

# IN POSITIVE LIGHT

A STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGY USING LINE, SHAPE, FORM, AND COLOR

by

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### **Abstract**

Line, shape, form... what do such constructs mean? From the molecular, to the vast expanses of the universe, their very existence serves to create our reality. Their reach is all encompassing: from the introspective realm of linear thought, to the experiences that shape our world, and the forms found within its physical domain. Life is multidimensional. Everything is connected, yet separate. Can the simple, yet intrinsically involved infrastructures of line, shape, and form be used to create a positive change in thinking to those that view them? Inspired by various pursuits such as nature, music, biology, philosophy, psychology, and spirituality, I seek to bring a new perspective to the way people converse with one another by challenging the introspective realm of thought that informs our outward expression. I will do this by seeking out those things that invoke a sense of purity, light, and positivity, then combining their multi-faceted ideologies into a multimedia, visual language that encapsulates the hope found within them. By using the constructs of line, shape, and form, adorned with vibrant displays of color, I hope to inspire people to see each other in a positive light, to challenge the patterns of thought that would inhibit its forthcoming, and to create a body of work that will envelope the space of the viewer as a call to attention. It is my goal that all who view my work will be able to relate to it without preconceived judgements as I believe every human has a fundamental psychological need for things such as love, empathy, acceptance, and understanding.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Line, shape, form... what do such constructs mean? From the molecular, to the vast expanses of the universe, their very existence serves to create our reality. Their reach is all encompassing: from the introspective realm of linear thought, to the experiences that shape our world, and the forms found within its physical domain. Life is multidimensional. Everything is connected, yet separate. Can the simple, yet intrinsically involved infrastructures of line, shape, and form be used to create a positive change in thinking to those that view them? Inspired by various pursuits such as nature, music, biology, philosophy, psychology, and spirituality, I seek to bring a new perspective to the way people converse with one another by challenging the introspective realm of thought that informs our outward expression. I will do this by seeking out those things that invoke a sense of purity, light, and positivity, then combining their multifaceted ideologies into a multimedia, visual language that encapsulates the hope found within them. By using the constructs of line, shape, and form, adorned with vibrant displays of color, I hope to inspire people to see each other in a positive light, to challenge the patterns of thought that would inhibit its forthcoming, and to create a body of work that will envelope the space of the viewer as a call to attention. It is my goal that all who view my work will be able to relate to it without preconceived judgements as I believe every human has a fundamental psychological need for things such as love, empathy, acceptance, and understanding.

Growing up I have always had this innate sense of wonder and curiosity about anything and everything. One particular avenue that my ever-wondering mind took often was observing how people interacted with one another. From the minute micro-expression to the inflection of tone in one's voice—I watched it all with utmost curiosity. I am also a born empath and being able to feel as others feel on a deeper level created in me the desire to inspire more positive experiences and interactions between those around me. In my personal experience, it became

apparent that in order to encourage this type of interaction, I would need to focus more on the good qualities the other person has and strive to amplify those instead of focusing on the more negative quirks. Though, as wickedness does exist, this may not be applicable to all. There is a discrepancy, but too often I believe people are quick to disregard others for minor differences and annoyances when something positive can be gained by both even during the most minor of interactions. It was during my time of self-reflection that I realized I wanted to create a body of work that is metaphorical, yet physical, that would exemplify and inspire the idea of seeing others genuinely, as having value, and in positive light. I chose to do this by emphasizing the human face, displayed as vibrant gemstones, as seen in figure 1.



Figure 1: *Is.* 2021. Spray paint on wood.

## CHAPTER 2: INFLUENCES

### Orphic Cubism

Many of my previous works leading to my current visual language were largely inspired by Wassily Kandinsky. Herschel B. Chipp put it beautifully when he said that Kandinsky “developed a nonfigurative vocabulary of colors and lines that, while rejecting the appearances of nature, still evoked the dynamism of visual experiences of it.”<sup>1</sup> This vocabulary of colors is what I aspired to incorporate into my work by taking the positive, experiential inspiration of the world around me and using colors that would perpetuate its essence. Examples of this can be seen in the use of warm and cool color palettes with the warm portraying the warmth of a sunset and the cool portraying that of a peaceful, misty morning. I wanted to work from this idea while keeping some semblance of natural form, in this case, the human face. I sought to give the viewer a clue, a hint though hidden, in order to connect their thoughts with the subject behind the visual implications. This is done by using differing color palettes, altering between greyscale and color, to accentuate the structure of the face while maintaining the notion that both palettes are part of the same form.

