

My Odyssey

by

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## Chapter I

Trauma is when a person is exposed to death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence. This may be through direct exposure, witnessing, through learning of a very close friend, family member or in a professional role. Despite the roots of trauma, it can become highly debilitating to be unable to describe, explain or even verbally express what is wrong. Dealing with feelings for neurodivergent individuals, people with mental illness, and anyone dealing with trauma can be difficult when we cannot comprehend them ourselves, let alone relate these things externally to heal ourselves, physically and mentally. Emotions are powerful enough to remain trapped inside of the psyche as well as the physical body. Thus, visual arts can act as a beneficial tool that aids in non-verbal communication about and dealing with matters such as trauma, anxieties, and mental health issues. Because of the deeply rooted mind-to-body connection, the act of creation is an efficient tool used as a healthy coping mechanism and a way to reveal significant and sometimes hidden parts of ourselves.

The objective behind collage art being a beneficial way to cope is that it promotes self-discovery and provides a way to freely convey emotions, thoughts, and anything else beyond what the constraints of words can describe and remedy the things we can not change. The implementation of brainstorming, experimentation, creation, and production all play a salient role in trauma healing because of our connection to thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as the use of visual, physical, or sometimes auditory stimuli. This idea of art in conjunction with healing has an emphasis on process over product. This emphasis relays the importance of the creative journey that is

art-making. The method of fabricating something substantial in the context of creativity has been a valuable mechanism for exploring and promoting pragmatic emotional and physical wellbeing. Visual arts, and more specifically collage art, is a widely misunderstood process that takes time, effort, and tenacity to curate and constructs emotionally vulnerable artwork for self-healing purposes.

Collage art, within the context of art history, was used to describe artwork relating to the Dada and Cubism period around the 1910s. Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso are the first established and recognized artists to have created the first collage, or *papier collé*, which is from the French word *coller* to glue (Wolfe, 2019, para 1-2). Not long after, in November of 1915, the Dada artist Hans Arp in Switzerland ‘explained that the works were “structures of lines, forms and colors that attempt to achieve the infinite and the eternal – beyond the human realm. They are a denial of human egotism” (Wolfe, 2019, para 5). Another reputable artist, Hannah Höch, created influential and incisive collage-style artworks that she used as a way to comment on the current political atmosphere as well as touching on themes of socially constructed gender roles and androgyny. Collages were used to retaliate against the cultural norm and criticism of the upper class, war, and societal norms (Collins, 2020, para 10). Surrealism quickly emerges from the heels of Dada and becomes the next recognized period of cutting and pasting as a means to make art. The surrealist artistic movement was rooted in the subconscious to discover and explore different concepts while successfully completing a cohesively understandable piece.

Outside of the strict and structured art history guidelines lies years of preceding insight, exploration, and findings in terms of collage. Paper agglomeration and gluing for

decorative use began in Japan during the 10th century. It was also known to use materials such as gold leaves or gems for spiritual recognition and adoration. The idea to create memorabilia in albums using collaging techniques started in the 18th century (Dina, 2013, para 1-3). Mary Delaney is an infamous artist from the 1700s who is well known for her paper mosaics. After finding a scrap of paper and a petal from a scarlet geranium on her nightstand, Delaney ‘invented a new way of imitating flowers.’ (“Late Bloomer: the Exquisite Craft of Mary Delany, 2021, para 2-3). Even being well off and established, Delaney didn’t step into her artistry until later in her life. Her work consists of a plethora of collages of floral pieces. She was a revolutionary leader in the art world who beautifully interwoven the worlds of science and art. Born in the 1700s into the upper-middle class, she is an underappreciated and unacknowledged collaging pioneer who deserves recognition for her strides in the art world.

The basis of using collage for medicinal purposes derives from its flexibility, versatility, and room for possibility. The very act of collaging stems from the idea and fundamental yearning that resides in ourselves for making sense of various aspects in the context of recording and arranging pieces, too, in turn, promote transformation and growth as a way to assemble a new conglomeration.

To understand and successfully implement art-making as a coping mechanism, the individual needs to be able to recognize and, most importantly, be able to accept their personal experiences with trauma or suffering, including the physical, emotional, and mental effects these stressors have on us.

Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Visceral warning signs constantly

bombard their bodies. To control these processes, they often become experts at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside.

They learn to hide from themselves. (Van der Kolk, 2015, 96).

