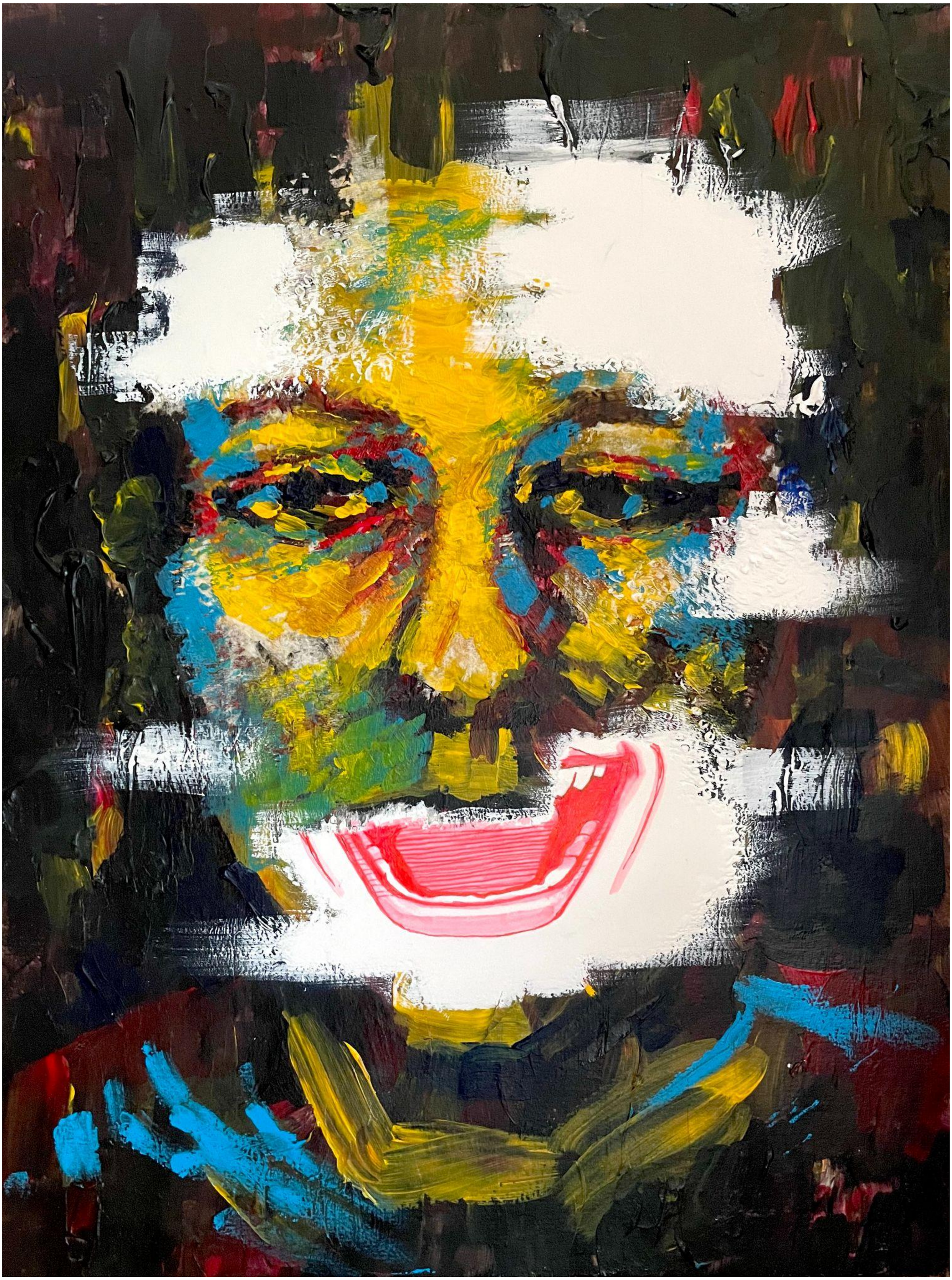
EXPRESSIONS UNBOUND

PwA zine | **no. 12 : Fall 2026**



Artists Featured In This Issue:

Sarah L. Blum (she/her)
Disobeying Orders
nonfiction writing

from “Red Badge Writing”

I think this piece speaks for itself and covers a lot. Mainly note that even in the military you can make positive change with courage, even if that means disobeying an order.

Was there something about the exhibition title (Expressions Unbound) that inspired you to submit this particular artwork?

I felt unbound when I disobeyed orders.

www.womenunderfire.net

Pauline Gates (she/her)
Praise the Soul Opening
poem

from **Approaching Joy! Creative Writing** with Maiah Merino

This poem was inspired by Joy Harjo's poem "Praise the Rain," and written in homage to her style. It is meant to be a journey from/through the universe to the individual. examining the meaning found in every aspect of living.

