

Courtney Meskell

Photographer and Multimedia artist

The Interview

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Courtney Meskell is a photographer and multimedia artist living and working in Boston, MA. Her work deals with the extreme contrasts between being on and off prescription and recreational drugs. Using color and light she attempts to encapsulate what those realities are to her. The embedded belief that she is unable to perform at the level of her peers has caused her to become dependent on Adderall. Through this work she explores how perceptions of self as well as behavioral patterns transform when substances interact with neurological disorders. In this process she uses the attention-deficit/hyperactive part of her brain to drive her creative process to represent the psychological as well as physiological impacts that various drugs have on her brain.



Introduction



Courtney will earn her BFA in photography from Massachusetts College of Art and Design in May, 2020. In 2019, she received a scholarship to Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Colorado, and was the recipient of the Gertrude Käsebier Bosworth Prize. Courtney was a teaching assistant for Amani Willett and Matthew Monteith, and a gallery assistant at Aviary Gallery in Boston.

Why did you start making art?

My grandmother has had a huge influence on my upbringing. Her job when my mom was growing up was in quality control at Polaroid. Seeing family albums always got me interested in creating my own images and preserving important moments.



Who influenced your work and ideas?

I was never really looking at photographers in my early years as a young artist. I was more interested in painters like Dali. And street artists like Banksy. The eye I have for photography mostly stemmed from those family albums.



Tell me about how you started?

In the third grade I started asking for a digital point and shoot camera. This wish has continued on since that time. I would get newer and better cameras and video cameras every year. As I got older and my parents noticed that photography was one of the few things that was consistent in my interests, my mom started to do some research. In my freshman year of high school I was gifted with my first DSLR, it was a Nikon D3000. My mom wanted to find a space that would instruct people in my age group on a weekly basis how to use a DSLR. After reaching out and receiving no's from institutions, art stores, and practicing artists, it seemed as though we were not going to get anywhere. Until we got a response from Kevin Salemme. Kevin was the photography professor at Merrimack College in North Andover. He still holds his role that he has had for the past 35 years as a Director at the college. He attended Merrimack College for his undergrad and Harvard University for his masters degree. Every Tuesday and Thursday for months I would visit Kevin in the photo department at Merrimack and he would teach me the importance of film, how to use studio lighting, work with a model, use Adobe programs more efficiently, and how to hold and use a DSLR.



How has your work changed?

At the beginning of my journey making images I was more focused on documentary-style images as well as studio portraits. I worked in that way on and off for years and as I started to work on my thesis my style has also transformed.



What is art to you?

This is really hard, art has been a way to express myself and see the world through a variety of lenses. I think for me personally my thesis project has helped me take a new and fresh look at my past, to understand a variety of issues regarding medicating children and adults.



What are challenges that you have faced?

Funding is always the first and foremost thing that presents me with a challenge. Being an artist that works in a variety of mediums, I am always looking for new materials to use. This process of experimentation that I go through definitely becomes costly. For example using paints, various canvases, brushes, printing on fabric, etc. Another challenge that I am faced with would be that I have ADHD. ADHD both drives and blocks my creative process.



Why is illustration/painting/design an important component of your photographic language?

Integrating elements of illustration/painting/design into my photography is an important component of my photographic language, due to my need to explore various media at a time. Considering that I have an extreme issue with concentration due to ADHD, I felt as if the multitude of mediums included would be a way for me to engulf that sense of chaos into my body of work. After exploring a more multimedia approach, it seems foolish to not be thinking and working in a variety of ways.