For people with trauma, it can be excruciating to be faced with the hurt and anguish that it can bring, including these physical and mental sensations that many times are disguised and indistinguishable. These sensations generate the urge to work through and process traumas for physical and emotional growth and healing. For the healing process to begin, the individual needs the capacity to have an open mind and the willingness to let go of what we can not control. Art acts as a sense of reliability and a means of diversion for when life becomes stressful and out of control (Caruso, 2018, para 16-17). This process is unique and utterly personal to the individual. It can be transformative using techniques such as the regulation and expression of feelings and the integration of our internal dialogue and our external environment. It leads to security in oneself and feelings of safety being restored in self-agency and the openness for potential in ourselves (Collins, 2020, para 9). Our inner dialogue has an enormous effect on our day-to-day life, not only mentally but physically as well. There have been countless practices and studies on this mind-to-body connection and how they balance and influence one another.

In working cognitively with a challenging art task, clients access internal creative resources and feel increasingly empowered, safe, and strong. Furthermore, the symbolism of the resulting art creation can provide the client with a sense of mastery over trauma, as it metaphorically constructs a new resolution to a stressful event (Tripp, 2019, para 7).

Collaging has been used in numerous ways throughout history in public rituals such as criticizing and commenting on politics and pop culture in which is inherently relatable and in turn creates a yearning for relief. Thus an emotional connection can be made. Being able to have freedom and jurisdiction about traumatic events is remedial because the suffering is rooted in the individual's feelings of helplessness and disorder caused by their trauma.

Renee Matthews is an interdisciplinary artist that often explores self-identifying themes such as spirituality, identity, and vulnerability. She uses art as an expression for herself and to reflect on the world. Her work consists of multi and mixed media collages that express her curiosities and relationship with the world. Collaging acts as a form of spiritual practice in conjunction with an eloquent and striking state of the art.

I recently found joy and purpose in creating images that explain concepts. People may have a hard time wrapping their heads around in other ways—using art as a language to communicate the unimaginable. (Matthews, para 4)

When discussing her collage work, Matthews is adamant about relying on herself and her intuition—forcing or trying to make things fit defeats the purpose. Instead, letting go and flowing with the work and letting the creation happen on its own and going back to analyze it afterward is how her process goes. She is experimental, and her intuitive nature keeps her in touch with herself and her emotions to express them through her artwork.

Kim Noble was diagnosed with dissociative identity (DID) in 1995 after years of struggling with trauma, and being undiagnosed. Twenty different personalities are the dominant presences in her life while bits and pieces of others are also in conjunction

(Ross, 2018, para 9). She has fourteen distinguished artistic personalities. Through painting she was given the outlet to express, record and comprehend all the different things going on inside of her. She is an incredibly strong and expressive artist who is a prime example of using the therapeutic effects that art has as tools for positive coping.

Nan Goldin is another artist who used her art as her diary to express and relate their feelings to the world. These deeply personal and intimate moments are put on display which makes individuals react and connect to the art and artist. She beautifully captures and expresses intimacy and vulnerability. When an individual experiences a piece of art and forms a connection, it is said that they are potentially stimulating the same neurons that the artist did when creating their work. This creates new neural pathways in the brain and, in turn, can trigger feelings of inspiration and creativity. This is recognized as embodied cognition, the idea of the body being connected to and having influence over the mind (Devaney 2019, para 2-4).

Laura Inspirit is another example of a collage artist using her creativity to express herself. She works closely with herself and her intuition, leaving the process of collaging intimate and unrestricted. Inspirit uses multi-medium art to express feelings and share parts of herself with the world. She has numerous pieces, including her intuitive collages, which are free-flowing forms of collage making. There are many artists just like her who have found ways to incorporate spirituality and self-help into their practice. Using expressive tools in positive ways can have an immense impact on a person's mental health and ability to cope.

Intuitive collages are a fun, experimental way of expression that has helped people explore a wide array of topics such as spirituality, self-love or self-help. A

spiritually focused intervention was held for six female Canadian university students chosen based on experiences of anxiety, stress, and sadness. This eight-week observational group consisted of mechanisms to aid in mental health management, such as mantra meditation, group discussion, and reflective collaging. The idea of a meditative collage is as simple as it sounds; it is a visual interpretation and representation of yourself which can include or omit any concept or objective based on the comfort of the individual.

Collage is a non-threatening visual form of art to express experience and make tacit meaning explicit. It is particularly suited as a liberatory research method to express developing internal awareness in a concrete form. It facilitates a congruent expression of elusive fragmented feelings through images chosen from a felt sense. By juxtaposing them visually in the collage-making process, impressions and emergent ideas begin to transpire (Margolin, 2014, para 11).

