

Throughout history, art has captured beauty in nature, in space, and in our lives. Art has given meaning to the facts behind the science. Art allows us to explore the darker side of human nature, and it allows us to connect empathetically with each other across the distances of our world and throughout the reaches of history. Art has always been an integral part of my identity. It allows me to pull intangible thoughts, emotions, and abstract ideas and give them form. In this way, I can share my perspective when there are just too many words, and when there are no words at all.

I work in a variety of mediums and focus on elements of concept, expression, color, and design. For this Human Condition Collection, I explored existential awareness through the medium of watercolor. I started by penciling in and masking the subjects. I chose and prepared a palette, then liberally applied a concentrated watercolor randomly with pipettes or splatter painting. The paint was manipulated with forced air, gravity, and with the natural ripples of the wetted paper. Depending on the effect I was trying to achieve, this process was sometimes accomplished by allowing the paint to dry between multiple layers. Once the background was completely dry, I removed the mask and used a wet on dry and edge softening techniques for the subject. When appropriate and to enhance the composition, I used ink to outline the shapes that the colors naturally took in the background layers. What is unique about the process in this series is that it allowed me to effectively combine an abstract background and a figurative subject harmoniously through echoing the color palette.

The Human Condition Collection is a series of 20 paintings that explore our four existential concerns as defined by psychoanalyst Irvin D. Yalom: Isolation, Freedom, Meaninglessness, and Fear of Death. Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. It is the view of existential philosophers that humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite living in an irrational world. Unlike the great majority of other life on this planet, humans have the capacity for acute self-awareness. When we aren't ready to face certain realities of our existence -- our ultimate separateness, our search for purpose and meaning, our freedom to make of our lives what we want, our mortality -- we struggle. This series is meant to capture these moments of awareness through the posture and expression of the subjects.

Artist Biography

Erin Kay McHugh was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. She studied at the Savannah College of Art and Design (Savannah, Georgia), La Universidad Metropolitana (Cupey, Puerto Rico), and the University of New Mexico (Los Alamos, New Mexico). She recently completed a two-year term on the Los Alamos County Art in Public Places Board. Erin is a member of the Los Alamos Derby Dames. She lives with her son, Jack Gabriel Santos, who plays percussion with the Los Alamos Middle School Concert Band. Erin currently works for a Federal Contractor at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.