

Episode: *Author Interview: "Our Masks"*

Guest: Megan Hildebrandt, MFA

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

[Access the podcast.](#)

[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Megan Hildebrandt, an associate professor of practice in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas in Austin. She's here to discuss her animation, *Our Masks*, in the November 2024 issue of the Journal, [Peace in Health Care](#). Megan, thank you so much for being here. [music fades]

MEGAN HILDEBRANDT: Thank you for having me.

[00:00:39] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point of this piece?

HILDEBRANDT: It became really clear to me during the pandemic that while in each household we were sort of reinventing how we cared about each other, how we showed care for one another, and how we modeled care for our children. And so, in this piece, it's really me trying to kind of see at that point, the pandemic and the experience of COVID-19, through my daughter, who at that point was seven. And just it helped soften and I guess calm a lot of my own experience and my own understanding of the pandemic to just listen to her think through something as simple as which mask she was going to wear that day or the idea of a mask as a fashion element for her. And then at the end when she says she's just really looking forward to not having to think about basically protecting herself so carefully with masks, that was a real surprise to me because it showed that she was not just, she was not, in fact, just thinking of this as a fashion choice, right? She knew about the bigger social, political, ethical, medical complications that would go along with the idea that there's going to be a day where she doesn't have to think about wearing masks every day.

[00:02:13] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees who view this animation to take from it?

HILDEBRANDT: Mm. I think that it's really...it's really important to always think of your patients not in a bubble, right? That they don't just exist in this world isolated unto themselves. That every relationship in their family and their friends matters and affects how they think about their own health, right? And so, I think if there's one thing folks could take from this, it would be to try to slow down and imagine who is helping my patient, right—in this case, maybe it's me, maybe it's June—who is helping my patient

make the best health care choices for them. And in this case, it's like a really sort of sweet moment between a mother and child, but those relationships are key to us taking care of one another.

[00:03:18] HOFF: And our final question might be difficult with sort of a finished art piece, but if you had the time and space to explore anything else, what would that be?

HILDEBRANDT: Yeah. Well, I think it's tricky, right? Because like with all of my animations, I'm always just looking for something that can easily loop or that is repetitive and is small. But I think in this case it would be really nice to have a companion piece where she is like, now it's years later, right? And to show her thinking about something totally different when she is about to walk out the door. So, because I think there would be a really nice sort of bookend to that. I'm not sure what it would look like. So maybe for artists that's not a kind of hard question, because we're always thinking about what we could've done differently or what's the next one we would want to do. No, I think it would be really nice to do a piece that even physically looked similar or formally with my son. And he would just be probably wrestling me.

BOTH: [laugh]

HILDEBRANDT: Right? But I can think of, yeah, I can think of a lot of ways. Because I do like the idea of tracking the development of my family and tracking time because even though this is a sort of intimate piece that seems to just be about me and my kid, it is really about all of us and our people, right? And so, I love the idea of an addendum to it that tracks not just the communal healing from COVID-19, but just the way we've all grown as humans since. [theme music returns]

[00:04:53] HOFF: Mmhmm. Well, maybe we'll see that from you in an upcoming issue, and if so, we'll be happy to have you back on the podcast. But for now, thank you so much for your time and for your contribution to this month's issue.

HILDEBRANDT: Oh, thank you, Tim. It was a pleasure.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.