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RESILIENCE

by

GLEND A MILITANO

(Under the Direction of Marc Moulton)

ABSTRACT

My objective for creating this body of work is to explore the complexity and beauty of the human brain. What inspired these works is my research on cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Cognitive psychology involves the study of internal mental processes, while neuroscience deals with nerves and nervous tissue that relate to behavior and learning. Neuroscience is where psychology meets biology. The series of paintings in *Resilience*, were created with the intent to connect these two fields of study, while charting my exploration and discoveries found linked with science and psychology. The brain and its components are portrayed in an abstract way to show human emotions, while experiencing complex behaviors.

These works illustrate the emotions experienced while personally undergoing a variety of physical, emotional, social and financial transformations. Through these experiences, some traumatic and some exhilarating, my resilience surpassed. My art communicates to others because it is relevant on an emotional level. The ability to overcome setbacks is a part of life that everyone can relate to.

Through these labor intensive works I express not only the resilience of the human mind, but the vulnerabilities and beauty of it as well. It is my desire to create dialogue about the emotional and psychological issues many humans face today. I feel the more we discover about the brain and how it works the better we will understand these various concerns.

INDEX WORDS: Resilience, Cognitive psychology, Neuroscience, Processed-based art, Human Behavior, Neurons, Brain

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M.F.A., Georgia Southern University, 2018

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of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My paintings are a combination computer generated images, manipulated sections of photographs, acrylic paint, washes, inks, cloth and mono-prints. These large to medium sized images are placed on hand crafted wood frames or white paper. I purposely chose paper to represent vulnerability and wood to signify resiliency.

The conceptual nature of these works is based on my fascination with humans' resilience to adversity. I have experienced countless hardships like divorce, single parenting, breast cancer and losing a parent. These painful and stressful experiences tested my ability to withstand numerous obstacles. When I entered college the second time around to obtain a BA degree my grade point was a 1.9. I flunked out of college at 18 not knowing what kind of career to aspire toward. I was told I would not be able to get an education degree because I would never bring my GPA to a 2.5. I went before the board of educators and explained why I deserved another chance. The board approved my acceptance on a trial basis. I graduated three years later with a 3.6 GPA in my field of study. I raised my three children, at the time 3, 8, and 9 while working on an undergraduate degree, when thinking about my experiences, *Resilience* was the best word to describe this body of work.

The traumatic experiences I have been exposed to have surfaced a variety of emotions within my paintings. Through research on resilience, I recognized the importance of the human brain and how it functions. The desire to understand

human emotions is a common occurrence throughout my paintings. Through these labor intensive works I express the resilience of the human mind, and the vulnerabilities and beauty of it as well. My research on the fields of Cognitive Psychology and Neuroscience clarified the reason why more research is needed on human behavior. Creating a clear understanding behind the process of my work has made The *Resilience* exhibition, momentous, valid and personal.

CHAPTER 2

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY / NEUROSCIENCE

What is *Resilience*? According to Diane Roberts Stoler E.D., a neuropsychologist, resilience is the ability to recover from adverse change.¹ She believes that, “The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it.”¹ Diane Roberts Stoler E.D., explains that there are two factors that help with resilience which are either internal or external influences. She feels that, internals are the most powerful way of restoring your energy.¹ The internalization of personal adversities I have experienced, subsequently assisted in the creation of this body of work. The result of undergoing this internalization process was the discovery of my intense resilience to hardships. What makes a person resilient? Psychologist identify some factors such as, the ability to regulate emotions and the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback according to an article in *Psychology Today*².

Exploring my own ability to handle life’s struggles expanded my interest in human behavior. While researching human behavior it was obvious that the function of the brain was significant in understanding a persons’ actions. Two fields of studies that are worth exploring when studying human behaviors are: cognitive psychology and neuro

¹ “Stoler, Diane Roberts Ed.D., “The Resilient Brain”, *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, LLC, “Find A Therapist”, 29, Oct. 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-resilient-brain/201510/resilience>, Accessed 8, Jan. 2018.

