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Gender, Trauma, and Disability: Gallery Reflection
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"Memorial"

While scrolling through Norman Klenicki's *Experience, Integration, Expression* exhibit, particularly the "Family" section, there was one painting that stood out to me as different from the rest. This painting, entitled "Memorial," was significantly more subdued than Norman's other works. In a sense, it stood out because it did not stand out. It felt like something I would see in my doctor's office, familiar and pleasant to look at, but nothing particularly special. It felt like something that was meant to take up space rather than tell a story. However, the more I studied the painting, the more vivid the colors seemed to become and the more intrigued I became. After reading the description, I realized that the painting was not as eye-catching as the others because it is meant to cause the viewer to reflect on the Holocaust and the victims it took. It is not meant to tell a story like Norman's other paintings, nor would it be his story to tell. Norman is not a survivor of the Holocaust, but he is deeply impacted by it due to the generational trauma passed down to him from his parents, both of whom are survivors of concentration camps.

Norman's trauma comes from a disastrous knowledge that he cannot express to others. He has the knowledge of his parents' experiences during the Holocaust, but he cannot tell those experiences as his own despite inheriting generational trauma from them. His art is his attempt to express his knowledge and inheritance of his parents' trauma in a format that others can understand and relate to. The interpretative nature of art means it can be integrated into a wide variety of experiences. The act of expressing trauma to others is therapeutic, and the inability to do so can be traumatic in itself. The viewer of Norman's exhibit is viewing his therapy; his art allows him to express his inherited trauma while simultaneously honoring the trauma's source, his parents. The pastel colors of "Memorial" are calming, allowing the viewer a safe and comfortable space to sit with the events of the Holocaust and their horrific outcomes. The painting feels like something meant to take up space because it creates a space, a space that honors the lives lost during the Holocaust.

The familiarity I first felt when looking at "Memorial," followed by intrigue and subsequent learning from the painting's description, reminds me of Laura Levitt's experience in the Tower of Faces in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Levitt felt a sense of recognition while viewing the photographs of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, she herself being a Jew. She even wished that her own family's photo was in the tower, but she had to remind herself that these families suffered during the Holocaust. This reminds me of how I thought Norman's "Memorial" painting could be in my doctor's office, and I had to remind myself that the painting is much more significant than a painting that would be hung on the wall in an office. It is meant to make the viewer feel welcome to sit with the trauma of the Holocaust, but it is not

meant to warmly invite them to the experience. I originally felt like I could experience his painting in my everyday life, aiming to connect his painting to my own experience. Yet I would not want to share Norman's experiences like Levitt would not like to share the experiences of the families in the photographs in the Tower of Faces. Similarly, between the photos in the Tower of Faces and "Memorial," the contextualization of the art causes a separation between the viewer and the image. As Levitt notes, the viewer wants to relate to the art; they want to see themselves in it and relate it to their own experiences. However, the horrific experiences that motivated the art are not something that the viewer would want to experience themselves. The viewer experiences a subsequent internal conflict between their desire to understand the art and their subsequent guilt of wanting to understand trauma on a personal level. Trauma is not meant to be desired, yet sometimes it seems that we cannot help ourselves.

The composition of "Memorial" appears to be a torn piece of paper in front of a red background. The red background symbolizes the pain of those who suffered through the Holocaust while the torn piece of paper has black encasing the bottom to represent the deaths of those who experienced the Holocaust with pure white light coming out of the black to represent the Holocaust victims themselves. The black portion of the painting resembles mountains and valleys. The black portion appears to be the earth where the victims died, and the pure white light that comes out of the earth is the victims transcending their life on earth into a peaceful spiritual existence. The separation shown in the painting from the red background indicates that the Holocaust victims that have passed are freed from their pain through death. Even after the Holocaust concluded, their trauma persisted and caused them pain, the escape from which is death. Death is represented as peaceful rather than something to be afraid of; it is a release from trauma and pain.