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Holiday Cheer for Children in Treatment

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HOLIDAY CHEER FOR CHILDREN IN TREATMENT

Honors Project by Rachel Hall
Fall 2016

Abstract

I have spent this semester crafting holiday cards for the patients at Akron Children's Hospital. I will be printing multiples of the cards to help spread some holiday cheer to the children who are in treatment during the holidays. In my research about art therapy I learned how much children in treatment can benefit from both viewing and creating artwork. For this purpose, I chose to leave the insides of the cards blank with an encouraging note for them to decorate and create their own piece of art on the inside of the cards. Allowing the children a chance to express themselves while they are in the healing process can be extremely beneficial to their recovery.

All the cards I displayed were created digitally so I am able to print multiples of them, but for the majority of the cards I tried to make them feel as handmade as possible through my illustrations to help inspire the patients receiving them to create their own piece by hand on the inside. I tried a variety of different styles for the cards that could appeal to different types of recipients and to create a unique aesthetic to the set.

HOLIDAY CHEER FOR CHILDREN IN TREATMENT

Rachel Hall

Honors in Art, 7100:499 – 001

December 8, 2016

As a senior graphic design student, deciding what to create for my honors project was no easy task. When I asked myself what kind of project I wanted to pursue, I felt that it was important for me to create a project that had an element of service to benefit someone in need. Considering my portfolio, I wanted to create a project that challenged my design abilities, had variety, and was distinctly different from work I had created in the past.

When I was contemplating how art could positively impact a person or group, there were many different options to consider. I could create a campaign to help a cause, I could help a service-based organization by creating marketing materials for them, I could create a public art piece for the community to visit and enjoy, the options were numerous. When I thought about the many ways that art can help someone, I decided that I wanted my work to be on a personal level rather than a piece that would circulate or be visited by the public. I wanted to create pieces that a person could receive that would send a message of endearment and positivity. After researching types of projects and art therapy, I decided to fulfil my project goals by creating a series of holiday cards for the children in treatment at Akron Children's Hospital.

While the holiday season may be cheerful and celebratory for many, it can also be a challenging time for others, particularly those who have suffered misfortune and are not able to participate in the festivities. For children recovering from an illness, this can be especially difficult. I chose to create cards to help these children during this season because cards offer the opportunity to communicate a message of joy and warmth through design, can be used to decorate a conventionally bleak hospital room, and are a traditional part of the season which can create a sense of normalcy while they are adjusting to being in a hospital during the holidays. With these goals in mind, I wanted to take the project a step further by researching elements of art therapy for my project.

In my research, I sought out how artworks and art therapy can positively help a pediatric patient's mental state and recovery while in hospitalization. I found that a great deal of art therapy practices in hospitals involve expressive arts therapy, which is when the patients are encouraged to create their own artwork while in treatment to express their emotions. ¹ A pilot study done by the

1. Hoffmann, B. "THE ROLE OF EXPRESSIVE THERAPIES IN THERAPEUTIC INTERACTIONS; ART THERAPY - EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPT." *Trakia Journal Of Sciences* 14, no. 3 (September 2016): 197-202

California Pacific Medical Center Research Institute tested the mental state of hospitalized children who participate in expressive arts therapy and found that it benefitted their cortisol levels, which can be measured as an indicator of stress.² The case studies I read about how expressive arts therapy benefitted the patients also showed me how much of an impact the practice can have. One example is in a case study on a child who had suffered a broken knee, the art therapist explains,

Once Alan overcame his initial resistance to the art materials, he was able to use artwork as a communicative channel to express his feelings about being in the hospital and away from his family, suffering from a painful injury. The anarchic, freeing quality of the art media lowered Alan's inhibitions and served as an outlet for his feelings.³

Akron Children's hospital also has the Emily Cooper Welty Expressive Therapy Center that engages patients to express themselves through different mediums of

2. Yount, Garret, Kenneth Rachlin, and Jane Siegel. "Expressive arts therapy for hospitalized children: a pilot study measuring cortisol levels." *Pediatric Reports* 5, no. 2 (April 2013): 28-30.

