



AL KITTEL

## About the Author

Allison Sue Kittel, known in the art community as Al, and as Allie to her friends and family, was the youngest of Joe and Sue Kittel’s four children. She arrived on January 28, 1992 joining her older brothers, Aaron and Mike, and sister, Jen. At age 5, Allie was diagnosed with Friedreich’s Ataxia (FA). Friedreich’s Ataxia is a rare recessive neurological disorder for which there is no treatment or cure. Her older brother Aaron, 15 years her senior, also had FA. As a child, Allie witnessed the slow, progressive nature of the disease, and its impact on Aaron’s life. Aaron died at age 33 when Allie was 18.



~ Allie holding the first proof of her book a few days before she died. ~

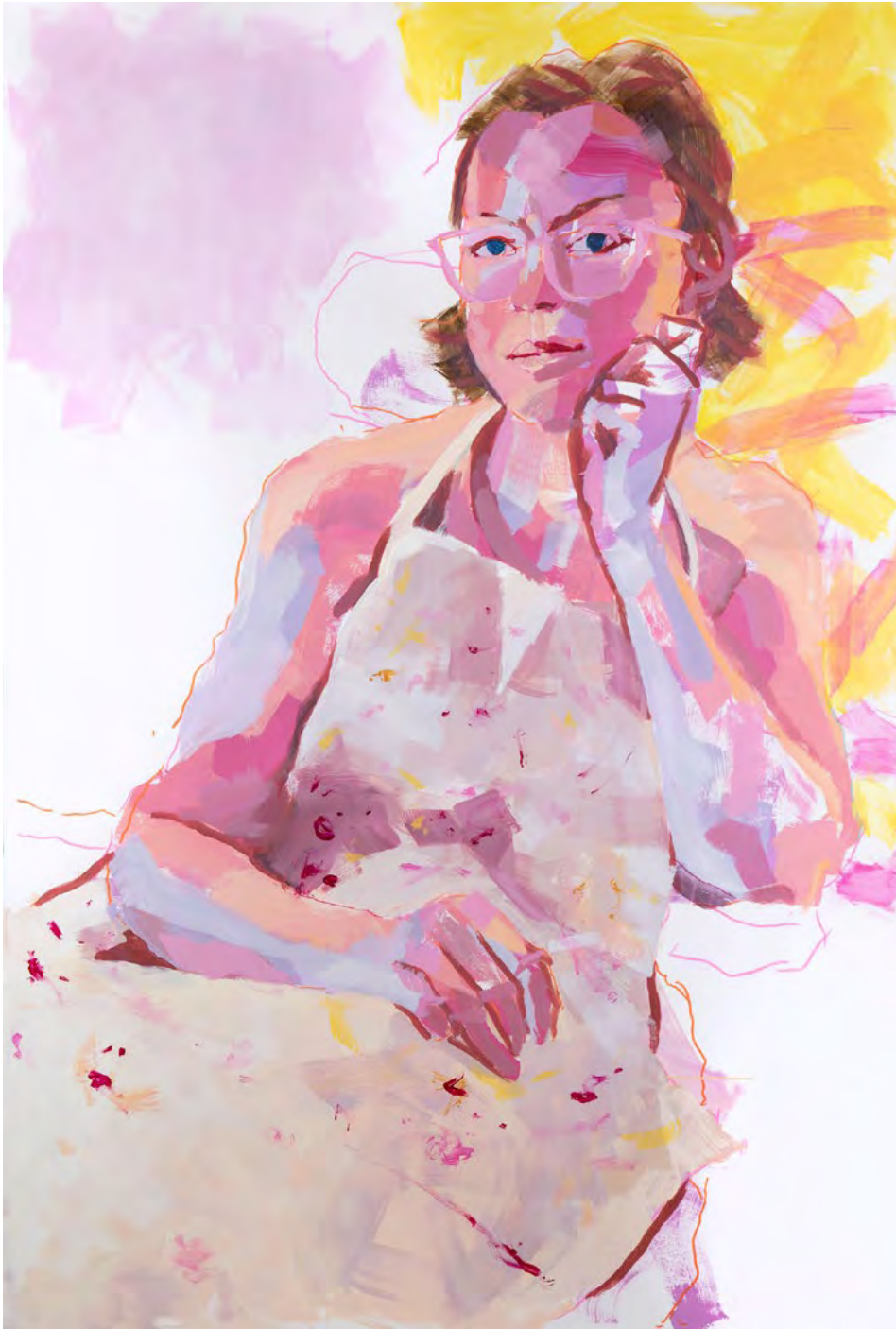
Although she was experiencing the physical effects of FA, Allie spent the fall semester of her senior year as an exchange student in Germany. When she returned, she left high school and moved into a spiritual community where her father was also living. During the next four years, Allie traveled on her own, in a wheelchair accessible van, living in Colorado, California, and Oregon until she finally settled in Santa Fe, in 2014.

