

Poetry is undeniably a form of art. I've been interested in it since I started grasping the concept of relation and connection. I find deep meaning in words that came from a place of raw emotion, but weren't intended to be palatable. I find beauty in action and behaviors that aren't done with art or performance in mind. My project is meant to capture the feeling of connection while also feeling distant and foreign.

Before I was even considering what shape my final project might take, I began writing short prose about the world as it was around me. I scanned them, printed them and folded them into zines because I wanted them to be fully tangible in a way that I was able to share with others. My final mixed media pieces are based on some of these writings and include some of my original photography. I selected these four photos because of their clarity and intrigue. They are all printed on canvas, which I then embroidered. I tried to match the words and other adornments with the feeling inspired by the photographs and by my personal knowledge of the people in them.

This project was a deep exploration for me. I questioned what it was that I considered poetry, outside of the conventional? And why the work I chose speaks to me? I still haven't found a definite conclusion to this line of inquiry, and it's possible I never will. I encourage each of you to think about situations in your own life, from the serious to the mundane, which inspire a sense of the poetic and ask the same questions.

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The concept of relatable content is indispensable to the art community. Many people create art for the sole purpose of sending a message, and many people view art only so they can feel a connection to an experience or person through shared happiness, sadness, and anger. I've always sought work about things I've suffered with and things I've found joy in. It's only been in recent years that I've found and fallen in love with works I can't find any direct connection to. Since realizing that, I've found that these works I never considered in the past come to forefront of my mind. I've written and made art about them and through this paper hope to articulate these ideas in a much more comprehensible way.

Poetry wasn't a direct interest of mine until a year ago and since then it has been a consistent nag that started as a mild curiosity and has evolved into an obsession. I began by reading the poems by teenagers posted online. I spoke with some of them about their work and their inspirations. Many of them spoke much more on visual or musical artists as inspirations than they spoke of other self-described poets. I thought that if those things could inspire a sense of poetic potential than I must've always had an unrealized interest in poetry. I continued to look at art and listen to music, and began to have deeper conversations with friends on what it was that attracted me to those pieces outside of what could be taken at face value. We talked about our obvious relation to the pieces, and went on to talk about why the specific method of presentation or why the person creating the art was just as if not more important than the piece itself. I praised pieces that were about being queer, being a woman, and having strange family experiences. I only began to acknowledge my feelings of connection to pieces and subjects that I had no experience with several months ago, but I'm sure these feelings were present for much longer than that.

Describing how I feel about these works is difficult. They feel vaguely relatable, but there's no apparent reason for me to relate to them. If I were a believer in reincarnation I would probably argue that I went through similar experiences as these people in a past life. I'm not religious and I don't really believe in supernatural experiences, so I have trouble finding a way to rationalize why I get these intense feelings of connection.

I fully came to realize these thought processes of disconnected association through the blog of a girl named Taylor-Ruth. I began following her when she regularly posted comics she had made about being a sad teenager, which I related to. I found myself on her blog again reading the text posts she had written and somehow feeling distant but completely understanding at the same time. She posted about overcoming addiction, various dramatic relationships, and aborting an unexpected pregnancy. I had never experienced those things but found myself feeling *empathetic* and felt like I somehow had vague memories that connected me to her words on the subjects. It seemed like if I closed my eyes I could envision myself in those exact situations, feeling the emotions she talked about experiencing.

Though I've felt some frustration in the past not understanding where these feelings come from, when I decided to use these mysterious art pieces as the basis for my final project, that frustration came forward until it was most of what I was thinking about. The best way I can describe this paper is as an ongoing exploration of myself in the hopes of concluding how it is I define what I see as poetry through ways that, currently, feel indefinable.

Merriam-Webster offers several simple definitions of *art*. "Something that is created with imagination and skill and that is beautiful or that expresses important ideas or

feelings". "Works created by artists: paintings, sculptures, etc., that are created to be beautiful or to express important ideas or feelings," and "the methods and skills used for painting, sculpture, drawing, etc." Those definitions do cover the general idea of *art*, but there are many artists who argue against that being a comprehensive definition. I would say that many of the people who argue that are artists. Personal definitions of *art* remain inconsistent from person to person, and even I could not give a solid definition to fit all the various thoughts I have about art. For the purpose of this paper, I'd like to define art as *an experience that provokes at least one thought or feeling that is difficult or impossible to ignore*. The artistic experience can be seen, heard, smelled, felt, tasted, or thought. I want the definition to cover as much ground as possible since some of the things I'll be speaking about will go from as concrete as music and paintings to as intangible as behaviors, ideas and experiences.