In this context, collage art is aiding in the transformative process of these women's stress and anxiety management and overall mental and physical wellbeing. The group's facilitators created a safe circle environment for developing their reflective collage, which aided in the successful implementation of art therapy. During the process of their creation, it was encouraged to not only become aware of but to incorporate any of the thoughts, realizations, or feelings that came to them during the process into their artwork. The interconnection and safe space created within their group fostered a stimulating and positive environment that was able to aid in their emotional healing. This part of the process allows for connections to be made between the subconscious and the conscious, as well as thoughts and feelings. These associations lead to the



“...alleviation of depression, enhanced hand-eye coordination, improved motor coordination leading to more independence and the restoration of self-esteem”(Caruso, 2018, para 14). Collaging was a way to reflect and evoke feelings of self-empowerment and liberation through creativity. The way we interact with and manipulate images acts as a mirror into ourselves. It becomes a reclamation of strength as well as an acceptance of emotions and vulnerabilities.

The collage process is easily understandable among a wide array of subjects. Still, it allows for feelings of contentment and liberation because of the freedom and self-sufficiency rooted in the process. “In their case, talking about the event won’t always bring up the trauma. So because of that, just talking about things won’t necessarily help them heal” (Fenneld, 2020, para 8). It is a manageable and enjoyable task for a traumatized individual to begin perceiving their thoughts through a straightforward process of sorting, cutting, combining, and interconnecting pieces that bring to light our subconscious and sometimes even suppressed feelings, memories, or realizations of oneself (Margolin, 2014, para 17). This form of art gives the individual an opportunity to discover new components that may have otherwise been neglected, and in turn, would continue to cause harm, sometimes undetectable.

For the healing process to work, trauma needs to be uncovered and processed. We need to experience and accept the interconnected relationship between our mind’s comprehension and our body's awareness. In other words, the cultivation of our interconnectedness can guide us towards healing ourselves. Traumatic memory is not linear like typical memories are. These memories are processed in the mind and body in

fragments of the whole. These manifested traumas cause negative repercussions without any way of identifying the source.

The action of art-making utilizes both hemispheres of the brain; therefore, it is a bilateral and multi directional process that engages both mind and body, thought and feeling (McNamee, 2006; Talwar, 2007; Tripp, 2007, 2016, as cited in Trip, 2019, para 5).

The evidence that supports this concept of an individual's mind to body connection enables the beginning of using art as a healthy coping mechanism, no matter the artistic skills of the individual. This connection is frequently misunderstood or overlooked, which can cause these traumas to go unresolved and, in turn, cause future complications. This is why art can add another element to the understanding and acknowledgment of one's past traumas. 'An artistic creation, unlike language, may contain paradox, complexity, and opposing points of view in one form' (Knowles & Cole 2008; Eisner 2002; McNiff, 2012, as cited in Silverman, 2020 para 1).

Sights or sounds related to a specific trauma may evoke negative physical, psychological and emotional reactions in someone with PTSD. Art therapy helps people with PTSD to reevaluate and assign new meanings to these experiences. Individuals with this mental disorder become triggered by their senses being stimulated, such as specific colors, sounds, or sights that evoke negative physical, psychological and emotional reactions. (Fenneld, 2020, para 8). Art therapy takes advantage of this to reevaluate and assign new meanings to these triggers. In an experiment regarding paintings, it was shown that individuals increased the blood flow to the area of the brain that causes pleasure, which results in heightened feelings of pleasure and joy.

By focusing on the creative process, uncomfortable feelings may be better controlled, thus lowering the likelihood that the client will become dysregulated. Furthermore, creating art in therapy can be an enjoyable, strengths-based dyadic process that facilitates a positive therapeutic alliance (Tripp, 2019, para 5).

The creative process allows us to make meaningful connections between our mental and physical wellbeing with the art we create. It becomes an insight into our own feelings regarding trauma.

There is continuous research that has produced indisputable evidence supporting the suggestion that visual arts can have a physical healing effect. It is feasible that it can alter an individual's physiology and affect their cognizance. This began around the 1940s, using art to enhance a person's overall wellbeing. (Caruso, 2018, para 3-4). Because of art's intrinsically gentle manner, research supports the lowering of stress levels when an individual interacts with art. There is overwhelming evidence regarding the adverse effects stressors can have on our physical and emotional self. Stress can manifest itself throughout the body in numerous ways, such as headaches, insomnia, aching muscles, increased depression and anxiety, and a weakened immune system, among a copious amount of other ramifications (Pietrangelo, 2020, para 2-3).