While Allie’s talent was evident at a very early age, it wasn’t until she arrived in Santa Fe that she discovered a deep sense of purpose in painting. In 2016, Allie enrolled in “Autobiography,” a painting and drawing class at the Santa Fe Community College. Over the course of the next eight years Allie painted her life story, creating a direct, poetic, and coherent description of her life with FA. As she neared the end of her life, Allie had two goals – to have an exhibition of her artwork and to complete this

book. Her art show, Cocoon, opened on May 9, 2024 at Santa Fe Community College and nearly all of her work was sold. It was important to Allie that her story was told both through her paintings and in her own words. All of the artwork in this book are Al Kittel originals and the text, with two exceptions, was written by Allie. Although she worked on the book for nearly a year, she was unable to finish this biography and the acknowledgments before her death.

Allie died using Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD) on October 22, 2024.

For this book I am choosing to focus mainly on the positive, and lessons I have learned and gifts I have received from living with Friedreich's Ataxia. But I want to acknowledge that there have been many challenges living with FA, especially in my youth, but also still. It is important for me to leave space for other people who are experiencing challenges, to be able to accept where they are in the journey and not compare their path with mine.



'Call Me What You Need To', 48" x 72", acrylic and posca pens on canvas, March 2024.

I want to be remembered as unconventional and not fitting into a template. I want to be remembered as intuitive and going with the flow of life even if I am misunderstood by others.

If I didn't have FA, I don't think art would be the focus of my life. Having FA created a longing because there is so much of life that I can't participate in or that is hard for me. Painting allows me to have infinite, unrestricted new experiences, to transcend the limitations of my body. Art allows me to share my self and connect with others, to escape the isolation of being homebound. I have to imagine that I would have found art somehow because it feels so intrinsic to who I am. Maybe, if I didn't have FA, I wouldn't have felt as much urgency to really pursue painting. But, because I have known this life would end in my thirties, I have always felt that clock ticking.

I hope that my paintings and my words hold value even after I have passed.

A big part of me doesn't really care how I'm remembered, just hopes that I am.



Song: So We Won't Forget by Khruangbin



'Self Portrait', 14" x 17", oil pastel on watercolor paper, May 2018.

My dad and I always talk about how I chose to have FA before I started this life. Having FA is part of my soul's progression. I feel like I have become a nicer, more compassionate person. I am more patient because I have had to continuously learn to be patient with my body. The patience I learned also applies to other people in my life. This patience came from having to constantly adapt to my ongoing loss of abilities and get to a place of acceptance rather than anger.

In my soul's journey, I needed to have this physically challenging life experience. But as a human being, I still needed to find passion and meaning in this life. Expressing myself artistically gives my life meaning. Because my passion for painting was so intense when I discovered it in 2020, I believe that longing was left over from a past life. A life where I was unable to fully tap into creativity because I had other obligations – maybe a family, or I had to work to survive. I believe it was my soul's desire to be an artist and FA gave me the opportunity to fully express that desire. I didn't have to sell my art to support myself in this life. I just got to express myself.



'Tie Dye', 36" x 48", acrylic and posca pens on canvas, 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. I'll see you soon, Aaron.*



For information regarding this book and prints of Al Kittel's artwork, please contact

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