

Cirque du Fantastique Suzann Gille

The spectacle of a circus has been a tool that society uses to role-play fantasy. The phantasmagoric experience serves as an avenue for escapism as performers portray a life of illusion that goes beyond the expected. The performer is dependent on the role of a cooperative audience for validation, but if we isolate the individual performer away from an audience their role becomes an intraspective archetype that can be used to understand mental illness. This body of work reflects on how we understand mental illnesses and to highlight the spectators' voyeuristic tendencies and then deconstruct that by normalizing mental conditions. Spectators gaze in curious fascination at performers and the circus serves as social tool in which the experience exploits the difference between the performer and the audience. Role-playing on a stage – in this case a circus – parallels the life of illusion those with a mental illness live every day in order to preserve the “show must go on” fantasy.

When viewing the work with 3D glasses, the viewer experiences another layer of reality to emphasize the idea of the circus as a simulacrum in the way that viewing something in 3D is just a hyperrealistic simulation of reality.