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Artists explore 'Invisible Disabilities'

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We all have a gap between our private self and our public self. For people with invisible disabilities including chronic illness, mental illness, and neurological conditions, that gap can be large.

"Invisible Disabilities," presented by Unbound Visual Arts and curated by Samantha M. Joyce at Arthaus Art Gallery, highlights 10 artists in this population. An exhibition that explicitly depicts the crucible of hidden challenges — the suffering they cause, and the wisdom they can bring — is something everyone can relate to.

Susan K. Teal suffers from anxiety attacks and trauma, she says in her artist's statement. Her self-portraits, made in 2020, after the death of her aunt and in the midst of pandemic isolation, depict Teal expressing a range of intense emotions. In "Labile," one expression unfolds to the next, as she screams, grits her teeth, and softens into sorrow. The



SUSAN K. TEAL

Susan K. Teal's "Labile."

INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

At Arthaus Art Gallery, 43 N. Beacon St., Allston, through July 17. www.unboundvisualarts.org/invisible-disabilities-in-person-exhibit

emotional tone recalls Edvard Munch's "The Scream" (and indeed, Munch wrote in his journal of suffering from tuberculosis and mental illness). Teal's frank realism in self-portraiture is startlingly intimate. The succession of faces offers a progression from rage to sadness, and a clarity of self-witnessing, that makes room around the pain.

But perhaps I'm seeing hope simply to ward off my own fragility. "Invisible illness has no arc. No narrative," painter Linda Morgenstern, who suffers from myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome, writes in her statement. In her small, gorgeously mottled paintings of houses, interspersed with wall-mounted tiny cardboard shacks, paint is like the stuff of life from which form coalesces and then dissolves, and the house a symbol for the body: structured but worn away by light, dark, and weather.

Works that explore an artist's disability without disclosing it open an even larger scope for a viewer's personal projection. Sam Fein draws a watery fig-



LINDA MORGENSTERN (LEFT); SAM FEIN @SAMFEINART

Linda Morgenstern's "Red Door" and Sam Fein's "Overwhelmed."

ure haunted by ghosts in "Overwhelmed." Her "Drug Mandala" assemblage — patterned with vials, baggies, pills, and candy — harnesses a medication regime's power for contemplation and spiritual growth by turning it into sacred geometry.

That's the job of art. Giving form to the unseen and fugitive parts of human-

ity and of society, it holds and consecrates them. Especially in such fear-driven times, artists like the ones in this show, who acknowledge their tenderness and struggle, are true leaders.

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