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### The Rise and fall of one's heart and soul

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# **Rochester Institute of Technology**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts**

**The Rise and Fall of One's Heart and Soul**

**by**

**David C. Prusinski**

**May 10, 2000**

# Approvals

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Acknowledgement**

Cheryl, my beloved sister and David A. and Wilma, the most wonderful parents a guy could ask for, them I love with all of my heart. Without their faith and love, I would have never made this journey afar.

Ed Miller, Keith Howard and Bill Giancursio, for their encouragement and belief in me. From them, I discover the joy of painting.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to interpret internal poetic feelings as visual images. The poetic visual impact is achieved through the manipulation of composition using male figures, symbols, color, space and scale in painting. The canvases are executed in the size, five feet by seven feet. These narrative paintings are created with oil paints. It is my hope that by producing such emotive visual images and their symbolism, viewers will reach the point where they can relate to the rise and fall of my heart and soul.

One deep red brushstroke  
Onto the bare canvas  
Create a sort of ellipse shape  
On the right  
Deep the brush goes into  
A pail of blood red  
Trail the brush leaves  
As it flies upward to the canvas  
Left ellipse shape it creates  
One more it must stroke  
In pail of blood red it takes  
Straight arrow it must pierce  
Voila

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## Inspiration

Symbolism has been used in art for generations. I have always been fascinated by the subtle messages in the painting of artists from the periods of Egyptian to Gothic and Renaissance to Romanticism. The symbolism was not often used to represent the artist's personal ideas, instead was a catalyst for the pictorial narrative. For example, in *Annunciation* by Simone Martini [Appendix, Image 1], Gabriel's olive branch crown and scepter are emblems of triumph and peace. The vase of white lilies is a symbol of purity. Most of the symbolism from the distant past had religious meanings.

The decision to use symbolism in my paintings occurred a few months after a devastating experience in my personal life. I was mused to write poems from this experience. Writing poems was meant to heal my soul. Suddenly I found the theme and inspiration for my thesis for which I had been struggling. I decided to translate my poems into visual images. To bring my poems to fruition, symbols were used from the history of mythology and religion. These symbols were internalized, then expressed on canvas. The appropriate understanding of symbols can have a healing effect, said the psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz (1,304).

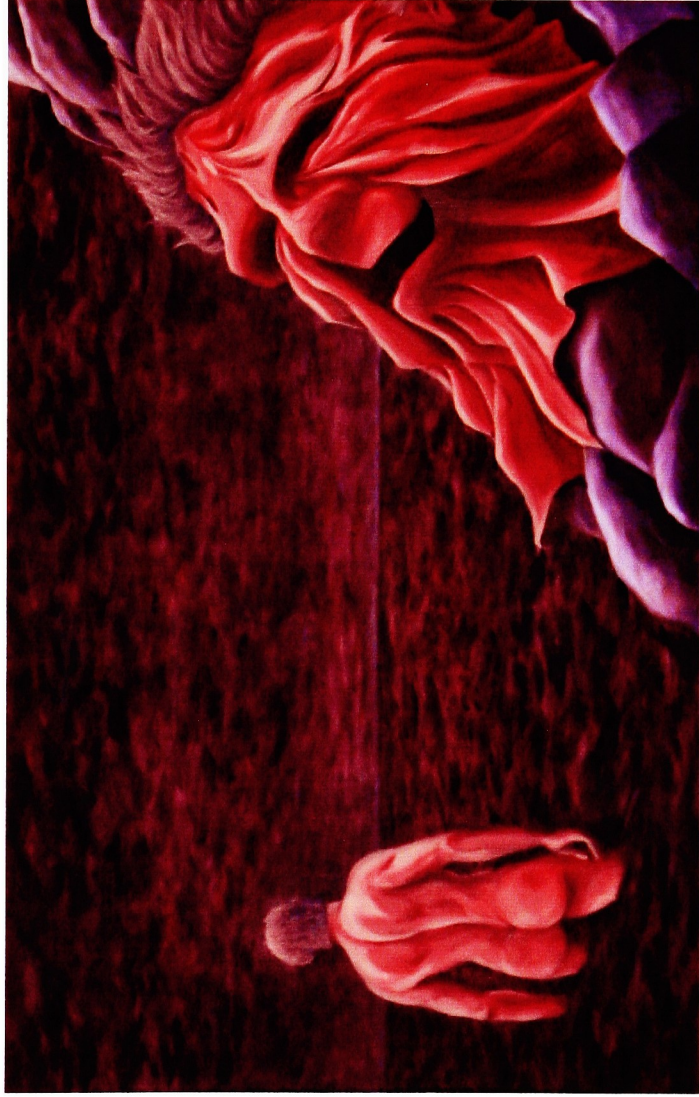
The poetic visual impact of my paintings was achieved through the manipulation of compositions using male figures, symbols, color, space and scale. Artists from Greek, Roman, Renaissance times and the period of Romanticism were all infused in my work. Working so closely with each

painting, I released my frustration, my heartache and filled each with love. The paintings became more than narrative paintings. The process of creating these paintings became my therapy, my spiritual journey toward enlightenment.

