

# Mapping Stigma and Resilience



Body maps created for the *Women marginalised by mental health, disability, or refugee background* Project.



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**Cover Artwork:** Anonymous, *I'm Gazing Back*, 2021, Acrylic on calico, 188cmx136cm

## Content Information

This catalogue features personal stories shared by people who took part in the research project Women marginalised by mental health, disability or refugee background. These stories explore many diverse experiences, including suicide, sexual assault, eating disorders, drug use, domestic and physical violence, abuse, and discrimination. This catalogue also contains strong language. Please make sure reading these stories is right for you.

The last page of this catalogue has a list of free support services that you can call if you need help or support.



Kim Maree Pauly, *Knowing and understanding*, 2022, Acrylic on calico, 190.5cmx76.3cm

# The Art of Resilience: Body Maps from the “Women and Body Mapping Stigma” Project

This is a catalogue of stories; true stories courageously told and generously shared. Stories formed from paint, pens, fabric, and glue. Stories fashioned from voice and word. They were articulated during the *Women\* marginalised by mental health, disability, or refugee background* research project (nicknamed *Women and Body Mapping Stigma* by the research team).

This project aimed to learn about women’s experiences of stigma and discrimination (and of resilience and survival) as a result of mental distress, disability and/or a refugee background. Stigma and discrimination can have profound impacts on quality of life, health, employment and even access to healthcare. These experiences can be upsetting to talk about, and hard to describe. Typical research methods (like filling out a survey) often fail to capture such difficult-to-verbalise experiences, so *Women and Body Mapping Stigma* took a creative approach to data generation. We invited participants to join the research team at art workshops where they created their own body map.

Body mapping is an art practice that involves tracing your body onto a large piece of paper or fabric and decorating this outline by drawing, painting, sewing, collaging, or writing. Through a guided process, participants visually represented their experiences of stigma and discrimination, and the people, actions and things that helped them feel strong and resilient in the face of these experiences. After maps were completed, participants were interviewed one-on-one, explaining their maps and the narratives, feelings, and ideas represented within them. Interviews and body maps formed the data which the research team analysed in order

to address the project’s aims. Taken together, this group of spoken and visual stories revealed much about the complex and diverse impacts of stigma and discrimination. Some important findings include:

- Stigma and discrimination exist on a spectrum ranging from the subtle (like indifference), the casual (stereotype or unexamined assumptions), the systemic (norms and rules that marginalise and undermine people) to the overt (bullying, verbal and physical abuse, or sexual violence). These experiences almost always result in self-stigma – internalised feelings of shame or disgust. As one participant explained, “I wrote on my map ‘Now let’s add stigma’ to show the impact stigma had on how I responded when I got unwell. I thought mental illness was like you’re locked away in a psych ward and left to die, that there is no help...That’s what I got from social media...and television.” We learnt that regardless of where it falls on this spectrum, stigma and discrimination can have damaging impacts; making people feel unable to seek help for their health, compounding their mental and physical health challenges; preventing them from leaving unsafe domestic situations.
- For many, the experience of mental illness, disability, or a refugee background can mean feeling both highly visible and also invisible, frequently at the same time. For example, using a wheelchair or walking aids can cause people to stare or ask intrusive questions making participants feel like they are always being looked at. At the same time, a lack of a



L.R., *An Island Never Cries* [detail], 2022, Paint, mirror, beads, glass, skewers, cutlery, plastic eyes, paper, pens, metal bucket, cotton wool, fabric, arm-brace, wood, buttons on calico, 182.5cmx155cm

ramp, or working elevator can make supposedly simple acts like getting to work, or onto public transport difficult or even impossible, meaning participants feel invisible; with their needs being overlooked or ignored. As one participant reflected, “Often I feel...like all eyes are on me...I think people are looking at me... [it’s like] being on the stage...but nobody is there... [I’m] appearing again tonight, where’s the audience? ...they’re all looking away”.

- Participants advocated strongly for a holistic approach to health and care. Often participants experience healthcare and support services as fragmented because their physical health, mental health or socio-economic situation were seen as separate “issues” by clinicians or support workers. Participants experienced these things as interrelated and called for a more integrated view of health. As one participant explained: “People with disabilities are people first and they too have mental health needs just like the rest of the world. And I think that for far too long this cohort of people have been overlooked and underrepresented”. Other participants praised organisations or individuals that take an intersectional approach to care:

“the psychologist...said to me... [these] mental health issues [are]...because of what’s going on with your body...that was like a penny dropping, I was like, ah okay! So that makes sense as to why I’ve been finding things really difficult”.

- Words matter: the things we say can have a profound impact. Using derogatory language, saying things that minimise difficult experiences, or that are patronising can have a really negative impact on emotions, mental wellbeing and how we feel about ourselves. Unkind or unthinking words can discriminate and stigmatise. As one participant stated, “It’s not easy to do it. It takes practice, changing how you let [other people’s comments and attitudes] come in and affect you. It’s also learning to change your own self-talk and [letting go of] the language you take on from other people”.
- Although stigma and discrimination have negative impacts, participants reflected on their strength and resilience; sharing the ways they overcome and combat stigma and discrimination. Family, friendship, artmaking, creativity, activism and advocacy, the natural world, pets, psychological supports, and

\*In this project we use ‘women’ as an inclusive, collective term. We welcomed participation from any individual – e.g., cisgender, transgender, non-binary, or feminine-identifying etc. – who identified with the designation of woman.

selfcare are some of the many things that make participants feel resilient and strong. As a participant commented: “[There are lots of things that help like] talking, sunshine, friends, family. Dogs are a big factor in my life, so having a companion”.

As researchers, we often find ourselves analysing the stories we gather not discreetly, but as a whole. We consider commonalities and differences, the key themes, outliers, or central messages emerging across the total corpus of data we’ve collected. This is important, and can help us understand trends, patterns, and the shape of the phenomena we are exploring. In fact, it’s by looking at the data as a whole that we were able to understand the findings recounted above. However, in this process we can often lose our clear view of the finely grained, unique, and singular story of an individual. The purpose of this catalogue is to put these singular stories squarely in view. A clear message that surfaced from our research is the power of testimony; of having the space and opportunity to share your experiences so that your learnings can benefit, inform, or engage others. Indeed, talking about (or visually representing) mental health, disability, or the experience of being a refugee is one way we can challenge stigmatising and discriminatory views and make it easier for others to share their experiences in turn. Sharing stories can also help the person doing the telling to resist, or lessen, the impact of stigma and

discrimination. As one of our project participants reflected: “anybody, it doesn’t matter what they’ve struggled with or what area of society they’ve been marginalised in... [it’s] empowering for everybody to have a voice and to be able to tell their story. That’s powerful”.

This catalogue shares twenty-three body maps created by *Women and Body Mapping Stigma* participants, each accompanied by an artist statement. These statements were written directly by the artists, or crafted from research interviews through a collaborative process between myself and the map maker. Some participants chose to be named; others preferred to remain anonymous. Each map tells an important, and distinctive story, each offers an insight into the minds and hearts of the person who created it. These maps depict and evoke a range of experiences. They tell stories of hardship, difficulty, and pain as well as revelation, recovery, compassion, and optimism. Participants have chosen to share these stories in the hope that they will make a positive difference to those who see them.

In this spirit, and on behalf of the research team, I wish you **happy reading and looking!**

#### Priya Vaughan

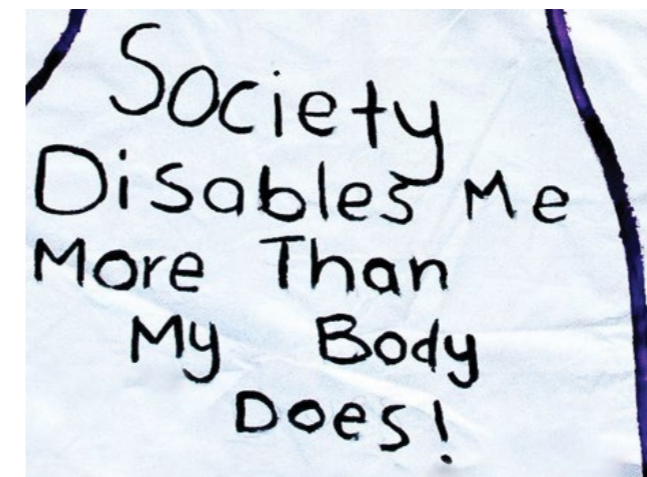
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Danielle Daws, *Branded* [detail], 2022, Paint, tape, marker pen on calico, 191.5cmx173.5cm



Dana Alderson, *Building Blocks* [detail], 2022, Fabric, paint, marker pen on calico, 181.5cmx154.5cm



Kaitlyn Thomas, *Society Disables Me More Than My Body Does* [detail], 2021, Acrylic paint and marker pen on calico 186cmx157cm

The “Women marginalised by mental health, disability, or refugee background” project is led by Katherine Boydell, and managed by Priya Vaughan. The research team and lived experience advisory group are Yamamah Agha, Jill Bennett, Alise Blayney, Angela Dew, Ainslee Hooper, Bronwen Iferd, Julia Lappin, Caroline Lenette, Cindy Lui, Apuk Maror, Jacqui McKim, Akii Ngo, Jane Ussher, Ruth Wells, Yassmen Yahya. The project was supported by an ARC Discovery Grant (DP200100597). This catalogue was supported by a Black Dog Institute Knowledge Translation Grant.

# I'm Gazing Back

Anonymous

When I designed my map, I knew the main figure was going to be in a foetal position because that is my way of surviving the world. I wanted to give a sense of my need to self-protect, and of how I've often felt being vulnerable to harsh external realities. Despite it being uncomfortable to be in a position of self-protection, this figure also represents a position that can feel nurturing. Because this is how I've survived - I have a rich inner life. I don't need the world to sustain me. It feels safer to be able to be on my own. There's so much to enjoy in this space I've created for myself. This figure is my true self, who I can be if I have the right environment to thrive. It is covered with beautiful floral, decorative forms. I was thinking of historical patterning used in fabrics and textiles. One of the most important things to me is creating beauty, those decorative patterns we find on everyday objects, like quilts, bring the beauty of plants into everyday life. I wanted to weave that beauty into the map to represent my inner life.

The second figure represents another self, the self that is quite raw and reactive to the world. The one that feels the need to push back and fight. I wanted this figure to have a rawness about it, the colours are almost muscular, like the skin is peeled back. This figure is very much secondary, it's a self that has grown in reaction to my environment, rather than being who I really am. This figure's limbs are in action; flailing and pushing away, whereas the first figure is at rest. I was thinking of the work of Matt Ball, who talks about the concept of Dissociachotic. Ball talks about the relationship between the world and the outward facing presentation of distress. And I feel like that second self is the one that appears "crazy" to the outside world. This is the self who doesn't feel safe and so presents to the world in a way that is intended to be repellent, to keep people away. So, this is raw, reactive kind of

behaviour but it is also intelligent. It's not just about being chaotic for the hell of it, it's like an armour, a kind of primal, self-protective strategy.

I painted the background of the map black because I wanted to give the figures a sense of floating in space. This connects to my experience of dissociation, of being completely unanchored and unmoored in the world. On the one hand that is terrifying, but on the other hand it can be beautiful. I wanted to give a sense of both the emptiness and spaciousness that I experience life as being. I've written "At wake I keep my dreams of sleep because I see life's 'seems' are cheap". This relates to when I was 20. I'd had some really difficult experiences. I had been in a bad way for quite a few years and then I moved to the country and started studying art and it was the beginning of really carving out my own life and honouring myself. I used to go to the university library and read - I was so interested in everything. I came across this amazing book, it was a psychiatric survivor book, an anthology of really rich poetry and artworks from people who had been institutionalised. And that is where I found that 'at wake' phrase. And it was a huge moment and the point that I discovered Mad Pride and realised I'm not the problem, I just exist within a bigger social problem. The *at wake* statement is a challenge to the accepted norms of consensual reality and I've used it as a mantra to remind myself to be critical and interrogate what's around me, especially if it seems hollow or unsafe. I also love the phrase because I have an incredible dream life, and that is an important part of my inner life. I don't compartmentalise my waking and dreaming realities, I see dreams as part of my living experiences, they help me understand myself and my world.

The floating eyes represent the gaze; that sense



Anonymous, *I'm Gazing Back*, 2021, Acrylic on calico, 188cmx136cm

of being surrounded by judgement and control, of being aggressively looked at, and prodded and governed by others' perceptions. And this gaze has impacted my everyday life, it's left me fearing what others can do to me. Ever since I was young I've been in constant fear of judgement from people in general. It's a gaze that makes me feel confined, like I'm being pierced through, and like I'm being controlled by the social judgements of others. The eyes are also partly representative of the male gaze and being sexualised aggressively. A big part of my experience of distress has been around sexual harassment and assaults, and the objectification of my female body. When I was younger, I dealt with persistent sexual harassment that completely changed my relationship to males, to the world, and my sense of safety. It did real damage. The eyes are also about the biomedical gaze that is characterised by a reductionist way of thinking about, looking at, and classifying someone as a set of symptoms. It's a pathologising gaze that erases the individual and their experiences. This biomedical gaze has impacted my help seeking around mental health supports. I'm pretty cynical

about the mental health system in general. Despite the intensity of my distress, I have a deep fear of what will happen when I seek help, I'm afraid of the way I'll be treated. I know that in the clinical space they will seek to control me. So, it doesn't matter how desperate or how bad things are, I will never seek clinical or public mental health support. This is borne from negative experiences of seeking help when I was young. Instead, I have found help and support through my community. You will see that the second figure has eyes on her hands – like the character in that nightmarish scene in Pan's Labyrinth. This is about pushing back, letting those who judge, appraise, control and abuse know that I can see them, that I'm gazing back. I wanted to make sure my map wasn't just about victimisation – it certainly tells that story – but I wanted to convey a sense of resilience. I want people who provide care to know that focusing on people's strengths and on recovery can have a profound impact. Enabling people to have a sense of agency, to focus on their inner growth and their strengths can help to foster self-determination which is vital.

# Puzzled

## Anonymous

People in wheelchairs with a physical disability are underrepresented in mental health, and support services are far from adequate for people with disabilities. So, I've represented myself in a wheelchair in this body map. I wanted to make sure that that was loud and clear. People with disabilities are people first and we have mental health needs just like the rest of the world. And I think that for far too long we have been overlooked and underrepresented.

I've used two central symbols in my map: the jigsaw and the map of the world. First, I've used the jigsaw because with mental health, there are so many fragments and pieces that combine to make you, you. When you have a mental health episode, well it really is like a jigsaw puzzle – you are trying to put yourself back together again. And it's such a puzzle to have a mental health challenge and try to work through all the pieces. I used gold paint to create the jigsaw pieces because people with mental ill health really do deserve a gold class service, but we tend to be low on the pecking order of service provision. I've had some horrible experiences, for example while I was in a mental health ward, I fell. And when I was on the floor, I had a staff member come in and kick me and tell me to get up! That left me bruised. But I'm working to change things. I sit on several committees at my local mental health hospital and I'm a lived experience representative for a resource centre, and this has increased my belief that things can change for the better. Especially for people who need support and who are in wheelchairs and have additional needs. I feel that I've been heard and that changes are being made to the long-winded system.

I've added different colours to create a map of the world on my body. This is because when you are mapping your mental health from day to day, you

really are going through a whole range of emotions and experiences. And this is a journey, a road you are travelling that encompasses lots of changes and twists and turns. You go through these emotions, you live through these experiences, and then you are able to move on to the next phase. Making this map helped me to explore how far I've come on my own journey. The road hasn't always been easy, I've had ECT twice, I've felt extremely suicidal in the past. But at the moment the pathway for me is very good. The road is very open, and that is very exhilarating. In a way this map is me doing a recap, seeing how far I've come.

