

Self-flow

By Lily Jiménez-Dabdoub and Liam O'Leary

Self-flow intends to connect and sensitize the viewer to mental health awareness and destigmatize misconceptions about mental disorders.

The containment of this work represents the contained emotions people who suffer from mental disorders experience due mainly to social stigma. The images are lit in an act to enlighten and acknowledge these emotions. *Self-flow* has been a long thought process and result from the dialogue between Liam and Lily. Both Liam and Lily are neuroscientists who explore self expression through artistic creative process. Liam is a McGill University PhD candidate studying the neuroanatomy of depression at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute. As an artistic parallel to his research, Liam is interested in finding physical forms that resemble depression. Lily is now on the path to become an art therapist, and so is dedicated to promoting mental health through her personal artistic practice.

As Lily's artistic interests are also on exploring the use of organic materials as a way to make an ecological statement, the creators originally thought of using a natural ink. Given the subject matter and this approach, they moved to the most organic painting material they found within themselves: blood*. After thinking about how sensitive the subject of using their own blood would seem, a decision was taken to use only Lily's blood as the best way to build a subtle but also deeper connection, a direct message from Lily, who has suffered depression and anxiety. This ink also serves as an exploration of accepting the nature of change as an organic process, whilst the quality of blood, its' color and its' density can change over time.

Self-flow unveils a state of peace and creative flow. According to Csikszentmihalyi flow is a state where an active creative mind works in perfect harmony. Thus, harmony happens only when we acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses. Thus the relation of creative flow by using the long brush strokes of the sumi-E painting technique when painting representations of brightfield micrographs of blood vessels (revealed using CD31 immunostaining) from Liam's research. As Liam studies blood vessels in human brain tissue received from psychologically healthy and depressed individuals, his work resembles looking into how emotions can affect our corporeal vitality.

*Blood removal was performed in a safe and controlled environment by health professional, we thank their understanding and enthusiasm to support this project: Fernanda Pérez Gay and Freddy Jaúregui, in deep gratitude: ¡Muchísimas gracias!

If you find any personal resonance through this work and feel the need to talk to us you can approach us, we will be happy to talk with you and encourage you to seek for professional help if appropriate. Sincerely, Liam and Lily.

**If you or a close friend is struggling, we highly recommend you to seek professional help services. Here are a few suggestions:

- If you are a student, seek the Counselling services at your University, they will be helpful! Concordia has counselling services at both campus and also you can check the *Empower Me program*: 1 844 741-6389 (toll-free).
- Jack.org McGill Chapter is a student initiative seeking to break down the stigma and open up the conversation surrounding mental health.
- Crisis Centers of Québec offers bilingual services for people in crisis, as well as their loved ones and caregivers. Includes telephone support, temporary housing, follow-up, and more. 514-483-3033 <https://www.centredecrise.ca/listecentres>
- Suicide Action Montreal is offered everywhere in Quebec, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-866-277-3553. Regional line in Montreal: 514-723-4000. <http://suicideactionmontreal.org/en>
- You can also check Lily's web (www.neurolotus.com) where she shares link of pages she follows for healthy mental habits from guided meditations (on Youtube) to Mental Health Awareness NGO's that have useful resources.

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Lily Jiménez-Dabdoub

Lily Dabdoub is a Mexican emergent artist aiming at promoting mental health awareness and sustainable artistry. She is part of the cohort of the MA in Art Therapy of 2019-2021 at Concordia University. Lily has developed research in the fields of Neuroaesthetics and Music Cognition. She is a Psychologist from UNAM and also holds a MSc in Music, Mind and Brain from Goldsmiths University, where she was part of the interdisciplinary audio-motor research group.

Liam O'Leary

Liam is a PhD candidate at the IPN program from McGill. Liam looks at human brain tissue under a microscope to biologically understand why suicidal depression occurs. He focuses on the death of star-shaped cells called astrocytes and the 'leakiness' of brain blood vessels. Liam likes science or art that sincerely address suffering with optimism or compassion. In his free time, Liam improvises with gymnastic rings, watercolours, and broken pianos.