² “Resilience”, *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, LLC, “Find A Therapist”, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/resilience>, 5, Feb. 2018.

science. Both disciplines are extremely important in understanding how the brain operates and how resilient humans really are.

At the very heart of cognitive psychology is the idea of information processing, according to an article written by Saul McLeod, a Psychology (BSc) Tutor at The University of Manchester in *Simply Psychology*. Saul McLeod states that, “Cognitive psychology sees the individual as a processor of information, in much the same way that a computer takes in information and follows a program to produce an output”.³ In Fig. 1, this painting originated with screen printed images of fragmented computer chips, and neuron like symbols as a way of showing a connection between the human brain and our modern-day technology. The chaotic action within the work symbolizes the emotional impact that transpires in our daily lives thus expressing the difference between humans processing of information. S. A. McLeod also recognizes that humans are influenced in their cognitions by many conflicting emotional and motivational factors unlike computers.³

S. A. McLeod indicates, “Cognitive psychology also suggests that we can study the internal mental/mediational processes that lie between the stimuli in our environment and the responses we make”.³ Today we are bombarded by outside information and are expected to process this information rapidly. Is this going to be an issue for our future generation?

³ “McLeod, Saul, “Information Processing”, *Cognitive Psychology*, *Simply Psychology*, 2008,

www.simplypsychology.org/information-processing.html, 15, Jan. 2018.



Fig. 1. Militano, Glenda. *Processing*. 24.5 x 27, screen print, acrylic,

The human brain is the most complex object in the known universe.⁴ It is estimated that there are a hundred billion neurons, close to a quadrillion connections between them, and we don't even fully understand a single cell according to Psychology Today.³ Neuroscience aims to understand how a person arises out of a clump of squishy matter; it connects psychology and biology.³ Ironically, because of its complexity, the brain is one of the least understood parts of the human body.³ M.S, Saravanan is a vice-

⁴ "Neuroscience", *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishe, LLC,

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/neuroscience>, Accessed 22, Nov. 2018.

principal and educator in India, he explains that: “The study of the brain has only begun to gain ground over the 20th and 21st centuries as scientific research and technology have improved.⁵ Neuroscience is a relatively new field, but the more research that is done, the more it appears that much of human behavior and mental processes—the key interests for psychological study—are intimately intertwined with activity in the brain. Understanding the brain is important no matter what type of psychology you will be involved with, because its effects permeate all human behavior.”⁴ The concept of neuroscience as a field began around 1969 when scientist decided they wanted to know how the brain works. Cognitive neuroscience made the largest break-through in brain studies with the invention of fMRI brain scans in the 1990’s.

Neuroscience focuses on the brain and its impact on behavior and cognitive functions. It mainly concentrates on the nervous system especially the importance of neurons to the brain. A neuron is a type of cell that receives and sends messages from the body to the brain and back to the body. Neurons and how they connect to one another is vital to the brains functional process.

The field of Neuroscience is especially important in the study of human behavior and how mental process are interconnected. According to an abstract in, *Science Direct*, written by B.T. Legesse a Neuropsychiatrist and Behavioral Neurologist, B.H. Price, a neurologist and E.D. Murray, neurologist and clinical neurophysiologist, “Developments in neuroscience hold great promise for continuing to shape our understanding of

⁵Saravanan, M.S. “What is the study of the brain called?”. Quora, 31, Jan. 2016.”

<https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-study-of-the-brain-called>, 6, Dec. 2018.

ourselves and our relationship with the world around us.”⁶ This group of Neurologist declares, “that human behavior is the result of brain activity. Different brain regions are responsible for discrete functions. Emotions, behavior, and cognition are produced and controlled by widely distributed neural systems.”³

Neuroscience realizes that the brain is not the only factor in determining human behaviors, however, studies of brain activity are vital to future developments in cognitive activities. In Fig. 2. I wanted to show how powerful neurons are to the brain and how today we receive a major part of our information through technology such as computers and cell phones. The fragment human like figure in the left bottom of the page has no face, which expresses how vulnerable humans are while being overloaded with



Fig. 2. Militano, Glenda. *Brain Surge*. 26 x 36.5, screen print, acrylic, water color, 2017.

