

# Connecting Through the Arts



(The Lion by Ryan Smoluk)

# WHAT IS NORMAL ANYWAY?

by Ryan Smoluk

Quarantine, social distancing, the covid-19 virus has created a new normal for most of the world right now. Seems like some people are freaking out and losing their minds. For those who struggle with a disability or autism, isolation is all too familiar. This is our normal. One thing I know for sure, is that for most people, life will eventually get back to normal for them.

I know this seems a little weird but it's almost like the world is getting a touch of what it would feel like to have autism.

## APPLE iPad PROJECT

I felt highly honoured when Apple contacted me, one of the biggest companies in the world.

They had partnered with Art of Autism to celebrate Autism Acceptance month this April.

It was a great opportunity for artists to create artwork using digital Apple technology and new software. Apple supplied the artist with all the equipment.

I also learned that iPad art could possibly be on display at Oceanside Museum of Art in San Diego County.

I have never used an iPad; I am totally a fish out of water. I had serious self-doubts. I thought to myself how will I know what I can do, if I don't try!

I was so excited when all 3 of my pieces were chosen for the art show at the Oceanside Gallery.

My Mentor Diane Thorneycroft

As much as I really wanted to do this awesome project, I still didn't believe I could do it. I'm not ashamed to admit it, I felt apprehensive and fearful.



Diana and me at my show " Culture Shock"

I phoned Diana and told her all about this exciting project. She listened. She knew I had no technical knowledge of computers or software.

Diana said: "Ryan...Yes! You can do this. Take this as a challenge. What have you got to lose"?

She suggested I start quickly putting together some concepts so when the iPad arrives, I can hit the ground running. Her advice helped me to stop overthinking and start to focus on how I was going to pull this all together.

We all need people in our lives like Diana Thorneycroft who support and push us to do more and try new things.

Once I received my iPad package I quickly got to work. I knew there was a deadline and I had 4 weeks to produce something I would be happy with.

**The Lion**

I decided to stay with a familiar subject matter. I have always liked the image of a lion. It is such a strong regal animal. It represents inner strength.

I found this image calming to work on. I am pleased with the end results and I liked the vivid color of the software.

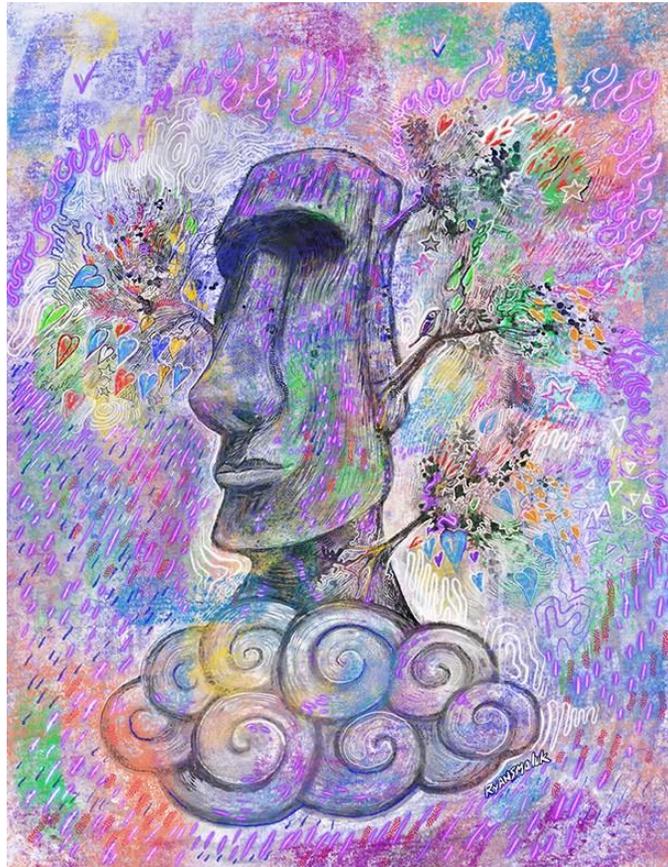


I have never created digital artwork like this before and I didn't know how to use the software. I feel that God gives up obstacles to overcome, its what we do with those challenges that define us.

I am so glad that I kept going and kept learning to use the iPad and the Apple Pencil. The more I played with the Pencil, the more excited I got!

If you use the Pencil lightly it draws thin lines and when you use more pressure the line becomes thicker. I liked the way you could zoom into certain sections and add more detail.