Was there something about the exhibition title (Expressions Unbound) that inspired you to submit this particular artwork?

Poetry is how I express myself; I was happy to contribute to the unbound expression of art in this exhibition.

Artists Featured In This Issue:

Melany Bell (S/he,They/Queen/GodUs)
PROSE : ON LOVE'S MANY FACES
poem

from **Honoring Our History: Abstract Art & Personal Storytelling** with Melany Bell

"The incalculable value of ascendant, deep literacy is the impact my work seeks to achieve. Deep literacy moves Audience/Participants from comprehension to action. Literacy is fundamental, simultaneously intergenerational and cross cultural. I choose/use both written & visual narrative forms for communication. Theoretically these offerings are languaging an understanding of a post-humanist, co-emergent entangled reality, supporting the evolution of the teachable terrestrial.
As scientific/creative instructor, I primarily work with systems-impacted youth -adults building skills toward creating their owned futures via: visual art as branding, acting, voice & speech for centered public speaking, and creative writing to engage critical thinking while capturing audience imagination or so-called, marketing. These skills come from a pedagogy centering the work of : Dr. Maxine Mimms, Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates Dr.Ronald Jackson II, my parents & Grandcestors."

Was there something about the exhibition title (Expressions Unbound) that inspired you to submit this particular artwork?

Boundlessnesses, possible procurement as curated assemblages of visual and written symbols, inspired me to send in an aphorism about love's lesser explored qualities.

www.melanybell.org

(on front cover)

Leigh Legler
Gesso
Mixed media

from **Mixed Media Exploration** with Jackie Argyle

Disobeying Orders

by Sarah L. Blum

I began disobeying orders very soon after I arrived in Vietnam. I saw that many of the officers believed that we nurses were government property for them to do what they wished. I was not interested in being disrespected or mistreated, especially in the middle of combat.

As an officer, first lieutenant, I was not supposed to “fraternize” with the enlisted men, but those were the guys who respected me, who I could spend time with and talk with safely. I would go to their gatherings, clubs and drink beer with them or apricot nectar, when the beer truck got blown up. The important thing was that we could be human with each other, connect, and share our feelings, memories and hopes for after the war. Once in a while I would go to our officer’s club, but it was not the same and not what I needed, so I did often “fraternize” with my brother soldiers who were enlisted. It was more natural and more like home.

The next time and the most serious time I disobeyed orders, was when the chief nurse of the operating room said, “no”, to my request to reorganize the instruments and supplies in the operating room (OR). I got all of us together who were interested in making the OR function at its best when we had mass casualties; which was very often. We discussed when to do the reorganizing so that we could potentially do it all and be done when the major came in the next morning. We had to guess at a night when it would be quiet, without mass casualties, so we could get it done. I was clear that doing it was essential to our operating room functioning at its highest level when we had casualties, whether a few or mass casualties over 30 at once.

That night we gathered, gave out assignments and got it done. We organized the suture packets and labeled each drawer with the type of suture material and the size, as in 3.0 catgut, or 6.0 silk. We did all the drawers in each section. We had five sections. They were not really rooms, as they were open on one side, so we referred them as sections.

Prior to that night, I had a carpenter make a long set of cubby holes, maybe eight feet long and two feet high. There were enough to allow for individual instruments of different types to go into each cubby hole. We labeled the holes from left to right top to bottom in alphabetical order, so it was easy to know where something was inside it. It was better than what we had, which was a pile of instruments, all wrapped in the same material so they all looked the same, with unreadable labels and we had to search under stress and feel what was inside the material to figure out what instrument it was.

We also labeled the shelves for what was on them in which areas, such as the bottles of saline solution, instrument packs, linen packs which held gowns and sheets for doing a case. All of that took from midnight until about 6 in the morning. By 7 am when the crew came in it was all done and the head nurse who had said “no” to doing all that, never said a word. It was done and it paid off in our efficiency at the next mass casualty situation and every one after that.

Now for the first one, that I delayed until now. I was at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco, in the five -month operating room course at the point where I was learning to scrub in on open heart surgery cases. I liked those cases because I was busy all the time and we were helping to heal hearts. On this particular case, after the colonel had done the actual surgery on the heart and it was working, he told the major to take over to basically close everything and he, the colonel was leaving. As he was leaving he put his hands on my breasts from behind. I was stunned/shocked and speechless momentarily. My mind began to spin, my stomach lurched and when I had my breath back, blurted out, “If you don’t take your hands off me right now I will break scrub and report you!” That would have been a disaster for the patient and the major finishing the case. The colonel left in a huff. I had to reconnect to my breath, decorum, and finish the case, as the major and the patient were depending on me. I did my job, but my world tilted, my faith, and trust were violated and I felt ripped open. I was very close to finishing the course and going to Vietnam and now this!

