

An abstract collage artwork featuring a dark, crumpled paper-like shape at the top, a blue and yellow patterned area on the left, and a cluster of silver, pearl-like spheres at the bottom right. The background is a mix of black, white, and various colors like blue, yellow, and red.

Cohort Archive

Fall 2024



Cover Art
“What it Means to be a Queer Survivor”
by Risi Gaude

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 4 | Introduction |
| 5 | Cohort Installation |
| 11 | Group Pieces |
| 20 | Cassie Calcaterra |
| 23 | Liz Johnson |
| 27 | Angela Joy Baldasare |
| 30 | Krista Kumpf |
| 33 | eli l.a. |
| 37 | Noon |
| 40 | Amanda Dragovic |
| 43 | Jenna F |
| 46 | Risi Gaudé |
| 49 | About Awakenings |

INTRODUCTION

Awakenings offers survivors of sexual violence a trauma-informed art-making experience that encourages personal and communal healing. Awakenings cohorts allow our survivors to heal together in a safe, trauma-informed environment, while building a creative community.

Awakenings Fall Cohort 2024 was dedicated to LGBTQIA+ survivors. Nine cohort members went through a healing arts curriculum together over the course of eight weeks. As the cohort finished, each member contributed to a group art installation in Awakenings Chicago Studio. This artwork was on exhibit October 2024 - February 2025.

This Cohort cycle was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts that directly funded the stipends each cohort member recieved.

The *Cohort Archive* serves as a documentation of images from the installation, cohort member reflections on the art they created and their experience making art alongside other queer survivors.

CONTENT WARNING

The following issue contains material including one or more of the following: rape, sexual assault, abuse, self harm

The intention behind this content warning is to prepare a reader so they can choose to bravely engage with potentially activating material, even if this doesn't always feel comfortable. May it also serve as a reminder that a reader can pause and take a break from reading. The stories will be here, ready when the reader returns.





Cohort Installation













Layers Contained

Group piece

Handmade paper, mixed media





Messages of Care

Group piece

Block print





Clay Containment

Group piece

Air dry clay, acrylic paint





Woven Abstractions

Group piece

Yarn





During their time at Awakenings, the cohort collaborated on four group pieces to be included in the final art installation. Each piece reflected on the workshop's intention to explore the healing capabilities of paper making, printmaking, sculpture, and weaving. Often, workshop was the first time some or all of the cohort members had worked in a specific medium. The group was challenged to create not only their individual projects in a new modality, but to also work together, learning around and with each other. The cohort worked intuitively, navigating in real time how to make space for each other's expression both individually and collectively.

These pieces are process-oriented, organic, gestural, and talkative. They were created quickly, interactions between image, text, color, and material being negotiated, arranged, and imbued with significance as the piece grew. For many, it was necessary to let go of expectations of perfection and control, instead trusting each other to create pieces reflective of the time and space shared in each workshop and the program as a whole. The group pieces synthesize the individual and the collective, prompting a consideration of what it might look like to heal in and with community.

While the cohort was welcome to pick and choose what to share as individuals for the Cohort Walkthrough, the group pieces were automatically included, documenting the growth of a shared artistic vision and archiving these ephemeral moments of exploration.

Awakenings Staff



Warm Release

Cassie Calcaterra
weaving, acrylic paint



Warm Release detail (top)

Cassie Calcaterra
weaving, acrylic paint

Melt (bottom)

Cassie Calcaterra
mixed media



Throughout the cohort, I found that it's easier to kind of turn off my brain while creating. It's like going into an automatic mode and releasing control over the process and outcome. Especially in the collaborative pieces we made, it felt right to let go and give into the process which I enjoyed.

I feel grateful to have been a part of this cohort. Working in and with a group of other queer survivors felt warm to me. We didn't have to explain ourselves to each other and were all there for the same purpose of making art and healing. I'm super proud of the art we made and the time we spent learning new mediums, laughing together, and thinking about our healing in new ways.

I wrote the poem below about my experience creating "Warm Release" and "melt".

healing only happens in the presence of light

liquid came down with gravity.
the weight we've carried/ hid
from those we love—
revealed now:
shed, shed, shed.

weaving through lines
of teal and tangerine—
following the yarn where it leads.
allowing loose strands space
to linger/ stay undone—
pause and release.

the soft light now,
the warmth radiating from my hands,
the melting wax contained in its vessel.

if nothing else, i'll remember to breathe
and i won't shy from the beaming rays.

