

The Beheld

Danika Rasmussen

2022, Yarn, reed, canvas, and hot glue on canvas, 16"x16"

Image Description:

Three-dimensional piece featuring a hole in the center of the white canvas. The edges of the canvas around this hole are peeled outward by yarn restraints in a variety of colors (burnt orange, sage green, olive green, beige, and navy blue) and ways; fanned out along an edge from a point source, and bolted down by knots (for example). There are also other slices or holes in the canvas around this central, largest hole, most where yarn and reed are woven and wound through. In some places the yarn is separated to create new textures, and in some places it is taught, while others are loose or free flowing. Strips of cut canvas and hot glue have been used to add additional textural details such as dots and lines. Centered around the top of the main hole are two eyes structured out of reeds and hot glue, as well as yarn, reed, and canvas linework above them to mimic hair and eyebrows.

My final project is a three-dimensional, tactile recreation of my mid-semester piece *The Beholder*. Utilizing yarn, ripped canvas, reed coil and hot glue, this piece is primarily meant to be explored via touch as opposed to sight. I was inspired to take this approach by the difficulties I faced in my original work, namely that "[m]y biggest challenge was really deciding how I would visually encapsulate a lived experience which is not visible." In exploring both my own expression of invisible disability, as well as the multitude of ways in which to make visual art more accessible, I decided to explore creating a piece which can be fully experienced with or without sight- as is the case with my disability.

I began with a blank white canvas which I then slashed down the center as my starting point. From there, I began to experiment with different textures, and techniques which would pull the piece forward from two-dimensional to three. I had planned to work partially without sight or with obstructed sight, and eventually decided against it since I was working with a hot glue gun and blade, however I did periodically do blind check-ins, where I would explore the entirety of the work by feel and determine where I felt something was missing, and what that feature might be. I attempted not to play as heavily

into visual aesthetics, which is ultimately impossible as a seeing person making a piece of visual art, but I think the motivation at least made a difference in the final product. I did, however, include eyes, an eyebrow, and some lines which mimic the sweeping of my hair across my forehead in order to 1) pay homage to the original piece and the particular attention paid to the eyes/lack thereof and 2) ensure the element of a self-portrait in the visual sense of the work. This is also demonstrated in the slices and cutouts in the bottom right corner to mirror the clawing behavior of the lynx in the original work. While this piece is meant to stand independently of its visual appearance, it does not in reality for the seeing consumer, so I wanted these connections and concepts to be somewhat visually evident as well. Other details include my initials in braille in the top left corner, features layered on top of/underneath each other throughout the piece (I attempted to capture some of these in photos), and a variety of textures and sensory information throughout the piece.

This was my first time creating a tactile piece, and was also my first attempt on this particular project. I really enjoyed it in an unexpected way, and particularly enjoy the experience of the piece now that it's finished. As a sensory experience, it's really satisfying and almost comforting, a feeling which is crucial to my relationship with disability but hard to convey alongside the more negative aspects. I also feel that while this piece is certainly more distant from Riva's artistic influence, it could not and would not exist without my having created the original piece first. In addition to the textures I created and implemented personally, I also used an old canvas which had been gessoed (gesso = a thin white paint which hardens) over, so there was some additional texture and character from the painting underneath and around the edges. Overall, I'm really pleased with the outcome of this piece, and wish all of you could experience it by touch in person!