

Visual Art Ethnographies: Stories of five transgender women.

ARED 7352 Issues and trends in Art Education Spring 2019 Dr. Sheng Kuan Chung

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Tell me about your life: how art transforms life

- My project of wanting to retell the life stories of five transgender women came to me as we were thinking about socially meaningful subjects for our art projects in Dr. Chung's class. I personally wanted to make visual art pieces but also wanted them to be socially powerful and individually moving. I decided to draw from my past work experience at the University of Texas Medical Center where I worked as a Research Assistant for Houston AIDS Research Team. I was responsible for finding transgender women and then educating them on medical research and seeing if they would be interested to take part. All of the women in my project are HIV +. During my 1.5 years of working with the women, I made life-long friends and understood the extreme adversity that these women were facing every day of their lives. The women stood out to me as real heroines of our times, their stories were life changing and transformative. I wanted others to hear them, I wanted the women themselves to feel empowered and meaningful-I wanted my art work to give them that power. So, here are my 5 heroines:

Holly and Veronica- "Mother Earth"

- Holly and Veronica are a gay couple of six years and they have been living together for the last 3 years. Holly met Veronica before she transitioned and while in a relationship with Veronica, she felt comfortable enough to open up about her "true" self-overtime, both decided that it would be best for Holly to transition. Holly transitioned officially 4 years ago.

"I perceive myself as a Scholar of Knowledge. A female mind that shares, that lives, that loves, that encourages...; living every day, to live life to the end and today I come to a realization that I have stepped up strong and have become the woman I always saw myself being" -Holly

“Mother Earth”



Michelle- "The Rebellious/Royal Queen"

- Michelle has been identifying as a trans woman for a long time, as long as she can remember and was on her own since she was 13 years old. She went through a series of foster homes and for some time has been homeless. Now, Michelle works as an entrepreneur and has been in a long-time heterosexual relationship with her partner of 15 years. Michelle wanted to be a doctor but did not pursue the dream. Michelle is busy traveling all across the USA and documenting her adventures.

"Reject arbitrary and unnecessary forms of social conformity that do harm to another, be free, be yourself, because you can only be who you are" -Michelle

“The
Rebellious/Royal
Queen”



Elisha- “Wife, Mother, Lover”

- Elisha is a native of Houston, TX but spent some time living in Louisiana until she moved back home. Her father is in the oil business and is doing very well financially, their relationship however is somewhat formal. Elisha has been sexually assaulted as a young child and suffers from PTSD. Elisha has no problems “passing” as a woman and was in a long-term relationship with a man she cared for however he had left her for another woman and gave her HIV. Elisha is working on getting out of her depression and moving on with her life and taking better care of herself.

“No matter what life throws at you, be strong and hold your head up high, dust it off and keep going” -Elisha

“ Wife,
Mother,
Lover”



Neelay- "Egyptian Queen, Super Auntie!"

- Neelay knew she was a girl from the time she can remember-she is a great auntie, she is a great cook and she is single. Neelay started college and went for a nursing degree but had to leave due to her mother's deteriorating health. Her mother drinks too much and her older brother is currently serving time in prison. Neelay is a perfect woman, she loves her family, she loves to cook and dress up nice, she caters to her other brother and his two children. Neelay has become our close family friend.

"I have always told myself to be fearless, embrace change, grow through conversation, strive through challenges-I was given a light so I shall shine; See me and you will see me for who I am..." -Neelay

“ Egyptian
Queen, Super
Auntie!”



Dee Dee-A Social Justice Advocate/Community Activist

- Dee Dee is a social justice activist and a respected community advocate. Neelay has identified as a trans-woman for a long time, since she was a child. She ran away from home at age 12 and has survived on the street by herself, through sex work and other odd jobs, she came close to death multiple times and by seeing everything she had and having been through all of this Dee Dee turned to social justice issues focusing on trans women's health, life and laws. Dee Dee has been invited to speak on the trans issues internationally and is always busy with her own non-for-profit organizations as well as trips and talks that she has been giving.

"If we judge others we do not have time to love them" –Dee Dee

“Social Justice
Advocate/Community Activist”