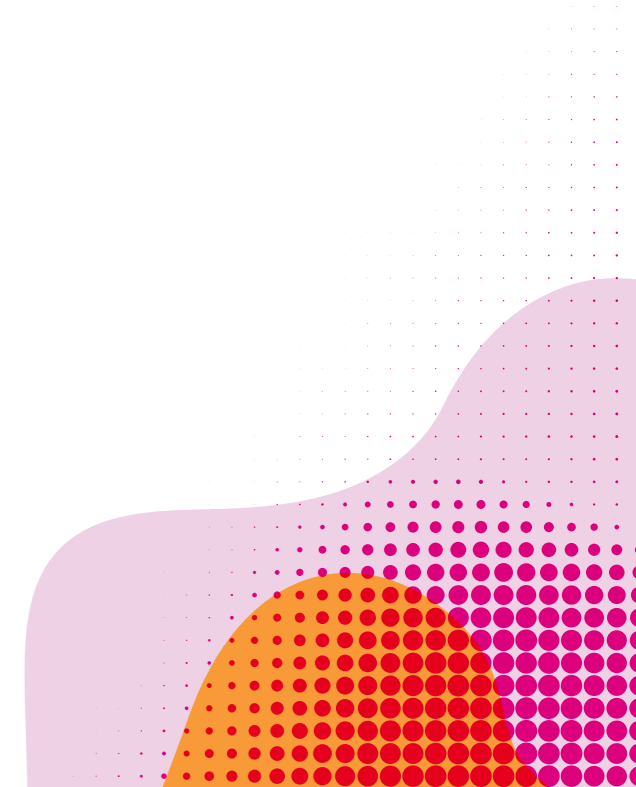
The colours I've used also have other meanings. Green and purple are women's colours, representing women's rights. The yellow represents the sun that sometimes shines through, and then there's pink in the lungs and heart, representing the air of life.

I've written words and drawn symbols around my body to represent things that help and support me, as well as things that cause pain. So, there's Art because it's a big part of my life, I'm very expressive in my art, and Garden because I eat from my vegetable garden, and it keeps me healthy. Positive things like Talking, Sunshine, Hugs, Friends, Love, Family, Swimming, Dogs – dogs are a big factor in my life, it's wonderful to have a companion. I've also put things like Barriers, Blocked, Toxic Words because they can pull you down every day. You might spot the phrase Jagged Little Pill because I used to self-medicate on pills, and those pills really were jagged because at the end of the day they come back and bite you in the arse.

I used the metaphor of snails as my slippers – you can retract and retreat, or you can explore and extend your environment. When I'm in my wheelchair, my footplate leads the way, I have

Anonymous, *Puzzled*, 2021, Acrylic and ink on calico, 154cmx120cm

to give way to my feet the whole time when I'm steering. Sometimes your feet don't seem like a valid part of your body when they're not moving. But you do have to be mindful of it and to protect and care for them. I've also drawn a big, warm cup of coffee. Coffee has been an absolute rock for me. The smell, the making of it for other people. Inviting people over and having a conversation over coffee with different people at different times. It really is a tool for connection.



# Is this for Your Comfort or Mine?

Ash

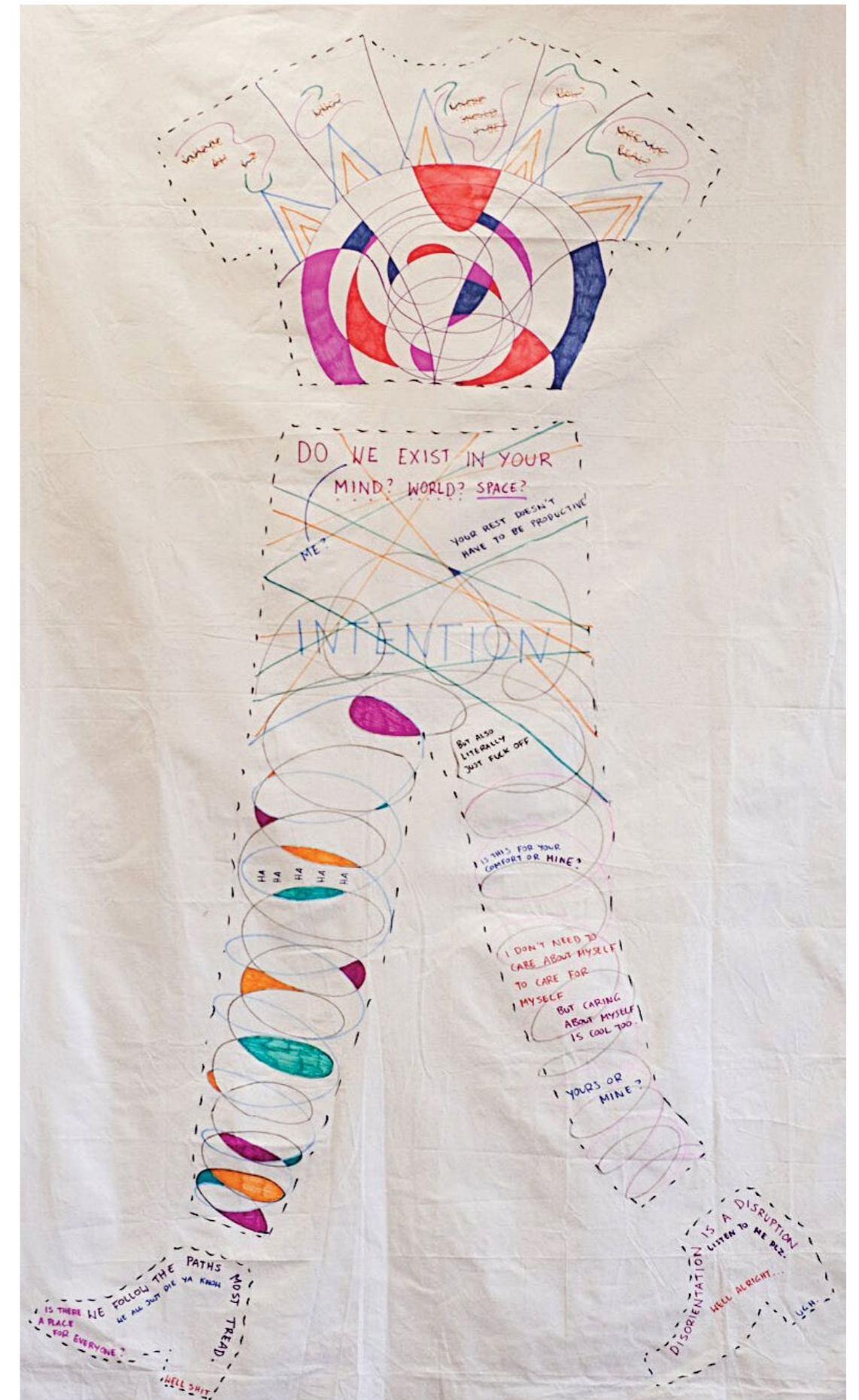
As I made my map, I was thinking about being stopped on the pathway of existence. For context, I'm a philosophy major and this is a theory by feminist scholar Sara Ahmed. When you are asked a question like *who are you or why are you like that?* your existence is put into question and that question is a stopping point for your existence. So, I posed questions on my map, and I crossed some out. I wanted them there, but I didn't want them to be obvious. I was in a bit of a sarcastic mood, and I wanted to puncture the formality of things I'd written, so as not to be too serious, even though I was asking big questions like *do we exist in your mind?* And really that's the main question that stops you, right? When you need something, or you are seeking something that helps you and that gets questioned or blocked or challenged. That makes you question your existence in the minds of others. I was thinking broadly about the experiences of people like me who are young, disabled, and queer and I was thinking theoretically, rather than personally.

This led me to think about intersectionality. Sometimes intersectionality is imagined as a bunch of intersecting lines of experience (for example, a line for disability, a line for being queer, a line for being young that intersect at my person). But there is another theory that sees intersectionality as a fluid, multidimensional space that we live and act in. And when we stop people, when we don't let them do things, or question their needs, then that that space stops being fluid, people are restricted and stuck. I wrote *is there a place for everyone?* on the toe and I found it funny that I couldn't really fit the words there; it's like when you cram your foot into a shoe and there's no room. I really focused on when

you are in a position where you get discriminated against, or you run up to something and realise oh, I can't access this, someone has not thought about me, or has thought about me and completely disregarded what I need.

At my hip I wrote *Your rest doesn't have to be productive*. That's something I've recently found the words to describe. Part of the reason we live in such an ableist world is because of the idea that everything has to be productive and if you are not productive in some way, then you are not useful. There's this weird framing, like oh you should have productive rest and 'good' sleep so you can wake up and be productive. And even when you are relaxing you must have hobbies that are about doing something or bettering yourself. And, at least for disabled folks, rest is not actually always productive, and it doesn't have to be productive. It should be okay to just sit there and do nothing. In addition to the pressure to be productive there's this pervasive idea of self-love and selfcare: you have to look after yourself and love yourself. That is just not realistic, I don't love everything about myself, I can accept parts of myself that I find annoying, but I don't have to be in love with them. And again, self-love and -care is just so you can become a productive being.

One of the last things I wrote was *fuck off* because, ultimately, I do just want people to fuck off, it's a coping thing. I don't want people stopping my existence, I don't want to be part of this hamster wheel of productivity, I don't want to have to fit in to this self-love movement. I would like to just exist sometimes and live my life. It's not necessarily that individual people are pushing me, it's the world, it's a big system and you fall into acting in certain ways



Ash, *Is This For Your Comfort Or Mine?* 2021, Marker pen on calico, 190cmx114cm



and don't really question them. That's also why I wrote *is this for your comfort or mine?* Sometimes I can't work out whether I'm doing things because I want to do them or because I've been told to do them, or I've had some negative experience that has subconsciously made me feel like I need to do that thing. When you are part of marginalised groups it's really hard to tell if you're doing things to feel like you're a valued member of society. You are positioned as part of a group that is seen as less valuable and it's really hard work to "make up" for that and prove that idea wrong. And these big systems don't even count us as being part of the system, you are not thought of, or thought about in a negative way. And that comes back to the idea of your comfort or mine? Often, I'm masking, I'm not doing those things that help me because the system hasn't recognised that those actions and behaviours exist or that they could help me, or be part of my being.

# Society Disables Me More Than My Body Does

Kaitlyn Thomas

At the centre of my body map I wrote *society disables me more than my body does*. This is really important and it's something I've always thought about in terms of my own experiences, and it has been really clear in my work in disability: people are not disabled by who they are, it's the things around them. It's not the fact that someone is in a wheelchair that's stopping them from going and doing something; it's the fact that somebody doesn't have a ramp or doesn't have accessible toilets. Ultimately people with disability miss out on things not because we have a disability but because people and places aren't accessible or inclusive. This is also why I've written *disabled isn't a bad word*. So many people seem to think it is and they use terms like *special needs* instead. I know some people are okay with this term, but it annoys me. My needs are no different to anyone else's, they are exactly the same. I need food and shelter, everyone needs that. But despite this we are *shut out*, it's as if society tries to exclude you, so that you get put away, behind closed doors.

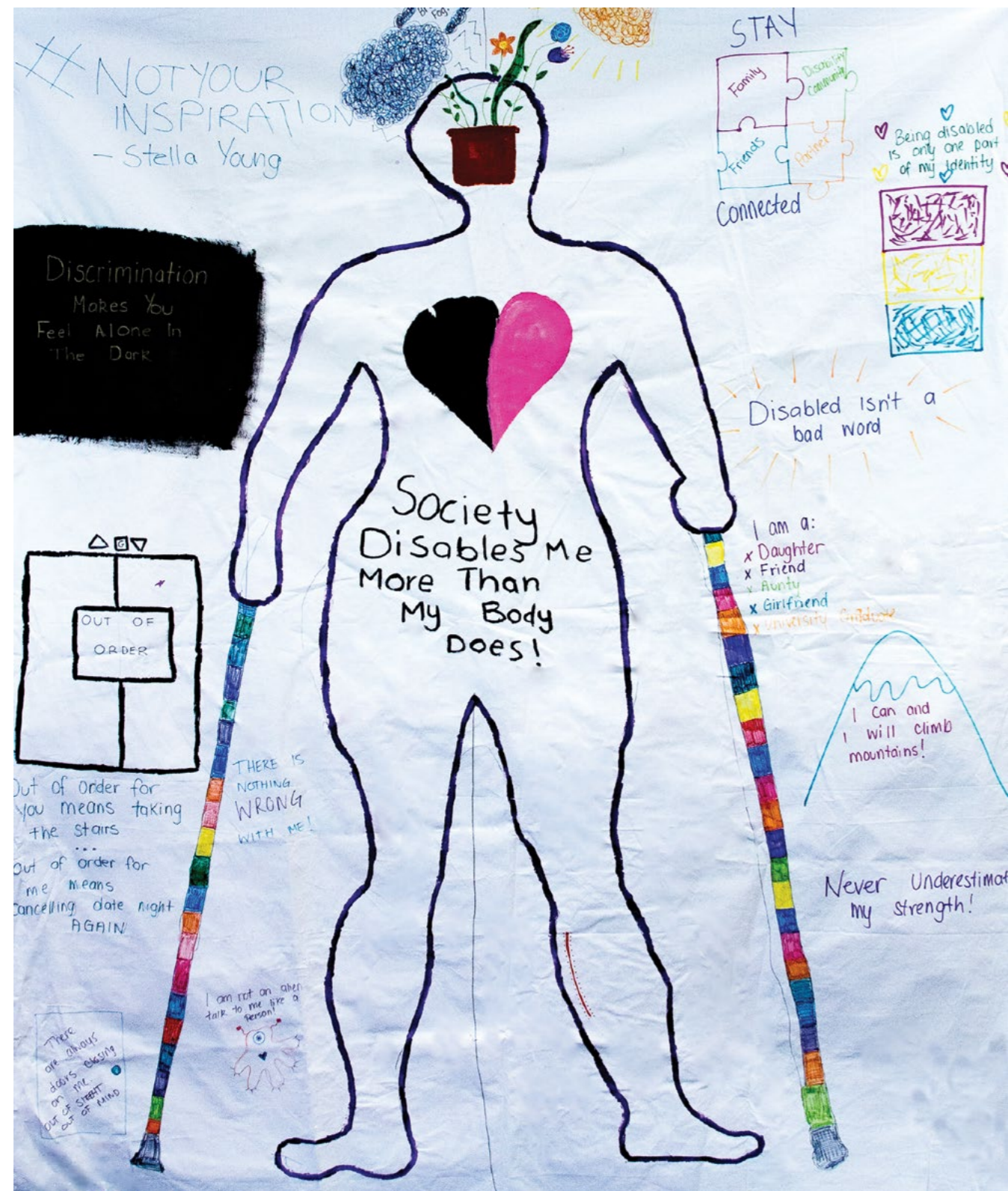
At the same time, you can feel very visible. Everyone seems to stare at me because I use crutches and I get so frustrated by the questions people ask me in public. Typically, when you walk past a stranger you might say, "oh hi, how are you going?" or "have a good day", that sort of thing. Whereas people will say to me, "what have you done to yourself?" or, "oh have you hurt your back, or ankle, or foot?" Because I have the crutches, they assume that I must have injured myself. Or people give advice, things like: "if you exercise, lose weight, think more positively, you will get better". I've said to people, "I have a neurological condition where tumours grow on my nerves and thinking positive is not going to stop the

tumours growing in my body". Actually, because people stare at my crutches, I decided to give them something to stare at by making them all jazzy, which you can see on my map. After I decorated them, I got a lot less questions about what I've done to myself and I got comments like "I really love your crutches, they look so cool".

I have also added *#notyourinspiration* which is from Stella Young (a journalist, comedian, and activist). Because that's the other thing people will say: "oh you're so brave", or "oh great job you did this basic thing". But I have to do that thing; I can't just not do things. I mean, what choice do I have? It's not a big deal, everyone does it. Don't make assumptions and just treat me as a person.

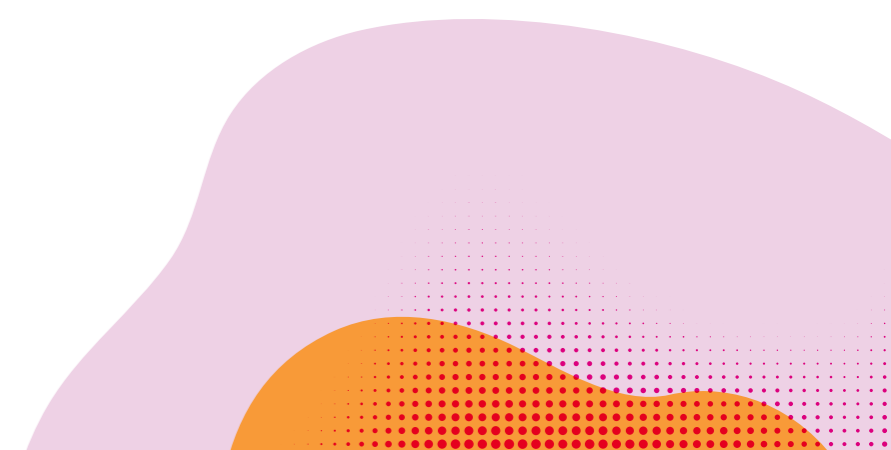
Being disabled is only one part of my identity, being disabled is not all that I am. I'm a daughter, a friend, girlfriend, university student, and aunty. I've also added the rainbow flag to represent being part of the LGBTQ+ community. I'm all of these things. This shows that people shouldn't make assumptions, everyone is different. And this is also important with health care or social support, don't make assumptions: my condition is going to be different to someone else with the same diagnosis. My experience is also not the same as someone else's with a disability. A one-size-fits all approach to treatment or care is not going to meet people's needs. There also needs to be recognition from professionals that we know our bodies better than anyone else.

