

# Head and Heart

Studies have found that many types of mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and dementia can be treated well with art-based therapy. Canadian artist Cam Forbes created a series of works called *Bathroom Retreat* that show different parts of her bathroom, specifically mostly from her view from her bathtub. These were painted after she had given birth to her daughter, while she was working through her postpartum depression. Having her art from this series in this exhibition will act as a catalyst for the start of a community discussion about mental health and the positive effects that art practices can have on one's mental health.



*Untitled*, Cameron Forbes, 2016,  
8 in x 10 in

Forbes's work in her bathroom retreat series is different from most of the other work that she has done as she tends to work mostly in outdoor spaces or public spaces such as bus shelters or at a lake. This series focuses on a confined indoor space that is extremely personal. None of the works from this series were titled and instead, they were just given the group title *Bathroom Retreat*. Grouping them together as opposed to titling them makes them far more personal to the artist because the viewer gets no extra insight into the situation that this was created in. Displaying these on the gallery walls without a title force the viewers to determine their own interpretation of the scene.



*Untitled*, Cameron Forbes, 2016,  
8 in x 8 in

Their interpretation of the artist's mental state at the time of painting the scene can become a reflection of the viewer themselves. Some of these paintings are completely black and white while others have some colour and then others are in full colour. Forbes wrote a statement on her website about how in her plein air studios she tends to "capture the moment" whereas in her *Bathroom Retreat* series she was able to use the time to reflect and experiment with the feeling of painting and how she can feel shadows and light now. In this series there is a strong sense that she was working through how to represent and capture one certain image as we can see that the faucet of the bathtub is repeated several times, we see it with varying amounts of colour and from different angles and orientations.

Forbes's statement about the *Bathroom Retreat* series as a whole works in combination with the images in the series as part of the art therapy Forbes was going through at the time. The study done by Sarid, Orly, et al. found positive results in the treatment of postpartum depression by combining discussions as well as writings and images done by the patient over the treatment period. Gaining understanding is one of the key ingredients highlighted in a study observing what the best practices and techniques are when integrating art-based therapy with a patient (Omylinska, Thurston, Joanna, et al.). Writing down her thoughts about what creating the art meant and what the space she created it in was a way for Forbes to gain an understanding of her mental state and how she is doing currently.

In a study focusing on the way in which art therapy is currently being implemented in the treatment of many mental health disorders, and ways in which it may be further implemented in the future, it is noted that the best results from art-based therapy practices come from group settings (Hu et al.). For this exhibition setting up space adjacent to the gallery space allows the

public to gather and create art together in a group setting. Including a corkboard-covered wall with the art area allows the public to display their own art and have discussions not only about Forbes's work and her words about it but also about the work of other community members. The study done by Omylinska, Thurston, Joanna, et al. gave eight key ingredients for treating patients with art-based therapy and some of those key ingredients include engaging in activities and developing relationships. This art area will present an opportunity for community members to engage in the activity of going to the gallery as well as creating art in a group setting that allows community members to develop relationships with each other.

Along with the show being held during May, which is mental health awareness month, the weekly sessions for mothers will bring awareness to postpartum depression and take steps to help those that suffer from these conditions. These weekly group sessions combine a practice of art-based therapy, along with mindfulness, led by a professional. Mindfulness practice as well as other alternative techniques can help lessen the effects of postpartum depression (Mammenga and Hansen). They found that the alternative treatment methods that had the patient participating more, such as yoga and mindfulness had better results than those where the patient was either just consuming things or using a product, such as placentophagy or essential oils. Forbes describes how having the confined space forced her to rethink the way she painted and helped her focus. She describes how she was able to take time with each painting as opposed to quickly making her paintings in her plein air studio. Having Forbes present not only for the artist talk but for the first session of the group therapy allows other mothers to talk in a more open way. This creates an environment that will show mothers a way to work through their postpartum depression that they may not have previously considered.



Untitled, Cameron Forbes, 2016, 8 in x 10 in

Having Forbes create a new piece specifically for this exhibition will be a final look for the artist to take a look back on what she has gone through. It will be a hopeful look for the community members that are going through similar situations. She has since had time to implement what she had learned from creating the works in this series and can take that knowledge into a new piece that can work as a reflection of what she has already created. Having her reveal this at her artist talk allows her to discuss her journey and the role that creating art played in that.

This exhibition of Cam Forbes *Bathroom Retreat* allows the artist to further discuss her experience with postpartum and the way she worked through her emotions and mental state with an art-based therapy process. Having the artist share her experience allows for a public discussion about mental illness and talk about experiences openly as a community. An open art area is a location for the community to gather to create and discuss art and mental health where many aspects of art therapy that have been proven to get positive results can occur without the necessity of a trained therapist. The weekly group art therapy session provides an alternative therapy practice for mothers with postpartum depression.

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