

The Garden: Graduate Exhibition

Emma Kokotek

**West Liberty University Graduate Exhibition
Master of Arts in Art Therapy and Counseling
Fall 2026**

Introduction

I am a mixed media artist based in central Illinois. I received my Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Arts - Painting from Illinois State University in 2018 and am currently in Cohort 5 pursuing a Master of Arts in Art Therapy and Counseling at West Liberty University, with the goal of becoming an art therapist and LCPC.



Artist Statement

Compilations of thoughts, emotions, and ideas race through my mind. Buzzing and unending. A comment that plays itself over and over in my head. Sticky thoughts. I work in bursts when they strike, often on several pieces at once. Repetitive markings or color palettes are weaved throughout the work. Some elements are abstracted or fragmented, whereas others are made clear. New narratives are formed. The work becomes an accumulation of headspace. It creates a visual journal, a record through time of my mental and emotional process. My creative expression functions as a tool of exploration, channeling what is deep within and bringing it out into the physical world.

My process is intuitive and in constant transformation. I embrace this fluidity. The exploration of material usage is essential to my practice, allowing me the freedom to create in whatever form feels right in the moment. The work often references the everyday, with the inclusion of textiles, personal journal entries, found objects, and domestic materials. Little moments collaged together form a collection. This collection becomes a garden in need of tending.

Layering and repurposing are essential to my practice. New thoughts overtaking old ones. No piece is ever truly complete as I will often reuse old art pieces in the creation of new ones. Continuation and accumulation. This method of making functions as a form of release, emotional processing, and regulation. It helps me develop a better understanding of myself and the world around me, giving me the opportunity to reconnect, reflect, and let go.

Professional Aspirations

My interest in art therapy is rooted in my own experience of utilizing the creative process as a therapeutic tool. I started to pay more attention to the emotional release and somatic experience of making art. As an artist, my focus shifted from product to process. Art making grants me the opportunity to regulate and reflect, a function I aspire to share with others.

The foundation of my future practice is centered around building a trauma-informed, client-centered approach. As a basis for therapy, I believe in building a strong therapeutic relationship with my client. I aim to consistently meet the client where they are at in their journey and tailor sessions around their individual needs.

I am particularly interested in working with female-identifying children, adolescents, and young adults. I aspire to create a safe, non-judgmental environment where they feel seen, heard, and supported to be themselves. By focusing on the strengths of the client and incorporating self-expression, I hope to help clients build resilience, develop regulation skills, and cultivate their ability to navigate the challenges of life. I am also interested in promoting growth and assisting a client in creating actionable steps that align with their future goals.

“In the fullness of time, a garden to nurture and protect. ”

-Rush, “The Garden”

Visual Journaling



Are You Ok?, 2026, mixed media collage, (an exploration of what feels safe and unsafe)

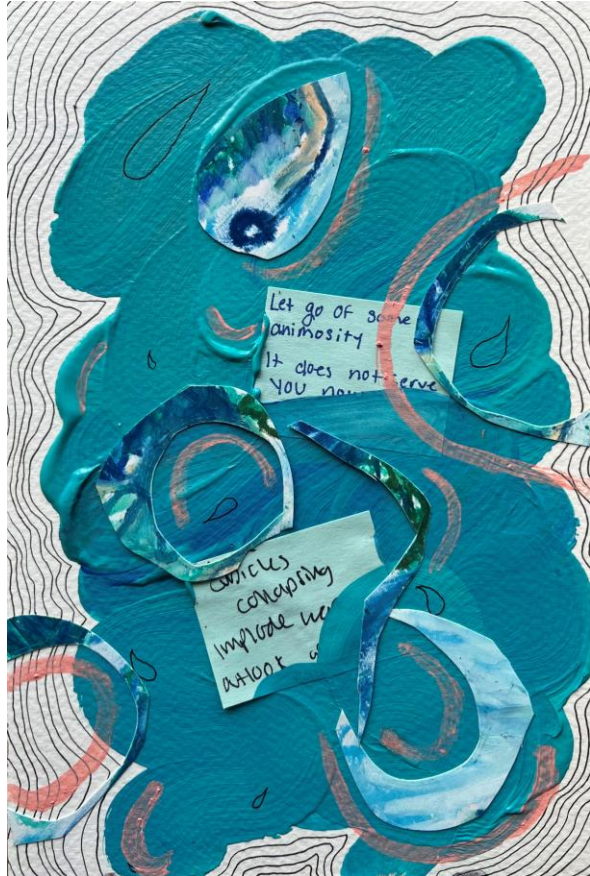


Who Do You Think You Are?, 2026, mixed media collage, (an exploration of strengths)



You, 2026, mixed media collage, (blackout poetry study)

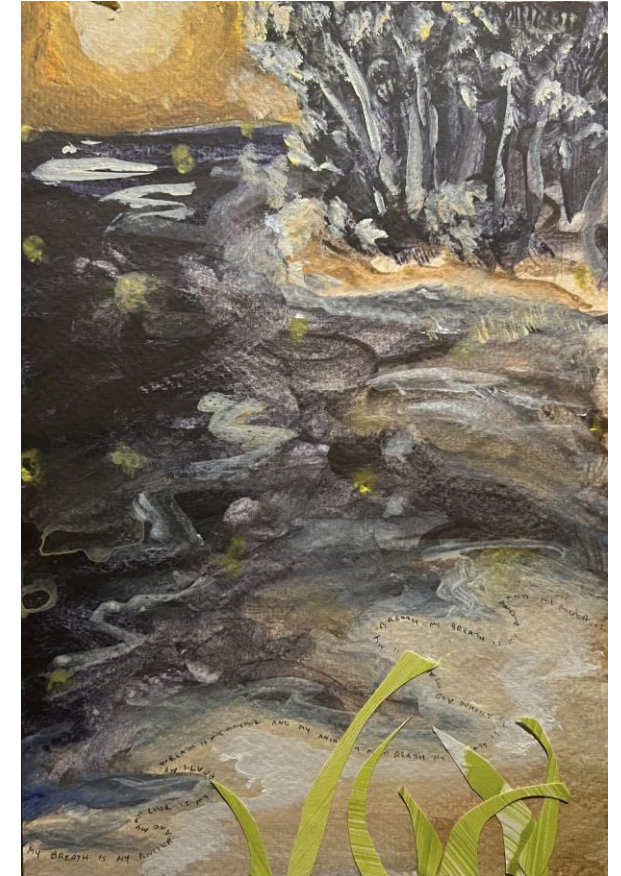
Visual Journaling



Just Let It Go, 2025, mixed media collage, (releasing what's held inside)



Buzzing, 2025, mixed media collage, (somatic observation of anxiety in my body)



My Breath is my Anchor and my Anchor is my Breath, 2025, mixed media collage, (safe place exploration)

Process & Play



Accumulate and Celebrate, 2026,
acrylic on canvas with collaged
paper and dried paint (allowing
myself to celebrate small wins)



Pressure, 2025, acrylic on wood
with collaged paper, (somatic
exploration of panic under
pressure)



On a Walk, 2025, dried leaves,
berries, and acrylic on paper (found
objects incorporation)

Observation & Release



Irreversible Action, 2026, yarn, tassels, pom poms, fabric butterflies, and fake moss on canvas, (reaction and reflection on the state of things)



The Endless Cycle, 2026, collage of photos and magazine clippings, (reflection on life and season cycles)



I'm Just Overreacting, Right?, 2025, ink, acrylic, and collaged textiles on canvas, (transformation of stream-of-consciousness rage writing)