

# Right Tibia MRI: Bone Marrow Edema and Knee Joint Effusion Paintings

Sarah Terry Pienkos

## Abstract

With this experiment, Oil paint was used on mylar, a thin clear plastic, to create a layered effect to mimic how MRIs are scanned, layered, and their resolution when seen. An unknown effect the mylar had was on the back/unpainted side gave a fuzzy, halo that mimicked the way MRI's actually look. The downside to oil painting on mylar was that the paint dried quickly when compared to painting on canvas or paper.

## Introduction

For the past few years, I have been dealing with an invisible, unknown, and undiagnosed disability that has affected my mobility, such as my joints, chronic pain, and many other symptoms. As a result of this, I have had many medical tests performed on me, like two blood tests, 2 sets of x-rays, and an MRI for now, not including the many back and forth doctors' visits. Then within the last year, I took an intro painting course for my major, where I started oil painting. Since then, I have incorporated oil painting into my practice, where I have started to document my disability. However, I don't document myself in a literal way, but rather through interpretive self-portraits. With this project, I wished to continue this practice.

## Purpose & Research Question

I wanted to continue to document my disability by creating what I would call abstract self-portraits. These self-portraits are of my medical tests and history, but never my body as you see it now. I wanted to develop my sense of self with these portraits as a way to cope with my body changing and no way of knowing the cause. With this and already painting other medical portraits, I wanted to continue but try to mimic how the MRI appears by painting on mylar and playing around with the medium, layering, and comparing how the image looks compared to the original scan.

## Subjects, Methods & Analysis

Using mylar cut into 8" x 8" squares, I used a grid behind the mylar to have a reference to make the sizes accurate to what they are in the images. Then digitally, I reversed the image, gridded it, then used that as reference to paint the images.

I used only phthalo blue and titanium white for the colors and mixed them to have midtones, as not only do I mostly work in blue but feel that blue can give many feelings. The blue also often gives people a sense of what these painting are as we often associate medical imaging with a hint of blue, like x-rays.

Then with the mylar, I painted on top of it like how I would with a canvas, not different techniques were used.

## Results

When painting these images, there were a few things that shocked me. The main two were how the mylar made the paint dry quicker than expected and how the mylar can make the paint fuzzy like how the image appears.

Mylar being a plastic would make me think that it wouldn't absorb the oil paint and make it wet for longer, therefore making the drying time much longer than compared to a canvas. However, the opposite was true, the mylar made the paint dry within 3-5 days. With canvas, the drying time usually can take 2 or more weeks for a thin coat.

Then the other shocking find was that when painting the first image, I turned it around to find that the back was fuzzy, blurred out some of the paint, and didn't show some of the layering that I had done. I enjoyed the look of the blurry back, so when doing the other images, I would continuously check the back to see my progress, what showed, and how much more needed to be done.

## Conclusions

Painting these images resulted in me exploring more of myself in relation to my disability and how my looks and feels. This project and future projects will continue and keep growing into something more. When researching and making, I couldn't find anyone else painting their medical imaging and using them as abstract self portraits. So, with this and the experimentation of material like mylar, I hope to continue to do so within the near future and educate people more on invisible disability's and show them in a more figurative way rather than literal.

## Directions for Future Research

For the future, I plan to continue to not only paint my MRI images but continue to paint my medical journey and abstract self-portraits as they come along. I will also continue to paint on mylar, as although you must work quickly to use the sheerness to its fullest effect, I liked the appearance and how easily you could blend the colors on the smooth surface. Although because of my disability, I could not get as many done as I wanted too with the joint pain in my hands.



Painted side of a MRI mylar image



Back/Fuzzy side of the MRI mylar image