In seeking ways to incorporate the semblance of light through the use of color, I was largely inspired by the color theories of orphic cubist, Robert Delaunay, as he had a similar focus. He aspired to use prismatic colors in a way that they alone could function as the form and focused on capturing purity and light within color.<sup>2</sup> He took color from the drab hues of the

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1. Herschel B. Chipp, “Orphism and Color Theory,” *The Art Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (1958): 55-63.

2. Chipp, “Orphism and Color Theory.”

original cubists and introduced a form of cubism that embraced a more vibrant palette. I wish to further push his ideas of finding purity and light within color by using an even brighter set of hues—neon colors. I believe that a neon palette brings the idea of light higher, as neon, containing a fluorescent quality, seemingly emits its own light, even within a dimly lit room. In order to appreciate the light, I believe one must also experience and understand darkness, represented by the monotone, metallic nature of the greyscale. As stated in Newton’s third law, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.”<sup>3</sup> One cannot exist without the other. Though opposites, both are yet true. This is summed up in an excerpt by author, Raven Davies: “The dark and the light, they exist side by side, sometimes overlapping, one explaining the other. The darkened path is as illuminated as the lightened, only the fear of the dark keeps us from seeing our way.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Art Deco and Art Nouveau**

Much of the inspiration for my work comes from the movements of Art Deco and art nouveau, or rather, a combined version of their ideologies. One of the visual characteristics of Art Deco is repetitive, geometric shapes. The figures represented such as flowers, human figures, and animals, similar to Art Nouveau, are simplified and stylized to adhere to the aesthetic of Art Deco. Architecture was a leading component in the Deco movement. As *The Art Story* puts it, “Art Deco architecture is characterized by hard-edged, often richly embellished designs,

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3. Khan Academy, 2021. *What is Newton’s Third Law?* March 2. <https://www.khanacademy.org/science/physics/forces-newtons-laws/newtons-laws-of-motion/a/what-is-newtons-third-law>.

4. Raven Davies, *Between Here and There* (NightLight Books, 2004).

accentuated by gleaming metal accents.”<sup>5</sup> I took this characterization and applied it to my work by using the greyscale as the metal accent and the embellishments as those small mishaps that occur during the painting process. Though I could have fixed these unsightly mistakes, I chose to leave them as I believe they add a new layer to my work, not only visually, but conceptually. They can be seen when standing up close inspecting them, much like when we nitpick and judge others, but by standing back and looking at the piece as a whole, they fade away, with only the positive elements showing.

The use of materials and production in Art Deco played a large role in the physical elements of my work. When needing to add a sense of wealth or value to a construction, the creators would use more precious materials such as ivory, turtle shell, ebony, and precious gemstone accents. I drew upon this concept and decided to portray my portraits as gemstones, or something having precious value. It is my goal that viewers will see the connection between the value of a gemstone and the people in the works and apply this added value when interacting with those around them. Along with the use of finer materials, Art Deco also focused on objects that could be mass-produced. In seeking a way to give my pieces a distinct and unusual shape, I began exploring ideas for a non-conventional canvas. I also wanted to use materials to create my pieces that were simple, or commonplace, as a way to represent everyday people and the value they held. It was then that I decided to use wood flooring, as it allowed me to “build” each portrait as a platform from which I speak, as an homage to the architectural elements of Art Deco.

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5. Story, The Art. n.d. *Art Deco*. [https://www.theartstory.org/movement/art-deco/history-and-concepts/#concepts\\_styles\\_and\\_trends\\_header](https://www.theartstory.org/movement/art-deco/history-and-concepts/#concepts_styles_and_trends_header).



The boxes in my three-dimensional work are plain, mass-produced craft boxes sold by a craft supply chain. The only objects that are not generic within my work are the pieces that contain elements from nature.