⁶ “Legesse, B.T. , Price, B.H. and Murray, E, D, “Brain and Behavior Relationships”. *Science Direct*, 20, Sept. 2016, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780123750006000732>, Accessed 20, Sept. 2018.

information. There is an intensity in the interaction between the neuron and technology components that helps create a strong emotional element to our processing of information.

In Fig. 3. The large center form is a symbol of a brain viewed from the top. The form was arranged in the center to signify the brains importance. The underlying neuron shapes take on an almost human quality. The fact that they are all attached to each other indicates that one could not exist without the other one. The brain-like figure is cut in half by a vague white line. To the left of the line is the indication of a frontal lobe. The frontal lobe is the part of the brain that controls important cognitive skills in humans, such as emotional expression, problem solving, memory, language, judgment, and sexual



Fig. 3. Militano, Glenda. *Brain Theory*. screen print, acrylic, water color on paper, 2017.

behavior.⁷ It is, in essence, the “control panel” of our personality and our ability to communicate.⁷ The splatters of paint located on the left of the brain implicate that activity is going on in the frontal lobe area signifying some form of communication. Computer chips are ambiguously placed in the background to convey the dominance the human brain has over the computer. In this painting the brain becomes a creature with many aspects of beauty elegance and strength.

⁷ Healthline Medical Team, “Frontal Lobe”, *Healthline*, 02, March 2015, <https://www.healthline.com/human-body-maps/frontal-lobe/male>, Accessed 21, Nov. 2018.

CHAPTER 3

PROCESS-BASED ART

Conceptually and visually this work is influenced by human processing, however the process it takes to create the work drives me to make more. Even though process-based art was more prevalent in the 1960's and 70's it is making a significant comeback in today's art scene. Pernilla Holmes in *Art & Philanthropy/Art* says, "Process-based art is taking a serious hold on the market, with major galleries and museums now championing the movement, and collectors queuing up to own these ultra-hands-on works".⁸

According to a gallery in Britain called Tate, "The term process-based art refers to where the process of making art is not hidden but remains a prominent aspect of the completed work, so that a part or even the whole of its subject is the making of the work".⁹ Process-based art values problem solving through invention and experimentation. The importance of the materials used, their placement and the construction of the work is noteworthy in my paintings. In my thesis work, *Resilience*, the experimentation of new materials such as cloth, monoprint, inks, collage, and screen print were an important aspect of these paintings. Manipulating innovative materials to create a cohesive piece of artwork generated issues where problem solving was necessary. Layering, experimenting and editing became a crucial part of my process.

⁸ "Holmes, Pernilla. "Process-Based Art's Rise". *Art & Philanthropy/Art*, 06, Dec. 2014, <https://howtospendit.ft.com/art/71231-process-based-arts-rise>, 24, Sept. 2018.

⁹ "Process Art". *Tate*, <http://Www.Tate.Org.Uk/Art/Art-Terms/P/Process-Art>, Accessed 4, Jan. 2018.

INSPIRATIONS

Eva Hesse is a noteworthy process-based artist whose interest in the human body inspired my paintings. Her work references the inside of the body, nervous system, arteries, and veins. I can relate to Eva Hesse on a personal and artistic level because she suffered with numerous physical and emotional hardships, ranging from political persecution to familial illness and depression, not least of all her eventual suffering and demise from cancer. Nevertheless, Hesse boldly forged ahead and made the most of her professional circumstances. Eva Hesse emphasized the inherent strength of flexibility and vulnerability. In my paintings I accentuate resilience while maintaining the vulnerability and beauty of humanity. Even though most of her more popular works were sculptures made with fiber glass, I identified more with her highly emotional paintings. I'm drawn to these works because of the layering of washes and inks with organic and geometric shapes that are similar to the process of my paintings. In Fig. 5, Hesse creates a creature like affect in the image very similar to my images in Fig. 4. Like Hesse, my work is also inspired by hardships such as divorce, breast cancer, and financial struggles, but because of the color palette I use, the viewer may only see beauty and colorful images. Hesse's work expresses a host of painful struggles in her life, many of them I can relate too; however, it is her ingenious experimental use of materials in a contemporary way that draws me to her magnificent paintings.



