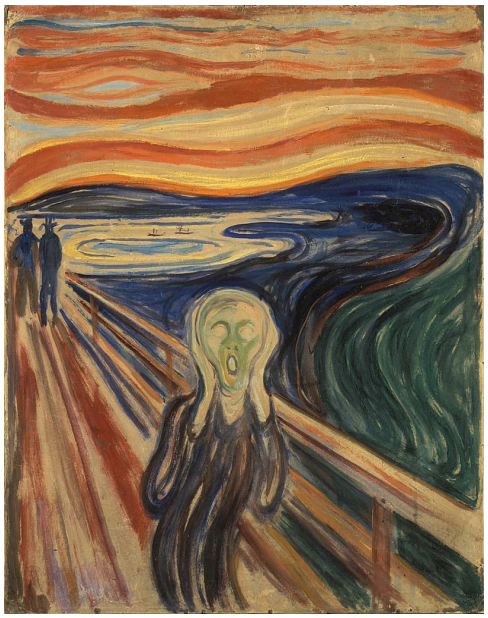

Figure 2. Edvard Munch, The Scream, 1910, tempera on board, 36 in × 28.9 in, The Munch Museum, Oslo

Concerning other artists and their works, Henri Matisse stands out for his Paper Cut-Outs—a significant departure from his previous works and the traditional art-making process he was known for. In the last decade of his career, Matisse began to face health issues that impeded his ability to paint and left him bedridden for months on end. In spite of his illness, he discovered a way to create art using scissors and painted paper. In making these larger-than-life cut-outs, Matisse was able to experiment with bold colors and simple forms much more freely, allowing himself to explore the emotional impact of color in this

[2] Chave, Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction, page #.

way. In his artbook *Jazz*, he describes the process as “drawing with scissors” and that “cutting directly into color reminds [him] of the direct carving of sculptors.”[3]

Psychology teaches us that emotions are stored in the body through a combination of psychological and physiological mechanisms. Neuroscience, in tandem with a handful of psychological theories, says that emotions can create lasting impressions on both the mind and the body. Unresolved emotional issues can manifest as tension or discomfort in areas of the body following traumatic experiences. Physiological changes such as increased heartbeat and shortness of breath accompany emotions such as anxiety, which are often caused by the brain structures that process feelings. Chronic stress, for example, can manifest as physical symptoms due to prolonged activation of the fight-flight-freeze response. This can lead to tension headaches, muscle pain, or digestive issues. Emotional experiences can also affect changes in posture, facial expressions, and overall body language. These ideas of the physiological reactions are representative in my works as well. One way I achieve this is through texture and patterning throughout the body, wherein I play with the quality of paper fragility, using unconventional materials such as studs to suggest aggression and bubble wrap to suggest tension. I use both materials that are familiar and materials reinvented to create a new purpose or meaning. This ideally allows for viewers to visually assess the physicality of the work and create their own impressions of its function.

Research by Nummenmaa et al.[4] presented in the article "Bodily Maps of Emotions" further confirms this by utilizing a topography of physical sensations to measure where and how emotion is stored in the body. This study pertains to how emotions are perceived and felt in the body. The research reveals maps of bodily sensations related to different emotions through self-report methods. Participants were asked to indicate with color on blank silhouettes of bodies where they felt activity increasing and decreasing in their own body in response to different stimuli. Across multiple experiments, different emotions were found to be consistently associated with specific regions of bodily sensations. This indicates that bodily maps of emotions are culturally and universally represented in the somatosensory system (which is the network of neurons that process touch, pressure,

[3] Matisse, Jazz, page #.
[4] Nummenmaa 2013

temperature, pain, and movement). This is reflected in language around bodily states in regards to emotions such as "heartbroken", "to have cold feet", or to feel "a shiver down one's spine" as the mind and body are deeply and unconsciously intertwined. While the research is limited by self-report and only conscious physiological responses, it nonetheless provides a helpful visual guide for how emotions are manifested. As I create each piece, I consider the implications of this research and apply it to where I want the focal points to be. Limbs may be exaggerated, stretched out, or posed in specific manners to suggest the power of body language.

Significance

Across this body of work, I seek to explore the connections between emotional processes and the physiological repercussions that shape the human condition. Guided by my personal experiences and interest in psychology, I aim to bridge the gap between the abstract internal processes of emotion and artistic expression. Some of the experiences I focus on include grief, contradictory emotions, resilience, self-compassion, chronic stress, and rage, examining how these emotions manifest within and throughout the body. Each piece is meant to be viewed as a stand alone work, while also contributing to a larger, cohesive narrative. Through exaggerated forms, texture, unconventional materials, and intentional color choices, I communicate complex and multilayered implications of what it means to feel. In this way, the body becomes a canvas for expression and a starting point for deeper reflection. It is my hope that my audience walks away from these works imbued with a new perspective on their own emotional experiences and feels encouraged to look inward for healing.