Last time I visited my family I got to see a waterfall. I used to love doing that before I got my walking aids. This time mum and dad took turns pushing



Kaitlyn Thomas, *Society Disables Me More Than My Body Does*, 2021, Acrylic paint and marker pen on calico 186cmx157cm

me in a wheelchair and then for the last bit I walked down the stairs using my crutches to be able to see the waterfall. Ultimately, the way I have to get somewhere might be different, but I will get to that place if I need: *I can and will climb mountains!*



# Knowing and Understanding

Kim Maree Pauly

I love this map, it's me and that's awesome. My body map is by far the greatest piece of art I have created. It represents the real me. Every time I see it, I smile. I love it so much. I understand that when some people look at it, they might think to themselves, "what is wrong with this woman". And I get it, this map captures me on my darkest days. But it's important to be able to share this, I want people to be able to understand what it can be like. It might be a bit uncomfortable to look closely at the map, but imagine how we feel living this all the time? I think there's a difference between intellectually *knowing* about mental illness and *understanding* it. I made this map because I want to help people really understand.

The head represents what it's like in my brain. There's an army of men and they are fighting against each other. That's what it's like when you've got mental illness, it's like your whole fight is against yourself. We were talking about discrimination during this research project, and I think we can be the worst offenders, we discriminate against ourselves and are our own worst critic because of what is going on in our brains. So, I wanted to portray that with the army men in my brain. With the eyes, I wanted to represent *the ride*, what it feels like when you are not feeling well. You are just going around in circles. Your life continues but you don't go anywhere. Like this morning, I woke up and I just thought, why am I stuck? It feels like I have no control over my life. And things can change so quickly, like sometimes you are happy, then sad. I feel like I'm being tossed about by a wave, or that I'm a mouse on a roller coaster: one day's good and the next day you wake up and think "oh crap!". I've also added flowers and vines in the body, to

represent the complex ways things change. Things are not always bad; some days are good. But on hard days those beautiful blooming flowers turn into vines that wrap themselves around you and can choke out everything that is good.

I've painted blue hands pushing on the side of my head because on hard days it can feel like the whole world is pressing on you. There's pressure from all sides and the smallest task can feel impossible. Part of the pressure comes from remembering what it was like when you were well, when you could take on any task. I've painted a plug, batteries, and wires on my arm to illustrate fatigue. For me fatigue is the biggest thing. I just hate it. I'm just always feeling so physically exhausted, my batteries are flat, and that then plays on your brain. You feel like you're running on empty. I've painted in what I call *the care factor switch*. When you're not well you feel numb, and you can't and don't care because you've just got no emotions. You don't want to be like that, but life just feels too hard, and you are just blank. I've also included images of human figures to represent feeling isolated, like I can't fit in. It's a constant struggle to be and appear normal (whatever that is!) and it can impact your relationships. Sometimes I'm dogged with questions, *am I enough? Am I too much? My brain works so differently to everyone else, how do I fit in?* All that overthinking is totally exhausting. I've added a fragile sign because that is how you feel a lot of the time. When you are fragile the way people treat you can make a big difference to how you feel. I was thinking about it in terms of a clay vessel. When you are not experienced making with clay then you can create a vessel with some thick spots and some thin spots. Then it all depends on how the vessel is handled, if it's knocked in a



Kim Maree Pauly, *Knowing and Understanding*, 2022, Acrylic on calico, 190.5cmx76.3cm

particular spot, or handled thoughtlessly, then it might break.

There is an image of a theatre and stage on the map. It represents how it feels when you are unwell, and you feel self-conscious. Then it's like you are on stage, but no one is there, the seats are empty. I wanted to capture a paradox: most of the time you are on your own, living life, and nobody sees the day-to-day struggles. You don't have an audience, and no one will applaud. But on the other hand, there's stigma and discrimination. People comment, or say things, and it makes you feel like you are on show. And, like I said, I can be my own worst critic, I don't look at myself in the best light, I am hard on myself. You can also see a person with a megaphone saying things like "just smile more". That represents the kinds of comments and attitudes you get on a daily basis. People say these things and you realise they just don't get mental illness. Being told to smile more just isn't helpful. People don't understand that I have been diagnosed, it's a real illness. People with cancer, or a broken arm, they don't have to prove they are unwell. But I feel like I'm always having to prove myself. I went through a drama with Centrelink, and it was as if they thought I was just lazy and I wanted easy money. I had to say to them, "do you think I want to live like this? Do you think I want to be in poverty for the rest of my life? It isn't something I enjoy. I'd love to be able to work, to live a normal life." Sometimes they treat you like you've chosen this diagnosis.

I have included words like *love* and *friendship* because they are things that can help and protect us, but on the other hand sometimes nothing can protect you from your own brain. But there are people and things that help. I have a strong faith, so I've represented the bible and my study with the magnifying glass, life buoy and anchor. My faith gives me hope, it's that speck of light at the end of the tunnel when things are tough. My art, the ocean, the support of my friends and family are so important. And my animals; If I didn't have my animals I don't know where I'd be. I've got two dogs, a cat, and horses. When I'm sitting on my couch at the end of the day with all of them (bar the horses), just surrounded by all that unconditional love – that's my happy place!

Finally, I want anyone involved with medical care or policies to look at this map and get a sense of what every day is like for people with mental illness. I want to let you know how hard it is to be presenting in the hospital when we are unwell. When you are in crisis, and you have to go to the emergency department and sit there in this crowded space. It's just not conducive to help seeking. It's a major issue. We need somewhere, a separate space for people who turn up with mental health issues.

I'm thankful to Black Dog Institute for giving me the opportunity to participate in such an important project. I feel it has helped me to gain a fuller understanding of myself.

# Now Let's Add Stigma

## Lesley / Ezfrommelbz

### Part 1:

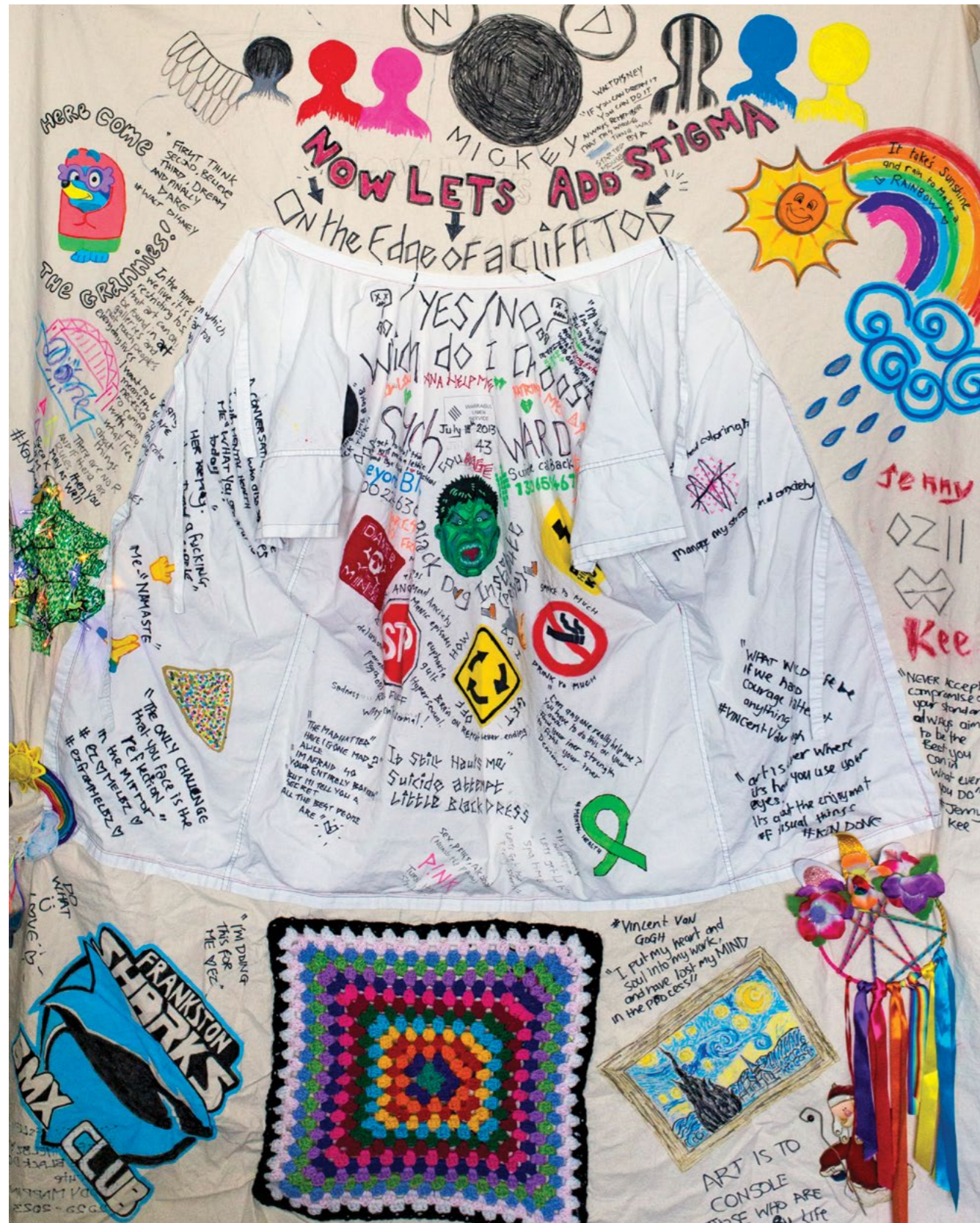
This artwork talks about suicide, my past 10 years dealing with bipolar, the good the bad and the ugly. How do you explain to your family or friends that you think the universe wants you to die? That you see messages on the TV, on your phone, computer, number plates on cars. I ask myself "can anyone else see this??? Or is my mind playing tricks on me? And why is this happening?? Who do I turn to?? People will think I'm insane". This happened to me 10 years ago, it went on for ages. I couldn't handle it. It's not that I wanted to die, I just wanted this mental torment to stop. So, I went for a walk (only 10 kilometres). I stood at the edge of the cliff... what now... YES/NO? What do I do??? Lucky I'm a chicken shit and scared of heights and that I thought, "if I do this, that's it, it's over". I just couldn't work up the courage to do it, to take that one step forward. I walked back to my car and a friend saw me and we had a chat. In my head I was saying "act normal, I don't want her to know what's going on". Then my phone buzzed. It was my daughter wanting to be picked up from a shopping centre. She had been there with a friend looking around the shops. I think I told myself I have to "snap out of this". At the shops I thought I'll treat myself to something nice because of what I had just gone through. So, I tried on this little black dress, I bought it, and I took it home. I have never worn it. It's called my "little black suicide dress" and it still hangs in my wardrobe. It has taken me 10 years to tell anyone this. Why? Because what will people think, will I be judged by you, by society?

### Part 2:

OK, now things are getting serious, two of my girlfriends are very concerned for my mental health. One of my friends takes me to hospital to see if she can get me some help. Again, waiting in the ER, the

TV is telling me "I shouldn't be here". I go through and see the psychiatrist, I tell him I'm fine, nothing is wrong with me. My girlfriend couldn't believe he let me go home as in the past weeks someone would stay with me all night, and I slept with a baseball bat in my bed "in case the bad people came to get me". Also, it was my mum's birthday in a couple of days, she was turning 70. I thought I just have to act normal, not ruin her birthday. On the way home from the hospital, I told my friend, "I need to buy my mum a cake" ...lol (really!).

July 18th, 2013: Again, one of my girlfriends says, "I need to take you to hospital", I'm like "Okay, I'll go". The mental torment was too much, maybe they could "fix me"? On the way there, again I saw nameplates telling me to die. We arrived at the care facility and straight away I didn't like it. I looked at the facility's name and it had God in the title, and I didn't trust it. Then we went inside and had a look around. I didn't want to share a room with someone, who are they?? Can I trust them? NO. Then we went and sat in the lounge room. I saw a Scrabble board which made me want to run, I was not staying there, because the words on the board spelled out Satan, God. I was like, "I'm out of here". So, they called an ambulance. When I arrived at the hospital, they put me in a white gown. I paced up and down and I couldn't sit still. I was like a caged lion, I just wanted to run. I saw a doctor and then next thing I'm going into the psych ward. In my head I'm like, "this is it, I'm dead for sure, once I'm in my family and friends are not going to know what they are going to do with me. They're going to kill me with a lethal injection". This is where stigma comes in; all I had ever seen on the TV was people in straitjackets and padded cells. I was shitting myself! I think the first night I didn't take any meds and there was no way in hell I would eat the food, it was poisoned. As days passed, I felt a bit better, not so many voices



Lesley/Ezfrommelbz, Now Let's Add Stigma, 2023, Paint, markers, crochet, christmas decorations, lights, weaving, fabric on calico, 188cmx153.5cm

in my head. But I felt like a zombie with all the drugs I was on. I think I stayed there for about a week, then I went to a care facility, again I think I was there for a couple of weeks (not sure, as it's all a bit of a blur and I can't remember).

### Part 3:

Now, 10 years on, I got to see my eldest daughter graduate as a nurse and a midwife. My youngest daughter is doing a job she loves and is an integration aid at a special needs school. Me: I'm a kid's art teacher and kid's entertainer. I still have some dark days, but I hope one day they will find a cure for this horrific illness. A massive thank you to all my friends and family who have supported me on life's journey through the tears, tantrums, and laughter till-you-cry. Love you all! ❤️