### **Nature, Biology, and Philosophy**

I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains; therefore, nature has always held a profound place in my heart. Many lessons can be learned while traversing a wilderness untouched by man, alone. As an avid hiker, I often find myself reflecting on life's mysteries as I venture on. In observing raw nature and how everything living within its borders interacts with each other, I have had many enlightening epiphanies into how we, as people, interact with each other. I began to associate people with that of a forest, each tree a different height, shape, color, thickness, and kind. Each different, yet rooted and entangled together within the same soil, needing the same basic essentials for survival on a psychological level: empathy, unity, understanding, and acceptance. The physical differences, such as those of the trees, are qualities in which people will often find flaw or disdain for another, yet the forest accepts and harmonizes with the differences of each entity. Suzanne Simard, a professor of forest ecology at the University of British Columbia, expounds on this philosophy in her TED talk by discussing the ways trees talk to one another. In the video, Simard explains that science has discovered that trees can actually share nutrients with one another through their root system. At one point she states, "Trees talk. Through back-and-forth conversations, (trees) increase the resilience of the whole community. It probably reminds you of our own social communities, and our families, well, at least some families."<sup>6</sup>

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6. Suzanne Simard. 2016. *How Trees Talk to Each Other*. August 30. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un2yBgIAxYs&t=3s>.

Through connecting my own observation with a scientific basis, I chose to take the themes of community, unity, and connection learned from nature and find a way to incorporate their influence within my work. I do this in the three unity circles I created titled: *Everyone, Is, Connected*. Each one poses a set of three faces interwoven by the use of two intersecting lines in the middle leading into the structure of each face. There are no breaks in the lines making them an infinite knot, a homage to the Celtic sailor's knot, which symbolizes friendship, affection, and love. Visually, the jagged nature of the lines is representative of the aforementioned tree roots, with each facial structure informing the next. The use of these lines has a multi-faceted meaning. Not only do they represent unity and connection, but they also serve a metaphorical purpose. Based on biology, these galvanized lines are painted to represent synapses in the brain, or the space between cells where information in the form of electricity is shared from one neuron to another. Even on a molecular level, appropriate interaction is necessary. I translate this microscopic communication to also symbolize the interactive nature of people and how one negative interaction can disrupt proper communication, causing a ripple effect and thus hindering the inherent prosperity of the whole, or humanity.

After exploring these themes, I found myself digging a little deeper into the metaphorical substance of my work and began a series of pieces focusing more on the inward realm of thought and its implications on our outward expression. Exploring multi-dimensionality, I chose to bring a new sense of dimension to my work physically by incorporating assemblage boxes to the faces. Each one represents a gateway to the mind and offers a visual of the patterns of thought which influence our actions. Every object used within these boxes was hand gathered by myself during one of my many nature excursions. As a collector of sorts, I keep objects such as bones, feathers, plants, rocks, etc. Each object that I collect either has intriguing visual qualities or has inspired one of my many mental pursuits. During one of those pursuits, I realized that in order to inspire

positive interaction, I would need to address and challenge the negative patterns of thought that would inhibit it. In my pieces *Breaking Out* and *Words Bite*, I use bones to represent negative thought patterns, and as a call of death to those mental strongholds. The coyote skull represents the carnivorous, ravaging negative words and the effects they can have when spoken, with the turtle shell being broken open, showing the power in breaking out of one's own proverbial shell. In my pieces *Through Struggle* and *Comes Growth*, I use roots and dried flowers. These pieces are interactive in that they are made to face each other, with the root portrait sitting lower than the flower portrait. This is to symbolize how one who is rooted can help another grow.

## CHAPTER 3: PROCESS

I begin each piece by drawing the face of a real-life model onto small sketch paper, focusing on the side view of the face. My goal is to capture the angles of the face and the likeness of the model using simple, continuous lines. I am not concerned with capturing the gender of the model as gender is not a focal point in my work. Therefore, many times the face will appear as having an almost non-binary, yet human look. Once I have enough drawings, I then transfer them onto the wood flooring panels using a projector and marker. By using the projector, I am able to manipulate each drawing's location individually on the wooden canvas before tracing it, thus allowing me to compose the best composition and size for each piece. Once the faces have been traced onto the flooring, I hand-cut out each panel individually using a hand-held Dremel saw. I then sand down the edges using a sandpaper block. When the panels fit together appropriately, I use an industrial strength glue to bind them together, connecting to the theme of unity and connection.