Cassie Calcaterra



DIY Baptism

Liz Johnson

Mixed media on paper with yarn on canvas

D.I.Y Baptism was born out of a series of prompts asking us to use color to express how queer survivorship feels. To me, a hot and bright magenta feels like queerness - revelatory, bold, & unique. But I also think of my trauma as a fog of pink; pink like flesh, like sinew, like rot. The fog tints my surroundings and makes my world small and illegible. The yellow, shining lights, figures, and thread represent community and the ways we knit ourselves together for strength. The soul-like beams dancing upwards are born from the self-actualizing power of living authentically that my queer chosen family & ancestors have exemplified and empowered within me. Out of the fire, we forge ourselves into the people we truly are and want to be.



What I Learned From Cicadas

Liz Johnson

Diptych lino print, metallic marker on paper



Open Wound and Accessories

Liz Johnson

Air dry clay, acrylic paint, rhinestone, yarn, resin

As a queer multimedia artist, with my primary practice being filmmaking, I can have unreasonably high expectations for my work. Particularly because often, I'm creating on behalf of someone else's vision and desires and hoping to execute something worthy of their time and money.

This cohort was not only a space to make art solely for myself, but a space to change the way I relate to my artistic practice. Being a part of this cohort was a practice in self compassion and non-judgement towards myself.

Both in my survivorship and in my artistic practice, I've struggled with internalized expectations of perfectionism. Every new project & new medium in our workshops was a challenge and opportunity to approach myself gently and give myself the expansive permission to play.

Working alongside people who understood the difficulties that exist at the intersections of queer identity and the experience of being a survivor allowed me a quiet comfort and reassurance. A sturdy solidarity gave me a sense of ease that I've struggled to find alone.

Moving forward, I feel less afraid of being perceived, more steadfast in my commitment to myself as an artist, and hopeful for a future amongst community.

Liz Johnson

they/them/theirs





Warning: Contents may Contain Joy

Angela Joy Baldasare
air dry clay, acrylic paint



Gender & Freedom (top)

Angela Joy Baldasare
handmade paper, mixed media

Dragonflies (bottom)

Angela Joy Baldasare
linoleum block print, mixed media

Throughout this process I made art from a place of trying to build myself back up after dealing with traumatic situations. Moving through and healing by allowing myself to experience freedom with how I present myself, giving myself autonomy in how I choose to live my life, and to celebrate the love that makes me who I am today.

Angela Joy





Sense of Self (top)

Krista Kumpf

Acrylic paint and water over repurposed canvas



Inadvertent Formulation (bottom left)

Krista Kumpf

Acrylic paint and water over paper



Sanguine

Krista Kumpf

Acrylic paint and water over canvas

Before I started at Awakenings, I knew I didn't want to stress myself out while creating healing art. I've already been to art school where I frazzled my nervous system while studying graphic design, so I'm beyond done with putting myself through undue pressure just for my art to "look precise". I also have severe chronic pain, anxiety, depression, & PTSD and I didn't want any of those nuisances to interfere with my experience while at Awakenings. So, to remedy all of the above, I opted to create pieces with absolutely zero judgment or criticism from myself. (Which, that's something I've been working on myself when meeting new people in my life the last several years, and I feel everyone can afford to practice the same policy.) I decided it was best to approach creating healing art through that same lens. After all, no one likes to be judged or criticized based off of others knowing only 0.01% of your life experiences; so why would I scrutinize art I created in a space that was designed to help heal me? That wouldn't make sense. Freeing myself from all expectations, rules, & assumptions towards my own art was the only way I could approach healing through art properly. I kept thinking to myself "The end result of every piece will be beautiful the way it is even if it goes against every graphic design rule. Just let it be; no need to stress over it or correct it." That's the only thought process I knew which would support that concept of healing through art.

Amazingly, creating all of this art gave me a new sense of self confidence in my personal life! The final result of each of my pieces gives me satisfaction & fulfillment. I get to look at each piece and say "Yeah, I did that... and with SO much meaning behind it, too!" with much glowing enthusiasm. Even after the walkthrough at Awakenings I noticed I had lasting assurance in every thought and action of mine.