Poetry is inarguably a form of art, but I would still debate against standard definitions of poetry. I'll use the Merriam-Webster definitions again for reference. They have two simple definitions. "The writings of a poet: poems" and "something that is very beautiful and graceful." I believe most people who take an interest in poetry would argue against that since some of the most well regarded poets have work that is very raw and harsh and, at least not classically "beautiful" or "graceful." I can imagine a broader definition that would include non-beautiful poems and possibly music as a form of poetry, but I would like to go even further beyond that and argue that poetry can include things that were not intended to be poetry and that poetry can even include things where no words are involved at all!

I've considered what I would define as poetry and why. I've found a definite range of sources and a few themes between several of them, but as for why all I've been able to come up with is that they feel "lyrically relatable" which is now just another term I'm struggling to define. While I will be speaking on how I identify these works as poetic, I feel like it will always lead to another "why" or "how." For example, I could say, "I find this to be poetry because of the specific absurd focus" and could be asked, "Why is that the poetic aspect?" I don't think there's a bottom to the "why's" that could be asked for this topic. Because of that, this paper will mostly focus on the things I'm considering and how I find them to be poetic instead of finding a definite ground to "why" I find them poetic.

I already briefly talked about Taylor-Ruth, and she really did play probably the most major role in my interest on the topic. Though some of her posts contain undeniable beauty, I don't consider all her posts to be poems because they're beautiful or graceful, because many of them aren't. Some are grossly humorous or totally absurd or deeply sad and emotional with no intentional beauty or grace invested. An example of one of her beautifully written posts would be, "A truth so nagging and persistent it showed as a thick layer of grease on my hands I fervently wiped off on my jeans and my hands became clean but when I stood everyone could still see it on me" and that is one of the posts I noted when researching. On the other hand, I felt similar feelings about and noted a post that read, "I want to make the women in my abortion support group shirts that say "*TOMB OF A WOMB*" but I'm the only one who thinks joking about it is funny."

I've always considered music, the process of composition, the sounds produced, and the lyrics written, to be poetry and since this project I've been able to hone in on the artists that inspire the feeling I'm trying to define. The musician who's come up the most in both my research and the music I've listened to while working on this project is Daniel Johnston.

Daniel Johnston mostly made music in the 80's and is widely considered one of the most influential artists when it comes to the lo-fi genre. Lo-fi is characterized by being recorded on low quality equipment and sometimes even contains further editing to produce a grainy and muted sound. He became popular not only because of his music but also because of the way he promoted it. He handed out tapes to strangers who were in and out of the music profession. He never asked for a promotion, deal, or review from any of the people he gave the tapes to, he simply asked that they listen to it. As his career went on he had more and more problems regarding his undiagnosed illnesses that have now been identified as manic depression and schizophrenia. As he continued into his 30s and 40s he had repeated delusions specifically regarding demons and Satan. He was deeply religious, and would write music against the devil. There were several times he believed people around him to be possessed by demons or even by the devil himself, and did attack people a few times.

A story from his documentary, *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*, that specifically spoke to me, was about a time in New York when he, his friends, and his manager went to the Statue of Liberty and he was caught drawing Jesus fish on the wall of the inside staircase. Hearing about that really triggered something I've yet to identify in me that shouted that *this* was an example of what was indescribable. I heard that story and thought to myself, "how could that ever NOT be considered poetry?" I'm still struggling to find out why that was my immediate thought.

A work that was recommended to me after sharing with several people the topic of my final project was a short book by Megan Boyle titled *Selected Unpublished Blog Posts of a Mexican Panda Express Employee*. I became immediately interested at the mere title of the book because I could think of nothing that spoke more to the feeling I was nursing than the written thoughts of an everyday person that they decided not to share with others until later. I ordered the book and have been reading it slowly and deliberately. I want to find surprises in this book well past this project. Some of my early favorites are, "if I drop a toothpick I'm pretty sure it will remain where it fell for three days," "Will Smith is in 'Men in Black.' He is also in 'Independence Day.' People like to see Will Smith reacting to aliens. Will Smith is a visual manifestation of the suspension of disbelief it takes to imagine realistically interacting with aliens," Which was followed by, "my cat jumped in the toilet."