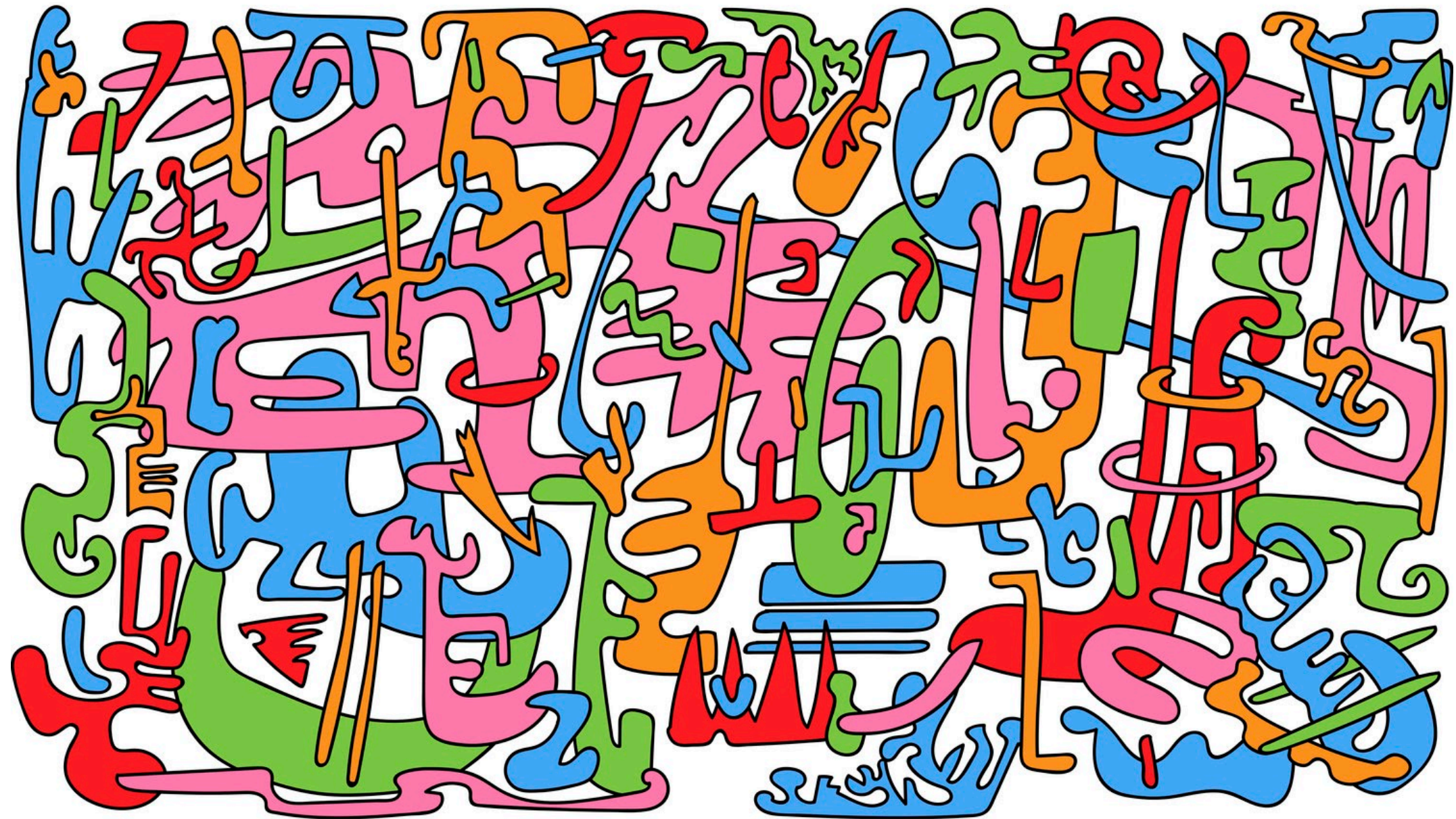
What do you want to accomplish by the end of the year?

I hope to produce a strong body of work that will help people going through similar problems recognize that they are not alone. As well as having a body of work that embodies a process that promoted growth and closure in my personal life.



Where do you see yourself going after graduation?

Ideally I see myself becoming a creative director at a large company. Living in either Denver, San Francisco, or Los Angeles. After college I hope to land a job in one of those 3 places and move out there.



What is the biggest lesson you take away from your time at MassArt? Is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Mass Art has shown me that you need to just keep pushing through whatever is holding you back. To take each new day as an opportunity for you to achieve greatness. And overall, to make sure that you are passionate about the things you do in life, art is much better when you can sense passion. And as for what I would do differently if I could rewind time, I would spend more time preparing to print and just making more work in general. I can't believe we are graduating, I will miss the community, facilities, and especially the cage equipment.

