

Al Kittel's paintings

Descriptions

Aerial Oracle (January 2023)

This painting was first titled "His Shoulders" because I feel like, in a lot of ways in life, I have been on Aaron's shoulders. He went first and blazed a trail for me, and from that, I learned what to do and what not to do in living with Friedreich's Ataxia. I saw him try to pursue art late in life and it was a struggle for him. I credit my artistic urgency to seeing him go through that. Inspired by a painting collaboration that I was able to do with my other brother, Mike, I approached the background of this painting as if I was taking turns with Aaron. I knew something was missing, so I put this painting away for nine months. In early January 2023, I had a dream that I had died and the only regrets I had were my unfinished paintings. I couldn't leave this painting unfinished, so I added the things Aaron loved - his dog Ori and sunflowers.

Allicat (July 2023)

A self-portrait of sorts.

An Opening (November 2023)

My brother, Mike, walking his friend Zach and Zach's son Zinn.
Song – *Coffee* by Sylvan Esso

Babycage (November 2021) not on Graphic Sky's web page

I was trying to voice my anger at being neglected and at the expectation that a baby is supposed to entertain itself. It is as though someone said, "We will take you to the park, but you have to stay in your cage, so that we don't have to watch you or play with you." You will be safe in the cage, out of harm's way, and the risk of experiencing life.

Burning Man (June 2020)

In 2010, I went to Burning Man, following a mid-life crisis. That year, I had dropped out of high school, left the church I had been raised in, and my parents divorced. Burning Man was a total shock to my system, so much so that I cried the first day and begged to go home. After I settled in, I saw a different world than the one I was born into. That week represented a birth into a new life, one full of self-expression and possibilities. This experience changed my life.

Call Me What You Need To (March 2024)

My final self-portrait. The canvas is 4x6 foot and I painted it sideways, so I could reach all of the canvas. On permanent display at Santa Fe Community College.

Crowsfeet (March 2024)

Before I am reincarnated as a human again, I want to be a bird.
Song - *Take What U Need* by New Body Electric

Erie (January 2023)

In early January 2023, I had a dream that I had died and my only regrets were my unfinished paintings. This was one of those paintings.

Family Dynamics (October 2021)

This painting explores generational trauma and how things are passed down. To understand why my mom raised me the way she did, I looked to my grandmother. In trying to understand my grandmother, I looked to my great-grandmother. In this painting, I was trying to find who to blame, and I realized that there is no one. I can't fully know someone's story. You can't know what you don't know. Everyone deals with life based on how they were raised, and their own life experiences. Generational patterns are inevitably passed on.

Foot (June 2018)

In school they have us learn to paint with oil paint, because "real artists paint with oil." But painting with oil slowed me down and was out of alignment with my internal urgency to create art. So, halfway through the 2018 summer semester, I bought some acrylic paint. This was the first painting with those paints, and it just flowed and made sense to me. I didn't realize my friend Eric was watching me paint, but about 30 minutes in he said, "Stop, you are done," and I thought, "Oh yeah, I am done." This was my first painting that I loved, which turned out to be a deterrent for a couple of years, as I was always trying to recreate that magic and increasingly afraid that I never would. I slowed down with painting after that and did not paint much between 2018 and early 2020, but this was the start of my acrylic journey.

How Others See Me (July 2021)

This is about sexuality and a personal exercise in being messy and keeping things really loose and undefined. I am a little baby doll in a world of sexy mannequin legs. People can't see me because I am so small, but if they did see me, I would look like a baby.

I Forgot What It Felt Like To Walk (July 2021)

Me on one of our family's annual rafting trips.

I'll Meet You There (April 2024)

Also known as "Delusional Optimism". This is about running and jumping and trusting.

Intimacy (October 2021)

This is two mimes practicing the display of intimacy without actually touching.

Kaleidoskope (January 2024)

My mom, Sue, and her husband, Ken, walking the beach in Hawaii, surrounded by their sea creature friends from scuba trips. This was a 10-year anniversary gift to them.

Legs (December 2020)

My legs in bed do what they are supposed to. Sometimes, I don't want to get out of bed. When I am in bed, I can forget that I have a disability. Even in my dreams, I am walking. In this "bed world" I am untouched by Friedreich's Ataxia. Out of bed, I have to face the challenges of these legs.

Like Water Off the Back of a Sitting Duck (May 2022)

There are at least three overlapping themes in this painting: vulnerability, disenchantment with the Mormon church, and patriarchy. As babies, we are sitting ducks, vulnerable, unprotected, and at the mercy of our parents' beliefs. Growing up in the Mormon church, I wasn't alone, but I wasn't

seen. At 16, I received a patriarchal blessing, which is a kind of conditional fortune telling. If I conformed, then I would be blessed. But, for women, the patriarchal blessing is focused on the role of motherhood. I didn't want to have children and felt there was no acceptable role for me. Women are expected to blend in and not take up much space. In my patriarchal blessing it was told that Satan's temptations would roll off me like water off the back of duck. I redefined that idiom to mean that the church's hold had rolled off me like water off the back of a duck.

Love's Fool (February 2024)

This painting is about reincarnation, and what I want in my next human life. I want to be a dancer and enjoy a really physical life. I want to fall in love, and be a fool for love.

Song - *Open* by Rhye

Men Make Me Uncomfortable (June 2021)

The title says enough.

Pastel Shorty (July 2023)

My brother's friend's dog. I had previously done a painting of Shorty for Ben, and then chose to paint one for myself in more pastel colors and looser.

Remind Me Of (April 2024)

My dad, Joe, and I, at the entrance into Burning Man.