3. Sundaram, Renuka. "In focus: Art therapy with a hospitalized child." *American Journal Of Art Therapy* 34, no. 1 (August 1995)

art including music and performance art.⁴ From all the information I found on how expressive arts therapy was beneficial as a creative outlet to pediatric patients, I knew I wanted to incorporate it in a strong way into my cards.

The insight about the benefits of art therapy and self-expression helped me determine the layout of the content of the cards. I decided that to fully utilize the cards as a means of communication and an outlet for creativity that I would design all of my cards with the content and messages on the front and leave the insides blank. On the inside, I attached a removable message to the receiver to 'be their own artist' and create their own work of art on the inside of the card. This encourages them to express their own creativity and provides a surface to do so, giving them the opportunity to further benefit from expressive art therapy. When I discussed my project with the volunteer center at Akron Children's, I was assured that the patients would have access to materials to create their own art, so I did not need to provide them. My next step was to determine the medium, themes, and styles of the cards and how to appropriately relay the message of holiday cheer.

⁴ "Emily Cooper Welty Expressive Therapy Center." Expressive Therapy : Akron Children's Hospital. <https://www.akronchildrens.org/cms/expressive-therapy/>

To better suit the idea that the cards be decorated by patients with their own handmade artwork, I wanted to incorporate the appearance of hand illustrated images within the cards. I felt that it would be beneficial if the images on the cards could serve as both inspiration and reference for the children receiving them, so they could see something achievable as a guide while they work. My chosen medium for this purpose was to work with digital painting and illustration for most the cards. This medium allowed me to maintain handmade qualities in the gestures of the brush strokes, while remaining highly editable for revision and variation. Incorporating a project with this medium was also a unique piece to my portfolio and allowed me the opportunity to learn experiment, and practice in new ways I had not previously pursued. I was able to incorporate a variety of different brush styles and explore alternative strategies for digital image making with this medium.

When I moved forward in deciding the thematic approaches to the cards, I approached it with an understanding of what has been marketed to children, what would be the most expressive and relatable to them, along with my own nostalgia about the holiday season. In my process, I spent time word-mapping to generate ideas along with sketching different subjects for the cards. Once I had a large selection of options I had explored, I concluded that holiday characters and

animals were a strong theme for the majority of the cards, seven of eleven had a character as the subject. In many holiday stories and traditions, the characters are often one of the most memorable components, so I felt it was an effective choice to use them more than other themes. For the art therapy component, I felt that if the children were inspired by the characters on the cards it may influence them to create characters of their own. Any character that they create could have its own personality, expressions, actions, and environment which would allow the children to directly relate to their characters and express their own feelings through them. Personally, some of my fondest holiday memories came from both the characters and holiday decorations such as ornaments and snow-globes, so I decided to incorporate some of those subjects as well. I felt that establishing a personal connection to each card was an important step in my process to convey the same genuine warmth that I wanted to express to the recipient. In terms of the written content for each card, Akron Children's asked me to not have any specific holidays named in the cards or any religious messages. With this in mind, I chose greetings that could be appropriate for any audience and some with lyrics from holiday songs.

To create the designs for each card I researched a variety of different styles both in illustration as well as holiday design. I created a Pinterest board with

many designs that inspired me especially ones that I found unique and unexpected. One of the most influential illustrators for me during this project was Eric Carle, who is a well-known author and illustrator for children's books such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do you see?* I admired the bold graphic qualities in his work and how he simplified animals into shapes what were filled with handmade textures and bright colors. He used cut tissue paper and acrylics layered with other media to create many of his iconic illustrations.⁵ I remembered these images from my childhood even though I had been exposed to them so long ago. I felt that as I was working if I could translate my characters into graphic shapes and then fill them with brushstrokes and gestures that generated a bold presence, I could create images with a similar impact and memorability. The card with the strongest resemblance to his style and work would be the owl card that I created.