Collaging is a means of creative expression that positively affects a person's mental and physical health. Its innate healing and calming ability aids in the understanding and healthy processing of trauma. The creation and absorption of visual arts is a known and potent healing tool that aids in reducing stress, anxieties, and other harmful thoughts, which in turn is proven to have positive and healing effects physically.

Collage art is a centuries-old art form that can act as a vehicle for the safe exploration of trauma imaginatively and intuitively; because of how the body and mind process trauma, individuals may be unable to express themselves and therefore feel isolated and helpless verbally. Collaging brings a mode of communication and expressive liberation that transcends the need for verbalization. The pieces become the embodiment of our pain and suffering and allow us to feel a sense of self-control and release from the constraints of unsealed trauma. The creation leads to an understanding of how to utilize our mind-to-body connection healthily. Art stimulates passion and creates a new aspect of expression that simply cannot be put into words. Using collage as a healthy coping mechanism has greatly benefited individuals who struggle with various mental and physical ailments. The creation process aids in us uprooting and detaching ourselves from our trauma in expressive and eloquently artistic ways.

## Chapter II

“If we don’t change, we don’t grow. If we don’t grow, we aren’t really living.” Gail Sheehy.

I think concrete and active forms of change started to have a significant impact on my life when I finally became aware of the fact that I was the one who had to take action in order to experience it. Figuring out where to begin is the biggest obstacle. With that being said, where to start? Contextualization is a tricky subject. Too much of it and the room for interpretation and perspectives become skewed. Too little, and there will be a disconnect and lack of awareness. The subtlety of hints and tiny nodes of understanding are the fabrications of the magic that sparks the flame of change.

The act of creating has always suited me. I am a hands-on learner; I do not process or comprehend linearly. Growing up with undiagnosed mental health illness made my ability to express myself more difficult than others, it seemed. I always thought that it was my fault, that something was off with me: was it my lack of understanding and ability that was the cause of all the mess? I could not communicate my feelings to others, let alone begin to understand or comprehend them myself. My memories are clouded with anxieties and incomprehensible pieces that I can’t ever seem to say. What I’ve come to realize is that I didn’t lack anything. I just needed to look at things from a new perspective.

The start of senior year was a whirlwind. Between Presidential elections and a global pandemic, you could say the stress was at an all-time high. Online classes and

lack of socialization created triggered unhealthy coping mechanisms because of the stress and anxieties that were constantly all around me. Traditional class settings created intimacy and helped me out of my comfort zone, whereas this caused isolation and complicated feelings to arise. Having fewer outlets of expression, in turn, caused a lack of motivation and created more complex feelings that became impossible to talk about or confront. This project stemmed from a yearning to transform, to make the change. It became a way of expression that actually felt freeing and evocative. It helped me pave my path, create change and begin to see positive progress.

The beginnings were tough, and I have a tendency to distract myself from my problems which leads to procrastination, pent-up energy, and, in turn, causes feelings of confinement. I began this project with high hopes and expectations of myself and things out of my control. Things quickly began to crumble. I was feeling a lack of motivation and felt out of touch with myself and reality. I knew something needed to change, but I couldn't figure it out. Afraid of being stagnant any longer, I got to work.

I knew about and had previously used art as a means of therapy on my own, but it was challenging to share intimate parts of myself outwardly. I thought perhaps the research would bring out the inspiration that I was so longing for. The amount of information I was sorting through was just too broad and expansive.

I began some experimentation with using different mediums to create. I dabbled with my musical instruments to no avail, so I switched gears hoping that something more tangible would be molded into my feelings.

Clay! I figured the more tactile approach would aid in the process of expression because of its malleable composition. I decided to investigate the art therapy process

for myself and began including journal prompts to add more depth to my ideas and hopefully spark inspiration. I created a controlled environment to structure my trials. I scoured over endless journal prompts and settled for a handful. I was then journaling before, during, and after the process to keep track of feelings and progress. After experimenting a couple of times in this manner, I wasn't satisfied.

I became increasingly frustrated with my lack of progress and what felt like an inability to express myself. It felt like mediums such as music or photography or even the clay were falling short of encapsulating the means of expression I wanted to infer. They all felt too flat and lacked weight. I pressed on with my research and begrudgingly moved along, unsure of what my next move was going to be.

