The U.S. presidential election of 2016 has had a profound effect on my approach to making art. Before this, I was mainly exploring issues about mental health, childhood memories, and loneliness. I still focus on all of these, but the selection of Donald Trump as president installed in me a sense of urgency. I immediately sought to compare his supporters ideologies with those of this country's darker past to see if they align. Sexism, xenophobia, jingoism, and racism reignited in a population that never really let them go, and saw their chance to help “Make America Great Again.” Just as it seemed that we were slowly making inroads against these antagonists, from the election of the first black president to the consideration of the first woman, we quickly turned back onto a troubling path. I recently started on works that deal with underlying meanings of the phrase “Make America Great Again,” both subtle and not, and how it calls for us to re-embrace an earlier version of America that ironically didn't embrace all Americans.

I have achieved my degree late in life after many diversions and stumbles. Now, after rediscovering a passion for making art, I’m excited by the prospect of combining that knowledge with diverse mediums. What attracted me to Ruskin is its keen appreciation of contemporary art. My background is in the traditional foundations of classical art. I have notebooks filled with pages of life model, skeletal, and still life drawings. I've always loved the beautiful realistic paintings done by artists such as Frederic Edwin Church, and still, try to copy some of those techniques to this day. But when I look at the works of various contemporary artists, like Chris Ofili, Kara Walker, and William Kentridge, I'm captivated by how they can integrate topical issues and non-traditional mediums into their works. I want to create work that bridge a gap between my desire to paint and draw with contemporary subjects and mediums. The breadth of materials available to express oneself is astounding, and I would like to explore more options. Contemporary art is challenging, requiring an ample amount of research and thought, but that is what I enjoy.

My works consist of various drawings and paintings, some done with an iPad, others with pastel or paint, and combined with digital animation produced with Motion 5 software. The subjects I explore now and want to more fully vary, encompassing mental health, loneliness, and understanding events from the past. One event, in particular, shaped my interest: For three years I lived next door to a neighbor who suffered from severe mental illness. The struggles he endured were both disheartening and frightening to witness, yet it seemed that the help he needed so desperately was offered sporadically and at the most basic levels. I’ve decided to detail my experiences living next door to him in a series of drawings and animations, with recordings I made of individual incidents (just in case we required help from authorities). He was a very nice person, but there were many occasions where I felt more threatened by than friendly towards him. The drawings started out first as written evidence in case he hurt himself (or any of us neighbors), followed by audio recordings of outburst he would have that I could hear from within my apartment. I added drawings later in an attempt to convey the sense of anxiety, and guilt, that his outburst caused in me. The slippery slope to this is that I’m not sure of the legality of my recordings, even though they were done in my apartment, and are of what I heard coming from his place.

Since I am now able to “paint” with the iPad in places I usually couldn’t, like pubs and coffee shops, a second series focuses on a sense of loneliness that I found in doing this very activity. I am alone when I draw, and sometimes the loneliness is quite noticeable. But all around are flashing lights, music, and animated conversations happening. I also explore this with a series of animations, coupled with audio recordings on my iPhone of the ambiance of the surroundings. Despite these electric surroundings, the main character in the animations is lonely, solitary, dark, and vulnerable.

A third subject is very close to me. It is a series of posters and videos revolving around a fire I witnessed as a child. In these I explore how fascinated, I was with the smoke and light not understanding the grave consequences that others had suffered. To me, the sounds and sights were fun because I was protected from the harsh realities that had occurred. My siblings and my interest in the action all around us is in contrast with the characters in the background, who are sullenly watching the events unfold.

With all of these projects, I want to find ways of combining an older form of a medium with a new one. That may involve an oil painting done outdoors, scanned and brought into Photoshop, and lastly the components animated in Motion 5. Using recordings of everyday life, the hubbub of the city makes for a more organic animation, sometimes with a bit of narration added. I am still learning this craft and exploring ways to make it more useful, and with the resources available at the Ruskin School, I believe that I can attain that goal.