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STUDIO ART | FALL 2021

## Blue Pajama Series

By Rachel Wyman



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*“Modern urban life is stressful, alienating and chaotic, and what it requires of people can literally be crazy-making. I see this in extremis in my workplace—an urban public hospital psychiatric unit—although one witnesses variations on mental illness and malaise everywhere. Whether overt or subtle, people are bound to be mad and/or sad at some time, just as we are bound to fall ill occasionally. We are all susceptible to disease and disorder, bizarre ideas and irrational behavior. Yet we usually don't regard traversing the city with the same trepidation as setting foot in a psych ward. Acute mental illness, particularly psychosis, is frighteningly otherworldly in a way that even the most stigmatized bodily diseases are not. Those deep in the throes of it appear alien to those who aren't; they inhabit unsharable realities. The psychiatric ward further alienates the mentally ill; here the most ostensibly "alien" among us are kept until fit to rejoin our usual urban isolation.”*

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*“Hospitalization alienates the mentally ill not only from the world, but also from their own selves. Any person admitted to psych transforms in to a Patient by first surrendering worldly identity in the form of personal clothing and possessions. Patients are given socks and a one-size-fits-all pajama "uniform" made of thin, baby blue fabric; they must don this material representation of their invisible illness for at least the first 24 hours of their hospitalization. There’s a practical reason for this: Everyone is considered a flight risk upon entering the hospital, since it is rare people voluntarily admit themselves. Should someone manage to elope, the blue pajamas give away that person as Patient.”*

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*“Eventually, people are discharged. Their clothing is returned, and they reenter the world where they can no longer be readily identified as Patients. Having spent time inside the psych unit, I now wonder how many strangers I pass on the street are former or future patients. I imagine these strangers, as well as friends, family members and myself, wearing the blue pajamas. Given our susceptibility to stress and illness, given the fragility of health and psychological wellbeing, who “gets” to wear the blue pajamas?”*

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**Rachel Wyman is a multidisciplinary artist and dance/movement therapist at a public hospital in New York City. Her work often concerns the body and “bodyfulness” (as opposed to “mindfulness”), as well as the relationship between visibly bodied external identity and invisibly embodied sense-of-self. She was born and raised in Walla Walla, Washington. [daisybuckwheat.com](http://daisybuckwheat.com)**

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