All of the colors in each of my pieces act as me pursuing to soothe myself.

All of the imagery I chose represents a few of the people in my life who've hurt me along the way - and me attempting to take back control of my mental and emotional health!

I wish healing from trauma was easy. I also wish everyone could be introspective and find how to heal their own wounds instead of spreading their pain to others.

"To live in the body of a survivor is to never be able to leave the scene of the crime." ~ Blythe Baird

Krista Kumpf



help our garden grow

eli l.a.

mixed media





love hotel (top)

eli l.a.

mixed media

scrappy (bottom)

eli l.a.

collage





the two miniature buildings are part of an ongoing series of meditations on safe spaces, in the tradition of fairy houses. i became the keeper of all the old unwanted things&wanted to grow up&decided to build something about it. they are made of excellent trash&keepsakes&detritus — of the people i've been&the people i've lost. all these little memories have a place to sleep now, where they can untangle&be cozy on cold days. i like that they are open-faced & have many places for many people to sleep — you can bring everyone and they'll have a bed. we are small enough to fit most places in the world and we have each other.

the houses include:

- murano glass maraschino cherry
- my dad's collection of watch and belt clasps
- my grandmother's collection of political pins
- dried native black-eyed susans courtesy of edgewater environmental coalition parkways for pollinators
- dried walgreen's roses (red)
- broken mail order geodes
- pink lady slipper shell
- spider plants
- fake pearls

eli l.a.



Flip

Noon

mixed media



Sticky (top)

Noon
air dry clay, acrylic paint

Wit (bottom)

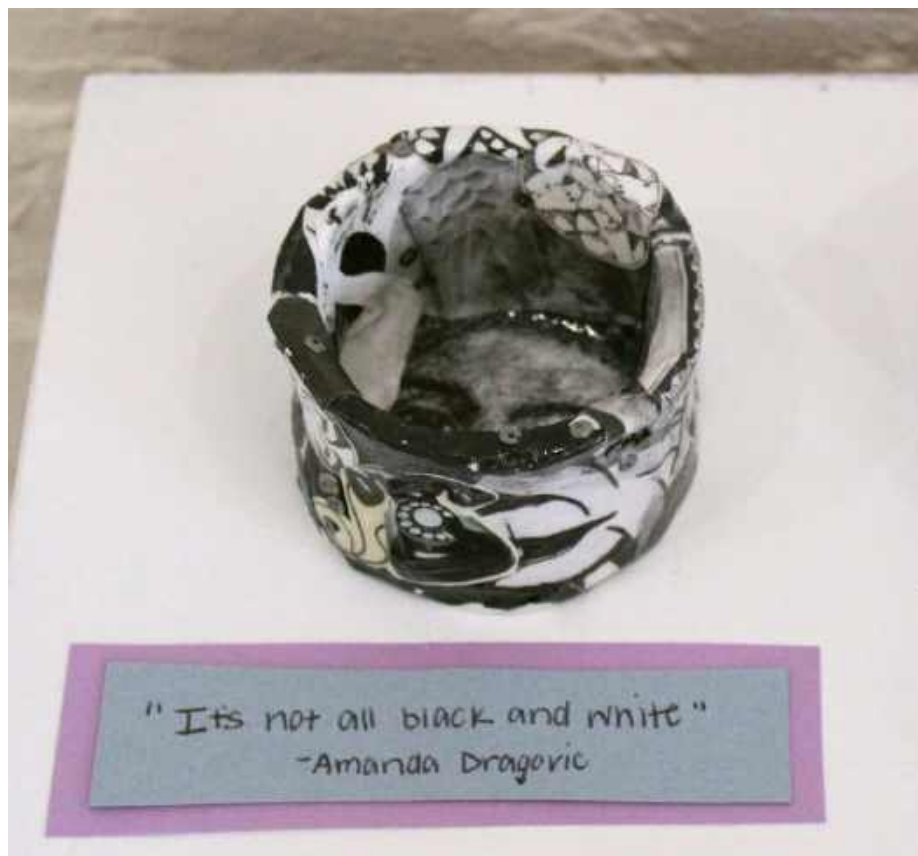
Noon
mixed media on canvas



I make abstract paintings that incorporate blob-like forms, winding linework, and vivid complementary colors. As a self-taught artist with autism and schizophrenia, I approach art as both expression and exploration, layering watercolors, acrylics, collage, alcohol markers, and gel pens in unconventional combinations.