Fig. 4. Militano, Glenda. *Brain Merge*. screen print, acrylic, water color, 26 x 36.5 inches, 2017



Fig. 5. Hess, Eva.

Laura Hoptmon, Head Curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) hosted a show in 2016 in New York, N.Y. *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*. The show included 17 of today's most interesting artists creating process-based work (as one- part of their more diverse practices).⁷ Michaela Eichwald a German painter is one of the artist featured in this show. Art Space describes Eichwalds' work as, "She integrates the artist's hand in a manner that is both base and instinctually human. The romanticism of the German painting tradition, grounded by Dieter Roth and Gerhard Richter, also influences her output and links it to a figurative inclination. Linking object and image, Eichwald forces her audience to reconsider the facades of realism and artificiality".¹⁰ My work in Fig. 7 creates a figurative quality although

¹⁰ Abrams, Loney Editor-in-Chief. "Michaela Eichwald", *Artspace*, _A Phaidon Global Company,

<https://www.artspace.com/michaela-eichwa> \, Accessed 2, Feb. 2018.

gesturally painted and draped with fabric in an intuitive approach. To know what is painted and what is placed on the canvas the viewer needs to get close to the work and even sometimes the eye is fooled by the mediums within the painting.



Fig. 6. Eichwald, Michaela. *Kultur Der Abgewandtheit (Culture De L'aliénation)*, 2013.



Fig. 7. Militano, Glenda. *Evolving*. fabric, acrylic paint, washes and inks on paper, 52 x 85 inches,

Another contemporary process-based artist whose work I admire is Kasper Sonne. Pernilla Holmes reveals that, “Celebrating color more viscerally through his processes is Danish artist Kasper Sonne.”⁸ In Fig. 9 my color choices are a combination of intuitively and purposefully chosen selections. I started the painting with a color palette of pinks and oranges then instinctively added greens and purples. Fig. 8 is an example of one of Sonne’s paintings. In this work I see organic figures comparable to my painting in Fig. 9. His figures like mine are organic and seem to float across the page. His color choice is also reminiscent of my paintings in Fig. 8 and 9. The difference between the two works is my use of screen print with in the figures, which brings intensity to the piece.

Kasper Sonne and Eva Hess both use opposite analogies. According to an article in *Artforum International Magazine*, Sonne uses purity and impurity, cleanliness and contamination--was clear, even to the point of didacticism.¹¹ The final product is highly resolved, almost elegant, seeming to contradict the raw, messy clashes it depicts.¹¹ My work in Fig. 9 combines the use of messy screen printing with multiple layers of ink and paint, yet the outcome is resolved therefore conveys a sense of emotional calmness surrounding the passionate brain and neuron like images.



Fig. 8. Sonne, Kasper. *Txc84*.
industrial paint and chemicals
on canvas, 186 × 155 × 5 cm,
2014.



Fig. 9. Militano, Glenda. *Connecting*.
screen print, acrylic paint, washes
and inks on wood panel, 36 x 48

¹¹ Meneguzzo, Marco, "Kasper Sonne". *Brand New Gallery*, Artforum International,

<https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-389725263/kasper-sonne>, Accessed 18, Dec.2018.