I begin painting the faces by starting with the greyscale section, then the color. If using a warm color palette, I will use a cool set of greyscale and vice versa in order to mute the brightness of the neon to give it a softer glow while emphasizing its hues simultaneously. In order to maintain crisp lines and define each polygonal color plane, I use masking tape to define each shape. I must put posterboard over each edge of tape in order to prevent overspray from getting onto adjacent sections. Using spray paint as my way of "breathing" life into each portrait I create, I then spray an analogous gradient of colors focusing on getting a seamless blend from one color to the next. Not only does this give each piece a graphic look, blending the boundary of digital, graphic work with traditional media, but it also exemplifies the idea of each color, or race, being able to blend together as one entity, instead of separate.

In some pieces, I relate each polygon to another by painting opposite spectrums to each other, thus creating stark contrast between shades and complimentary colors. This method gives a sharper appearance to the polygons, giving these faces a “shattered glass” look, and serving to show someone with inner conflict between their light and dark sides. In other pieces, I make smoother transitions from one polygon to another by continuing the gradient sequence. By doing this, the pieces seem to fit together and give a more dimensional and complex appearance to the face. I choose the placement of each section by connecting each corner to the surrounding section’s corners. In the contrasting faces, this produces a starburst-like effect, which allows the mid-tones to merge together forming a line of color within the face. By doing this, I am able to create movement and a path for the viewer’s eyes to follow, leading them around each portrait. In the smooth transitional faces, I use the color to create a sense of a light source on the gemstone, causing them to have a glowing effect near the outer portions of the face.

I work on the assemblage boxes separately, alongside the portraits. Each one is created by carefully placing each object within multiple layers of resin. The clear resin lends itself as a perfect way to create simple, yet intricately placed compositions. Certain objects, such as the bones in my pieces, have to be held in place by using various tools and tape to balance the objects in place as the resin dries. Once the boxes are complete, I use industrial glue to adhere them onto the pre-cut-out slots on the wooden faces. I then test to see how the boxes balanced when placed upright in position. On pieces where the box is not flat on the bottom, such as seen in *Words Bite*, I must create personally constructed bases to set them in the correct position.

## CHAPTER 4: EXHIBITION

The body of work for the exhibition consisted of nine pieces: two singular faces, three unity circles, and four assemblage pieces. The singular portraits and unity circles were wired and made to hang on the wall, whereas the assemblage portraits were presented by sitting the boxes on pedestals and displayed like sculptures. The unity circles and singular faces were placed by alternating them, beginning with a unity circle, spanning five pieces in total. The center circle was the culmination of all color palettes within one piece, and thus was the center piece. The roots and flowers pieces sat on separate pedestals, adjacent to one another, with the skull and turtle shell pieces functioning as singular pieces.

During the exhibition, I had the opportunity to take a poll by talking with various viewers of the work. In order to see if my work was successful in conveying its message, I spoke with people who had not been told my interpretations of it and asked what they concluded upon its viewing. The responses I received were overall positive. Most people admitted to getting a positive sense from the work and many saw the faces as gemstones. Much to my surprise, and delight, it took almost everyone I spoke with a moment to see the faces hidden within the geometric designs. I feel as though feeling the positivity and then seeing the faces can be beneficial to putting viewers in the mindset I wish to inspire. As far as the assemblage pieces, many people connected well and close to the ideas I wished to present, but ultimately, viewers will end up having multiple interpretations of them.

In my future work, I hope to expand the vision for my work sculpturally. Though I will continue to create non-sculptural pieces, I wish to push the boundaries of the dimensionality in

my work, creating more complex and space enveloping structures. I wish to improve my work in a metaphorical sense by continuing to study psychology and finding ways to express and challenge the viewer's thought processes in a way that is easier to understand visually. It is my goal to create pieces that beckon the viewer to interact with them mentally, and perhaps even physically, creating somewhat of a puzzle through which the viewer can come to their own conclusions, which would change their thought processes for the betterment of how they interact with other individuals. Though this is just the beginning, and I have far to go in truly translating my message through a visual language, the responses I received from just this small, initial spark indicate that I am on the right path in my conclusion.

