



OAC
Community

Perspectives

Obesity, Art, and Remembering My Brother

by Austin James

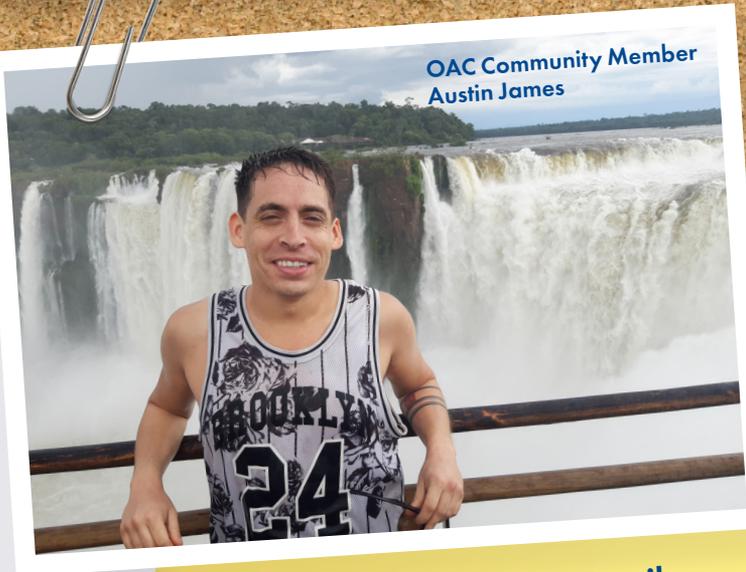
I work as a multidisciplinary artist in Chicago, IL. The main mediums I work with are full-scale art installations and photography. I also own a boutique art gallery that specializes in a unique collection of contemporary art. My gallery and art studio are both based in the prestigious Zhou B Art Center in Chicago's South Side – a multi-story arts incubator with sister sites in Beijing and Kansas City.

Outside of art, I'm an avid traveler and I work in real estate in Chicago. I've lived in the Chicagoland area for most of my life, but I've also lived in Argentina, South Korea and China. I think these experiences give me a unique perspective on culture and the disease of obesity in the U.S.

Honoring My Brother in My Art

In September 2018, I created a full-scale art installation in memory of my late brother Justin, whose life and health were affected by serious obesity, and whose birthday was approaching. It goes without saying that this was a very emotional piece for my family, but I find that art helps me express myself in a way that truly liberates my thoughts.

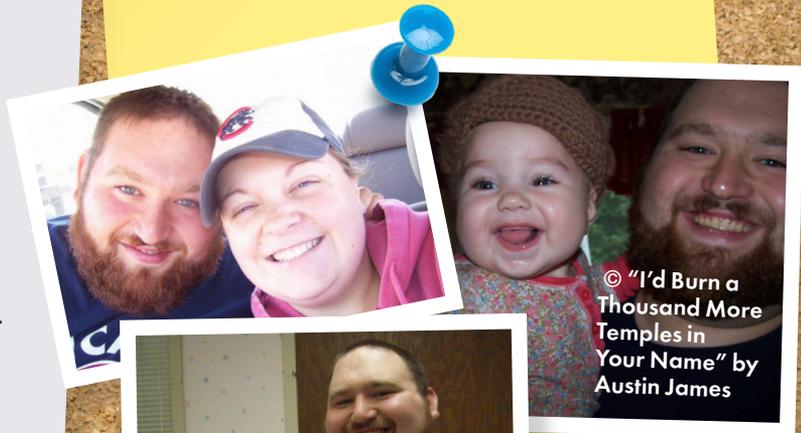
After working through the necessary steps to put together this art installation, I found that I was able to make peace with his absence and recognize how obesity has affected me personally. I loved my brother—who struggled deeply with obesity—more than words can ever describe, and a loss like this is something I hope no one ever has to endure. Especially, in part, as it is a disease we can try to fight.



OAC Community Member
Austin James

Obesity's Impact on My Family

We grew up in Porter, Indiana, a suburban town about an hour from Chicago. In 2009, at age 27, Justin passed away from pneumonia—although obesity had also compromised his health. I was 22 at the time. My brother was married with two beautiful young children and lived close to our family home.



© "I'd Burn a Thousand More Temples in Your Name" by Austin James

“ I was inspired to make an art installation not only to express my emotions, but also to educate others about the impact obesity can have. ”

At the time Justin fell very ill, I was living in South Korea teaching English. I was unable to be there for him at the hospital, but I video-called my mother every day for updates. I remember my father calling me at 3:00 a.m. one morning with the news of his passing. This perspective—one gained from thousands of miles away from home during a tragedy—is profound. The sense of mourning I experienced was endless, and the loss completely re-shaped my life, habits and outlook on everything.

It was incredible that after almost a decade later, I was still carrying emotional strife. Every year, each new season felt like a cyclical reminder of my brother. Leaves changing reminded me of childhood memories. The way the wind blew reminded me of how he used to sing. I was inspired to make an art installation not only to express my emotions, but also to educate others about the impact obesity can have.