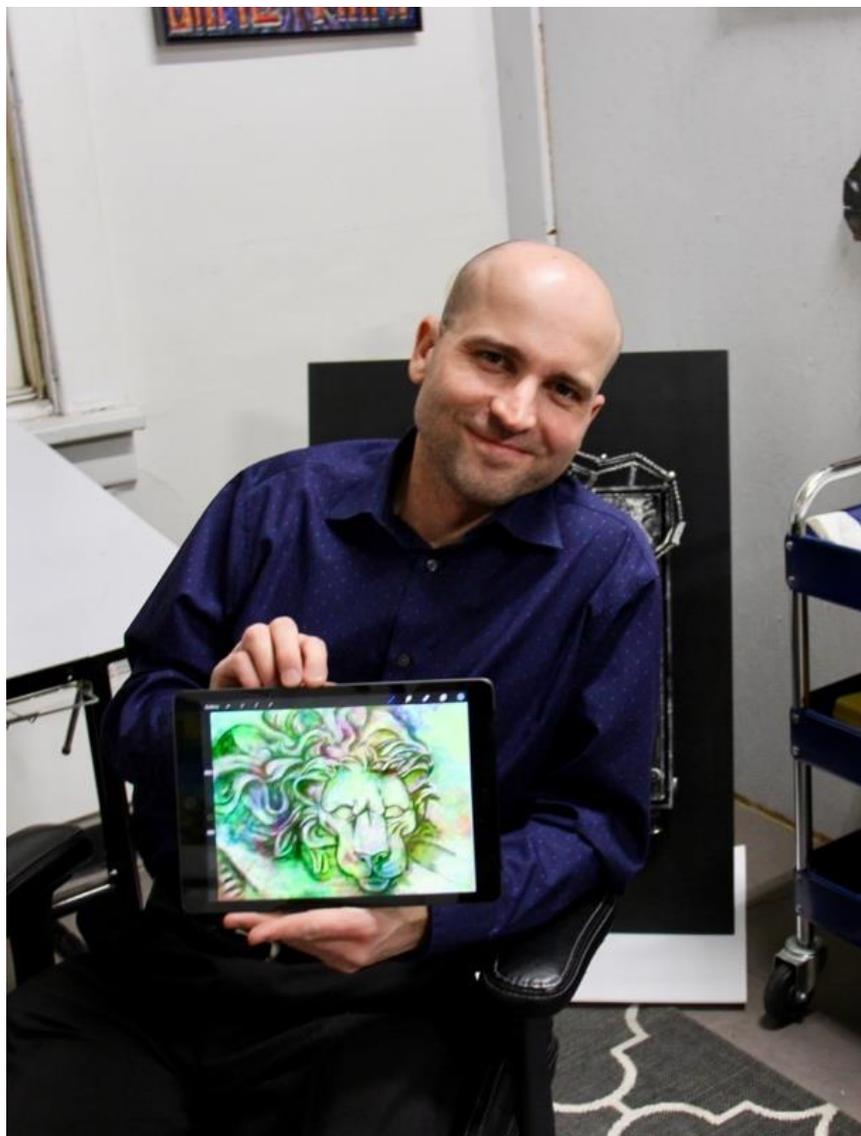
In this image of the Easter Island head you can really see how I was able to add lots of detail. And I really like working with lots of detail.



Head in the Clouds

The Easter Island head is another subject matter that I like to draw. It's just a fun piece to work on. Even though I was using a new medium it seemed less scary to use images that I like and am comfortable with.

Everything was going well again. I was feeling more secure, I was starting to feel healthier mentally and physically. The Apple project was going well! I had experimented and become more confident with the software. I was beginning to relax and enjoy the whole process.



Me in my art studio with my iPad

My friend Jenel Shaw came to visit me one evening in my art studio. She took this picture of me with my iPad. I met Jenel last summer when she started to work as the executive director for Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba ([aanm.ca](http://aanm.ca)). Jenel has become a friend and ally in the art world. I was happy to see her and show her my progress.

I was really glad she took this picture of me working on my iPad, little did I know things were about to get bad again.

## Broken iPad



Jet Mask by Ryan Smoluk

A few days after this picture was taken the unthinkable happened. I accidentally dropped my iPad and shattered the screen. I was devastated. I had no idea what I would do! I was worried sick. As this happened in early March, the COVID-19 pandemic closed all non-essentials businesses, including the apple store here in Manitoba Canada. I didn't know what to do.

My mom suggested that I contact Apple head office and let them know what happened, but I thought that if I didn't say anything the problem would go away. The problem unfortunately did not go away. I was constantly occupied with how irresponsible I had been.

I decided to bite the bullet and contact Apple myself. When I explained to Apple what had happened, they immediately told me not to worry. They said these things do happen and that they would send me a new replacement right away.

I was so shocked! I could not believe it! I never expected them to be so understanding and accommodating.

Lo and behold a few days later I received the replacement iPad. I was so happy that I had decided to write about it.

## Life Challenges

Life can be difficult sometimes and challenging, it is important to keep pushing yourself. Obstacles are put in our path so that we can learn and grow.

I am lucky to have so many strong people in my life that help me to overcome those barriers. They encourage me and help me to deal with my problems head on. This is especially important when you are feeling down and depressed and can't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

While the Apple project had ups and downs, I now feel more confident in myself and in my abilities. The work with my iPad has taught me a new skill which I can use in my artistic career.

I have also learnt through this process that it is important to persevere and keep trying, Even if you think you can't do it, you will never know until you try!

To learn more about Ryan visit [www.ryansmoluk.ca](http://www.ryansmoluk.ca)