Throughout the thesis report, I will describe each of the paintings, the reasons I choose certain symbols for each painting and basic cultural explanation behind each symbol.

Rich crimson sea  
Soothing the sea is  
Caressing my sanity  
Into the seductive blood sea I drown  
Worlds I am lost into  
Pool of laughing blood I drink  
Worlds I travel beyond  
Peace I seek  
Found it, yet I do not  
Back to the shore I swim courageously  
Seductive crimson sea beckons me forth  
Back into its tempting fruit  
I drown again  
And again

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*Illusive Summer 4.5' x 7'*



## *Illusive Summer*

*Illusive Summer* portrays the water element. Sky above deep in black, purplish with blood, thunderous streaks across the canvas. The dark wine sea below reflects the mood of the stormy sky. Far right on harsh purple rocks lay a dynamic shocking pink and bleeding red "Shakespeare" tragedy mask with its illusory smile. Dark lifeless eyes bear black coal caverns. The drapery flesh of the mask waves toward the lone male figure roaming far into the tempting wine colored sea. The face of the man can not be seen for he is facing a distant horizon, removed from reality. His posture invokes an image of the rear view of *Kritios Boy*, a Greek sculpture [Appendix, Image 2]. His curvy muscular spine and firm butterball buttocks are exposed to us. The figure is painted with a limited palette of angry red and torturing pink flesh. Strong dashing brushstrokes indicate the battle of his private demon. Quiet the sea seems, yet the navigation through the water seems difficult for him.

A range of strong red becomes symbolic. Red is a color filled with emotion. The setting was inspired from a line of the poem, "seductive blood sea". Sea is a place where one can easily be lost. I quoted the saying of Jesus of Nazareth, "This is the cup of my blood". Blood and wine are often interchangeable symbols. Thus the sea becomes wine. Wine is my interpretation of self-denial, the inability to acknowledge the truth.

The mask on the rocks represents the tortured battle I had with my heart and my soul. This is an illusory mask I don in reality. The mask is an



overt way that an individual's expression can be submerged. Psychologist, Aniela Jaffe noted that the symbolic function of the mask indicates a union with the individual's inner demons (1,236).

Water is commonly associated with the positive forces of birth, fertility and purification, but it is also appears as destruction. "Water can be destructive. Water drowns and erodes, wearing away even the densest of stones given enough time" (2). For it represents my losing strength and faith in the name of love.

Here on the bench  
I sit waiting for him  
Hours pass  
Patiently I wait  
He is late  
Days come and go  
I wait still  
He will come  
Seasons turn  
Still I wait  
He will be here  
Time drifts by  
A fool I may be  
Nevertheless I wait  
For him here  
On the bench

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*Folly Autumn 4.5' x 7'*

## *Folly Autumn*

The limited earth toned palette in *Folly Autumn* depicts the element of Air. Multiple rust-colored autumn leaves blow past the dominant upper anatomy of the burnt sienna crow on the far left. Its gigantic wing encompasses the lower left quadrant of the painting. Subtle, but fine repetitive yellow orche lines breeze across the bird's head. A captivating cold eye captures the viewer. An opening beak cries of an upcoming prophecy for the nude male figure sitting restlessly on the hard cold bench. His patience weathered face stares to the right and away from the crow. The posture of the male is inspired by the Greek sculpture of the defeated *Seated Boxer*, [Appendix, Image 3]. In his hand, he holds a lifeless flower, which is releasing its petals to the wind. The simple tree beside him stands vertically against the prevailing wind. Far across and into the background between the blacked burnt umber woods are the cool burnt umber stormy brushstrokes of the sky, which illuminates the cold orangish yellow sunset.

Birds are symbols of thought and spiritual process (4,27). The crow represents my subconscious, which is trying to win my attention. The far-seeing sun acts as an oracle, predicting my future. The crow and the sunset are collaborating. Together, their consultation feeds my intuition, I listen and follow. Marie-Louise von Franz quoted, "One must simply listen, in order to learn what the inner –the Self– wants one to do here and now in a particular situation" (1,163).