Through different trials I established my own process to create this style through my digital painting. Many of the characters are defined by vector shapes, and then painted with raster brushes. First, I created the characters in Illustrator, brought in each individual piece into Photoshop as shape layers, and

5. Beneduce, Ann. "Eric Carle." *Horn Book Magazine* 79, no. 4 (July 2003): 425-428.

then used the layers as masks in Photoshop while I painted so I could maintain the graphic qualities of the vector shapes. To create a variety of patterns and textures, I used different types of brushes and techniques for painting the shapes in each character. For the faces and personalities to many of the characters, I referenced classic holiday animations such as *Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer*, and *Frosty the Snowman* as well as the works of other illustrators such as Eric Barclay. I wanted to create an individual style by combining the two approaches to character illustration. The cards that I did not work with this approach I tried to maintain consistency by using raster brushes in some capacity into all the cards, while exploring alternate types of designs.

One of the biggest challenges I had while I worked on this project was to find the balance between having a variety and diversity in my cards while maintaining a consistency as a set. While each of the designs are unique and share the use of raster brushes as previously mentioned, another way I was able to connect them as a set was through paper choice. Initially I had ordered and intended on printing the cards on a variety of different stocks and colors of paper, but after further revision I decided to only use white cardstock for every card. This helped to further establish the cards as a series. Working through a

solution to this problem was a valuable learning experience as a designer since in the world of marketing cohesion and consistency are extremely important.

For the exhibition of my project I worked with the other five honors students who were working on Honors in Art projects as part of a group show in the upper atrium of Myers School of Art. The idea was that since each of us had such distinctly different projects, that together it would make a unique and diverse show. In my individual exhibition of my project, I wanted to create the same sense of warmth and comfort that I worked to establish in my cards. In order to create the welcoming environment for my cards, I decided to display them on a lit holiday tree. This setup engaged the viewer to look around the tree to discover each individual card much like how ornaments on a traditional holiday tree are viewed. I accompanied the tree with a wooden table and festive tablecloth that included a description of my project as well as extra cardstock and an invitation for viewers to create their own holiday cards with it to contribute to the project. This allowed other art students to be involved and consider how their artistic abilities can contribute to their community and helping one another. I did receive five card submissions while the exhibition was up which was fewer than I had expected. Learning from the small outcome of submissions if I were to reach out to the school for a project in the future I would be sure to send out

email blasts and social media posts in addition to my exhibition to rapidly reach a larger range of participants. Overall, I felt that the exhibition successfully displayed my work with the specific mood and tone that I had intended.

To complete my project, I will be preparing five sets of the eleven cards along with the five cards that had been submitted by students during the exhibition for a final total of sixty donated cards. I hope that through my research and designs the recipients of the cards feel the messages and warmth I intended to communicate as well as benefit from expressing themselves through art therapy on the inside of the cards. My honors project was an educationally enriching opportunity to use my design abilities to both help people in need and explore new techniques and skills in my field of study. This series will offer a unique addition to my portfolio, and the experience of working independently to create the project will be a valuable to have as I move forward toward a career in design.

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Honors Research Project

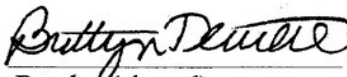
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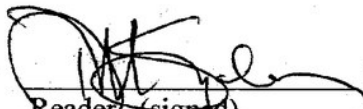
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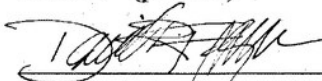
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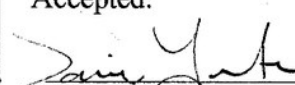
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TIS THE
SEASON
TO BE
JOLLY!



HOPE YOUR
HOLIDAY
IS A HOOT!



GOOD TIDINGS
OF COMFORT AND JOY



SEASON'S
GREETINGS