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**APPENDIX A****ARTWORK**

*AJ*. 2019. Spray paint on wood.



*Timberleigh*. 2021. Spray paint on wood.



*Everyone*. 2019. Spray paint on wood.



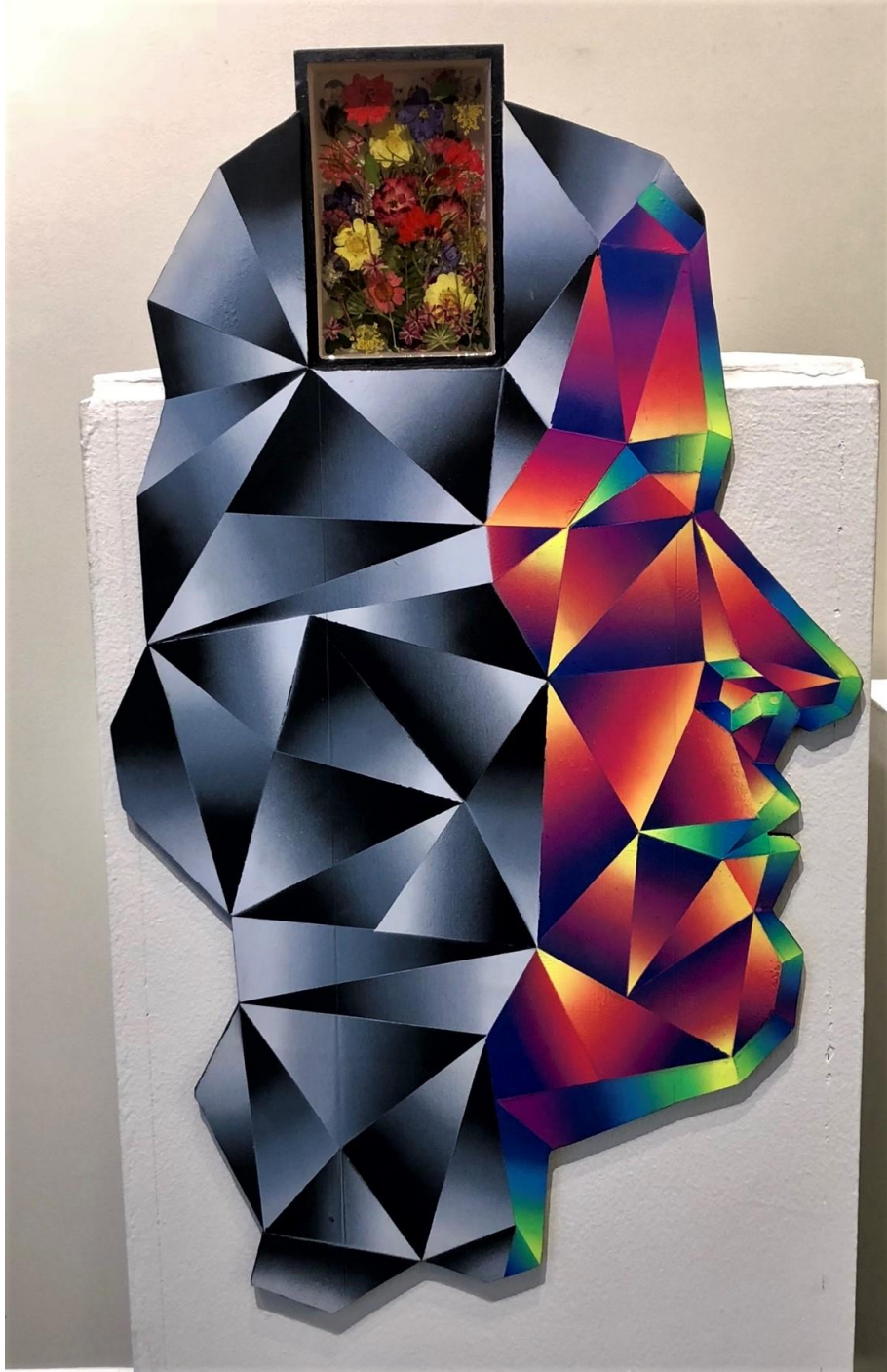
*Is.* 2021. Spray paint on wood.



