

From visual to visionary



MS has inspired me to redefine my art.

by Michelle Droll



Presto! — polystyrene packaging foam, netting, neoprene, fishing line

Summers have always been miserable for me with fatigue and tingling pain in my legs. I was always told that these symptoms were due to allergies ever since I was a teenager. When I woke up blind in one eye in the summer of 2005 when I was 35, I was alarmed and scared. I was diagnosed with [optic neuritis](#) through an MRI. My vision partially returned over time. After two years and many tests, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2007.

A flare-up of optic neuritis five years later caused permanent damage to my other eye, leaving me with good peripheral vision but only fuzzy gray spots in the middle of my visual field in both eyes. I was now legally blind. With my new normal of “low vision,” my inability to drive has made the greatest impact on my independence.

At times, I thought an MS diagnosis was the finish line for an obstacle course with limits and boundaries, but now I know that each day is a new starting point in a race to a horizon line that’s as far away as my determination can make it. I may not know what hurdles I’ll encounter but know that I will leap over them when I can and crawl under them when I can’t. I hope to inspire others to do the same.



Olé! — spray foam insulation, tinted silicone, acrylic paint

I’m a visual artist. My vision loss is still frustrating and discouraging at times, as I cannot create the detailed and precise images that I used to make, but I have found ways to keep going with my artwork and have found art to be my greatest coping mechanism for the stresses of life. I have gone from visual to visionary, redefining what I think “art” should look like.

I combine bubble wrap, packaging foam, burlap, basket reed and plastic lids with paint and tinted silicone to create vividly colored compositions. I make do with what I have around the house and often take the pieces apart to reuse the materials to make new pieces. I take a photo of each piece of artwork to collect a memory.

I often title the compositions using rhymes or puns to add humor.

The process of making is more important to me than the product, as it is the experience of living moment to moment that helps me manage everyday anxieties. I know that bad days will happen, but I can usually cheer myself up with some creativity.

See more of [Michelle Droll’s artwork](#).