

The Obstacle is the Path

The phrase "the obstacle is the path" originates from Marcus Aurelius and encapsulates the idea that challenges and obstacles in life are not detours but integral parts of the journey itself. In the context of the exhibition, this concept employs the notion that obstacles, whether personal, societal, or creative, are not barriers to be overcome but rather opportunities for growth, self-discovery, and artistic expression. Artists explore this concept through their works, confronting obstacles such as illness, personal histories, and inner turmoil. Rather than shying away from these challenges, they embrace them, using them as fuel for their artistic endeavors. Each artwork becomes a testament to resilience, courage, and the transformative power of art in not just overcoming, but transcending adversity.

Not for the faint of heart, taking the artist's path is a journey through self-doubt, criticism, creative blocks, rejection, societal expectations, and so on. I often wonder why this path is so romanticized, and it is no wonder it is equally vilified. The romanticization of the artist's life reflects a longing for authenticity, depth, and connection in a world that can sometimes feel shallow and materialistic. Artists, as the culture makers, the visionaries, the changemakers, the heyokas, offer the highest forms of cultural critique and societal healing. Their work is a beacon of light, even if the path is obscured for them. "Beacon" by Chrissy Espinoza embodies this very idea, showing a figure in a fog with vision obscured while at the same time offering light to anyone nearby.

Artists and creatives, known for their heightened sensitivity, deeply perceive the world's beauty and complexity. However, this sensitivity, often seen as a weakness in society, can lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout without adequate self-care. In the case of MaryV's self-portrait, "Crying at Home," she delves into her inner conflict and insecurities. She embraces her vulnerability with the camera as a means to self-love. Similarly, working through inner turmoil, Fernando Orellana found solace in creating the Firenze-19 series. The series encapsulates the raw emotions, fears, and delusions of catching COVID-19, ultimately serving as a symbolic conclusion to the pandemic and a pathway to emotional liberation.

Amidst the pandemic, political divisions exacerbated the challenge of coming together, hindering unity within a diverse culture of individuals with differing opinions. Eseosa Ekiawowo Edebiri's artwork, 'Coming Together,' is a poignant symbol of humanity's interconnectedness and the intricate layers of relationships that bind us. Crafted using a

handmade latch hook rug in striking black and white, the work radiates a subtle yet powerful sense of comfort and unity.

Sometimes, the city is the obstacle. In 'La Ville, Les Arbres,' Nadiya Jackson uses poetry and video to reflect on her struggle of moving to a new city. She navigates unfamiliar streets, cultures, and infrastructures, which may initially feel like barriers to her sense of belonging or connection. However, instead of viewing these challenges as insurmountable obstacles, she approaches them as opportunities for growth and self-discovery. By immersing herself in this new environment, Jackson embarks on an existential journey that leads her to confront her identity and relationship with nature. Natalie Thedford takes a different approach to the obstacles in a city pertaining to her practice and craft. Thedford employs materials such as city drain covers, landscaping tarps, and drainage pipes, typically associated with obstacles or infrastructure. Instead of seeing these materials solely as hindrances or mundane objects, Thedford transforms them into the elements of her artwork. By repurposing these materials, she confronts and reimagines their utility, turning obstacles into opportunities for creativity and expression.

Jenna Annunziato often repurposes materials in her own way, painting discarded objects and exploring the concept of worthlessness. The overlapping ideas between Jenna Annunziato's and Sarah McCormick's work lie in exploring personal struggles and challenges to traditional narratives. While McCormick confronts her upbringing in a conservative community and challenges narratives of fear through her work, Annunziato explores the theme of worthlessness in "Innocence Lost" by subverting the traditional symbolism of angels, highlighting the fracture between traditional beliefs and personal experiences of inadequacy or brokenness. Both artists engage with personal narratives and societal norms, using their work to challenge and redefine conventional perspectives.

In a similar vein, Cory Feder's artistic journey intersects with themes of faith and personal struggle, drawing inspiration from biblical narratives and grappling with the complexities of creative expression within the context of spiritual belief. Feder's inspiration for "The Burning Bush" derives from the biblical narrative of Moses encountering the burning acacia bush and communing with the divine through the flames. Grappling with darkness and finding guidance through illumination is a universal human experience. Feder finds significance in the tradition of paper cutting, as it uniquely communicates through the interplay of light and shadow.

Drawing parallels to Feder's exploration of faith and doubt, Masha Sha's work 'Trust' embodies a similar journey of embracing uncertainty. Through the meditative process of

creating reflective graphite marks by hand, Sha navigates the complexities of the creative journey with trust and resilience. Even though Masha is fluent in English, her non-native background infuses her interpretation of words with a unique perspective, often drawn to literary or poetic expressions.

Amidst life's trials and tribulations, a realm of possibility is waiting to be unearthed, echoing Albert Einstein's timeless adage that "in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." Ralph Waldo Emerson further underscores the significance of inner strength, suggesting that our internal resilience far outweighs the external forces we encounter. This exhibition seeks to revive our understanding of resilience and potential. As Union Hall commemorates its fifth year of nonprofit success, our commitment to nurturing and championing artists remains steadfast.

— Esther Hernandez, Chief Curator