The next day, I was called into the office of the supervisor of the operating room. She told me that I was being insubordinate to the colonel and would not be able to participate in any of his cases from then on. She was not interested in anything I had to say. The highest-ranking officers in the military believe they are entitled to do as they please with any of the female members of the military and we are to allow them to do what they wish. I never agreed to that. It was my first experience with the audacity of a high-ranking male officer but not my last. My first book, *Women Under Fire: Abuse in the Military* is about the culture of abuse toward women in our military and includes many horrific stories of women in the military who were assaulted in violent ways. It is still happening and there is no intent in our military leaders to stop it.

I am and always have been a rebel. That was exacerbated by being a Vietnam Veteran. The next time I disobeyed an order was during my assignment at Madigan Army Hospital in 1968. I had recently returned from Vietnam and was assigned to a surgical unit. I was a captain at that time. The head nurse was a major and an alcoholic. She did not like me and the feeling was mutual. We had a young man come in who was paralyzed from the waist down from when he tried to go over the wall at Fort Lawton to go AWOL instead of going to Vietnam. He, like so many like him, did not want to die or be permanently maimed, so feared going to Vietnam. He climbed the fence at Fort Lawton but instead, fell over the wall and is now paralyzed for life.

My head nurse sought to punish him by withholding care from him. We were all ordered not to care for him or order supplies for him. I did not agree and thought it was cruel and inappropriate. I took it upon myself to protect him and provide what he needed. I had the support of his buddies who were patients. When I was caring for him behind the curtains they watched out and warned me if the head nurse was coming that way. I also found a sergeant who would order supplies that the patient needed without the major's signature. It worked and the guy was eventually released and court martialed.

Praise the Soul Opening by Pauline Gates

Praise the dark rainbow,

Praise the crow feather—

Praise the crow's silent flight.

Praise the sunset and the stardust,

Praise the turning earth.

Praise the sunrise,

Praise the warm soil,

Praise the bud and the open flower,

Praise the ripe fruit,

Praise the tunneling worm.

Praise the sin and the sinner.

Praise the dream and the dreamer.

Praise the closed eye and the open eye.

Praise the silence and the breaking of it.

Praise the open hand and the raised fist.

Praise the curled toes and the arched back.

Praise the heartfelt embrace; it opens the soul.

PROSE : ON LOVE'S MANY FACES

LOVE must have called out the Èṣù's Àṣẹ in me as I got to thinking about what we were saying and its further mean+lessness in the face of anti-racism, anti-rage, anti-war and its many justified AGAINST as righteous,

And what about Love and her inversions called Hates? What's She got to do with anything at all?

Where does Love stand defined in place of knowing about a thing?

And how do we, a particulated species unknown to even the very microbiome making us up; even our bacterial performativity is outpicturing, outmatching, besides itselves, making us sick without balancing it with immune systems measured killings.

Like when We wailing for our owned childrens deaths, he/she/them, representing Us, yet owned by proximity and much more important than anybody else' kin. Akin to not caring unless...

Us monocrop, monoculture, plantation thinking homosapien, caught in a web of soon disintegrating SUPREMACY we claim,

'The Others' invented.

NOT ME

We cough out while inhaling Love’s obscured, cloudy, nearly deceptive contributions

Often misappropriated by Roman+tics even if titles of Indigeneity are enchanted, Rooted to the terrestrial in total.

Doesn’t the word love leave out the incalculable, invisible+observables presenting Her meta-dimensionality?

Our dis+eases a belly full of mental illness, let's call Anthropocentric :

Time telling/keeping the metaphor for holding to a linear dimension in an infinite space of limitless

Sex as sensuousness when in fact of content, it is no more than stirring a stick in a ***whole***

(continued on the next page)

Or feverishly bouncing a ball.

Our measurement problems and such,

There are too many unnamed contradictions to list conflicting elements dis, dat and, da third

We are worthy of ridicule. When exploring the deceptions created by centering our single species made-up of ignored multiplicities of beings,

Ignored quarky, positron non-beingness popping us in and out of what's called existence, The Void, The Larger Consciousness System,

How do we find any arguments we're making, sound?

And What about Love? What's She got to do with anything at all?

How do we distinguish between the properties of an infinitude of unknowable entanglements when selfishly, self-centering our situated type of wellness?

Even in the face of an errant, arrogant child named, phases of humanity?

