

Episode: *Author Interview: “Painting Through Macular Degeneration”*

Guest: Michael Zitser

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 Michael Zitser, a graduate from California State University, Los Angeles, with a bachelor of science degree in biochemistry and a minor in art. He’s here to discuss his painting, *A Portrait of Age-Related Macular Degeneration*, in the June 2025 issue of the Journal, [Embodiment in Art Practice](#). Michael, thank you so much for being here.

MICHAEL ZITSER: Thank you for having me.

[00:00:46] HOFF: To begin with, can you visually describe your piece and tell our listeners what they should be looking at closely in this painting?

ZITSER: Yeah. So, my painting is about the condition age-related macular degeneration. So, as people grow older, a lot of them experience vision loss. And so, what my painting focuses on is, how does that vision loss impact artists who are using vision as their primary mode of creative expression, and very often for their careers and livelihood? And the painting itself is an acrylic painting where it’s an artist who is painting outdoors in, as we call it, a plein air, in art terms. And what’s happening is there’s a pixelated effect over the artist himself and the painting and canvas that he’s drawing on, making you consider how vision loss not only affects the artworks that these artists create, but how they view themselves and their identity.

[00:02:10] HOFF: You’ve touched on it a bit already in this first response, but what’s a key point that you’re trying to investigate in your artwork about embodiment and ethics in your creative processes?

ZITSER: Yeah. Well, I’ll say at the core of this painting, it’s about dignity and adaptation. I think it challenges the idea that losing vision means losing creativity. And it argues that instead, artistic expression can evolve alongside physical changes. And I think there’s this ethical responsibility, not just for doctors, but for society as a whole, to support people as they navigate these changes. And I think this could be approached through better accessibility, emotional support, or just recognizing that art is still possible in new ways. And then the key takeaway is that losing one’s ability doesn’t mean losing identity.

[00:03:13] HOFF: And so, what do you think is particularly important for health professions students and trainees to be taking from this piece?

ZITSER: I'll say for future health care professionals, the biggest lesson here is that treating a condition like age-related macular degeneration isn't just about eyesight, it's about the person. And vision loss doesn't just affect daily functioning. It shakes up someone's sense of self, purpose, and joy. And so, when working with patients, I think it's important to think beyond the clinical aspects and consider the emotional and psychological impact of this condition and then many other conditions. And so, I think an important question to ask in general is, how can you help someone continue doing what they love, even if it looks a little different? [theme music returns] And I think that's where true patient-centered care comes in.

[00:04:14] HOFF: Michael, thank you so much for your time on the podcast, and thank you for your contribution to the Journal this month.

ZITSER: Yes, thank you 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](http://journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.