There are things she writes about that I can directly relate to, but I find the subjects she writes about that I have no experience in to be the ones I connect with the deepest. She wrote a list of all her past and present sexual partners and all of her encounters with them, and at the end, totaled them into different categories. I read that section with deep attention and felt intense twinges of pain and empathy and I still can't identify where they came from. She is a very matter-of-fact writer with a very cold and calculated style that I find myself drawn into so intensely.

All of the things I've talked about above are marketed by people who call themselves artists, but I don't believe every person would look at blog posts or a criminal offense such as vandalizing a national monument and agree with me that those things are art. It's possible even the artists themselves don't consider those things pieces of their artwork, but I can't help but consider them that way. To me there is something in reading these words or listening to these accounts that I find deeply compelling and it frustrates me to no end that I can't identify what they're compelling me to do.

Though there are things I can relate to in all these people I've mentioned (usually mental illness) as well as the creators of works in my bibliography that weren't mentioned

in this post, most of the subjects I find myself drawn to and I feel the most intense about are the ones where I have no experience. I have never had an abortion, I have never attacked someone based on a delusion, and I have never listed out sexual partners for the sake of feeling an empty accomplishment, but when these people talk about all those things, I feel like I'm there. It feels like I'm having a flashback to moments that never happened in my life. I expected to have a full realization during the writing of this paper, but I can say that it hasn't happened and I don't think it will at this point.

I started thinking of and writing down small phrases of absurdity that came to my head. They were mostly about real experiences I had, and were stated in a very matter-of-fact way. They were usually about very menial things that for some reason made a resting spot in my brain and wouldn't go away until I wrote them down. Most are about a concrete occurrence, and some include a vague association. One based on something that happened to me when I forget about the sensitivity of the skin on my face read, "Cheeks irritated by sunscreen kind of look like a rosy glow."

I've compiled these and decided I wanted to put them into some form that is reproducible and share them with others. I've called these, "truisms", a word I first used to describe Taylor-Ruth's posts regarding her love of dirt and then further fell in love with because of the Jenny Holzer piece of the same name to me. I believed, "truisms" was the most appropriate word because it's a word I used to describe the posts I felt a connection to before I acknowledged I felt that connection. I felt it was important because I believed, and still have hope that, there are others who feel these unexplainable feelings, and that we can commiserate on our shared confusion. I decided to make a small, six-page zine. Each could be made out of a single piece of copier paper. I tried to write out the lettering and was reminded of my disdain for my own handwriting. I got a magazine and spent at least six hours over three days cutting out letters from the body of articles and pasting them together to spell out my truisms. After I finished the words, I drew small simple objects that matched with the phrases and pasted them into the pages. I scanned it, edited it so that there wasn't clear evidence of the paste lines or folds in the paper, and printed out 45 pages of it. I folded them all in one night. The following morning, I put them on the snack cart to be available to any Oxbow students or faculty. I will be continuing to make these with the truisms that I continue to think up, and will hopefully be making other works on this subject outside of my final project work.

I didn't reach the breakthrough moment I hoped to while writing this paper, but I definitely have a much deeper understanding of the subject. I've become better at identifying more new media to keep feeding me vaguely relatable content. These things help me to feel a sense of connection, even if it's unfounded. After months of ruminating on blog posts, and not having a clue of what I wanted my final project to be about, I decided this was a topic I cared about and was not already thoroughly challenged by others in a way that was accessible. I doubt I'm the first person to ever speak on the matter, but I was unable to find any sources on the subject besides holding conversations with people, mainly my classmates, who felt similarly. I walk away from this paper feeling like I may or may not be able to tell what it is that makes these pieces feel connected to me, but I feel like as long as I continue to consume and create media of this type it won't matter if I ever fully understand it. I have no particular hopes or expectations for any potential reader. If I felt just a bit more detached, I would likely hope that after reading this you shared my views, that you'd seek out these sources that I find to be incredibly amazing when they're

beautiful and when they're real and violent, that you'd ask me more so I could have a chance to sound more eloquent through my speaking rather than my writing. I am not against you doing any of those things, but I found this to be so personal that I can't find it in me to care one way or the other how anyone else views this subject because this project and this paper is only and will only ever be about my connection to these people and to myself.

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