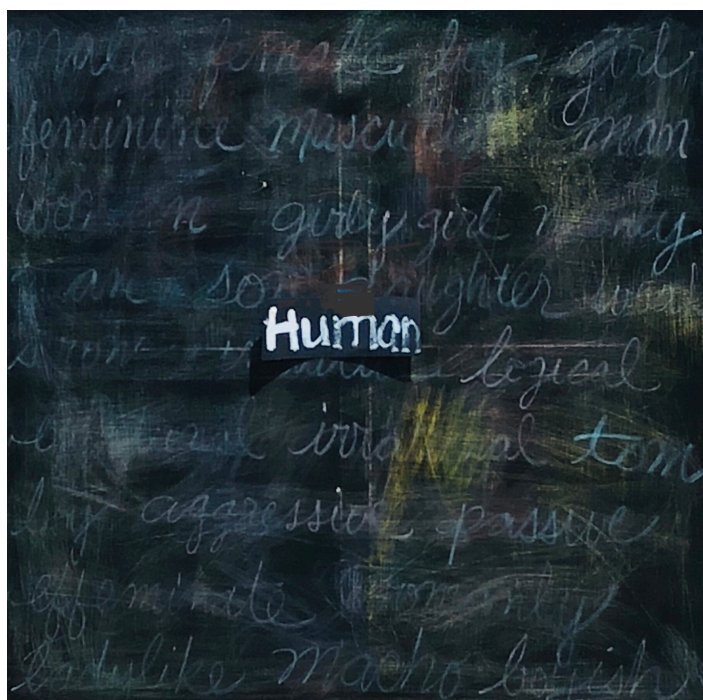


H-U-M-A-N is a series of paintings that is a culmination of the learning, ideas and experiences I've had during the past several years. It began with a painting entitled *Human*, which I painted in 2018, as I watched my eldest child's struggle with gender dysphoria. As she was trying to become what felt right to her, I observed the "otherness" of her, the "triple stare" by strangers, the whispers, wondering if she was a man or a woman? Why does it even matter? She is a beautiful human who is courageous and open hearted.

This first painting I created was an emotional response to the labels, the categories, and the fear in relation to gender identity; the way in which dominant society reduces humans into traditional male and female roles. I wrote down all the labels and stereotypes I could think of across the canvas, and then, cathartically, I scratched them all out, taping the word "human" on top. The current painting, *Every Living Soul*, in this exhibit, manifested in a similar way.



As the mother of a transgender adult child, I want her to be seen as a human soul who is allowed to embrace her identity and let it shine; to have freedom of expression, safety, love, and a sense of belonging.

This should be a human right for ALL people, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, ability, skin color or socioeconomic status. Loving kindness, open minds and open hearts need to prevail. When we truly see

each other as fellow humans, with all of our beautiful differences, then we begin to have compassion for all.

Much of the work in this room began from a place of love, from a sense of beauty and awe in our shared humanity. Art has the power to transform, heal, and bring community together.

“Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.”

-Bell Hooks

Dimensions of othering include religion, gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation, and skin tone.

Belongingness entails an unwavering commitment to not simply tolerating and respecting difference but ensuring that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in society - the circle of human concern.

Widening the circle of human concern involves humanizing the other, where negative representations and stereotypes are challenged and rejected. It is a process by which the most marginalized out groups are brought into the center of our concern through higher order love, the Beloved Community Dr. King envisioned.

-From *The Problem of Othering: Towards Inclusiveness and Belonging* by John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian

Namaste is described as “the light within me honors and loves the light within you.” The word light may be replaced with Spirit, Divinity, or Pure Consciousness. Saying “Namaste” is an expression of honor and respects the other person as being made of the same Pure Consciousness as you. Isn’t that beautiful? The effect of saying and hearing “Namaste” is to feel a sense of union, compassion, and acknowledgment regardless of external differences.

-From The Yoga Mind by Rina Jakubowicz

Only Breath

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu,
Buddhist, sufi or zen. Not any religion.

or cultural system. I am not from the East
or the West, not out of the ocean or up

from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not
composed of elements at all. I do not exist,

am not an entity in this world or the next,
did not descend from Adam or Eve or any

origin story. My place is placeless, a trace
of the traceless. Neither body or soul.

I belong to the beloved, have seen the two
worlds as one and that one call to and know,

first, last, outer, inner, only that
breath breathing human being.

-Rumi

For the Hardest Days

Some evenings, after days where the world feels
like it has poured all of its despair onto me,
when I am awash with burdens that rests atop
my body like a burlap of jostling shadows,

I find a place to watch the sunset. I dig
my feet into a soil that has rebirth itself
a millions times over. I listen to the sound
of leaves as the decide whether or not

it is time to descend from their branches.
It is hard to describe the comfort one feels
in sitting with something you trust will always be
there, something you can count on to remain

familiar when all else seems awry. How remarkable
it is to know that so many have watched the same
sun set before you. How the wind can carry
pollen and drop it somewhere it has never been.
How the leaves have always become the soil

that then become the leaves again. How maybe
we are not so different from the leaves.
How maybe we are also always being reborn
to be something more than we once were.

How maybe that's what waking up each morning is.
A reminder that we are born
of the same atoms as every plant and bird
and mountain and ocean around us.

-Clint Smith