Sharing the OAC in My Art Installation

I recently stumbled across the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) when researching non-profit organizations to leverage for my art installation, which I carefully titled, “I’d Burn a Thousand More Temples in Your Name.” It was important to me that people not only had an emotional reaction to my artwork, but could also take away unbiased, science-based information about obesity if they were in any way affected by it.

My art installation was a collage of family photographs and artifacts from my brother’s life, paired with science-based data on obesity as a pervasive disease not only in Chicago, but across the globe. More than 93 million Americans alone are affected by it.



© “I’d Burn a Thousand More Temples in Your Name” by Austin James

LEARN, CONNECT, **ENGAGE**

We know that your health journey can be overwhelming at times and we want to be there for you. We recognize the power of support through on-going weight and health education, connecting with others who have similar concerns and ultimately, joining together to take action for ourselves and one another.

**LET US SUPPORT YOU
ON YOUR HEALTH JOURNEY AND
BECOME A MEMBER
OF THE OAC COMMUNITY TODAY
AT NO COST!**

Get access to valuable education and community-exclusive content and support:

Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
And Much More

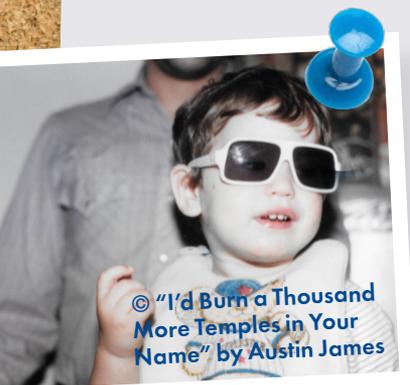


JOIN TODAY:
Go to [ObesityAction.org/Join](https://www.ObesityAction.org/Join)

“My art installation was a collage of family photographs and artifacts from my brother’s life, paired with science-based data on obesity as a pervasive disease not only in Chicago, but across the globe.”

Visitors to my installation were able to see a timeline of moments in my brother’s life, as well as childhood art projects and collected items. For example, one time he hid my iPod because I failed to clean up my hair after trying to cut it myself. He left me a note, and my sister-in-law framed it and gave it to me as a gift years later. Brotherhood is always comical.

I was beyond excited to share my brother’s story at the prominent Zhou B Art Center. The piece was incredibly emotional and caused many people to stop and take notice. It was a dedication to the loss, sorrow and overwhelming feelings I endured in the wake of my brother’s passing while in my studio apartment thousands of miles away in South Korea. It was incredible to have strangers view my brother’s life, portrayed by tangible memories of love and the life he lived.



In addition to his personal keepsakes, I created an interactive portion to my installation which included educational resources provided by the OAC. I also displayed an iPad with the current State of Obesity report for people to scroll through. My goal was to give people a jarring understanding of the emotional loss that personifies grief and open their eyes to the impact that obesity can have on someone’s precious life.

How I’ve Come to Understand Obesity

Obesity is a disease that exists almost subconsciously in our society and day-to-day life. You can see it in the way environment shapes our health. You can see it in a loved one who has difficulty flying in airline seats, breathing while walking up the stairs or finding energy in the afternoon.

But perhaps even more so, symptoms of obesity are so varied that many people don’t understand it is the root cause of their related conditions. These can include sleep apnea, joint pain, breathlessness, fatigue, hypertension and often low self-esteem. Though sometimes subtle, these conditions can lead to heart disease or cancer, and work silently to weaken the immune system.

We see obesity play out every day in our lives –when others, or ourselves, have difficulty getting on a bus or performing everyday physical activities. I included graphs in my installation not to scare people, but to illustrate how many parts of life obesity can impact.

In my own way, I am impacted by obesity. My brother’s passing will remain the greatest heartbreak of my life. If I could go back in time, instead of glossing over his obvious symptoms, I would have candidly asked Justin about his health. Sometimes love for another person can mask your ability to see how sick they are, and if we’re not careful, true problems might not be addressed.

Thoughts I Wish to Share

My sincerest hope for my art installation and my story is that loved ones, and people who are themselves struggling with obesity, can recognize and treat important symptoms before it’s too late. One of the hardest aspects of obesity is how chronic and complex it really is.

It was important for me to have people process emotional responses to my art installation, but it was even more important that they had credible information to take away. I thank the OAC for giving me the resources to be able to make that happen. Facing obesity and talking about it openly, honestly and without judgement is the best way to show support and find help.

For more photos from my entire art installation, you can visit: MakoJames.com/Obesity.



© “I’d Burn a Thousand More Temples in Your Name” by Austin James



Looking for more OAC Community perspectives?

For more from the OAC Community, including personal stories, words of wisdom and more, visit: ObesityAction.org/Community and click “Find Support and Connect” on the left-hand menu of the Community home page. You can share your own OAC Community perspectives and experiences too!



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

info@obesityaction.org

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



@ObesityActionCoalition

@ObesityAction