Form, as body language, plays a crucial role in my work, serving as the foundation for conveying and interpreting emotion and its effects. By altering posture, shape, and anatomy, I reflect on different types of nonverbal communication that are easily recognizable and indicative of specific moods. Hands, for example, are incredibly powerful tools for storytelling. The intentional absence of heads in my figures is rooted in my desire to preserve a sense of universality through anonymity, allowing viewers to project themselves into the work with ease. It is crucial that the body serves as the primary communicator in these works. I believe the presence of facial features would draw too much attention and ultimately force how the viewers relate to the pieces. In *The Burden of Absence*, the figure kneels with an awkwardly hunched back in a prayer, suggesting an act of desperation and spiritual loss. In *Joyful Contradictions*, the overall posture is bursting outwards, arms raised and feet ungrounded, conveying both elation and struggle. Other figures, such as the outstretched and limp extremities in *Pressure Points* or the jagged, claw-like hands in *I Am a Mosaic of All My Broken Pieces*, reflect the physical toll of chronic stress and unregulated aggression, respectively.

Throughout my work, texture serves the purpose of heightening the visual and sensory experience of emotion for the viewers. I include a level of physicality in each figure

because I believe the works are most effective when seen in person. The dimensionality encourages viewers to engage deeply and actively rather than observe passively. In *Stitch by Stitch (An Armor All My Own)*, patches of wood pulp paper are sewn across the body, referencing the tactile process of mending as a metaphor for emotional healing. The fragility of the paper, contrasted with the dense, embossed surface beneath it, reinforces the parallel to the resilience of skin; newly healed skin tends to be fragile compared to the strength of fully matured skin. In contrast, the limbs of *I Am a Mosaic of All My Broken Pieces,* spray-painted black and given a rough, abrasive texture, embody aggression and lead the viewer's eye to the center of the piece. At the figure's core are ink-muddied shards that create a mosaic riddled with many points of tension. A delicate, semi-transparent paper was used to give the impression of a literal paper skeletal structure in *The Burden of Absence*, emphasizing the fragility and instability that comes with grief. These textures are much more than decorative elements—they are meant to pull the viewer in for a more intimate experience with the work.

Color is another driving force in this body of work. I use color with the intent to evoke emotional resonance in viewers, utilizing its versatility to create layered meanings depending on the surrounding context. For instance, *Stitch by Stitch (An Armor All My Own)* features a nuanced mix of reds and greens, symbolizing conflict and healing, respectively. In *Pressure Points*, the core of the figure blends yellow atop a blue underpainting, producing a sickly green. Though yellow is often associated with warmth and positivity, its placement in this context distorts its meaning, giving it a more unappetizing aesthetic. This transformation of color symbolism is apparent throughout every piece, allowing me to experiment with a much broader palette to tell a story.

Art is inherently psychological as it offers clues about who created it and their understanding of their own subject matter. It is really no surprise that the psychological underpinnings of this collection have largely influenced the planning stages of each piece individually. There is also a significant degree of personal influence within these pieces, as my own understanding and experiences of how emotions manifest in the body hold as much water as the psychological theories that interest me. *Joyful Contradictions* explores the concept of an emotional paradox, which is the idea that conflicting emotions can coexist, which challenges the notion that feelings must be mutually exclusive or their own

distinct event. There is an inherent discomfort and confusion that comes with experiencing joy and sadness at the same time, because we tend to view emotions in binary terms, forgetting that there exists a grey area where multiple things can be true at once. We also tend to believe we can accurately pinpoint our emotions, leading to the misconception that outward expressions can be neatly categorized based on made-up check boxes; “I’m happy because I’m smiling," or "I’m sad because I’m crying." In reality, smiling and laughter can mask stress, while tears serve as a regulatory release for overwhelming feelings, including sincerity.

In addition, my work addresses the consequences of ignoring or suppressing emotions due to fear of vulnerability or to uphold a positive image. *I Am a Mosaic of All My Broken Pieces* channels the destructive potential of unchecked rage, born out of emotional suppression. When faced with intense negative emotions, it can be difficult to know what to do with such powerful feelings. Yet, these feelings are necessary components of our emotional well-being because beneath the fragmented shards of our experiences—both good and bad—exists a whole, multifaceted identity. There is a great danger to the kind of rhetoric that has spread about emotions equating to weakness or failure. Whether this view stems from societal pressure or a lack of coping strategies, it’s crucial that such misconceptions are challenged. Emotions are intrinsic to our survival and well-being, and through my art, I aim to spread awareness about mental health and invite others to gain a better understanding of themselves.

All in all, my thesis exhibition ‘emBODYed’ functions as a stepping stone for larger discussions around emotional awareness and growth. Combining my two disciplines has long been a goal of mine, and I believe there is a lot of merit in integrating psychological research with creative practice—and vice versa. For me, at least, art has always been a way to externalize what cannot be fully expressed with words. I believe that art has a unique ability to bypass language barriers and speak directly on shared human experiences, making complex emotions more accessible and validating for a diverse audience. Although my works may not be “profound” as far as uncovering new psychological revelations, I hope it opens doors for others to confront traumatic and negative life experiences, and to overall build empathy for themselves and others, if only 5% more.