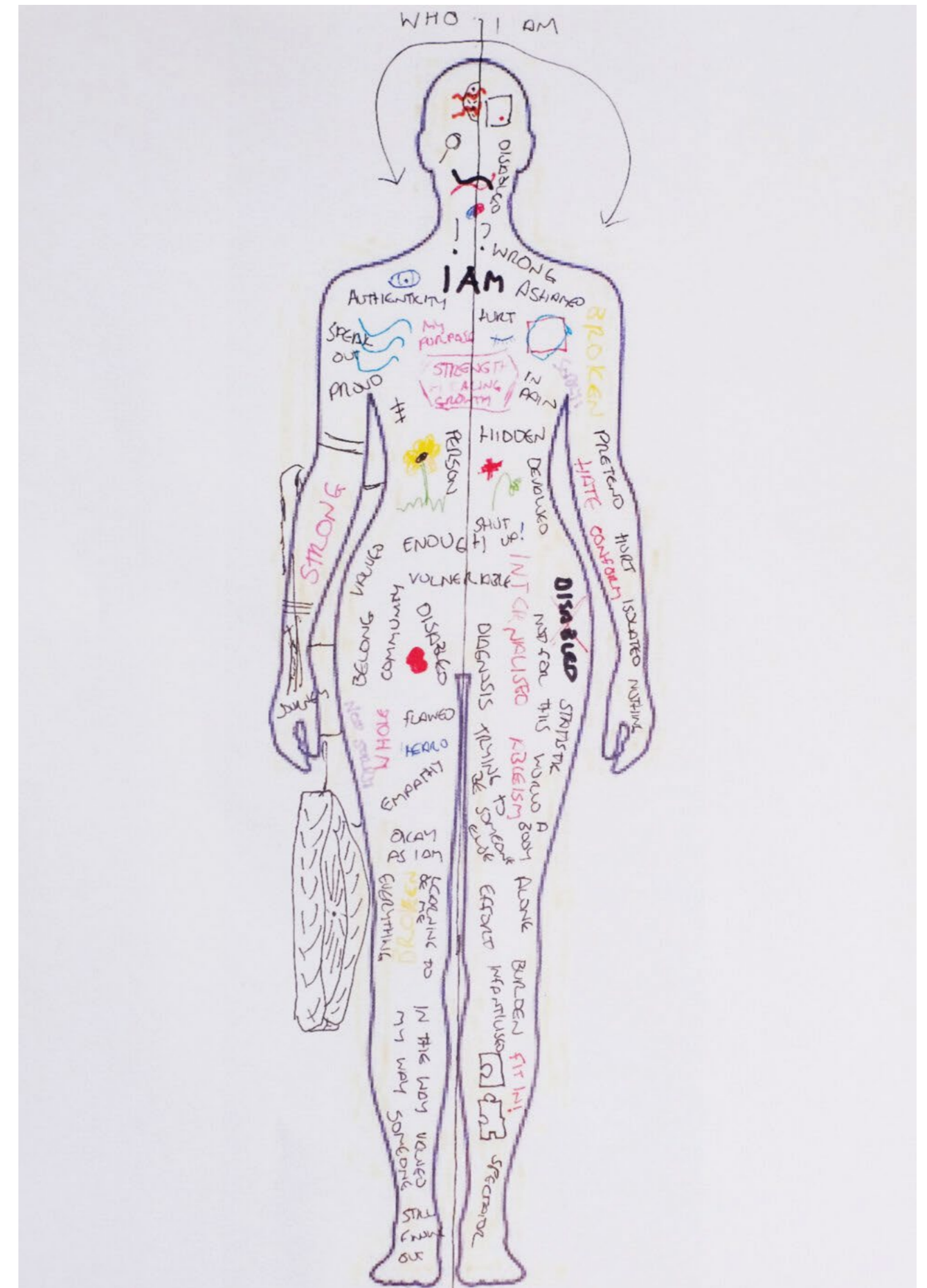
# Strong Woman Work

Ainslee

I grew up hating the fact that I had a disability. I tried to shun the disability identity, and none of my friends had a disability. I'd look at other people with disabilities and always thought they all seemed to have a chip on their shoulder, and I thought, no, I don't want anything to do with that. Then, in my 20s, I ended up in the hospital due to severe migraines and was vomiting profusely. I had to lie on my back the whole time while they figured out what was going on. I have no feeling from the waist down, and I got pressure sores because there was no pressure care in the hospital. So, when I got out of the hospital, I started using disability services which I'd never used before. And the way they spoke to me – I had major problems with it, which ultimately got me into the consulting and advocacy work I'm doing now. Then around the same time, I remember apologising to my partner – we've now been together for 17 years – because all this wheelchair equipment and aid equipment was around. He's like, "What?" He goes, "You realise you're disabled, right?" So he had to keep constantly reminding me that I have a disability. So that hospital experience and my boyfriend made me realise that I couldn't pretend that I didn't have a disability. It wasn't until a few years ago that I understood that I had internalised this ableism. I didn't realise how ableist I'd been to myself. The influences around me made me go down that road. I was told I was a burden when I was 15 years old, which has always stuck with me; it was part of why I shied away from my disability. I also grew up being told, "don't say anything, don't complain, just put up with things, and just appreciate everything you get, even if it means shitty treatment". So, for years I was uncomfortable telling people not to talk to me in condescending or offensive ways. I remember seeing Stella Young give her "I am not your inspiration" talk, which was so funny and helped me call people out.

I used to say that I was a person with a disability, and if anybody said I was disabled, I would freak out and say no, I'm not, I'm a person with a disability. But with the last few years, with what it's been like with disability during COVID and with starting my PhD, I say I'm proudly disabled. It's a very political statement that has become urgent since COVID. I had to pull out of my PhD because of the things I was reading. For example, there was one article about the pandemic triage of life-saving equipment. I've read this in medical journals too, there are criteria for assigning access to life-saving equipment, and if there is a disabled and a non-disabled person, the life-saving equipment goes to a non-disabled person. It's assumed that, regardless of who they are, the quality of life and social utility of the disabled person will be less, that they will not have as good quality of life or be as valuable to society if we save them. I had to put my PhD aside as I could not get past knowing where my place in society is because of my identity.

It was a hard choice to leave because I love research, and my path to a PhD wasn't straightforward. I was bullied at school, I hated it and I couldn't wait to get out. I wasn't supported in subjects that interested me because the school told me it would be too hard for them to accommodate me because of my wheelchair. So, I was just disengaged, and I didn't do well academically. When I finished school and went to TAFE, people looked at me, and because I was crap in high school and was in a wheelchair, they decided that the perfect job for me was in info-tech. I remember going to a recruiter after TAFE, I took my resume and told him I wanted to do web design and had excelled at it. And he goes to me, "you need to take a good, hard look at yourself and realise what you can actually do". He didn't look for web-design work, he set me up with an interview



Ainslee, *Strong Woman Work*, 2022, Digital print on calico from the original marker pen on paper, 80cmx190.5cm

at Centrelink. And I remember he said to me beforehand, “throughout the interview, you’re not to speak, I’ll speak for you. At the end of the interview, you can just tell me whether you understood everything”. I ended up in that job for 20 years, and again, I was bullied, this time by management. I had a nervous breakdown. And after these experiences, I understood why people I knew with a disability seemed to have a chip on their shoulder – it was purely because of the hell they went through. I was off work when I had that hospitalisation. I remember watching daytime TV and thinking, “my god, my brain is going to turn to mush”. I was physically unwell, and looking back, I clearly had a major depressive episode. But the doctors didn’t catch on. Often specialists don’t treat you like a human, they just treat you like a body, and they focus on the part they need to fix, and that’s it. And then someone suggested that I go to uni. So, as a mature-aged student, I did a Bachelor of Arts with a focus on Anthropology. When I got a Distinction for the first time, I cried and thought, “I’ve got a brain!”. I was so broken and self-destructive when I finally left my Centrelink job. Luckily I had found an excellent psychologist who said, “If you don’t leave, you’re going to die.” So it was her permission that validated my decision to leave.

The same psychologist told me, “You’ve got a disability; when you’re born with a disability, you’re also born with mental health issues because you’re in a fight or flight state from the word go because of what is going on with your body”. That was like a penny dropping. So many people in hospitals and really everywhere don’t understand that mental

health can affect people with disability. So many of my doctors didn’t understand that, but some get it. I had an excellent doctor in my second year of strict bed rest who looked at things holistically and understood that if your mental health is crap, the rest of your body will suffer as well.

I used a pre-made outline for the map; when I was looking online for outlines, I saw that representations of bodies are all so generic, and they don’t represent my body, my spina bifida, my scoliosis or my wheelchair. So, I added my wheelchair on one side to capture the change to embracing disability as part of my identity. I’ve added the word “proud” to my map, thinking of some lines from poet Laura Hershey: “remember, you weren’t the one / who made you ashamed, / but you are the one / who can make you proud”. That reflects my newly found purpose in life, with my consultancy, to fight ableism and stop disabled people from being pigeonholed. At my heart, I’ve used pink to write *my purpose, strength, healing, growth* to represent the following: When I was going through the nervous breakdown, I got involved in strength training and recently I started doing Strongwomen training and I entered my first Strongwomen competition, and I won a trophy. For me, it represents both physical and emotional strength. Through this training, I’m slowly starting to deal with stuff I’ve been going through that I hadn’t faced since my nervous breakdown. It has really helped me on my selfcare journey. It’s hugely important to me. When I’m having a crappy day, I’ll look over at that trophy and remember, that I’m more of an authentic me now.

# Visible/Invisible

## Helen Hartill

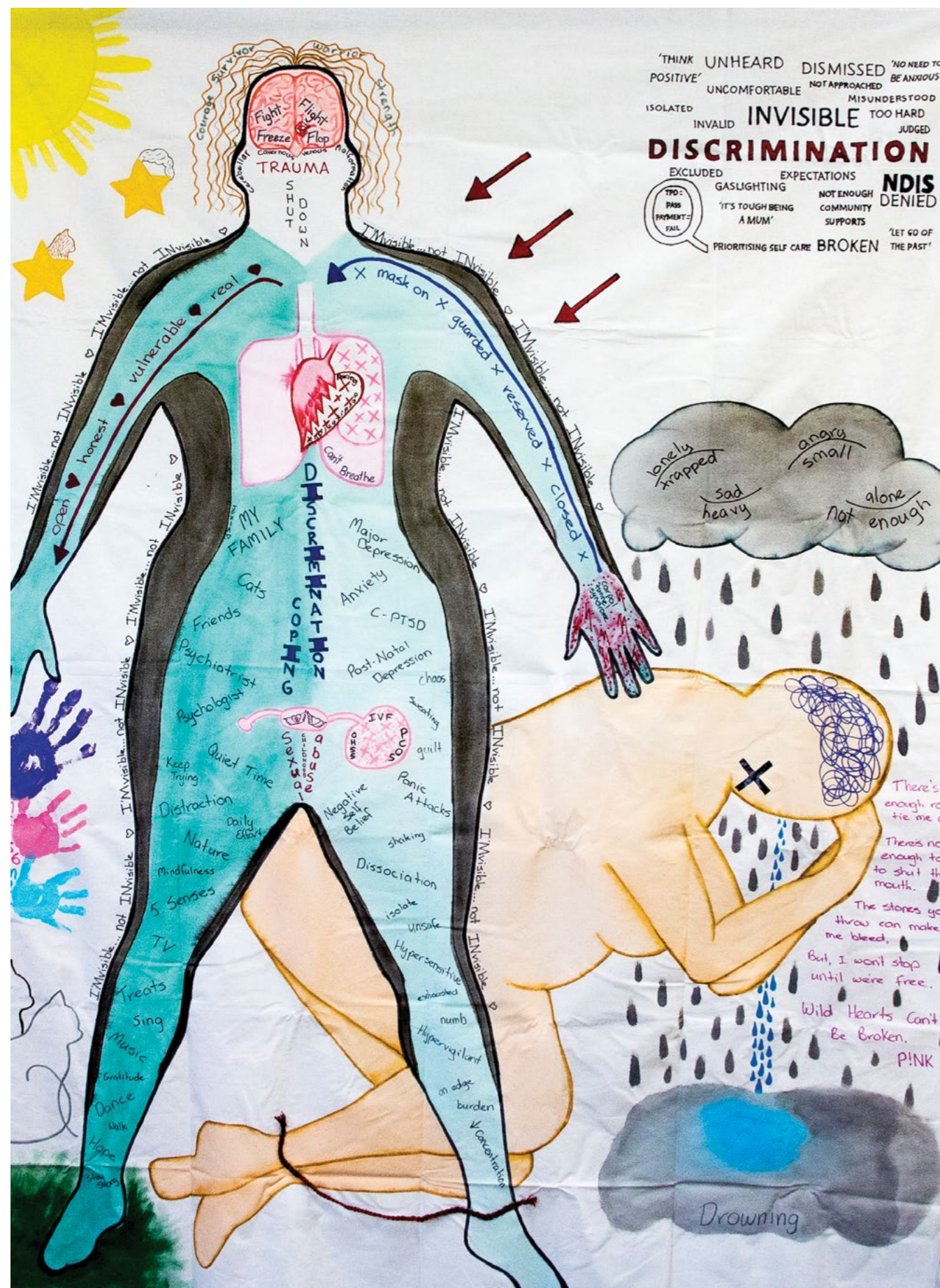
There are two figures in my map. The figure that is lying down, she’s the person people don’t see; she’s beige and washed out and that’s how you feel, like you are not quite yourself, you’re hidden from view, but still very much there. The standing figure is the person I show to the world. We are tied together, and I can’t break free at this point. It’s been a long journey, I’ve been unwell for about 10 years, and I’ve gone through a lot, and I haven’t had the space to be completely well. From the very beginning I felt very much like, although I’m not well, I still have to be there, present, in daily life. I follow the *Real Depression Project* on Instagram and they shared a quote that has stayed with me: “the worst part about having mental health issues is that your seemingly required to have a breakdown in order for people to understand how hard you were trying to hold yourself together”. And that’s exactly what I feel. Behind the scenes, what people don’t see is that you work to the point of exhaustion every day to make sure that you’re presenting in an appropriate way. You feel you don’t have the freedom to just have a moment without that being judged. Only my little family of four and my immediate family have seen aspects of my struggle. I try to be as open as I can about being unwell because it’s important to fight stigma, but there’s also an expectation that you can’t go around crying every day or having a melt-down. Otherwise, people look at you like there’s something fundamentally wrong with you. If I had a physical illness people would just consider me sick. But with a mental illness, people think that you’re broken.

Some people who know about my mental health are scared to ask me about it, they avoid it because it’s awkward. But it’s isolating when people don’t ask, I’d rather you say something, don’t be afraid to approach. I think that is the way that stigma about mental health will change, if people are able to feel

comfortable to say, “how are you going, do you want to talk about it?”.

My hidden self has tape on her mouth and that is connected to a song by P!nk. She sings, “there’s not enough rope to tie me down, there’s not enough tape to shut my mouth”. I feel very strongly about those lines. My childhood was quite difficult, I was sexually abused by my grandfather and my mother is very toxic. But, like my mental illness, those experiences might pull me down, but I’m not going to let them take me down. Both mental health, and abuse can be invisible to others, and they can be taboo to talk about. This is a theme that runs through many of the stories I’ve shared on my map: the visible/invisible factor. For example, I have a left cerebellar cavernous venous malformation, I have had carpal tunnel, both things that are unseen, but have a big impact. I have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), I went through IVF, I had two miscarriages; these are not visible to other people and again, can be taboo to talk about. You’re still very much struggling behind the scenes, and it makes life so difficult, especially because nobody can see what’s happening. To address these unspoken things, I’ve put lots of words on my map. I didn’t want to leave anything unsaid, I didn’t want to be vague, I wanted to blurt it all out. For me, words are so strong, they are a way that people can instantly understand. You can see on my standing figure I’ve listed words on one side that describe my experience of discrimination. In my daily life, like on my map, I try to be real, vulnerable, honest, and open. But when I experience discrimination because of my mental health I have to put my mask back on and then I’m guarded, reserved and I’m closed. Often, I feel discrimination is coming at me all the time.

I’ve written “not enough community supports” because I’ve had a few admissions now. When you



Helen Hartill, *Visible/Invisible*, 2022, Paint, thread, marker pen on calico. 183cmx139cm

are in hospital you get group supports and they are really beneficial. You are with a bunch of people that are completely different and it's so good to have different perspectives. But I think there is a massive divide: either you are in hospital and sick, or you are on your own at home (hopefully with some support). There doesn't seem to be anything in between, and it's so hard to get public supports as those in crisis who need immediate care are prioritised, which I absolutely don't begrudge. But you have to fork out a fortune for private support. We have to pay for top hospital cover to access any supports, and the cost is unbelievably expensive. Accessing NDIS and the disability support pension is complicated. So, there is a need for something in-between: there needs to be support in the community for both those in crisis, and those coping in the every-day.

I've added words and images to my map that represent things that I use to cope. You will see two stars at the top of my map. One is for my Nanna, she was a really great support; a loving woman, non-judgemental, quietly giving, and one of the strongest people I've ever met. She was just there for me, a mother figure, who gave me unconditional love. We lost her December 2018, she was 94. The other star is my beautiful cat Cleo who passed away February 2021 when she was 16. I had her from when she was six months old, when I was living on my own. She was my little companion, and we were so close; when I was upset, she'd come and sit on my chest. My kids don't really remember my Nanna, but they do remember Cleo, and they often speak of her. So, we go outside together, and we pick the two brightest stars and we say, that's Nanna and that's Cleo. Being outside, looking at those stars, feeling the texture of the grass under foot, being with my children and husband, these are things that support my wellbeing and keep me fighting for my health.



# Connection and Disconnection

Janina

I wanted to represent the feeling of disconnection I experience between myself and others. There's a big red question mark on the map, and it represents feeling misunderstood and not connecting. Even if people hear you, they might even be listening, but they don't understand. And sometimes they just don't care, they don't want to be involved. This reflects a kind of discrimination, a lack of care about, and engagement with, mental health. It's a situation that can occur in your work life, and even with friends or family. There is a heavy rain cloud with raindrops falling, and they echo the tears on my face. The rain clouds represent general feelings of depression that overcome you. They also connect to the way disconnected interactions, and the perspectives of others can impact you. There's a brick wall on my map that further emphasises the disconnection, and the feeling of isolation that brings. I've added a mask to my face, it covers my tears and represents me hiding my true feelings from the world. As I painted the mask it started to look like the kind of thing a superhero would wear. This felt right because people with mental health issues are actually superheroes, facing the world despite all their problems.