As a struggling, broke, and mentally ill undergraduate student working a full-time job and moving out of my childhood home, I was thrust into being entirely reliant on and responsible for myself. The latter is hard enough without all the baggage preceding it. I was constantly setting my expectations too high, which resulted in the same feeling of defeat and unworthiness. Unprecedented times call for some exceptional learning experiences and chances to grow.

Collaging had definitely inspired my art, even before I was comprehensive of the fact. I am drawn to abstraction; I have always loved puzzles and the challenge of creating my own boundaries and contexts. When the decision to use collage came about, it immediately clicked and became the backbone of this creative project and process.

*National Geographic's*, Health magazines, newspaper clippings, and ephemera began to clutter my space. I spent hours grazing over paragraphs, searching for

anything that popped out and inspired me. Scanning each page, becoming absorbed in the materials, and before I knew it, I was neck-deep and felt close to drowning. Feeling the pressure and immensity of my responsibility, I started to psych myself out. I had good intentions and well-structured plans for myself, but every time they seemed to fall short or just failed to work at all. Not to sound ungrateful, but I was starting to despise the saying ‘trust the process’—one step forward, two steps back.

The timeline for this project is the longest to date, and it affected my daily life. I was becoming so consumed with the careful cutting and organizing, hours of intricately and delicately maneuvering, and I hadn’t realized that I had stopped progressing. The act of using my Exacto knife and searching for inspiration was and is therapeutic, but it is only one part of the bigger picture.

Between work, regular zoom classes [Zoom], and just trying to keep my head on straight, I had let myself become distracted and, in turn, created stagnance and frustration, both within and outside of the work I was doing. I was feeling myself withdraw. In an anxiety-ridden panic, I forced myself out there and started to reach out and gain some insight from others’ perspectives.

Hindsight really is 20/20. I was so busy getting lost in the preceding structure I failed to do the actual creating part. I threw myself into the process; I dedicated a sketchbook to keep and contain my collages and just started combining, placing, sticking, gluing, peeling, regluing. It takes patience to figure things out.

I began to see the bigger picture and was finally taking control of the situation. I was still using the journal as a way to prompt and record my discoveries and ideas. On



paper, I was doing everything by the book. I had a structured method of processing. I felt the improvement and progress I was creating, but something still wasn't right.

I became so frustrated and defeated that I felt utterly helpless. I thought I wasn't doing enough, and the cycle of frustrating and self-deprecating thoughts become so loud I shut down. I continued on autopilot, creating for no other reason than to make something. It felt ingenuine and inauthentic. That's because I knew deep down that it was.

It only takes a second to send me in a downward spiral. I was adamant about the structure and function, and being in control of the situation was suffocating me. I was sabotaging myself. Not on purpose, but after going through life and constantly feeling like the problem, it feels impossible to step outside of your mind. I had reached my breaking point, and I could no longer see the progress I was so hopeful of achieving. I had to snap out of it.

After throwing myself the pity party of the year, I had realized that it wasn't anything wrong with me, but the thoughts, the ego ruminating inside my physical vessel. I am not my mind, I am not my thoughts, and I am most certainly not my flaws or mistakes. Why were these things so easy to say to others but so incomprehensible to myself?

I had morphed from pushing and motivating myself into dictating and constraining my every move. This was an adamant theme both in the project and in life in general. Instead of acting like a controlling tyrant, I needed to stop holding on white-knuckled to all of the unrealistic expectations and demands of this and that and the other thing. The world is hard enough on us as is; shouldn't we be trying to make it easier for ourselves?

I become attached so quickly and profoundly to items, material things, ideas, even other people. Then why is it so easy to detach from me?

To be kind to me, a seemingly foreign and unfamiliar feeling. To be patient, understanding and give me the compassion and respect I give to others. Trauma is a fickle, conniving little entity of itself that messes with your head and creates illusions to prevent the seeds of growth from sprouting. Something finally clicked. I could break myself down, but I also have enough strength to build myself back up.



I found myself inspired again. I became focused on not only expression but as a way to connect to myself and pay homage to me. Amid this creative breakthrough and spiritual awakening, I was given a suggestion to look at Dustin Yellin's *Psychogeographies* (2015) which contain multiple life-sized intricate 3D collages "exploded catalog of icons, thirsts, dreams, and even nightmares congeal as physical,

humanoid, shapes” (Yellin, 2015). I was immediately amazed and inspired. I was incredibly emotional looking through his pieces and decided just to let myself have fun.