Reflections and Future Plans

Once the exhibition has concluded, I'd like to pivot away from these works for a little while. While I don't see myself pursuing anything further with these specific works at the moment, I do hope to revisit the concept someday to explore new ways to develop and expand upon it. The experimental and multimedia approach I took with this project was quite different from my usual artmaking process, and as a result, I didn't feel completely confident in every decision I made. Having that confidence in my abilities and decision-making is important to me to feel satisfied with my art. I believe that this sense of assurance within myself in anything I make is reflected in the quality of work I put out. Since I have yet to refine my method or style with the combination of mediums I used, I sense that I still have more practice ahead of me. While I understand the potential for these works to be exhibited elsewhere in the future, it's not my main priority right now.

In the year following graduation, my professional development will remain fairly understated. I intend to use the first half of the first year to prepare a portfolio for when I apply to grad school in the winter. I'm still considering my options, but, at the moment, I'm looking at a couple of low-residency programs outside of Indiana. My other options included Michigan State University, which offers a fully-funded opportunity either through an assistantship or a fellowship. Still, I have plenty of research to do before I can confidently say which direction I am taking. While my lease is still active in Muncie, I'm going to have my hand in many pots, particularly within the local art scene, participating in events like First Thursdays and Yart Sale. I'm also interested in exploring opportunities to showcase my art in galleries in my hometown of Anderson during this time.

Five years down the road, I picture myself continuing my academic journey and completing my MFA degree in Studio Art. Doing so will not only reinforce my artistic skills but also deepen my understanding of the contemporary art world. Alongside my studies, I plan to create a dynamic portfolio of work that is suitable for both gallery settings and palatable for artist alleys, fairs, and online sales. Establishing my presence as a professional artist is another forefront goal of mine that I know may prove to be challenging. For my art to reach a broad audience of people, I will need to market myself among digital spheres as well as within my local art scene. Participating in art events and exhibitions is one assured

way that I can achieve this. In addition to these goals, I have a passion project that I would like to pursue. Writing and illustrating my own web comic would be a lifelong dream come true. I have a lesser-known love for storytelling and writing that I don't often share about myself, but it is something that excites me. I believe bringing this project to light would be the most fulfilling achievement of my artistic career. I hope to one day get the opportunity to share my inner imaginative world and inspire young artists, just as many of my favorite web comic creators have inspired me.

Exhibition Statement

I said that I was feeling blue, but inside, I became turbulent green skies and blistering flashes of deep indigo, swirling like an insatiable storm at sea. My limbs heavy like long anchors dragging me towards the abyssal depths of the ocean. My chest resounded with a hollow ache, as if grave robbers had carved out my heart, leaving nothing behind but an empty chasm.

Though a bit dramatic, the words we use to describe our feelings can paint a clear picture at best, while at other times, they may not even scratch the surface. Conveying complex psychological processes such as grief or anxiety and understanding how they physically manifest in our bodies is not always an easy task. If that much were true, art would have never existed in the same way it does now. Each body is a canvas for a deeper exploration of the beauty and complexity of being human and what it means to feel. It is my aim to bridge the gap between psychological theories about the physical impressions of how we feel and visual language to evoke emotional resonance within viewers.

By examining the works born out of the Expressionism movement, much of my inspiration is drawn from the distortion and exaggeration of form, bold outline, and shifts between swirling and angular movement. Mark Rothko's color field paintings resonate with these ideas as well; relying on selective color palettes to tap into the human psyche of onlookers. Similarly, the Cut-Outs from the later part of Henri Matisse's career inspired my approach to organic borders, pushing the human figure as a means to experiment with space, color, and light. I invite the audience to explore each piece's unique physicality from up close. I then encourage the audience to take a step back, viewing the works as a collective, as if they were interconnected parts of a large mechanical whole. At last, with a moment looking inward, the boundaries between the self and art begin to dissolve.

Exhibition List

The Burden of Absence, gouache paint, chalk pastel, and oil pastel on paper, 27½” x 35½” x .007”, Chloe Phipps

Joyful Contradictions, acrylic paint, chalk pastel, and oil pastel on decorative paper, 33½” x 32” x .007”, Chloe Phipps

Stitch by Stitch (An Armor All My Own), acrylic paint, oil pastel, and embroidered thread on embossed paper, 55¾” x 27⅓” x .007”, Chloe Phipps

Where Love Blooms, Gardens Grow, gouache paint, oil pastel on paper, 35” x 29¼” x .007”, Chloe Phipps

Pressure Points, ink, chalk pastel, and gouache paint on decorative paper, 39¾” x 45” x .007”, Chloe Phipps

I Am a Mosaic of All My Broken Pieces, ink, chalk pastel on paper, 51½” x 30¼” x .007”, Chloe Phipps

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Sharp, Jasper, and Pritchard, Saara. "Mark Rothko's Mirrors of the Soul," Sotheby's. March 29, 2019. Video, 00:00:34, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5xW5dI7UBU.