I think culturally, or perhaps it's to do with education, lots of people don't understand what it means to be impacted by mental health. Like there's someone close to me, and I told them I'm going to a therapist because of depression. And they were like "Why a therapist? For depression?", depression and mental health just didn't exist for them, and it was as if it wasn't socially acceptable for me to be having that experience. I have added scratches and scars to my right shoulder – I wanted to show those internal scars that come from mental health, things

that are often invisible to society at large, but that we carry. I was also thinking about a German writer who published an autobiography. He recounts a story about telling his parents about his depression. He said, "Dad, I have depression", and his dad said, "Well, sometimes I feel sad too but then I watch some cute kitten videos and I feel better again." This is a clear example of the way many people lack understanding about mental health. Being with people who also have experiences with mental health can help overcome that sense of isolation and disconnection. I've drawn a green circle with nodes on it, on the left side of the map. It is a counterpoint to the circle with disconnected dots on the right hand side. The united circle represents a support group I attended. Everyone was different, they had different life experiences, but they also had things in common. It's such a good feeling to be part of that connected circle. When we did the research workshops to make our maps, it was wonderful to meet people and share our experiences, to find commonalities and differences.

I've divided my map into two halves. On the right side are difficult or hard experiences, and on the left are things that help. I've written supportive and wanted the S to be the inverse of the question mark on the right. There's an ear to represent those people who do listen and try to understand. Like a therapist, partner, friends, family, or even researchers. I drew a necklace which was a present from my husband and represents courage. At my left arm I've drawn the Anahata or heart chakra. It represents protection of my heart, and it also symbolises my yoga and meditation practice. I've also drawn a red symbol, it looks a bit like a bird, or flame or a flower. I wanted it to be abstract and



Janina, *Connection and Disconnection*, 2022, Paint, oil pastel, pencil on calico, 150cmx190cm

to represent all the things and people that are protective and supportive. I've left my body map unfinished. I found that during the body mapping workshops my creativity flowed, but it was much harder to finish the map when I was alone. This is really significant; it connects back to support and connection and how vital it is. It is just so important to have the chance to connect with like-minded people in order to share knowledge, help each other, or even just listen. I wish there were more free, public groups where you could connect with others and do something creative or therapeutic. Something like our body mapping workshops. One size doesn't fit all, so having different options for that kind of support would be wonderful. My unfinished body map represents all of this.

# Hidden Colours of the Invisible

Penny Shapter

While creating this artwork I was reflecting on how those of us who live with mental illness experience invisibility. Most of our battle is underneath what is visible to the world. We are like a tree whose appearance depends on its roots, the soil it is grounded in, the nutrients it is getting and the external environment. Just like a tree, mental health needs to be nourished properly, so we too can grow to be bold and beautiful when all the factors play their part. It can be hard to maintain, there are factors beyond our control. But just like trees, we are strong and resilient. There is duality in experiences with mental health: our visible beauty comes at the high cost of holding on, withstanding storms, healing from wounds inflicted by ignorance and circumstances. There are times when invisibility knocks down some leaves and branches. The two smaller figures on the map represent some of the darkness that comes from feeling invisible and being discriminated against. I decided to make them smaller so they looked like they are in the background, which is how invisibility and discrimination makes you feel. Discrimination around mental health can sometimes be very subtle and hard to pin down, but it still hurts. Sometimes it can even come, surprisingly, from health care professionals who don't know how to treat trauma. When you are discriminated against you feel diminished and very vulnerable, it shapes your sense of self. Both bodies are naked to show the rawness that comes from discrimination. I've used words around the figures because words are powerful. As one quote reads: *...words can plant gardens or burn whole forests down*. Often people misuse words, you can be insulted and assaulted by words. Words can cause real pain, whether they are said by family, friends, people around us, or

healthcare professionals. And we can then take those words on as part of our own self talk. So, there's a dual meaning to that quote, words can be positive or negative.

Duality is a key theme across the map and is also present in the symbols I've chosen to represent my experiences. For example, the lotus starts in the muddy, murky water but then it blooms. This represents the potential to come into the light. We might start in trauma, or in difficult circumstances, we might be marginalised or discriminated against, but we can come out of the morass, and blossom into this beautiful flower. You can survive and be seen. The heart is a symbol that is universally recognised, it is the root of our emotions and sometimes, when we are treated poorly, we feel it at our heart. The heart I've painted has been shattered by negative experiences and treatment. But it has also been rebuilt and the cracks filled by gold. I'm very inspired by the Japanese art of kintsugi: the piecing of broken objects back together with gold to embellish the cracks. For me, that is a really powerful analogy. Instead of thinking of myself as broken, I've been able to say to myself, yes you may have been broken but you have put yourself back together beautifully with gold. The breaks have made you beautiful. Often, I feel a sense of brokenness, and kintsugi reminds me that I'm not broken, I am pieced back together, and pieced back together stronger. This has helped me on my own journey, it has helped me to move past very difficult experiences. It's taken lots of practice, changing how I let words, actions, and experiences come in and affect me. A large part of it has been learning to change my own self-talk, and not taking on the language and attitudes of others.



Penny Shapter, *Hidden Colours of the Invisible*, 2022, Acrylic on calico, 156cmx187cm

There are flames on one of the small figures, and the large central body. Fire represents the passion and power to stand up and be heard and to advocate for yourself and others. It signifies strength and energy. But fire can also burn and destroy. This connects back to invisibility; we can be consumed by shame. For many of us who have been marginalised, there can be intense shame and this shame can really prevent recovery. Everybody has a story, sometimes really complex, big stories. And we can shame people into silence, not let them share those stories, render them invisible. I have my own complex story and there are things in this story that would make people cringe or be shocked. I held shame about these for a lot of years. But the things that happened were not my fault. If people are not allowed to tell their stories, then they become hidden. Instead of coming from a place of judgement when engaging with people who need support, those providing mental health care should listen to the person. Because everyone's situation is unique. There might be things that are common across particular groups, but ultimately everything plays out uniquely for each individual. I'm now very comfortable talking about my experiences, and we are getting better about dealing with it, but it's still frustrating that we, as a society, often still do such a bad job of speaking about and acknowledging mental health. The only way we will improve is if we talk about it more. This means giving people a voice and just listening. It's great to have policies and methodologies to treat people but that doesn't mean you understand the lived experience of people getting that treatment. So, the only way to gain that is to listen to people's stories. Because it's empowering to have a voice, to be able to tell your story. It's powerful to give people the voice to do that: we should all have the right to tell our story and to own it without judgement or shame.

# Cocoon to Butterfly

Rachel

My map portrays a journey. It's the journey from my past to my present, and my hopes for the future. It represents both an old version of me that was experiencing trauma, pain and feeling judged and it shows what I'm working towards and what I'm becoming. My hope is that people who have had similar experiences see it and feel understood and not so alone. I'm also sharing my map so people who haven't had these experiences can get some understanding of what that's like. I hope they feel inspired to act and help others. I decided not to be literal with my map, I didn't do an outline of my body, instead I took an expressive approach. I also don't like to stick to instructions, so I just let my emotions and thoughts flow.

The red and black section connect to my past: the several years I struggled with complex PTSD, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. I've used those colours because they represent the darkness I feel, and feelings of intense pain and isolation. I've covered a section of red and black text with black fabric. This is like the mask I wear so that people see me and think, "oh yeah, she's fine" but underneath there's so much going on. I feel I have to hide my emotions. The red and black words are associated with my anxiety, trauma, and emotions. I made the text large to represent how it is in my mind when I'm hearing this constant stream of negative words. There's also a list of trigger words that can really shut me down, stop me reaching out, sharing, or talking to someone when I need help. Many of the trigger words relate to my personal life, I was in an abusive relationship. I also lived through narcissistic abuse from my family. Throughout both experiences I was hiding and suppressing my emotions and that just does not help your mental health. So, I wanted to share these words, to just get them out. My long-term goal is to not let these words affect me so much. The map also has a statement about

the words people have used to label me like "rape victim" or "abuse victim". I'm trying to get away from these labels, I don't want to be reduced to those words or for them to define how the world thinks of me. That's why I wrote "Victim to Survivor". I want to go from a negative label to a positive one and to feel like I can go out into the world and say, "I'm still a person, and I have value".

In my map I've tried to give a sense of the isolation and the injustice that many of us experience when dealing with the justice, welfare and mental health systems. It's been a difficult process for me. I remember giving a statement to the police, and then leaving the station. It was all so evidence based. What they wanted was things like text messages, or call logs. My distress, and the psychological trauma I endured just wasn't seen as evidence, and I didn't feel that I had been understood. It was really traumatising. Afterwards there just weren't the right supports to help. It's left me feeling that the whole system needs to change. I think that in general there is a lack of awareness about abuse. When you are in an abusive relationship it can be very isolating. I'd like people to know that this is something that many people experience and that you can make a difference by reaching out to people in distress. If you see someone crying in public don't ignore them, go up to them and say "Are you okay? Can I help you?". Something that simple can be the start of positive change that shifts the way the world operates.

The brightly coloured sections of the map are about my transformation. So, moving from being alone, isolated, and in danger to being able to relax, stay in one place, and feel safe. I wrote "I'm safe" and that's a very important statement because I could only start the process of healing and connecting with people once I felt completely safe. My



Rachel, Cocoon to Butterfly, 2022, Pen, fabric, crayon, paper on calico, 146cmx175cm

transformation process has been slow, it's been a series of baby steps, but throughout the process I've known that, hopefully, I'm going to be healed. That's the goal. At the moment I feel like I'm in a cocoon and that in the future I will emerge as a butterfly that can venture back into the world. In the middle of the map, I wanted to acknowledge the people and organisations that have helped me. I've had help from lots of wonderful people: friends, services, social workers, housing support, phone support from 1800RESPECT. They are like a family to me, my new family unit. They've been amazing, without that support I wouldn't be here today, and I wouldn't have achieved all that I have.

My life has changed so much since I made my map. All the negativity on my body map has dramatically reduced. I am now a proud pet owner to a rabbit named Captain Snowball and my mental health is so much better.

# Building Blocks

## Dana Alderson

I'm a bit self-conscious about drawing, so I didn't want to draw my map. I prefer to communicate through writing, rather than talking, so I've used text on the map to represent my feelings and experiences. The text I've added is like the legend you'll find on a street map or a topographic map. I do make maps at work sometimes, so I think that's coming through here. That discomfort around talking can feel very overwhelming. Especially when I feel like I can't communicate to friends, family or really anyone about how I'm feeling and why I'm feeling a particular way. I've held that for a long time and have come to recognise it as part of myself. I've never been able to completely eliminate it, that is an unrealistic expectation. It will always be there, and it really has shaped me in terms of my interactions with people and my hesitance to develop close relationships with a lot of people. During the body mapping workshops we did some creative exercises reflecting on our experiences of discrimination and stigma. I created a picture of a train carriage with my seat facing in the opposite direction to everyone else to represent the times I'd been bullied at school. As I made the map, I reflected on similar instances when I've withdrawn into myself. I am not in situations where I'm bullied anymore, but that tendency to withdraw into myself is still there. It's a protective thing.

I created my map using squares of fabric, it creates a kind of pixelated effect. The squares and their colours have several symbolic meanings. I used a block of solid colour to form my body, to capture when I'm not feeling particularly well. I wrote words in my body like down, scared, alone, and hopeless. The colourful blocks represent tools that help me manage my depression and anxiety, things like cooking, yoga, friendship, family, work, meditation, gardening, nature. I use these tools in different ways. My feelings of isolation, exclusion and depression

are never completely gone. So sometimes these tools are just to cover that up, to get me through the day. But then at other times they are quite strong building blocks for me moving forward with my life. On the map, the colourful squares are almost like beams of light, coming from my hands. As I made the map I began to think of these tools/ colourful squares as kind of like my superpowers and so I wanted them to be bright and colourful. At the bottom of the map there's a beach. It's a place where I feel very grounded and it's special to me. I'm a town planner and for me there's a sense that my connection to the world is very spatial, a spatial connection to places.

I'm 40 and it's taken me until now to figure out all the various things that support my mental health and make me resilient in the face of discrimination. I'd like people looking at my map to know that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to getting better with your mental health. It's about what is helpful to you. Sometimes it's enough for me to go and see a friend, that will help get me through, but often a health provider won't necessarily suggest something like that. But that was a strategy that my psychologist recommended, they said "you need to go and have some fun and see friends". It can take time, but eventually you recognise the things that do help you. And it might be something really simple, it doesn't have to be overly complicated. It could also be a few things that work together, like for me connecting with friends, doing yoga, on top of antidepressants and seeing a psychologist have been really helpful. Lots of people have mental health issues, and you might never know that they do, because, like me, they use these techniques or tools to support themselves. I want people to know that I don't think that the tools I, or others, use are band-aids, they don't cover things up. It's more like, you are going to have difficulties in your life. You are



Dana Alderson, *Building Blocks*, 2022, Fabric, paint, marker pen on calico, 181.5cmx154.5cm

not always going to feel great, but you can draw on different tools to help you. And they can really help. And remember, it's okay to need help, it's much more common than you think.



# That Little Seedling Will Grow Again

Kerry

The whole purpose of my map is to try and be a bit more open, not so much with the research team and people who see it, but with myself. Some of what's on the map I try not to think about and don't talk about.

I've drawn a tangle of lines in the brain. I get quite anxious and overwhelmed, and if I become bombarded with too many thoughts, too many memories, my brain feels squiggly. The words "I just want to forget for just a moment" hover above the brain and describe a specific event that I don't want to think about. This is an event that is represented by the uterus too. I hold lots of guilt about this, and it's a source of great pain and grief, and something that feeds my fears about being a bad parent. My oldest son sexually abused my daughter for 3 years and I had no idea, even though I was a social worker. On the map I've written a quote from Sappho, "What cannot be said will be wept", because although I rarely share it, I do still cry about what happened. It's very hard for me to tell you this part of my story but a part of me does want to share it. From my professional experience I know it's not that uncommon, but it's one of the biggest secrets families hold. I want to share this with other mothers who have experienced this. I've drawn the guilt monster at my side because no matter what I do, it doesn't go away, it is always there. I've written, "I sat with my anger long enough until she told me her real name was grief", to capture how, when all this happened, I went from sorrow to just being really angry. After a while I realised actually I'm not an angry person, I'm grieving.

I drew heavy weights on my shoulders. I grew up with a mother who had considerable mental health

issues. That immediately singled me out, because the things happening in my house weren't like what was happening in other kids' houses. I've written "It's hard to trust when all you have from the past is evidence why you shouldn't". This is about the way I was brought up. For a long time, I was angry at my mum for not being a mum. I felt quite defenceless out in the world, stuff would happen, and she wouldn't take care of me. I can talk quite freely about this now, but when I was 16, I was raped. I went and told my mum who didn't believe me. She called me a liar and raced around to the family of this male and asked, "Did your son do this?" and of course they said he didn't. She came back to me and told me I was lying and called me all these names. That was a definitive moment that said you clearly can't trust anybody. It's difficult for me to separate myself from that upbringing. It's always sitting there, and it's a weight on my shoulders that I'm constantly trying to fight against. The weights also connect to other experiences, like when I separated from my first husband. We had three children together, and he took my children and told me that I was a bad mother. I had severe postnatal depression and was really unwell. So, he just took them and told everyone I was a bad mother and shouldn't have them back.

There's lots of difficult stuff on the map, but there are positives too. I wrote, "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow". I wanted to show that despite everything, you can keep growing. Even when things feel like they're falling apart, there's still that little seedling. If you nourish it a little bit and take care of it, it will grow again. I also wanted to show that there is a lighter side, there is lightness to how I feel. It's important to know that things aren't static,



Kerry, *That Little Seedling Will Grow Again*, 2022, Marker pen on calico, 143cmx182cm

they don't stay bad, they can change. The lanterns represent the things that bring me light, things like my art and my art journal, my friends, and my family. And they also represent me, because I work hard to lift myself up and out and to continue to function. The hearts on my palms represent me trying to heal myself. I've done this by taking care of my daughter who has complex PTSD. She's been through a lot. The hands also connect to all the careers I keep finding myself in. I just can't seem to escape roles that are about caring. Right now, I work in mental health with carers who have loved ones with mental illness. Before that I was a social worker, and I'm also a qualified midwife. I'm always trying to take care of other people, and I wonder if it's because I know what it's like not to be treated well, and to be ignored, and to have things said about you. I try to make sure that every interaction I have with the people I work with is caring, and free of judgement. I want them to know I'm right there alongside them. It's important to be kind to people, and to recognise that ultimately, we all struggle so we need to be compassionate. This is something I'd like people working in mental health care to

know. From my experience as a carer of someone with mental health needs, I think it's important that those providing care should be open to the whole person. This means considering not just that health consumer, but their family as well. There's always a big story, the consumer isn't a standalone person. There are always lots of people, experiences, and factors around them.