Noon (b. 1994)





It's Not All Black and White

Amanda Dragovic

air dry clay, mixed media



Cohort Gives Me Butterflies

Amanda Dragovic

mixed media on canvas

Hello! My name is Amanda Dragovic and my piece is titled “**Cohort Gives me Butterflies.**”

Our Journeys are always intertwined with the thrill of stepping into the unknown. Whether it's experimenting with a different medium, or joining a collaborative project there's always a wave of nervous anticipation. There's also beauty that comes after pushing through those fears. I've learned to cherish my initial nerves as a sign of growth and transformation. My art has become a reflection of the friendships forged and the adventures taken. With each project I remind myself that every masterpiece starts with a single, brave step into the unfamiliar.

I blend a variety of textures, images, and colors to conceptualize the thoughts and feelings I often have trouble expressing. This specific piece is a thrifted canvas I repurposed. I chose these colors, to represent the Awakenings peacock feather, and the experience I've had here. My canvas is adorned with recycled magazine clippings, photos, a hand made woven piece, a custom linocut design, stickers, sequins, and lots of love. I wanted to cover this canvas in all of the new mediums we learned throughout our time here at the cohort & take up space! That's something I need to be reminded of more often. I hope this peice serves as a reminder, the only thing you have to fear is fear itself.

Amanda Dragovic



Purple Positivity Pot (top)

Jenna F

mixed media

December 2, 2021 (bottom left), **Night Sky** (bottom right)

Jenna F

mixed media



Recovery

Jenna F

mixed media

My pieces are about hope in recovery. While I do have more work to do, I have been amazed at my own progress. In the past, my art- especially poetry- was full of pain and suffering. Some of my pieces are still like this. However, I wanted to share my hope and healing for the cohort exhibition.

December 2, 2021, is the last time I self-harmed after over a decade of struggling. I used colors I love, found a great magazine to cut hopeful words from, and had fun layering handmade paper and glitter over a quick drawing of my arm with cuts. Some of the cuts are visible here on purpose, as some faint scars are still visible.

“Recovery” was a fun weave. I wanted to express black-and-white thinking and feeling stuck, then the slow transition of healing with its many twists and turns and obstacles. That’s what everything in black and white represents. The colored yarn represents how free I have felt as I continue to get better and better. “Recovery” is not perfect which is why the very bottom has black and white and color. I put my heart and soul into the symbolism, and it felt empowering to complete the process. It’s a nice bonus that I like the product.