I began the painting in Fig. 9 with screen-printed images on a clear-gessoed wood canvas. These printed images are intensely dynamic and stark. To create tranquility within the piece I use acrylic washes in the foreground to help determine which part of the print will prevail. While creating the painting in Fig. 9 I am constantly altering the images through washes of watered down acrylic paint to help determine the importance of each image. Pouring the washes onto the wood panel while simultaneously spraying the panel with water allowing the paint to rearrange on the canvas. This affect changes the painting instantaneously. While working on a piece I am lost within it not concerned with how it began nor anxious on how it is resolved. My inspiration comes from watching the transformation of the figures and surrounding areas while creating the work. I reconstruct the painting to a degree that it is no longer recognizable as its' origin. Holmes states, "The recent fascination with material and how it can be manipulated, at the heart of process-based work is perhaps the larger question exploring the dichotomy between art as a physical and a social construct." ⁸ Holmes also states that, "Many process-based artists – question why certain materials are valued by society as art." ⁸ Each time I introduce a new material into my paintings; such as, recently adding fabric, it becomes a challenge on how to make the material an intricate part of the work. The material is important to me; however, the process of convincingly assembling the fabric affectively within the painting is what makes art gratifying.

CHAPTER 4

MY PROCESS

The word “Process” has a binary implication in my paintings. There is the physical process used to create the work in addition to the processing of information via neurons and the brain. The symbolic neuron and brain like images are meant to illustrate the emotional impact of my life experiences. The computer chips are symbols of an outside world influence on my life. These works are a metaphor for the age-old question of Nature versus Nurture. The roles of a person’s chemical makeup and their environmental influences in forming attitudes and behaviors.

Since I believe environment plays an important role in my life, the foundation of my paintings originates with symbols or images of importance to me like, myself, my children, grandchildren, cell phones, and computer chips; however, these images are just information I frequently reflect on. The figures I begin with may just stay in the foreground of the painting and may not be of real importance to the viewer. These images are important in the process of making my art because they are representations of my life and or significant parts of my life. Process in making the works is of great importance, however, the core of the works are my experiences in which I draw from. The people that surround me and the things I have felt through my personal experiences is what motivates me to create more paintings. I do feel that art can be a feeling, an expression, a thought and or a point of view that an artist’s wants to share with the world.

In Fig. 10 I want to express the emotional aspect of how humans react to their life experiences. Fig. 10 is an example of how active our human brain can be during the day.

To increase the emotional component of this painting I increased my mediums. These works are composed of mixed medium such as: screen print, fabric, acrylic paint, collage, washes, watercolors and monoprints to increase an emotional concept. Using an intricate array of materials supports and creates a complexity within the subject matter aesthetically and emotionally. The contrast between foreground shapes and chaotic images verses a calm background, expresses some of the emotional tensions I have endured through life experiences. The expansion of mediums creates a collage affect that allows me to show the many facets of human experiences. Images of the brain, neurons, cell phones, computer chips, and a photograph of myself in the print lab create an intensity between the organic human form and nervous system verses geometric architectural forms of a building and computer like configurations. I create these partial images by placing a cell phone image into Adobe Illustrator software then separate the image into four to ten colors. I then decide which portion of the image I want to screen print into the painting. Fig. 10 is labor intensive due to the multitude of layering through screen printed images. Through the many layers in this work I want to express an extreme degree of *resilience* while undergoing a variety of transformations in mediums on canvas in comparison to human life experiences.



Fig. 10. Militano, Glenda. *Processing Information*. screen print, acrylic, watercolor,

In Fig. 11 I aspire to express the idea that the human being is a complex and strong yet vulnerable creature. We have the means to create beautiful experiences through our strife and pain. The purple neuron like shape appears to be receiving or giving information to the large figure in the center. The large screen printed central figure is brain like implicating its' importance in the piece. This painting is emotionally charged and expressively arranged going in a downward motion. The stenciled neuron like figure in the bottom of the page, although depicted with a

wider variety of color, is more subdued than the rest of the painting and signifies a vulnerable side to human emotions.

When I work on a piece of artwork the design and layout is my first consideration. In this work I started with a limited color palette of blues and greens creating a cool background. The screen-printed images are printed dark to light intuitively creating a sense of flow and movement. Varying the values in these colors helps to create depth within the painting. I do not register (to align each printed image) the images, because I like repeating the images randomly yet controlled to see what affect they have on the canvas.



Fig. 11. Militano, Glenda. *Exchanging*. screen print, acrylic inks, paint and washes on wood panel, 23.25 x 48 inches, 2017.