I've written, "Be messy and complicated and afraid and show up anyway". This is a way of saying that, actually, it is okay to be the way I am. Sometimes I think maybe I'm crazy. But it's not that. I'm just very complicated, there's a lot of stuff that I have had to process and a lot of fear, including of rejection. All that can stop me from doing things. So, this is a reminder for myself. For anybody looking at my map, this might also be a reminder to be brave enough to trust. Open yourself up a little bit, because you don't know who or what you will find. You might just find someone who's understanding. You might just find a place to heal, I know it takes bravery and courage to do that – but you can do it.

# Walking on Stoney Ground with a Pocket Full of Hope

Tass O'Flaherty

I used sewing materials on my map because I like to crochet, I sew, I knit. I had one grandmother who sewed and another who crocheted and knitted. They taught me and I find it relaxing, so it helped me to relax while I was trying to tell my story. My story isn't just about one thing, it's about the whole of me and what's made me. There's been bad things, there's been good. It's just what life brings you. I'm learning to deal with difficult things better than I did in the past.

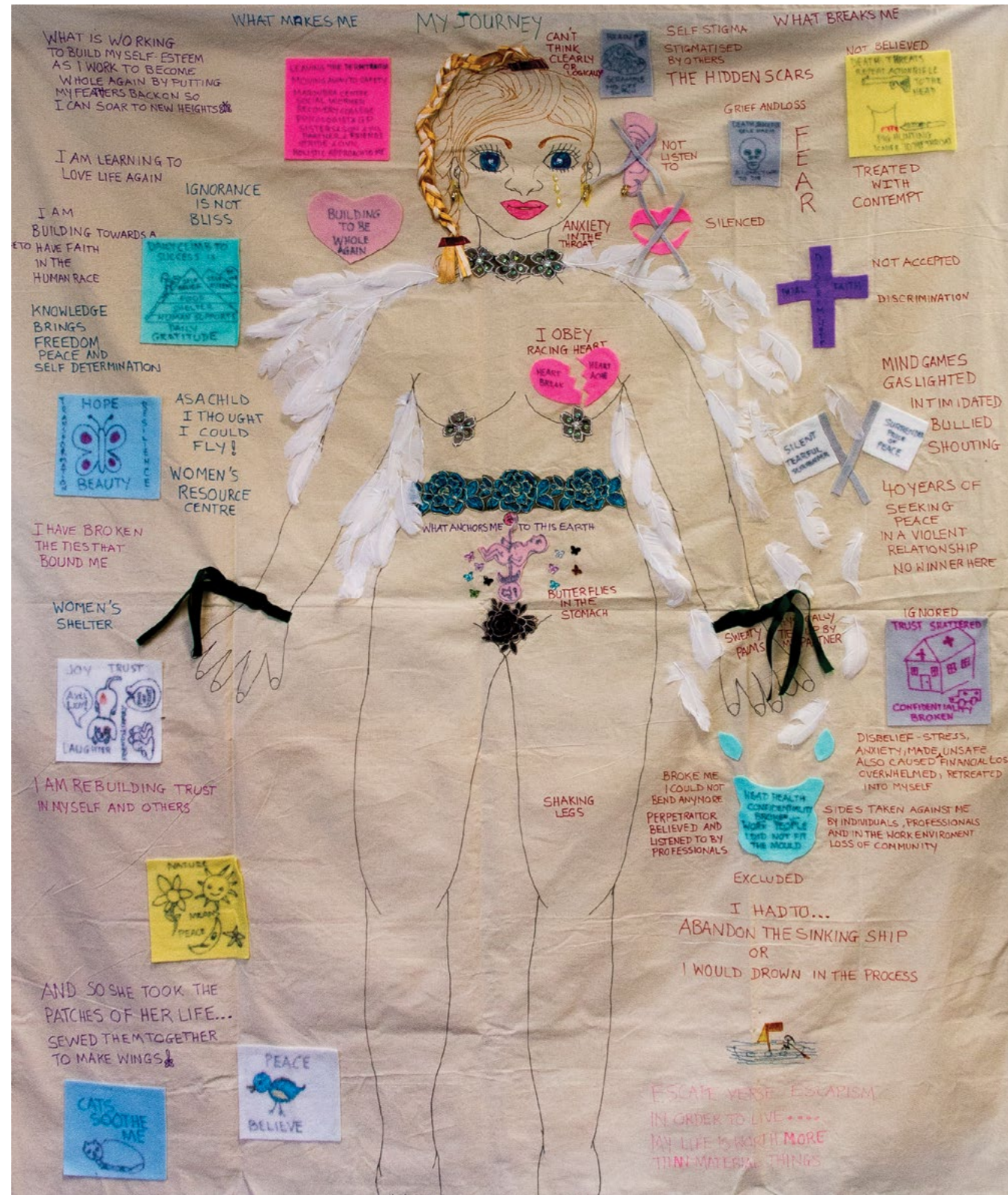
I used to be really quiet. You'll see "I Obey" written on my chest. That's basically what I did growing up. I went to Catholic school, and I was taught to obey. I think that a religious upbringing can define you, you can feel bound by a set of rules, and it means you are not confident in yourself. Every child needs space to be themselves, to have confidence in themselves. My upbringing didn't give me that space. Obeying also connects to the ribbons on the hands – my ex-husband tied my hands behind my back and the colour of the ribbons represent the colour of the rope. As a result of this I was sectioned and sent to a mental health institution which was an experience in itself. On the map the ties are broken physically and mentally. I broke free and I'm not bound anymore. I've added feathers to my figure. When I was a child, I used to think I could fly so wings represent a feeling of freedom. On one side the feathers have fallen off, because through my marriage I lost my wings. But I have regained them by being myself. I've put flowers around the throat to represent the thyroid. My marriage and my anxiety triggered my thyroid. I've always felt my anxiety in my throat. I would lose my voice physically. When I'm unwell I get to a point where I can't speak, I can't articulate, and so I act out. I wrote lots of words on the map because this is an

opportunity to speak. I never used to speak up in the past. In the past I used to clamp down, I'd go to the shower and cry and then come out and put on a smile. It became just a part of my day, a part of my life. By putting my emotions into words, it's been a way to get them out of my system, to a degree.

The squares on the map represent my experiences, some that really broke me, and others that have helped. There are things that occurred throughout my marriage, like being threatened with a 22-repeat action rifle and a pig hunting knife. There were verbal threats and intimidation, but the fact that the gun and knife were in my home and it was inferred they could be used against me, made the possibilities very real. When I tried to tell clinicians about this, they were either dismissive or didn't believe me. My ex-husband is a very articulate man, very convincing. I've represented a hospital in one of the squares, because a hospital I was being treated at broke my confidentiality. I disclosed something I had to do for my safety in my marriage, and they rang my husband and told him. It's taken me a long time to trust again.

I also sought the assistance of a psychologist in the nearby town who finally told me that he preferred to work with men as men had a hard time. He stood me in front of a whiteboard and proceeded to draw a stick figure at the top of a cliff and an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. He then proceeded to stab at the ambulance with his black coloured whiteboard marker telling me that my husband was my ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. And that I needed to change. I walked out of there never to return to a psychologist while I was there in that community. I couldn't bring myself to say it on the day, but I really wanted to tell him that my husband





Tass O'Flaherty, *Walking on Stoney Ground with a Pocket Full of Hope*, 2022, Feathers, marker pen, fabric, ribbon, beads on calico, 152cmx180xm

was not my ambulance at the bottom of the cliff but that he was the person pushing me over the edge into the abyss, that black void of nothingness that you reach when your mind can no longer cope with life's realities. I would often sit in the sun looking at the sky and question god; why me? while looking at the sun and the passing clouds I would plead with the heavens and ask why I am still here?

There's a sinking ship on the map. This connects to the very rural community where my husband and I lived. My husband went around and told everyone that I was broken, that I was mentally ill. In fact, I had been broken by him, but he didn't tell them that. Everyone believed him, they chose sides and didn't believe me. I was very isolated and alone. I had two friends who were not from the community, and my sister, they helped me leave. It was so hard to get work once I'd left. I was honest about my situation, and my health, and I couldn't get employed. I didn't fit the mould; I wasn't what was expected. In the end I left the state, my sister helped me. It would have broken me completely to stay.

The map also celebrates those people and things that have been giving me confidence to be more me. There's a picture of a cat, I had to leave my cat behind, because he was a farm cat. But I love cats, they really soothe me. I've drawn my sister's dog who is absolutely beautiful. He would sleep on my bed when I was living at my sister's and give me lots of cuddles and doggie kisses, he made me feel calm. The square about daily successes represents people that have helped me since I moved. People at the Maroubra Centre, the Recovery College, the Women's Resource Centre, and the social worker who helped me find where I'm living. Having somewhere to live that is your own space, where you can be yourself, and not feel you have to please somebody else makes a huge difference. The birds on the map also represent freedom and how I'm finding my peace. The flowers around my waist, and the baby are for my son, he anchors me to this world, to this earth, and to the here and now.

I'm sharing my story because I hope my map can help somebody who is in a situation like I was. If this is you, I want you to know that there are people

who've experienced what you are going through. I want you to know that there is help out there. I want you to know that you don't have to continue to live like this. It's possible to break away and make a better future for yourself. There are people out there willing to help you. You just have to reach out. Sometimes all it takes is speaking with a good GP, or with someone who can tell you who to go to, and sometimes they will help you to get there. There are Women's Resource Centres in Sydney, and those places aren't just for women. I've met good, kind, caring, thoughtful men who have been in situations like mine. I don't want to see them fall through the cracks either because I know they are worthy too. There are resources and people that can help you, no matter who you are. There are good people out there who will not judge you, instead they will reach out with caring hands, a warm heart and kind caring words. If you know someone who has been in an abusive situation, I want you to know that it takes time for them to heal, to build trust, and to be able to speak their truth. So, don't be too impatient, give them space to heal. They will get there in the end. Remember that the physical scars are the things that most people see. But it's the mental scars that cut the deepest. Those scars can undermine your confidence, and it can take time to speak up. You've got to find that courage in yourself. For me that took a very long time. When things are hard, you might feel like you don't have any hope inside yourself. But remember that your good friends will believe in you, and they will hold hope for you. Sometimes it's your family who will hold hope for you, if not them; then it will be someone else, maybe a nurse, or a clinician. Someone is out there who will hold hope for you. Especially when you don't hold hope for yourself, I want you to know there are always other people who will gather your hope and nurture it while you are learning how to regain your inner-strength and heal your wounded soul. The harm you have experienced is more than skin deep. It takes time. You just have to believe all things are possible.

To whomever is reading this I wish you well for the journey that lies ahead of you. I hope in the end that life's light shines brightly upon you as you step away from the dark abyss of the past into a brighter future.

# I Am Rosie B

## Rosie B

I am an open person. So, the posture I used to represent my body depicts my openness and vulnerability. It was important not to use a hard outline, because I've always been open and vulnerable to both my benefit and detriment. As you have more life experience you learn that no matter what you do, you can't ever get away from who you are deep inside. So, I've actively committed to being open and honest, and to trying to grow and be better every day. After I had my eldest daughter, I did a Circle of Security course and learned that when a person does the work and starts healing it can affect seven generations forward. I've seen that impact happen already in my lifetime. My commitment to being well, to finding out more about myself and healing has positively affected my entire family. I'm always open with my kids. I take medication to manage my mental health and I always say to them, you know, "Mummy takes these medicines to make her brain work properly". It's important that they know that, and that it is not like what happened in the past, with other members of my family, where your mental health is a big secret, that you can't talk about. Ultimately, we all have a story and it's important to be open and share. It can build hope and community, it can help break down stigma. It's good for all of us, it makes everyone feel less alone.

I chose yellow, signifying hope and light, as the central colour for my body because I have been described as bright and almost unchangingly happy. And that is how I feel about myself a lot of the time as well, when I'm not depressed. The swirls at my head represent my bipolar diagnosis, and how my brain feels when I am hypomanic. The words on the map signify self-stigma and the discrimination I have experienced because of my mental illness. I've crossed the words out to indicate a feeling of rejection, a feeling that I have no value or worth and

that my voice and my choices have been taken away. This feeling comes from discrimination from the outside, and from my own self-talk when I don't feel like that shiny, yellow Rosie. The black tornado at the heart represents rotting nothingness inside, and the symbols on my hands and feet connect to me being left feeling powerless with no control, no agency, feeling unreal. The words choice and voice also relate to my experience help-seeking. I've found it really difficult to get help in the past. It's hard when you feel that you are seeking help in a health system that doesn't value you or give you a voice or a choice. I have always felt lucky to work in that system, because it's given me an insight into how it operates. I can't imagine what it's like if you don't have that experience. It takes commitment to seek help and people within the health system can sometimes not realise that people who are asking for help have already done so much to be there. They've overcome so much, they've been down so many different avenues, made so many attempts to get help. Sometimes it's like a maze, and you keep hitting dead ends. And when you do finally get to that point of asking for help, you sometimes get met with a response like, "Oh well, we can't provide that for you". I know that for those of us working in the system, burnout is a very real thing and resourcing is also a real thing. But that person has come so far before even getting to us. Everything in the system is so siloed and separate, so it can be hard to be directed to, and find, the right place for help.

The pink, purple, and red flowers, and the hearts radiating from my body, symbolise love, beauty, and generosity. I've always been obsessed with flowers, I trained to be a florist and that connection to flowers has continued. I've written "bloom, darling heart". These words are hugely significant to me. They represent acceptance of myself, and commitment to learning and growing (or blooming). I didn't



Rosie B, *I Am Rosie B*, 2022, Paint, marker pen on calico, 158cmx195cm

receive a diagnosis until I had children. First, I had postnatal depression, and it wasn't until recently that I got what I think is the correct description of what I experience in terms of my mental illness, which is bipolar disorder. It's been a time of real growth and of feeling like I'm becoming myself. I also call my kids darling heart, it's a term of endearment that I never used until I had my children.

My family are so important to me, I feel a profound interconnectedness between my children, my mum, and my husband. My husband has been with me throughout everything, he's my safe person. He's

loved me for over two decades now. I feel so lucky to have him because he's always accepted me for who I am. And no matter what is going on, he's there. The red heart in the middle of my chest was created by tracing my children's hands – I decided to do this to acknowledge the impact becoming a mother has had on my personhood. It symbolises my love for my children and shows that they were my catalyst to get help. I try to do better every day for them, so I can teach them that no matter how you are, or who you are, it's okay; it's all you and it's all beautiful.

# Diamond Clarity

## Anonymous

The background to my map is my ongoing journey – over many years – with chronic illness. It's a difficult journey with a chronic illness. Often your illness is invisible to others, and even people who know you and love you will say things like "you don't seem sick". If you aren't visibly ill, if you aren't lying in bed, then people can make assumptions. I have to keep going, to get up, and do stuff despite how I'm feeling. What people don't see is the effort it takes. People can have a hard time understanding you have to manage your energy levels and they take it personally if you can't come to an event. Sometimes I feel like they don't really believe me, like I'm making excuses. This is a kind of discrimination, but it's subtle, I think it's because chronic illness is not well understood. Another important part of the background is that, in the past, I've been diagnosed with anxiety, depression and PTSD.

I have two body outlines. The standing figure has an open, strong posture to represent the resilient me. It depicts when I'm feeling great, maybe I'm meditating or having a good day, and my mind is calm. This body is filled with images of things that I find supportive or that help me; my cat, music, creative activities that can be so helpful. You'll also see meditation and prayer. I'm not a religious person as such, but I do pray, and I believe in a higher power. The second figure is in a foetal position, curled in and closed off. This represents needing to protect myself, retreating, blocking things out, and going inward. That's what I tend to do when feeling threatened, vulnerable, or not up to dealing with life. I've added an out of order sign to this figure. It captures what it's like when things are not working – I don't want people to interact with me, I don't feel functional. I have a friend who was given a sign as a joke that said *out of my mind, back in 5 minutes* as an alternative to the *back soon* sign she'd leave at her business. It just made me laugh

– I could relate to that sign. When I get overloaded it's like a brain explosion, like I am out of my mind. At those times my mind – the prefrontal cortex – is not online and I don't know when it's going to come back. It all depends on how long it's going to take me to regulate and get back to myself, to that calm state represented by the first figure. It could take days, if it's a bad episode, to climb out of that hole. Or it might be a couple of hours or less. I've knotted the fabric at the stomach to represent that feeling of clenching and tension. I also cut the heart out of the foetal figure. When I'm experiencing those brain explosions it's like I go into an emotional panic. My normal heart feelings are just not there. But I saved the piece of fabric I cut out and attached it to my standing figure to represent the space where I hold self-compassion. Because when I'm in that place my heart is much more open.