Brown symbolizes segregation from reality in Christian context (3,149). Vegetative death is also the color brown. I specifically choose the season of autumn because it parallels with time of my birth, November, the zodiac Scorpio. It is the sign of rebirth and regeneration, from death comes new life.

The tree symbolizes my individuation; process of self-awareness. It is the Tree of Knowledge.

Deep in void of darkness  
Broken wings I mend  
Devastating heart I tend  
Eternal flame I feed my lonesome soul  
From the light of stars afar  
Unknown to me  
With patchy wings they fly me  
Into the light  
Joyous my heart sings  
Heavenly light my soul intertwines with  
Prisoner of darkness no more  
Among I live once more  
Love I am free to give  
Again

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*Luminous Winter 4.5' x 7'*

This cold blue grayish painting is the representation for the element of Earth. A bold vertical hibernating tree stands in the center of the canvas. Its branches reach, begging for the heaven above. Left of the tree, an upclose-sculpted face of a male angel is portrayed. Its tugging smile challenges the unforeseen. Its smooth marble eyes stare out of the canvas as if forever guarding the nude male figure behind. His exposed body is cold like snow on the ground. His pose before the tilted tombstone is reminiscent of the sculpture of the archaic Greek, *Dying Gaul*, [Appendix, Image 4]. Some distance behind the figure stands another statue of a male angel. In its rising left hand is a sword, which reaches against the raging dark sky above. A shield on the other hand calmly protects the light of Heaven behind.

Earth is commonly seen as the Mother. Physically I am fashioned from the Earth. Heaven is known as the Father. Soul I heed from the Heaven. Acknowledging peace, I take from the light and facing the ground I give my love. Snow reflects the purity of my love.

Again, I include a tree. The interpretation differs here. It is the Tree of Life. It symbolizes the passage from motion to rest, time to eternity and separation to union (5,194). Carl Jung deciphered the meaning of a child's stick drawing of a leafless tree where he supposed it might symbolize evolution, physical growth, or psychological maturation (1,90). Journey far and back I have finally come home to my heart.



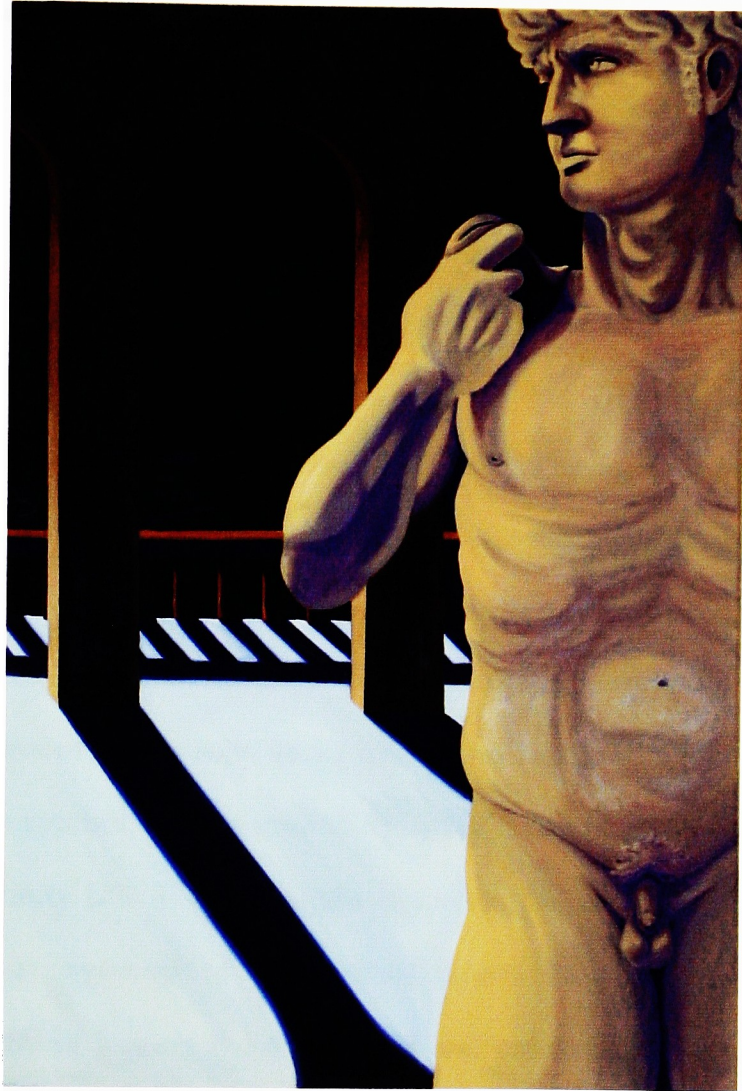
Archangel Gabriel is center stage, whose name means “God is my strength” (6,32), speaks of the strength I drew upon, the faith I have for life and love.

