

Episode: *Author Interview: “Muscle Memory as Embodied Record Keeping”*

Guest: Jessica Delli Carpini

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[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 Jessica Delli Carpini, an interdisciplinary artist currently based in Chicago, Illinois. She's here to discuss her 3D light sculpture, *40.20*, in the June 2025 issue of the Journal, [Embodiment in Art Practice](#). Jessica, it's so good to talk to you. [music fades]

JESSICA DELLI CARPINI: Yeah. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:00:39] HOFF: To begin with, can you briefly visually describe your piece and tell our listeners what they should be looking at closely in your artwork?

DELLI CARPINI: My sculpture is a neon sculpture. It is a series of ten squares, and it is filled with krypton gas mounted on a gray painted panel. So I would say that when you're looking at art, there's no right way to look at art. And one of the first questions that I like to ask viewers is how the piece makes you feel. So do you like it? Do you not like it? Are you confused by it? I think those are all valid reactions when observing art.

And so, the gas that I use to fill my sculpture is called krypton, and it's an interesting gas compared to the other noble gases because it's not as bright as the others. And then it also has this interesting movement to it, where the light looks like it's almost breaking up into little beads, and the electric current running through it looks like it's almost wavering back and forth at some points. And you get this sort of optical illusion when all of the squares line up, and you're looking at this sort of tunnel of light. So, that's something I would invite viewers to look at more closely.

[00:01:53] HOFF: So, what is a key point that you are trying to investigate in your artwork about embodiment and ethics in your own creative processes?

DELLI CARPINI: So a key point I'm investigating about embodiment is muscle memory. When I view art, one of my favorite questions to ask myself is, how do you think they made that? And especially in the contemporary art era, which we're in, I feel like thinking about the steps an artist took to create a piece is really important to its meaning. So with my piece, *40.20*, muscle memory was a huge idea I was thinking about when I was creating it, because the actual process of neon bending is really physically demanding. And so, when I was first learning how to glass bend, it was kind

of a mess. Like, sometimes the glass would get too hot too fast, and it would crack, or sometimes it would just explode and shatter. Or sometimes you would just accidentally touch the hot glass and burn yourself. It was a very intense process to go through. And we're also just working in the basement of my school with glass shards everywhere. So, you just leave the studio covered in glass, sweating, very physically exhausting overall. So when it came time to actually design a piece, I knew I wanted to highlight this sort of formed muscle memory where the design itself appears so simple, like just a bunch of squares, but it actually is holding so much history through the process. And it's so technically hard to achieve since neon isn't exactly a forgiving medium and achieving accuracy's very difficult. And especially since a lot of neon art is viewed as two-dimensional signage, achieving this accuracy in three dimensions, because I went a more sculptural route, was a very technical challenge. But that was something that I was thinking about with this piece, really the record of the body, which is muscle memory.

[00:03:57] HOFF: And finally, what do you think might be particularly important for health professions students and trainees to consider about your work?

DELLI CARPINI: I'm sure health professionals and students know all about how amazing the body is and how it can do all sorts of things. But just remembering that we are more than just our minds, and little repeated behaviors over time can have a really powerful impact. And I think from an art perspective, considering that there is more than meets the eye, especially in current times, a lot of art is really process-heavy, and honestly, very physically taxing on the body. And so, that's something to keep in mind and can help open up a new appreciation of art, where you're really thinking about how involved artists' bodies are in their practices and just how artists really pour their whole selves into their works. [theme music returns]

[00:04:49] HOFF: Jessica, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

DELLI CARPINI: Thank you so much for having me.

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*.