

Backstory
Kent Museum
Rose Umerlik
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To look at my artwork and see abstracted forms and a minimalist use of color, one might think it is about gesture or the act of painting or impulse, but the layers and the lines and the forms are woven straight from the stories of who I once was and who I am now. These compositions are a complex language of how I relive my past, how I self-reflect in the present, and how I hope for the future. Each painting is inextricably tied to my personal history... my backstory.

Like a lot of people, my childhood was not idyllic and I didn't know it until I was much older when I could see myself failing at relationships and friendships. Love and affection did not come easy in my childhood home and as a young adult it completely eluded me...but I knew I wanted it. In my early thirties, I was able to identify that something was seriously lacking in my family life. It was a very hard recognition to make and cause for a lot of searching and pain. At this point, my artwork turned in the direction of painting about family dynamics, and the relationships between people. I became fascinated with the different roles that members of a family play in the family dynamic. One family member could be strong and loud while another disappears, or perhaps two family members could only exist with great distance between them. The dichotomy of close familial relationships and the distances between us was fascinating to me.

During this time, I sought out exposure to healthy families and healthy love. These experiences gave me insight into a completely different way of living that started to translate into hopeful paintings. I could imagine different stories of love through painting and I began to use painting as a tool to explore what I hoped love and family could be, as well as a tool to analyze the struggles that inevitably marked my journey towards healing.

The stories embedded in my artwork address family dynamics, love relationships, parent and child relationships, or my own process of thinking and hoping. I've always been drawn to science, and I tend to use abstracted anatomical shapes as symbols in my work. A "head" will signify a person, a "brain" will signify thinking, a "heart" will signify emotion, overlapping lines will signify conversation or touch and an assemblage of these shapes will signify intimacy or conflict. Each piece is intensely personal; each piece is about a particular person, a particular relationship, a particular pain, a particular joy or a particular longing. It is my hope that the honesty in my artwork might speak to someone and ease the struggles rooted in their own stories.