I knew I wanted to inspire myself. I wanted something that could transcend words but give me the relief of my voice being heard. My process became much looser and intuitive since I was feeling more in tune with myself. I used my journal to let go and spew nonsense instead of dictating each step. I began to feel the satisfaction of creating art in mindful ways.

I let myself be messy, go with the flow, and childlike. It was freeing and fun. I used acrylic paint and dollar store brushes, fingers on shaky hands just figuring out how to let go. It strengthened my relationship with my intuition and showed me just a glimpse of the beauty and wonder that lies inside me. Not only did I see progress, but I was beginning to create real change in my life.

My process became relatively simple: music because it sparks my imagination and makes me *feel*. I give myself time to work, and I don't force it if it's not going anywhere. I let loose, used paper scraps, ephemera, and found images to convey my intimate emotions and feelings. It was a way to visualize and correlate these small, intricately beautiful, and essential details with parts of myself. I used the flowers from my bouquet that I pressed and dried myself. I wanted glitter and paint and candle wax to give texture and show perseverance. I used vibrant colors to entice the tiny human in me to point at their favorite color, 'lellow.'

My intuition has always been strong, and I have been sensitive in sensing shifts in energy for as long as I can remember. My mind could become a sinister place when doubt crawls out from under the bed and fear creeps out from behind the closet door.

Monsters have always existed; they instead lack form and carry their weight within energy shifts. Vocalization is only one form of communicating and comprehension. Transcendence can only occur if you are not constrained. Being conditioned to believe that the only way to communicate was to talk was extraordinarily discouraging and influenced a disconnect from the self. I can be heard even when I appear to be silent. If you can't listen to me, it's not because I'm not using my voice; you aren't mindful enough to notice.



This was a process of discoveries and inspirations which continued to create and inspire different forms of expression. The writing was a little easier when I would just relax. Drawing felt restorative when I would go with the flow. Going out to shoot seemed more compelling when I let my inner child explore.

And so the seasons began to change, the signs of spring chirping and perching themselves on my balcony railing. I was getting fresh air, appreciating and enjoying my own company. I was feeling inspired to take some self-portraits and was highly pleased with how they turned out. I knew I wanted to incorporate the self-portraits I

photographed and my beautifully lifesized and tactile portrait. But this didn't feel like an easy task.

The most significant and most debilitating factor of anxiety is the way it seems so slight that by the time you realize what it is, its fog has already crept its way past your cognizance and begins to suffocate you. This is precisely why it is so important not just to listen but to observe and be present, so you don't get caught up in that black smog.

Instead of becoming frustrated with me, I met myself with kindness. The problem isn't taking on the challenging task; it's letting yourself be swept away in its current. I am not my anxiety. I continued to journal and let myself brainstorm and take time to process. The funny thing is, it's so much easier to figure out and follow through with inspiration when you give yourself the time and patience you deserve to do so.



I used my portraits as the foundations for digital collage pieces. I transformed my photographs into digitized sketches that are proud of occupying space and act as the missing visualization of my written words. I used photography to inspire and capture

myself in 2D. I rebirthed these images and gave them depth and multidimensional qualities to demonstrate how incredible the progression of change is and the enormity of its effect on your attitude and way of thinking.

I was able to see the bigger picture that became *My Odyssey*. I wanted to create a relationship between the final pieces and the process it took to get there. I also wanted it to be easily accessible and digestible for others to experience the work. After some internet browsing, I came across a niche social media application that could act as a digital zine. I was so intrigued I had to experiment. I was able to enhance the experience for whoever may stumble across these pieces of me. Instead of passively watching, it required your action to explore and navigate through my process.

Extremely emotional and with heightened energy and newfound hope, I was actually reaching the light at the end of the tunnel. It's a bizarre feeling. Being able to not only be so proud of me because of the art I had created, but I was able to use it as a catalyst to cause a real and permanent change in my life for the better. I am open to the continuous lessons I will earn from being mindful and not just communicating, but being heard, being comprehended, and making time to give myself the validation and recognition I know I deserve.

The love I was shown and the positive feedback from viewers helped confirm that this was a success. Although I'm still learning the ropes of self-love, it's also important to remember how connected our energies are. We feed off each other and receive confirmation, validity, and comfort, knowing that others get it. Not only do they call it, but they truly appreciate my vulnerability, and hopefully, it leads to a spark of change in their own lives.

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