CHAPTER 5

WORK ANALYSES

Donald Kuspit an American art critic (in Van Proyen, 1991) quotes, “Art is about the artist’s environment and experiences.”¹² Dr. Kuspit also says, “I began to feel that the artist is not exempt from life.”¹¹ There is no way out from seeing art as a reflection or mediation or a comment on life.¹¹ I became interested in the process, including the artist’s life.¹² I became interested in how art reflected the artist’s life as well as how it reflected life issues, or existential issues with which we are all involved”.¹² I agree with Dr. Kuspit when analyzing my past and present paintings. My life has a profound impact on the work I am presenting in *Resilience*. I have been in stressful situations and have made many difficult decisions. Some of these have been in my control while some were not. Among these were: a tumultuous divorce, being diagnosed with breast cancer, deciding to go back to school later in life, a decision to have children, becoming a single mom, becoming an artist, being diagnosed with anxiety and depression. These tough decisions and circumstances good or bad, right or wrong have made me the person and artist I am today.

My work has always embraced human emotions whether I use the figure or not. I have either shared personally or through other people several mental illness disorders including anxiety, borderline personality, bio-polar disorder and depression. These experiences of disorder are in my work either consciously or subconsciously.

¹² Barrett, Terry, “Principles of Interpreting Art”, *Art Education*, Vol. 47, No. 5, Interpretation, Sept. 1991, <http://terrybarrettosu.com/wpcontent/uploads/2017/08/Barrett-1994-Principles for-Interpreting-Art.pdf>, Accessed 10, Nov. 2018

Psychologists have found a link between processing information in the brain to these various disorders. “Scientific advances in recent years have made it clear that the brain plays a central role in mental health.¹³ We understand mental illnesses as conditions that negatively affect a person's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.¹³ Mental illness disrupts one's ability to relate to others and to function when meeting the demands of daily life.”¹³

The paintings in my thesis show are a representation of life struggles whether it be a mental illness or resolving a complex decision. “To keep the many functions of the body and mind working properly, the billions of nerve cells in the brain (which are also called neurons) must communicate with each other and work together frequently.”¹³ The neuron and brain like figures are used to represent how humans communicate and make life decisions. The complicated layering of a multitude of mixed media within the paintings help express the complication of human behavior. Bright colors indicate the beauty yet complexity of our experiences and life choices. Serene areas within the works reveal our vulnerabilities as human beings.

¹³ DiscoveryHealth.com writers, “The Brain and Mental Health”, *HowStuffWorks*, 10, Sept. 2008, <https://health.howstuffworks.com/human-body/systems/nervous-system/brain-and-mental-health.htm>, Accessed, 20, Jan. 2018.

The layering process represents the many facets that can occur in life. I personally have had many experiences that I want to share with the viewer. These paintings are like a journey through the brain where I include the hardships as well as the beauty and vulnerabilities.

My works are highly emotional yet there is a struggle to set boundaries. When I first began graduate school the main critique given to me about my works was that I used too much color. I was also told there wasn't enough space for the viewer to rest. I filled the canvas with too much information. At the time I honestly did not see or understand what the professors were telling me. I later found out that I suffered from anxiety and was put on medication for it. This need to do less was like a personal need to set boundaries in life as well as in my paintings. Why did I need to create boundaries with in my work? Why can't I place anything on the canvas and not worry about consequences? I think the idea of "Setting boundaries" is misinterpreted. According to Lynne Forrest, a therapist, Setting boundaries is a "mindset that comes from believing that we are safe, loved, and deserving of kindness and respect."¹⁴ A counselor once told me to set boundaries with someone of great importance to me. I had no idea what she meant; therefore setting boundaries must have been a challenge in my life even back then. In *Human Resilience* I feel that I have created a balance between the figure and the foreground, chaos and serenity, beauty and conflict. Feeling as if I deserve to be

¹⁴ Forrest, Lynne, "What does it mean to set boundaries?", *Lynn Forrest Transforming Victim Consciousness*, 27, Sept. 2012, <https://www.lynnforrest.com/clearing-story/dealing-with-strife-hardship-coping-with-life/2012/09/what-does-it-mean-to-set-boundaries/>, Accessed 3, Feb. 2018.

treated with kindness and respect has given me a new found respect for my art. Creating work that I feel deserves to be seen and understood is why I choose to be an artist today.