The angel represented with the sword is Archangel Michael, whose name means “Who is like God?” (6,31). Michael is a symbol for the victorious. He, who is known by all three Western religions – Judeo/Christian/Islamic, emerges as the Prince of Light (love) fighting a war against the Prince of Darkness (hate) (6,33). It is symbolic of my forgiveness.

The tombstone does not represent death, instead it is a way of letting go of the past and an embrace of what life has planned. “I commit my body to the ground its resting-place; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust”.

From the Alpha I voyage  
Toward the fruit of life  
Joy I deliciously taste  
Love I drown intoxicatingly  
Sorrow I feel heartily  
Grief I cry feverishly  
At the Omega I die  
Not  
For the Omega is the Alpha  
The Alpha is the Omega  
There is no beginning or an end  
Triumphantly I resurrect  
Celestial life I sail onto  
Forever

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*Enlightened Spring* 4.5' x 7'

## *Enlightened Spring*

Warm and cool colors in this painting are manifestations for the element of Fire. The towering cropped immortal statue of Michelangelo's *David* seductively occupies half the space of the canvas. The warmth of naples yellow on the skin is tempered with cool purple shades. The powerful elbow hovers above the light on the ground from the unseen moon behind. The diagonal cool blue moonlight contrasts with the ultramarine blue and burnt umber shadows on the temple floor. The burnt sienna arches proudly rise up as high as the statue of *David*. Stepping through the arches lay the porch with a repetitive balustrade of violet burnt sienna. Outside the rail stands the illusory verdant pine. Beyond the tree spreads the rolling dark violet hills where it meets the dark ultramarine sea to the left.

The element Fire is seen as a force of purification. Chinese culture views fire as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge, where Hebrews see it as a symbol of divinity (2). The moonlight is the symbol of my soul, a night fire.

Arches are symbolic of my spiritual ascent. Passing through an arch is an act of rebirth, of leaving the old behind and entering the new (2). Lessons have been learned. The future I embrace totally.

A tree is included once again, but a pine tree is portrayed instead. Pine trees stand for immortality. The Egyptian pyramid was inspired from the form of a coniferous tree (3,244). Michelangelo's *David* is an eternal symbol of immortality. For my heart and soul never die.

The physical environment of the painting has the combination of two scenarios. Landscape represents the environment I live in, while the temple houses my soul.

At last, I am able to journey through life with love, understanding, forgiveness and wisdom. I end this painting with a philosophy I take to my heart. Everything becomes what it was destined to become from the beginning (3,380). The ancient Chinese Taoist philosophy tells us that "All things are as they should be".

## Conclusion

*Luminous, Illusive, Folly* and *Enlightened* are about the Wheel of Life. My paintings are the record of a person living in contemporary times. The symbols may be ancient, but the interpretation is new. After observing the viewers' reaction to my paintings during the thesis show opening, I have concluded that symbols are essential to our survival. I witnessed an emotional reaction to my work. This body of work was inspired from personal poems I had written. The poems included in this thesis report were excluded from the exhibition. The response to the work was present in the absence of the original inspiration. It is important to me to have each piece stand alone, with the viewer applying his/her own interpretations of the symbolism present.

The purpose of my paintings is to break out of contemporary social and religious norms, and bring them into the Twenty First Century. Throughout history, the same symbols have been used, but their interpretations have evolved and changed, a translation to meet each era's ever-evolving literacy of human behavior. With imagination and intuition, I create a contemporary symbolism where viewers attain a point that they can relate to the rise and fall of the human's heart and soul.



## Appendix



Image 1: *Annunciation* Simone Martini



Image 2: *Kritios Boy*

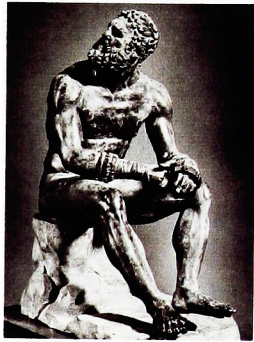


Image 3: *Seated Boxer*



Image 4: *Dying Gaul*

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