*Connected.* 2020. Spray paint on wood.



*Words Bite.* 2020. Mixed media.

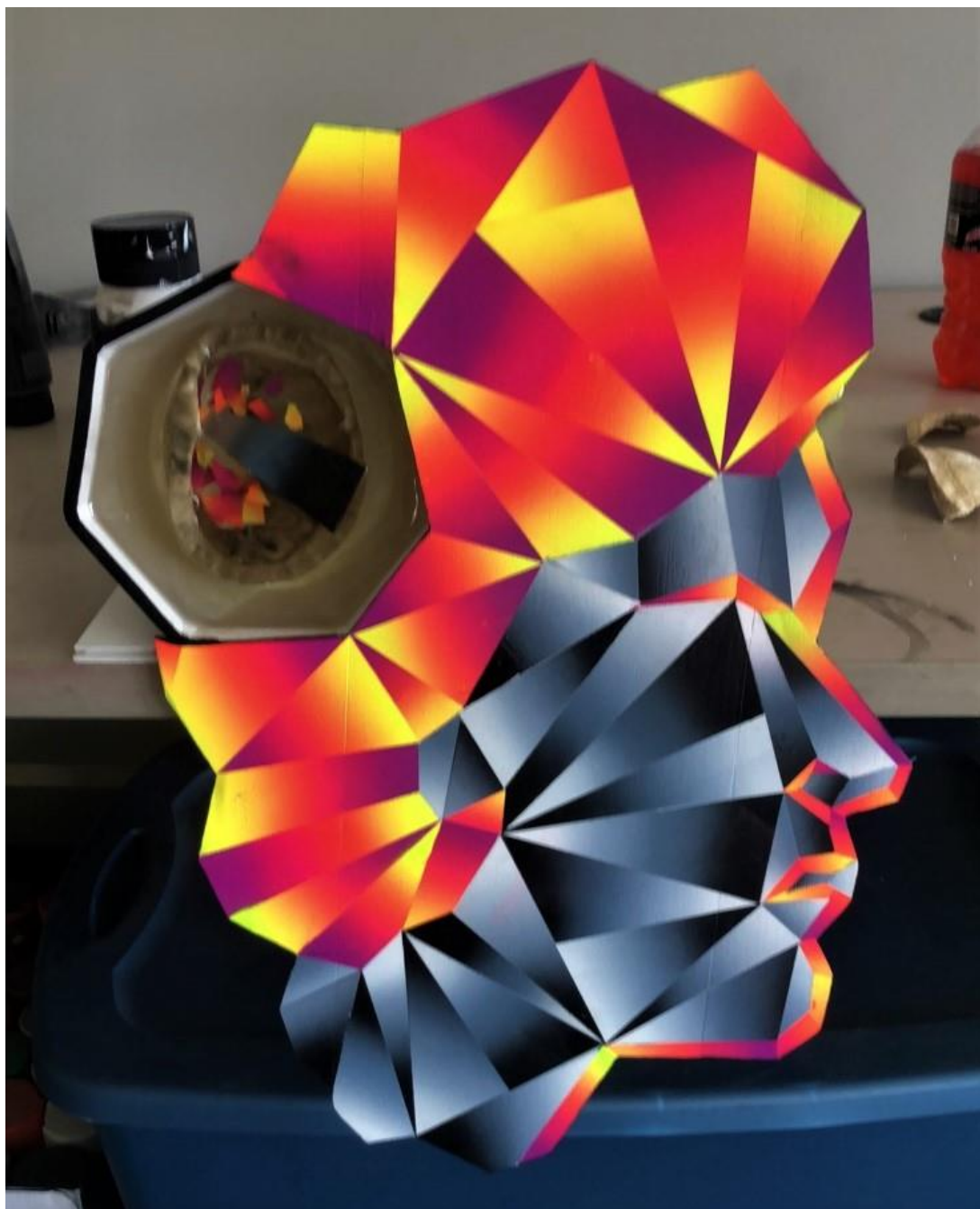


*Comes Growth.* 2020. Mixed media.



*Through Struggle.* 2020. Mixed media.





*Breaking Out.* 2021. Mixed media.