The lips on the hands of the standing figure affirm the importance of speaking up and speaking your truth. This is something that really sums me up. I find it hard to talk about stuff, especially when I'm having a difficult time. It's much easier to retreat rather than speak. But I do write, and I do make art, so that's a way to talk through my hands and express my feelings. Journalling and art have helped me get my feelings out of my body. There's a diamond at the throat of this figure which also connects to the importance of voice. It's something that's come up a lot for me, speaking my truth with clarity. I haven't been very good at this but am trying to do it more. I always tend to put things back on myself – I'll pick up on any judgements or even just another person's discomfort, especially if they don't know what to say about how I'm feeling and I don't want to make people uncomfortable. I don't want to be judged. So, I will tend to minimise my feelings or experiences, or just not say anything. But then I end up feeling like I haven't been heard and



Anonymous, *Diamond Clarity*, 2022, Paint, marker pen on calico, 190.5cmx155.5cm

that I can't be heard. Which is maybe also because I haven't found the right place or space to talk.

There are a group of small human figures with their arms around each other on my map. These figures are intended to unite the two larger figures. They're little versions of me and they're embracing and linking all the different parts of myself represented on the map. The two larger figures represent two extremes of my experience, and the small figures represent the stages in between, the different levels of experience. I also added a circle around the two figures and filled it in with a watery blue colour, because it didn't seem enough to just have the links in between, there had to be something embracing the two. I realised the figures aren't facing each other and I wanted something embracing them to hold them together. This really helped – I think I'm getting better at being more welcoming of that other part of myself and I'd like to keep working on that.

Since making the map I no longer have those brain explosions. I think because of some somatic work I've been doing for PTSD over the past little while. Although it's sad to remember those past experiences it's so heartening they've stopped.

# Lesser-Class Citizen

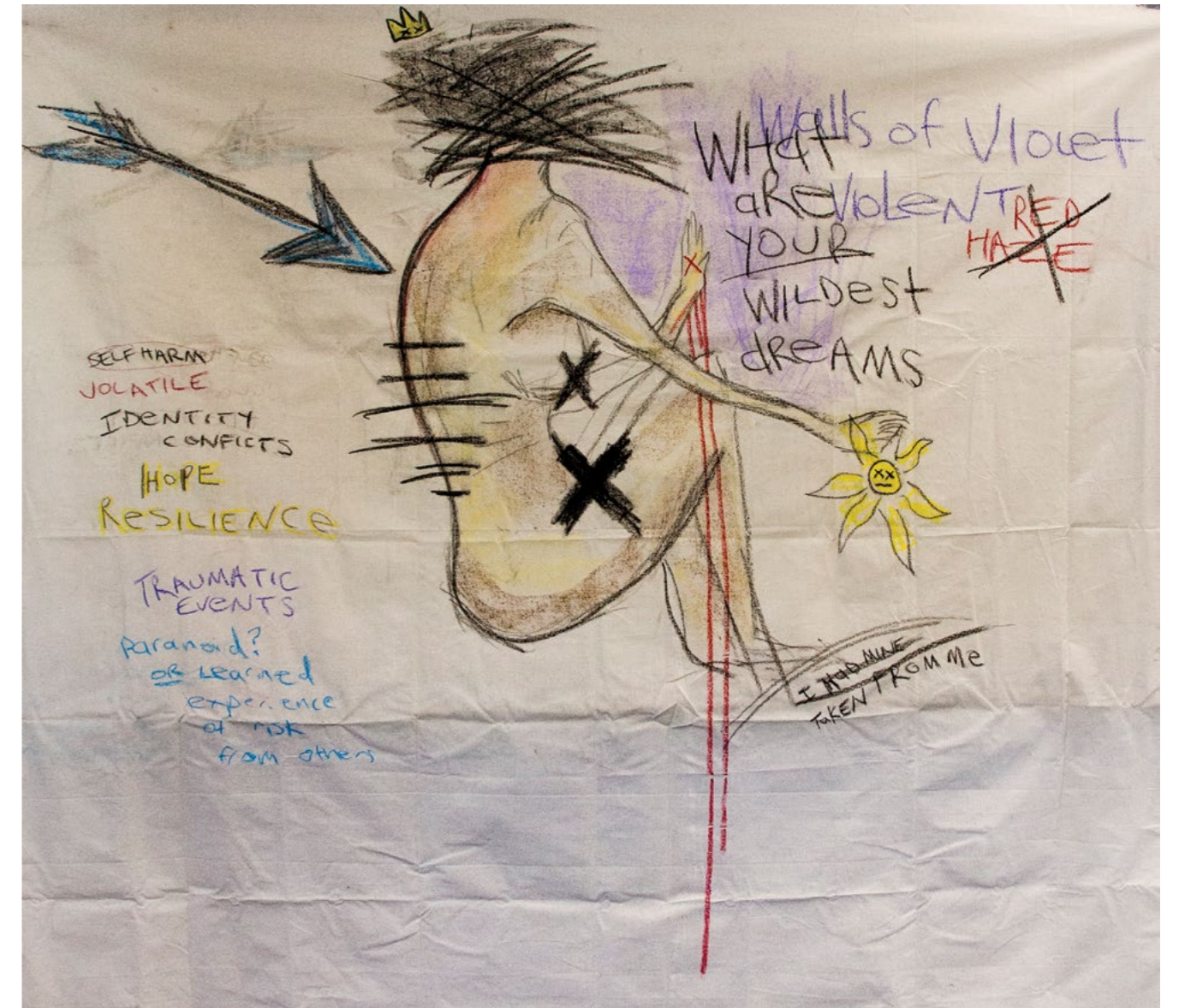
## Anonymous

I am a South Australian artist with lived experience of autism spectrum disorder, schizoaffective disorder, borderline personality disorder and PTSD. Through my creative works, I aim to explore the fractured nature of an identity at conflict with itself. My map depicts a range of experiences, it's about sexual assault, mental health, suicidality, drug use, anorexia, it's all encompassing metaphorically.

I was only diagnosed with autism a few years ago. In 2013 I was hospitalised for acute psychosis, and I was treated like a neurotypical person whereas if they'd screened for autism then I would have received an autism-informed treatment and I probably would have been on my road to wellness sooner. When I was in hospital I was screaming at the doctors, "I'll never be society's, or your version of sane." I wasn't lucid enough to explain that what I meant was I have always been peculiar, I have always been unusual. There's more nuance to personality than what we pathologise. When I was in hospital, I was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD) and schizoaffective disorder. Because I had those diagnoses attached to my record, I was never sent for a referral, despite numerous requests, for autism or for other things. It was just, "You've got BPD, you've got schizoaffective disorder. We're not going to look further into this because you're wrong, you were diagnosed by a professional". And it's true, I did present with BPD and schizoaffective disorder at the forefront, but that was not the core of my day-to-day troubles. In the end they don't assess the whole person, they assess the label. I think the onus is on normalising function. There has to be a bit more accommodation of the eccentricities of mental illness or neurological disorder, instead of trying to churn out "normal" people. We are all unique individuals because of our life, and our internal experiences.

I've come to expect stigma. When I disclose my mental health, I'm met with a range of reactions – people can't relate to what you're saying, or they'll be vindictive, or treat me differently. Eventually I want to be an advocate for mental health, because so much needs to be done to raise awareness. Sure, there are buzzwords around mental health but there's still not true understanding. At the moment, it's very superficial, a pseudo-awareness. For example, people might know to ask are you okay? But when I respond by saying, "No I'm not okay, because this, this and this are happening", there's panic because I have gone against the social script. I learned that the hard way in my mid-20's. I told someone exactly how I was feeling, and they were mortified, they said, "Why the hell would you say that?". Well, it's because you asked.

It's hard to put my experiences of discrimination into words. I've faced discrimination with employment and trying to build friendship groups. Even friends have treated me as lesser, as a lower-class citizen. I'll say something and they will respond with, "Oh, don't worry about her, she's crazy. You don't have to listen to her. You don't have to respect her". Or I've had ex-boyfriends convince me that what I was experiencing never happened, and that I was crazy. One incident in particular, in hindsight, it was domestic violence. But because I was quite unwell, borderline psychotic, on the wrong medication, and heavily medicated, I wasn't aware that was what I was experiencing. I trusted that person to be my anchor in reality, so when they told me the arguments were not happening, that I'd dreamed them or they were in my head, I believed it. It was probably eight months of experiencing it before a friend caught on and told me what was actually happening. After that, I broke up with him and went off that medication. That was probably my most robust experience of being targeted



Anonymous, *Lesser-Class Citizen*, 2022, Crayon on calico, 180cmx155cm

specifically because of my mental state.

Society holds stigma about mental health, but it's the interpersonal expressions of that stigma that are impactful to you. You should be able to trust the people around you to have your best interests at heart. And they may have so-called normal people's best interests at heart. But because you're a lesser-class citizen in their mind, you are vulnerable to their exploitation. I feel a lot of the traumatic events that have happened to me occurred, at least in part, because I appear vulnerable and easy to victimise. Now I engage in regular psychology sessions. I've only been doing that for the past year, but when I'm faced with maltreatment from friends, or others, I can speak to my psychologist and process what is happening. I can address the issue, but not have to lose face socially. The psychology sessions allow me room to explore the impacts of stigma and work out how to confront it.

# ..To Be A Butterfly

Andrea Whitmore

The images in my body map encompass the Who I Was and the Who I Am Becoming. There are two figures, the small figure a representation of the younger Me – sad, lonely, alone – and the larger figure is more upright, confident and safe. The central focus – the candle – depicts the hope held out for me even when I could not see any myself. It shines on both the dark and light sides as it was both in my darker days and in recovery that others continued to hold onto that hope until I could find my way to see it for myself.

The younger me is surrounded by wings as a protection from the world – trying not to be seen but full of potential to be able to spread those wings and fly one day. The rain is a constant as there never seemed to be any sunshine in my life.

The older me is divided into two parts – the darker side filled with pain, confronted by the stigma and discrimination that so often comes along with mental illness, and the continued search for help that never seemed to come. I felt locked into a continued cycle of failure, abuse and pain. It took many years to build a wall that both protected me and held me up enough to break those chains. Along the way I learnt to value each small step as a major achievement and begin to build upon those wins to create a better life even when things would spiral out of control for a time. I began to see the rain as something to learn to dance in rather than something that I was drowning in.

The lighter side is one many years in the making – and included a lot of help, support, encouragement and faith instilled in me from both myself and others. Once that 'lightbulb' was turned on, it was easier to see the value in myself and begin to find a more positive way forward. Rather than surviving each day I began to 'live' a little – and the more

I did, the easier it became. Through the amazing help and support from a wonderful team, I could finally feel valued, cared for and safe. With their help, I began to feel my own self-worth and belief in myself. I began to stand strong, knowing what I believed in, who I was and what I could become. Along the way, those wings – once broken – began to repair themselves and grow, and gain the strength needed to lift me up to shine in the sun.

Mental illness is NOT something to fear nor is it something that needs to rule your life. But it is also not something you can 'get through' nor work through on your own. We all need love, support and encouragement to find our best selves and whilst having a mental illness is certainly challenging, with the right help and support everyone can find their place in this world.



Andrea Whitmore, ...To Be A Butterfly, 2022, Acrylic paint on calico, 113cmx182cm

# As Long As I Know Who I Am

Kaela Hope

I'm studying psychology and I thought that taking part in this project would be a good insight into the research process. I love art, and I've gone through a fair bit in my life, so I thought well, why not contribute? Thinking about stigma and discrimination, I have gotten to a point in my life where I've dealt with and processed those experiences. If you'd asked me to make this map 10 years ago, my reflections would have been quite heavy. But I've come to terms with who I am, and I'm starting to feel that it doesn't really matter what people say or what they think, as long as I know who I am.

As I was making the map, I kept coming back to two experiences – they were the first things that came to mind when I considered discrimination. First, I was in a relationship, and I was discriminated against by using religion as a way of controlling me. My views didn't meet up with his views, and I wasn't allowed to have an opinion of my own. My belief in God was exploited to control me. And second, my experience of being a young mum. I can still remember being a mum at 17 years old, and feeling inadequate because people would look at me and go, "Oh, you're too young to be a mum". I still get those comments today, like "You're too young to have five children, or to have an 18-year-old". It doesn't bother me now, but when I was younger, I felt I was abnormal. These experiences were the basis of my map.

The shadowed side of the map represents everything I've gone through since I was 11 years old. It represents the place I was in, a place that I have left behind, it's a distant memory. It reflects my ex using religion to control me. He told me God was

the head, he was under God, and I was under him. I wasn't allowed to do anything, otherwise I was not being a good wife. He tried to strangle the life out of me, that's why I've depicted him as a snake. I just felt so suffocated, I was a shell of my former self, he squeezed the life from me. I've stitched up my mouth because I wanted to strongly convey the feeling of not having a voice. I was involved in a big messy situation with my ex, there were allegations made about him from my children. And no one wanted to acknowledge or deal with it. I was forced to be quiet in the face of nasty and vindictive blame from his family and members of my own family. My ex was very good at manipulating people and getting them to believe him. I had to go through family court, I was a mum trying to protect my children, and I felt like I got absolutely roasted. In court they absolutely pull everything apart. You feel like you are not being listened to, your children are put in a situation where they have to have contact with a parent they've accused. It wasn't done with any sensitivity. For me the impact was huge, things got very dark. There needed to be some sort of counselling or support. I didn't have a voice in the experience, it was so difficult feeling like no one believed me. There was a lot of heartbreak for me then. I've mended now, but I still bear those scars.

The bright side of the map represents where I am now, and who I am in myself. This side is about growth and resilience, that's why I've drawn the tree at my leg. A while ago I went on a picnic with my partner and there was a tree that had been cut down, but it had all of these new shoots, greenery and flowers growing from it. I thought it was so beautiful, it reminded me of how I'd been cut down by my ex, how he'd try to control me. But



Kaela Hope, *As Long As I Know Who I Am*, 2022, Paint, marker pen on calico, 190.5cmx155.5cm

despite this, there's new life, I've grown again, and I've learnt so much. The yellow background, and the colourful flowers represent my personality, I'm bright and bubbly and I love nature. Throughout all my experiences I had to be strong for my family, I had to keep it together and keep going. I did a lot of soul searching, working out who I am, and realising it's okay to be me. I've always known who I truly am, but I had to go through a process of putting those pieces back together, bit by bit. I also had to stop blaming myself, that was a big issue that kept me down. I was blaming myself, like I should have done things differently. I've gotten to a place now where I'm able to separate myself from the past. It was a big part of my life and a big learning curve. Yes, I could have made better choices, but now I have to really forgive myself. I've tried to move on, and I try not to be so self-critical. Yes, I wish it hadn't happened, but I've learned big lessons from it. In the end, you have to move on and focus on the things that you can change in your life, rather than dwell on what has already happened.

I've always loved art since I was a kid. It's always been a way for me to explain and explore what I'm feeling, it's therapeutic. I found it very empowering to think about everything I've been through and how far I've come, and then to create an artwork about it. I've been able to tell my story without feeling like anyone is controlling me or silencing me. I've been able to be who I am.



# Interconnectedness

M.C.

This artwork maps my feelings of anxiety. The pose I chose for my body feels soothing to me. I was thinking about getting into bed, having a nap or a sleep, and trying to make myself feel better. My face, hands and feet are painted blue which represents the feeling of coldness, a sensation I experience when I'm struggling. I have also decided to cover parts of my body with little clouds cut out of pink fabric. I was thinking about selfcare and being kind to myself. I wanted to evoke softness and a sense of soothing myself by covering the areas of the body where I feel cold. The pink clouds also cover the words such as: *chin up, get strong, awkward, anxious, scared, too good, sensitive, quiet*. These are the messages I heard or felt when I was younger, from some of the members of my family and at school. As a result, I've often felt that there was something wrong with me and that I needed to change. I don't think those are very healthy or useful ways to describe a child. Now I am aware that there probably wasn't anything wrong with me, but it still surprises me how impactful all this is, how persistent these words are. They used to come up quite often for me, so I started to consciously reject them.