Santa Fe Dream (November 2020)

A dream I had – minus the ham sandwich 🍔. I've debated whether it's finished or not, which usually means it is ... unless it isn't.

Self Portrait (May 2018)

This is my first self-portrait in color. It's done with oil pastel.

Sitting on a Dock (February 2022) not on Graphic Sky's web page

This painting is a meditation about going someplace, to be alone and still.

Skeleton in a Wig (June 2020)

Spring of 2020 was going to be my last semester at school. It was too much work for me to drive there, set up, paint, clean up and drive back home. I cried nearly every day, out of exhaustion. But in March, classes went online, and I had to learn to paint at home which I had never done. Because I had nothing else going on and could leave my set-up out, I kept taking painting classes online and spent most days painting all day. I still didn't think I would get good at it, but I enjoyed doing it. The prompt for this painting was to create a self-portrait without depicting yourself. This painting reflects feeling stuck in my body. The skeleton is confined to the floor and is trying to peer up to look out the window to see the world passing by.

So Late So Soon (March 2022)

My eldest brother, Aaron, had the same neurological disease I do, Friedreich's Ataxia. This portrait is of me as a child at age 5, sitting on Aaron's lap, as he sits in his wheelchair, his legs now my legs. The painting represents a loss of innocence. When I was five, I started taking the same

supplements that my brother, Aaron, was taking. No one else in the family was taking those medicines and I therefore knew that I would go through what Aaron was going through. I avoided spending time with Aaron, looking back I can see the reason for that, I wasn't ready to face my future. The painting also explores my past and future, converging. On the top right corner is my childhood home, where the possibilities for one's life are boundless. On the lower section of the painting, is my brother's home, where he died at age 33. I had the option to live there after he died. I'm certain that if I had accepted, I would have died there too, after living a small unassuming life. Instead, I traveled alone around the US, while I was still physically able, living in different states. Now, I'm at a point in my disability where I don't have many options, or much time left. Most of my life is behind me and I finally understand my brother's affinity for this quote by Dr. Seuss:

“How did it get so late so soon?
It's night before it's afternoon.
December is here before it's June.
My goodness how the time has flown.
How did it get so late so soon?”

Stay Wild (January 2024)

I painted this as a gift for my physical therapists.

S'trueberries (April 2022)

This is a personal painting about a moment my brother, Mike and I, shared.

Subconscious (October 2023) not on Graphic Sky's web page

This painting is based on a dream that I had of plants growing out of the roof of my mouth.

Song – *Could I Be* by Sylvan Esso

Sunbeam (November 2022)

This painting is a continuation of “Like Water Off the Back of a Sitting Duck” in exploring my resentment toward the Mormon church for having taken the best physical years of my life. I did not begin to feel the physical effects of Friedreich's Ataxia until I was 16, and had left the Mormon church shortly after that. The toddler in the water is me before I feel like I was claimed by the church. I recognize her as my true essence. The colors represent my playful world and how I felt before my wings were clipped. The church is represented by the LDS Salt Lake City Temple, looming and threatening to encroach upon my world. Later in the painting process, I could see an alligator forming in the land, and I leaned into that. I realized that the alligator was protecting me from the church and wanted to keep me safe. The meaning of the painting was transformed as it came forth: from me resenting the church, to reclaiming my childhood. I repainted my history.

Swollen (February 2021)

This is me expressing grief and giving a name to it.

The Earth Sighs (April 2024)

Before I am reincarnated as a human again, I want to be a bird.

Song - *On a Spanish Dune* by Liam Kazan

Tie Dye (August 2023)

I have attempted to paint my brother Aaron's portrait for years, and it never worked out. One morning, I woke up thinking about Aaron a lot. Crying as I looked at old photos of him, I felt his presence prompting me; "OK, now is the time." So, I pulled out a 3 x 4 foot canvas, because I knew it was monumental. I painted with so much urgency and excitement, to see and spend time with Aaron. I decided to paint with my left hand, I am not sure why. Thinking about it now, it kept me out of my own way. I finished in three weeks, which is pretty quick for a big painting. After I had finished, I knew this one piece was the reason I was a painter. Hey Aaron, I will see you soon.

Tiger Mantis (April 2023)

See what you want to see.

Ultramarine (February 2021)

Unseen (August 2020)

The prompt for this painting was "how others see me." My response was, "they don't." I often feel like when people look at me, all they see is my power wheelchair ... like I'm not a person, but a machine. At the same time, I feel naked, exposed, and vulnerable. Any stranger knows my most intimate challenges, something I wouldn't share if I had the choice. Even though I stand out, I feel invisible.

Vishnu's Basement (October 2023)

My brother, Aaron, rafting in the Grand Canyon.

Song - *Miles From Nowhere* by Cat Stevens

Water Tiger (February 2022)

The under-painting is a collaboration between me and my brother, Mike. We took turns painting, ten minutes each, back and forth. When we were finished, we talked about the process and what inspired us to do what we did. We both agreed we didn't like how it turned out, but we loved the experience. I was inspired to continue the collaboration by myself and refined and layered-on images based on things we had talked about. My goal was not to cover what we had done, but to enhance it. The figures are eight-year-old Mike holding me, after I was born.

What Once Was . . . Will Always Be (February 2024)

My brother Aaron and I feeding geese at a park.

Song - *What Once Was* by Hershey

Winged (October 2020)

At the time this was painted, I was propelled by anger at my body falling apart, a side of myself that I don't share with others. This is the only time I can remember being overcome with anger as I painted.

Yellow Trees (August 2021)

This was my first painting that was just about gratitude. My dad, Joe, in the mountains of Santa Fe.