

Psychodiagnostics:
**A *Vanitas*-Inspired Exploration through Still Life and Rorschach's
Inkblots**

Departmental & College Honors Project
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In the Fall 2023 semester, my understanding of *vanitas* developed into a state of change through the memory of what once was. I removed objects from a clear space to reinterpret the traditional, Baroque still lifes I once used as references. Objects appear rendered completely, partially, and some objects line-drawn as a display of a changing or fading memory. Yet, the objects in my pseudo-*vanitas* still lifes have had no personal significance to me.

I ended my Fall 2023 semester questioning why I chose the objects in my *vanitas* still lifes, and concluded that they were mostly traditional still life objects, which also held no significance to me. I spent my winter break analyzing what objects I could use that had some part in my life, but I don't have anything besides pictures of my family. While I reflected on these pictures, I thought about my family members' lives, and how their physical place in my world was the object I was searching for. Many of my family members passed when I was quite young, so I grew up without being around anyone besides myself. It was then that I realized I held no personal significance in physical objects in my own life, but the medical objects that consumed my relatives' final years were more apparent in my memories about my family than the actual people were. The objects I choose to represent within my artworks today showcase vintage medical objects such as hypodermic needles, wheelchairs, and more, to reflect upon my conscious memories of my fractured, failing, and deceased relatives.

Hermann Rorschach (1884-1922) was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst with a background in art, who developed the Rorschach Inkblot tests. These tests were created to understand the patterns of perceiving objects, shapes, other things as something meaningful to whoever viewed the inkblots. Whether the inkblots made faces, houses, cars, etc., they were always interpreted as something with meaning to their viewer. If viewers could not see anything within the inkblots, they were deemed clinically insane, and taken into treatment. While I

reflected upon the photographs of my family, I interpreted my own disassociative, non-sentimental values in objects to the ideology of Hermann Rorschach. If it were the 1920's, I would have been deemed clinically insane for not holding sentimental value within people or objects if I could not see anything within the inkblot tests, and would have been institutionalized in a similar fashion my relatives once were: consumed by medical diagnosis, sterile laboratories, and ultimately driven to a point of no return.

My final honors project includes a collection of eight lithographic prints that I have drawn on top of with a quasi-still life collage. There are two different inkblot tests, both inspired by the inkblots that Hermann Rorschach created, each including three different drawings and developed from a minimal to a maximal collage-drawing. The lithographs are prints of an inkblot test, where the background of the inkblot is black, and the inkblot itself is the white of the paper. I used charcoal pencils and Prismacolor colored pencils to draw rendered and line-drawn, medical objects.

Symbolically, rendered objects act as a memory that is most recent or concurring, while the line drawings act as a memory that is being lost or fading away. The prints are 6.5" x 10.5", and the drawings break the border of the black lithograph. The small scale of these drawings creates a sense of intimacy when viewing them. By forming an intimate scene, the viewers are physically brought closer into the work and allows them to contemplate their own memories, inkblot diagnosis, and medical histories. My mixed media lithographs act as a bridge between conscious and unconscious memory for both myself and the viewers of my work.

Over the course of my honors project, I've increased my drawing skills, and now am less timid when it comes to layering and erasing drawings. Within my mixed media lithographs, I flip the figure and the ground quite frequently, which adds a deeper optical illusion to the pieces. I've

learned to manage my time quite well, as lithographs take at least three days to create, process, print, and dry before being able to draw on them. Over the course of my project, there have been numerous drawings that I have made and eliminated from the final, as they do not reflect my current concept. My honors project both serves as a continuation of my *vanitas* exploration, a psychoanalysis of the effects of the Rorschach tests, and a reflection upon my own grief with familial loss.