The painted surfaces, commonly called canvases in painting, I have chosen wood and paper and fabric are all important in creating this concept of resilience verses vulnerability. I believe that humans are resilient yet vulnerable in all aspects of life. At the age of fifty-two I thought I had an excellent diet, exercise and regiment to promote a healthy person; however, I still got breast cancer. Through the breast cancer I saw my vulnerabilities as well as my strengths. Up until this point I had no idea how much health meant or how much being sick would create character. I had looked at having an illness as a weakness, however I realized it showed my strengths.

It has been established that the brain can retain a lot of information and can perform many tasks at one time with this information. The Fragmented screen-printed images from a variety of sources such as technology and the human figure are used to express the intense struggles we face in this century, while deciding what information is useful in our decision-making process.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The paintings in *Resilience*, were created to express emotional responses to adverse struggles using abstract symbols of brain like images and neurons. The neurons symbolize my experiences and emotional responses while undergoing diverse traumatic life changing events. The brain indicates my resilience to these circumstances. All the other symbolic images represent the chaos and beauty of environmental influences.

Human behavior is indicative to how individuals respond to internal and external stimuli. It combines the physical action and observable emotion associated with an individual's response. My curiosity about human behavior led to research on cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Cognitive psychology is about processing information, where neuroscience focuses on the brain and its' impact on behavioral functions. The human brain is an intricate and imperative part of our psyche and biological make up. According to Kendra Cherry, a psychology expert, "The cerebral cortex is the part of the brain that functions to make human beings unique. Distinctly human traits including higher thought, language and human consciousness as well as the ability to think, reason and imagine all originate in the cerebral cortex."¹⁵ I have included the outer portion of the brain to symbolize my resilience when being exposed to life experiences.

¹⁵ Cherry, Kendra Reviewed by Steven Gans, MD. "A Guide to the Anatomy of the Brain", *Very Well Mind*, 05, Nov. 201, " <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-anatomy-of-the-brain-2794895>, Accessed 22, Feb. 2018

My paintings represent the human figure in an abstract way by fragmenting it or using symbolisms to represent it. The human brain like images are used to represent the emotional aspect of the figure because it controls our processing of information, emotions and bodily functions. These intense paintings were created in an abstract way to express the complexity and vulnerability of the human brain since it is where decisions are made based on our moral development and consciousness.

I see the brain as complex, vulnerable, and beautiful. Therefore, I have integrated beauty in a complicated subject matter into each of my works by using delicate papers and fabrics, layers of materials, and sturdy wood. The wood symbolizes the toughness of environmental influences while the fabrics and paper symbolize the inner gentle part of our soul.

I included neurons in these works to represent how important communication is to human behavior. The attached neurons in my paintings, symbolizes the connections we have in our environment and with each other. The interconnections of neurons and their release of neurotransmitters in response to nerve impulses creates brain activity. The whole circuitry is driven by the process of neurotransmission. My work is about the emotional aspect of human behavior whether it is environmentally charged or internally charged.

The complexity of human thoughts has created many questions in science, psychology, medicine and mental illness. Today there are countless questions surrounding the study of the brain and how it affects human behavior. It is my desire in these works to create a dialogue about the emotional and psychological issues many humans face today and to encourage more scientific and psychological

studies on the human brain. I would also like to help in understanding how to become more resilient when life sets you back.

These works are about the emotional impact during my struggles and my need to survive. It is my hope that others can relate to these life events. I am resilient today by taking control of my life and to learning from my mistakes. The need to become flexible to formulate adjustments to my goals and find ways to adapt is important in being resilient. Although I have used this graduate program to expand my knowledge of materials and process, the work has particularly evolved conceptually.

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