

Hands



“A helping hand”
“A show of hands”
“An iron fist”
“At hand”
“By hand”
“Close at hand”
“Handmade”
“Firsthand”
“Get your hands dirty”

“Hand in hand”
“All hands on deck”
“Hands down”
“Hand-me-down”
“Hands-off”
“Time on my hands”
“I know it like the back of my hand”
“On the other hand”
“Out of my hands”
“Raise your hand”
“The upper hand”
“Shake hands”
“Secondhand”
“A heavy hand”
“Try your hand at”

Hands are everywhere. I use them for pretty much everything I do, and they’re built into our language in a way that I’ve never stopped to notice. Yet most of the time, I’m barely conscious of my own hands. They’re just another part of me that’s always been there, doing their thing in the way that most of us consider to be “normal,” and so I’ve never really considered them.

Stimming is a behavior that is very common among autistic people. It is short for “self-stimulatory behavior” and occurs when a person engages in a set of repetitive movements or sounds. Stimming is used for stimulation, self regulation, and self expression. One of the most common types of stimming is hand-flapping (Stout). Amythest Schaber, in her video series “Ask an Autistic,” explains, “We don’t just need it [stimming] for self-regulation, it’s the natural way that we move. It’s our natural way of growing, learning, expressing ourselves. And so if you tell a child ‘Don’t flap! Don’t flap your hands in public!’ the child is just expressing their joy and you’re telling them ‘No. Stop. The way you move is bad and shameful’” (Schaber 9:14). Autistic people are often told to have “quiet hands” when a neuro-typical person wants them to stop hand-flapping.

This got me thinking about hands and how we use our hands, and I thought to myself, *are anybody’s hands ever really “quiet”?* Our hands are always in motion, always doing something to help us interact with each other, with the world, and with ourselves. I pet my dog, I write an essay, I scribble a grocery list, I tap my fingers on the desk as I think hard about what I’m working on, I cook dinner for my family – my hands are always involved. I began to consider and appreciate my hands in a new way, and then I began to wonder why all hands can’t be appreciated because all hands, whether acting “normally” or not, are useful and beautiful things. A person should never be ashamed of their own hands.

Julia Bascom writes on her blog, “I’ve been told I have a manual fixation. My hands are one of the few places on my body that I usually recognize as my own, can feel, and can occasionally control. I am fascinated by them. I could study them for hours. They’re beautiful in a way that makes me understand what beautiful means” (Bascom).

This painting shows two hands in motion. I painted them with colors that you can only see if you look hard enough, and so they don't appear exactly as my hands do the human eye. The background is covered in an array of fingerprints because I wanted to use my hands in multiple ways during the process. To create this piece, I spent a lot of time examining hands. My goal was to become more conscious and appreciative of them, no matter how they behave or interact. I wanted to show that hands should be prized instead of shamed, and I wanted to capture all hands, in all their uses as uniquely and unconditionally beautiful.

Bibliography

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