Jenna F

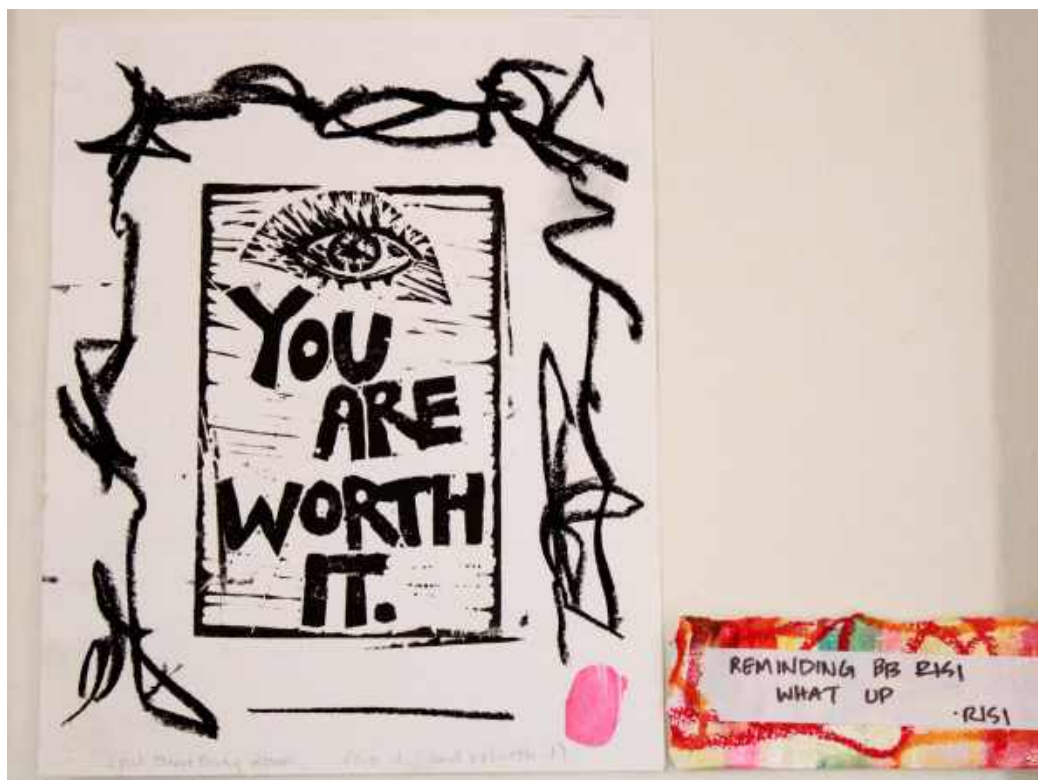


Carousel of Healing (top)

Risi Gaudé
mixed media

Texting You Back From Beyond the Styx (bottom)

Risi Gaudé
mixed media



There is Comfort in the Clay (top)

Risi Gaudé
polymer clay, acrylic paint

Reminding Bb Risi What Up (bottom)

Risi Gaudé
linoleum block print

REMEMBERING (& LIVING STILL)

Remembrance is a gift, and it has also been weighted. Hard to turn over in my mouth. Hard to tie the cherry knot and feel proud. I wake up some mornings tired, from carrying what I knew yesterday into today. Waking up with a ceremonial bow to the boulder of burden I was thrown and reavow that it is mine to carry alone, through my days, grocery stores, and first dates. I even carry it when I've forgotten about it on my serene river walk. I sit and wonder how nature could make a flower so unabashedly pink. Then I think about the word unabashed. I think about how I wish I was. My mind circles back to shame. After a minute or two, my feet get up to circle back home too. Acutely aware, once again, of this thing I am carrying. I walk somewhat slumped and shoulders rounded. I find it difficult to think that I wouldn't have taken a different route home - maybe a longer, curious one, dripping in joie de vivre, the kind I used to have more of - had I not remembered what I didn't want to know.

Sometimes (often) I forget that I am still and forever walking home. There is still time to have curiosity. This moment right here now, is one of them. My walk has not ended. I am still eager to see the butterflies and watch the couple ahead laughing, racing each other to the end of the block. I can still reach for community, build with strangers, and see myself anew. My chance isn't over and this alternate path isn't a consolation prize. It is my very own, sweet life - won back.

This experience with Awakenings has supported my practice of remembering: I am still becoming. It has renewed my thoughts on trauma, creating with people, and healing visibly. In the years of trauma-induced hyper-independence, art has been my safe, big, bold world. Where not a thing can touch me. And that world has done what I've asked of it; it's kept me safe from harm and let me lick my wounds. I've grown stronger and more assured. I've come to admire that when I'm down and counted out, set up to be a sucker, I rebel with the most vibrant colors I can get my hands on.

Creating art with and beside fellow queer survivors has taken the safe place I've found inside myself, extracted and expanded it to include people outside of me - a group where together, we can imagine the unimaginable and, together, we expand the ripples of safety in the waters around us.

From my time in this cohort, I'm more focused and aware that much of the work and art for this coming chapter is to heal how being a survivor shut down my willingness to engage with the world. Reaching for community has been this really crucial next step to reigniting this light of mine. I feel a growing capacity to show up and take up space for things that matter to me. Like making life my art, and us healing together.

I continue to do my best to remain open to unimaginable opportunities for goodness, like what I found here and with you all.

AWAKENINGS

The *Cohort Archive* documents and uplifts the experience and artworks of survivors who have gone through our Cohort program.

At Awakenings, we provide survivors of sexual violence with a trauma informed, inclusive art-making experience that encourages healing. We carry out this mission in our art studio located in the Ravenswood neighborhood of Chicago and online.

INTERESTED IN A COHORT FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?

If you want Awakenings to provide a healing art cohort experience for your community or clients, please email us to learn more.
info@awakeningsart.org

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