The words placed behind my back are all connected to my past and represent the things that I've sort of digested and worked through. Some of them I'm still working on as they still feel messy and tangled up, although I am improving. The words in front of my body are the things I'm still dealing with, such as leaving the past behind me and not letting it sabotage my present and my future. For example, those negative messages I received as a child sometimes pop up, and when they do, I struggle. I've added words like *mother tongue* and *understand* to depict my struggle with communication. I've also included a poem by Della Hick-Wilson, which I feel I can connect to this struggle as well. The

poem starts: *darling, you feel heavy because you are too full of truth*. I've always felt I had trouble putting words together as effectively as others. English is my second language and, as a migrant, it takes longer to express yourself. I'm improving but when I'm tired it's hard to convey my thoughts efficiently. Sometimes my thinking and speaking feels choppy. I remember also struggling in my first language, having trouble communicating and relating in primary and high school. I often felt like an outsider and a weirdo, and I guess maybe I was broken-hearted because of that. But at the time I didn't understand that perhaps my heart was broken many times. I struggled in social situations and couldn't cope with bullying, but I didn't share this at home. Instead, I suppressed my feelings and I think this shaped how I see myself and the way I've learned to relate to people in general. However, as I've grown up, I've realised there are a lot more people like me. People who seem less conventional, but who are smart and interesting. That is why Hick-Wilson's poem feels encouraging to me, it resonates.

My map includes some of the things that help and support me. There's a big block of chocolate. I try not to eat too much of them, but sweet snacks are comforting. There's also a lot of green on my map which represents nature. I wanted to create a sense of connection to the natural environment as that is soothing to me. Sometimes it's helpful to acknowledge that, in the scheme of things, our troubles are not that big or that important. This is something I often forget. The green also reflects my thinking about ecofeminism. Ecofeminist theories make a lot of sense to me and provide a vocabulary to explain ideas that I had felt but hadn't been able to articulate. It is wonderful to find connections between similar ideas. I think the world would be a better place if humans were more aware of the



M.C., *Interconnectedness*, 2022, Marker pen, fabric, thread, paint on calico, 150cmx183cm

interconnectedness between themselves, animals, resources, and the planet.

While making this map I reflected on my life experiences, and I've come to feel like I'm grieving my past struggles. The pressure to be *normal* – to fit in and to communicate in ways that mean you are taken seriously – is immense. Thinking about how I, and many others, struggle in this area, can be really defeating. I think that, as a society, we often assume that talking loudly and fast means strength and, the opposite, that being quiet and slower means weakness. It's my hope and my belief that this is changing. I'm also hopeful that people are becoming more aware of differences in terms of personalities, mental health and neurodivergence and that societies are becoming less rigid in terms of our expectations about what is considered *normal*.

# Branded

## Danielle Daws

My figure is stuck, rooted in place, with the darkness from the ground seeping up. This is how depression feels to me. I can't tell where I stop and it begins, we've become so intertwined. My background is a wash of yellow-orange, simply because it appeals to me visually. A colour full of warmth and hope, it didn't feel right to have it actually connect with my body, hence the grey shadowing between. The shadow around my figure represents a buffer between me and my illness, and life. Medical intervention has brought me so close to returning to my life, but society keeps me at arm's length. I feel separated, unable to cross the chasm.

The hospital bracelets serve multiple symbolic purposes. I am identifiable to clinicians, but I am also labelled as a certain type of patient. My many hospital admissions have saved my life, but they have also become a part of me that I can't hide. I feel branded by them. They represent the relief of diagnosis and treatment, but also the stigma and red tape that exists around that.

Every time I go to hospital, my ID bracelet is a constant reminder of many complex things:

- I am a psychiatric patient.
- I will most likely always be a psychiatric patient.
- I am treatment resistant.
- I have been unwell for 16 years (statistically, my condition is *usually* resolved within a few months of diagnosis).
- Access to the medical interventions I need is decided by bureaucrats.
- I am terrified that I have passed this predisposition to depression onto my daughter, and I feel pre-emptively guilty about it.

A few years into my recovery, I discovered that water colouring brings me relief from overthinking. Watching how the colour moves through the water. Discovering how pigments blend and repel. It seems to occupy multiple parts of my brain simultaneously, crowding out the anxiety. It illustrates that just as my depression has become a part of me, so has my recovery.

The zentangle patterns highlight two focus areas – the head and the heart. The brain is busier than the rest of my body. The swirling lines are how my thoughts often feel – tangents leading nowhere. My heart is more careful and compartmentalised, representing my learned behaviour of keeping myself guarded. The two colours don't interact apart from existing in the same space, red in the inner heart, surrounded by black – keeping the centre of my heart protected.

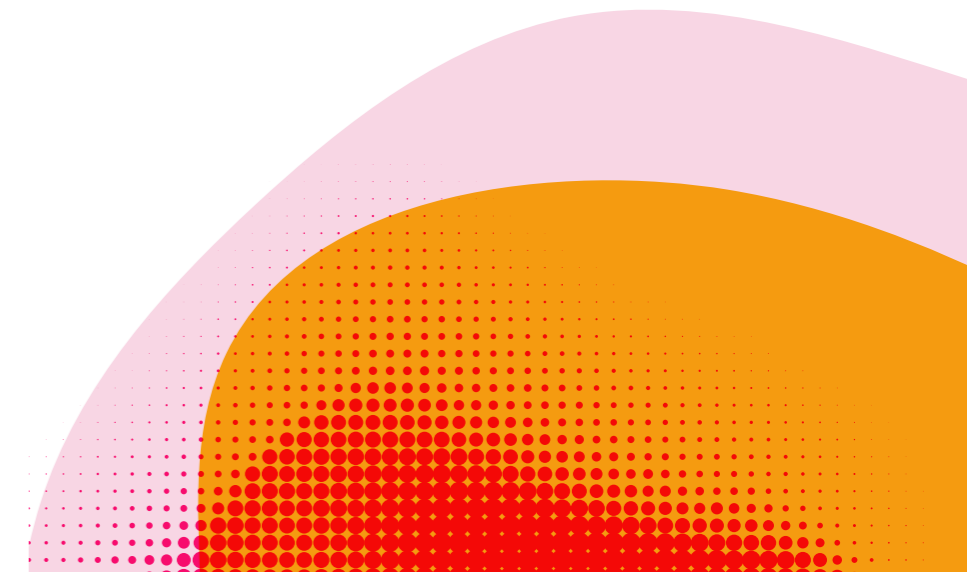
I have been living with/recovering from mental illness for over 16 years. Since becoming well enough to re-enter the workforce 5 years ago, I have been trying to gain employment in the mental health sector as I believe my lived experience has value alongside my tertiary qualifications. I've been unsuccessful at every turn, and it has been very demoralising. One way that I have felt excluded in this area is that the majority of lived experience roles require you to have a specific qualification, regardless of your background. And where I live, that qualification costs around \$6,000 to complete. I was out of the workforce, not by my choice, for eleven years. Where am I supposed to find \$6,000 to pay for a qualification that basically just gives me *permission* to talk about my lived experience and be entitled to be paid a pittance for it? In all other jobs, you are paid for the experience you bring. Why do I have to pay an exorbitant fee to have my experience legitimised?



Danielle Daws, *Branded*, 2022, Paint, tape, marker pen on calico, 191.5cmx173.5cm

Because I can't seem to gain employment to use my voice for the benefit of others, I decided to be heard through alternate means. This research project has allowed me to do that.

Since participating in this research project, the hospital that has been the source of my treatments – where I am branded, but also safe – has closed. The roof was too expensive to fix. My psychiatrist and colleagues have started an out-patient clinic to provide the treatment I, and so many others, need. Currently, Australian private health funds refuse to cover this, despite it being thousands of dollars cheaper than the previous model.



# You Are Another Me

## Anonymous

During the research project, every time we were asked about “discrimination, exclusion and stigma”, it made me feel like the “other” because I didn’t feel I’d experienced these things. Every effort was made throughout to explain that I belonged, but I still felt like I did not. What I brought to the table was shameful and unnecessary – I was wasting everyone’s time. It is only now that I realised that self-stigma is still a stigma. This is a revelation! I’ve realised since that I deal with so much shame inside my head, it is very hard to accept that I belong anywhere. I am never ever good enough to belong. This has been a consistent experience of mine in every group or organisation I have been a part of since my childhood. Self-stigma has had a huge impact on me. I hope that my map might give you an insight into what it is like to be me.

I am a senior leader at an impact startup. On my best days, when you look at me you will see a passionate, energetic individual who is strategic and commercial-minded. On my worst days, I will make awkward statements about market trends and customer acquisition, and you will see me as a mediocre marketer with brown skin – too easy to dismiss. What you will not see is how much I care about the mental health of that junior colleague who I never interact with, about that senior colleague who might be feeling left out, or how I influence my boss to ensure those colleagues feel connected and valued. You will not see how passionate and proud I am about the lives that my company impacts. You will not believe how much my colleagues and bosses say they cherish me for my work and my work ethic – you won’t believe it because, to be completely honest, I don’t either.

The masks across the body represent hiding the injuries, scars, and vulnerabilities I carry. The ones on my body hide my sexual abuse experience,

an unrequited love, and surgery that made me incapable of naturally conceiving children. The one on my head hides a feminine, soft, almost gullible side of me, which I am ashamed of exposing in a professional context. The blue crosses on my body are my response to the sexual abuse. It was just wrong. Period. It messed me up on a level that is hard to assess. I still minimise myself when I am around people as if they are about to abuse me too. I can still start crying for the silliest things, and when I am with someone who is being rude or mean in the slightest, my instant reaction is to shut up and run away. I feel extremely hurt and want to vanish from existence. I feel like I have a very low willpower to live compared to other people, and my theory is that this is because a lot of my mental energy is wasted making sense of life. I remember the moment that I learned about sexual abuse on TV. This was significant, as I realised that that was what I had been through. Then I spent years thinking I was not normal. As a teen, I was ashamed of myself. I saw myself as less than others – I felt I was unworthy of love. This is why I went into a relationship with a guy I wasn’t drawn toward but who was generous enough to like me. It didn’t end well. The sexual abuse was done by my first uncle. This means if I see that monster now in front of my parents, I need to smile and treat him respectfully. My parents have a bunch of health issues and would be destroyed if they learned the truth. So, I have stopped going home and haven’t met my closest relatives for over 5 years. I haven’t seen my childhood friends and family friends for over 10 years. None of those lovely people are worth the trauma of going back. I see my parents when they visit me here.

I’ve drawn footprints across my body to represent the way my experiences have made me very sheepish, especially in situations where someone



Anonymous, *You Are Another Me*, 2022, Digital print on calico from the original pencil on paper, 153cmx185cm

holds power over me. The more sheepish I act, the more I give others the right to offend me. I have experienced several situations where I felt like people were walking all over me. The spiral at my feet represents the downward spiral into depression, that is always lurking under me. The black lines at the bottom of the map represent being locked in a state of depression. I've had a few phases of depression and it feels like self-inflicted prison. When I am there, I have little energy or motivation to break out of it. The orange and red lines at my feet are metaphorical bleeding from my childhood wounds that went on for years and years and still continue to this day. That blood is what I stand on every day. But that red has turned into my energy, it is my power to do good in a way that makes sense to me.

There is also healing and hope on my map. I've written Rumi's healing words, "you are another me". If every individual is just a different version of me, their pain is a different version of my pain. Everyone has had pain or will have it, in one form or another. I have had pain, but I have also been remarkably fortunate in other ways. That realisation makes me grateful for my life and makes me feel

connected to others in pain. The butterflies are individuals, almost like angels who have given me positivity and stopped me from the constant whirlwind of negativity and depression. My husband. My therapist. My dog. My brother. My mum. A few spiritual gurus I respect. The clouds and sun represent visions of an idealistic world that keeps me going. I look at that and I feel life is worth living. The mountain peaks are the numerous wonders and adventures that have come and gone, including interests, travels, movies, art, relationships, inspirational people, causes, hobbies, pursuits, personal projects etc. These are things that have given meaning and colour to my life and saved me from the spiral of depression. The last thing I did was to draw the orange and yellow lines around the body. Looking at my map I felt it told a biased story of pain and struggle. I added those lines to show that my deepest pain is also the source of my endless energy to do good in the world. When I am at my best, people around me see me as an energetic individual that has an endless motivation to do good.

# An Island Never Cries

L.R.

Taking part in the Body Mapping project gave me the opportunity to revisit and reconsider my experience of "difference" as a person with disabilities. What I discovered was unexpected. Physical disability and anxiety have been part of my life for decades, with hearing impairment a more recent barrier to participation. But this is the thing: I experienced these as defects, shame filled my cells, apologies were my introduction.

The body map helped me to express, finally, this painful distorted sense of self and to fully grasp that my shame was learned and the barriers external.

Through the workshops and subsequent creative journey, it was liberating to look with compassion on the injuries that gave rise to my physical disabilities and to articulate my feelings of distress around these. To give my anxiety a physical form and dare to express the hurt of trust misplaced.

Blood red ruptured strands of beads for my nerve damage, the black boundary of my psychological "abnormality", black throughout my body because shame was part of my core. Everyday items falling from my crippled grasp. A cloud of eyes watching, scrutinising, impatient, questioning why I'm so slow and clumsy, why I can't understand. Titles from my library of self-help books with injunctions to self-improvement and assimilation, making plain the frightened search for understanding of why and how I became so tortured.

"Sticks and stones ... but names ...". Not so. Names do hurt. The phrases and words are actual things that were said to me or my internalisation of such labelling. When I began the torrent of expressions about my experience, the frustration I felt about endless diplomacy, making others comfortable, there was backlash from my inner critic, about "complaining" and being a princess. Wow. The

power of framing and exclusion to make the one who can't enter carry the blame.

How do I manage the sadness and loneliness that arise when I'm wounded? Retreat, yes. "I have my books ... to protect me ... I am a rock, I am an island". But so much more, it is nature – walking and seeing and being with plants and animals and birds – that is my great comfort. I am so grateful that I can do these things, for in the beauty of the natural world there is freedom.

To those who create the rules that define us and the spaces we must inhabit – a plea for equality and inclusion: consider our experience of a society built by and for the able-bodied. Look with compassion.

We are mirrored in your gaze.

I want to thank the Black Dog Institute, the facilitators of the workshops and my fellow participants for this extraordinary opportunity to reflect and speak and hear. This work would not have been possible without the help and love of my dear friend and amanuensis Aaron McGarry. And Priya Vaughan, whose patience, encouragement, and generous spirit gave me the space to surprise myself.



L.R., *An Island Never Cries*, 2022, Paint, mirror, beads, glass, skewers, cutlery, plastic eyes, paper, pens, metal bucket, cotton wool, fabric, arm-brace, wood, buttons on calico, 182.5cmx155cm

# Support Services

If you are experiencing mental distress, or thinking about suicide, help is available. Below is a list of services you can call to speak with someone who can help, or who can help connect you with people who can provide support or care.

## Australian National Services

- Lifeline (24/7): **13 11 14**
- Beyond Blue (24/7): **1300 22 4636**
- Kids Helpline (24/7): **1800 55 1800**
- MensLine Australia (24/7): **1300 78 99 78**
- Suicide Call Back Service (24/7): **1300 659 467**
- QLife – anonymous and free LGBTIQ+ peer support (3PM–Midnight every day): **1800 184 527**
- The National Indigenous Postvention Service – After Suicide Support (24/7): **1800 805 801**
- Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling (24/7): **1800 011 046**
- Brother to Brother 24-hour crisis line for Aboriginal men (24/7): **1800 435 799**

## State and Territory Services

- NSW Mental Health Line (24/7): **1800 011 511**
- HeadtoHelp Victoria (8.30 am – 5pm weekdays, except public holidays): **1800 595 212**
- Mental Health Emergency Response Line (Perth Metro, Western Australia) (24/7): **1300 555 788**
- Rurallink (Rural/Regional Western Australia) (4.30pm – 8:30am Monday–Friday, 24 hours Saturday, Sunday/ public holidays. During business hours you will be connected to your local community mental health clinic): **1800 552 002**
- 1300 MH CALL (Queensland) (24/7): **1300 642 255**
- Access Mental Health (Tasmania) (9am to 10pm every day): **1800 332 388**
- Northern Territory Mental Health Line (24/7): **1800 682 288**
- Access Mental Health (A.C.T) (24/7): **1800 629 354**
- Mental Health Triage Service (SA) (24/7): **13 14 65**

## International

If you are based outside of Australia, please visit Find a Helpline to find a free, confidential support-line or hot-line local to you:

- Find a Helpline: <https://findahelpline.com/>



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