Let’s be honest, even in the face of our so-called Blackness as the invisible infinite the stars are left in, we do not incorporate Love's enumerable messages to :

BLOW AWAY, fall upon, grind down, digest and eat, burn and bury; when even the seed needs THIS Love’s tending to grow. How did we forget: raging storms, freezing to death, desert heat, falling hail, earthquakes, furious lightning, volcanic eruptions,, all are Life Giving Forces of LOVE, yes?

Don’t we yet know Love has many knowns that look like destruction at first? Don’t we know anything at all yet?

Author: Melany Bell | Artistic Director | FNTP | CGP
Functional Nutritional Therapy Practitioner |
Certified Gut & Psychology Syndrome Practitioner |
foodisfirst@gmail.com | (206)288-3166 | www.melanybell.org
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Path with Art **Classes** Featured In This Issue:

Approaching Joy! Creative Writing with Maiah Merino | Q2, 2026

How do we approach joy during this time of uncertainty? This course brought together a variety of authors including: Joy Harjo, Annie Dillard, Mary Oliver, Ross Gay, Marc Nepo among others, to reflect on and play with the ways in which we can live more deeply in this moment, together. In this supportive 8-session creative writing class, participants discovered how to use poetry and reflective writing as anchors for grounding, resilience, and personal discovery. Through weekly low-pressure prompts and generative exercises, each participant examined how literature can capture light and hope, transforming everyday observations into extraordinary creative pages. In a collaborative community circle, each participant had opportunities to share their work, cultivating collective connection with peers.

Honoring Our History: Abstract Art & Personal Storytelling with Melany Bell | Q2, 2026

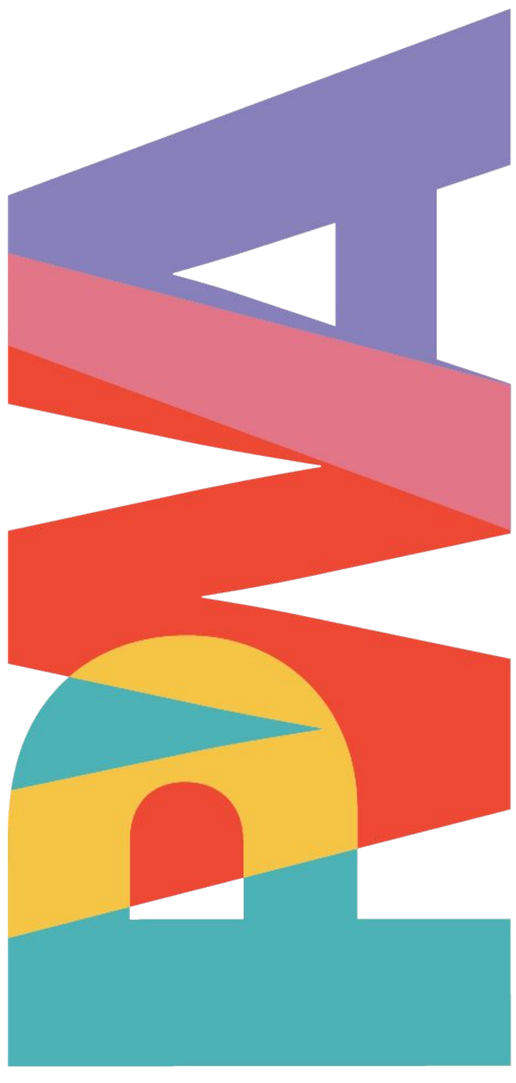
Your lived experiences, memories, and cultural influences are the ultimate foundation for powerful artmaking. In this supportive online space designed exclusively for veterans, participants used the freedom of abstract art to express personal histories and tell stories on ones own terms. Each week, participants experienced a blend of creative writing prompts, group discussion, and demonstrations designed to inspire one’s practice - using materials like oil pastel, markers, and collage supplies. Together, the class embraced the courage it takes to honor the experiences that shape who we are, experimenting with new techniques in a supportive environment - celebrating one’s own identity and claiming a vital voice as a community historian.

With no prior art experience required, this class was entirely focused on the joy of experimentation, creative play, and honoring the unique perspectives that shape who we are.

Path with Art **Classes** Featured In This Issue:

Mixed Media Exploration with Jackie Argyle | Q2, 2026

This class was designed for artists who already have some familiarity with one or more mediums and were interested in expanding their creative practice by mixing different materials together. While gouache and crayon was provided, participants were welcome to bring any other materials they had on hand—such as pencils, watercolors, collage paper, or fabric. Throughout the session, they explored the core principles of layering, color, and value to create compelling, multi-dimensional images. Whether participants were looking to break out of a creative rut or simply wanted to experiment with something new, this class offered the perfect supportive environment to discover fresh ways of art-making!



Path with Art

pathwithart.org

front cover artwork:

Gesso by Leigh Legler