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## Artists with mood disorders get a lift with exhibition

**JOANNE SHUTTLEWORTH**

GUELPH — Fractured. Isolated. Broken. Disjointed.

These are words Micheal Yee used to describe his favourite artistic style, cubism, but they also aptly describe the way Yee feels when he's overcome with depression.

"I don't know what came first, the chronic pain or the depression" said the 31-year-old Guelph man, whose piece *Disintegration* is part of the Touched by Fire show and sale at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto Nov. 26. The show features artists who suffer from mood disorders. It's sanctioned by Mood Disorders Association of Ontario.

"I've felt depressed for a long time, but I've felt pain for a long time too. After a while it all blends together into one big hurt," Yee said.

He started to experience depression and migraine headaches as a teen. The pain became widespread and fuelled his depression and he found friends didn't understand. He was seen as weak and consequently suffered in silence for years.

But four years ago he began working with Dr. Gordon Ko, a pain specialist at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto. A Jungian psychoanalyst has also helped him handle his depression.

A varied approach, that includes yoga, mindfulness, supplements and therapy has had some success. Today he feels more hopeful and optimistic about his future, he said.

And creative expression through art has helped him through.

"My hope is that through our stories and our art we can spread the message that depression and other mood disorders are not signs of weakness, which is an idea that many people in our society have the tendency to embrace," he said.

Two other Guelph artists who also suffer mood disorders have also been selected for the Toronto show. Jay Lefler has two pieces and Peter Howlett has one.

"It's very impressive that Guelph has three artists in the show," said Judith Rosenberg, founder and director of Spark of Brilliance, a local organization dedicated to healing through the arts. "Their work is very different, but very inspiring."

All three artists have connections to the local organization, she said. Lefler is her son and inspired her founding of the organization. Howlett and Yee have been creative mentors with the program and have led workshops.

"Michael is quite an intellectual actually. He is quite a writer and storyteller too. He's come a long way and it's all been because of his own desire. He has a tremendous work ethic," Rosenberg said.

Touched by Fire was started by a Toronto couple whose daughter, an artist, committed suicide. Rebecca Burghardt suffered from severe bipolar disorder and took her own life in 2005.

Her parents worked with the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario to start the art show and sale. An online gallery is maintained at [www.touchedbyfire.ca](http://www.touchedbyfire.ca) and once a year work is selected for the show.

"It's such a great thing for the artists to be exhibited this way," Rosenberg said. "It's such a lift for them. I'm looking forward to celebrating."

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