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### Configurations

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the College of Imaging Arts and Science in  
candidacy for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

# *Configurations*

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5/2003

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## ***Thesis Proposal***

The purpose of this thesis is to explore texture, movement, form, and color in the same concept: “Painting”. My goal is to find an integration of those aspects mentioned above. Through my thesis, I want to present to the viewer a different aspect of the human figure. I present the intimate relationship of the human being and God, as a main theme. The relationship between God and human being will be observed by symbols and textured forms, which will transmit a different feeling. I observe this relationship as a different relation of the spirit, presenting men as terrestrial creatures and God as a celestial power (I do not present God figuratively). Taking reference from Michael Angelo’s work and Renaissance time, with all Christian meaning, I want to express my feeling about it in a modern and semi-abstract way. Through my work, I am conscious about how much passion and sensibility I have for live.

The utilization of different materials such as: acrylic paint, pallet, rollers, and brushes of different sizes give to my work a personal touch and perspective. Texture is one of the important aspects in my work, exploring how to give movement and creating a unique sensation in a semi-abstract level. In my work, color, texture, and form, are three different aspects, but the goal is getting them integrated as one. The title of my thesis is “Configuration”, which its psychological meaning is: (a static or dynamic aggregate of sensations, feelings, reflexes, and ideas so organized as to function as a unit in individual behavior), reflecting every thing that I want to get in my work.

## *Acknowledge*

This thesis is dedicated first, to my God, the almighty. For some, this power comes from within. It is the love of my soul and the guide of my life, who teaches me to give and forgive, and who makes me a better human being.

To the greatest feeling of all, Love, which has given me the happiness and sadness to mature in life. It has taught me the meaning of real love and disillusionment. This makes me believe and it also makes me doubt.

To my family who always supported me on this project that we call life. I know they love me and I love them. I have the unconditional love to believe that they will accept me with my faults, and my virtues, no matter the path that I decide to walk on.

To the friendship, that showed me the difference between one person and another. It also showed me how to trust and not trust. To those who do not believe in me, thanks, because you make me a stronger person. But, especially to those who believe in me, because they make me believe in them. They were sent to my side by a higher power.

Thanks you for everything because, through all of that, I learned that those feelings cannot be expressed with words. Instead, I express them through my art.

## ***Introduction***

Through the years we have recognized art as a means of expression that has not changed with the passing of time. That is one of the main points of my thesis: How can “I” present feelings, forms and movement with a spiritual concept through paintings? Sometimes a human being can see in his mind a concept but that concept cannot be transported easily into another environment. Therefore, artwork might be interpreted in various ways depending on the viewer’s perception.

I am interested in the spiritual aspects of human beings. These aspects are the anxieties of the inner self of man in his constant search for the Creator.<sup>1</sup>

***Configuration*** is a thesis where I have mixed, not only texture and color, but also the theme of adverse feelings; the positive and negative aspects of human beings in figurative terms. There have been a lot of styles in art but in some ways the themes have been constant to this day – Love, sadness, happiness, and the unknown. Feeling is an ephemeral concept, which can be divided into different facets and characterized in different ways. In this thesis and through my paintings, I want to express the inner turmoil and feelings that human beings exhibit. These feelings may or may not be expressed in words – hence a painting. Art is a unique way to express and communicate symbolically.

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to paintings: “Sacrifice – The Soul without self” and “ The Unity of our Soul”

My work, based in color and movement, creates forms with feeling and meaning that represent Life. Each one of my paintings has a purpose and goal: the integration of texture, color and form.

I found that mixing these elements expressed what I wanted to achieve. Through a long exploration process, I invented a new and innovative approach to painting.

I express the same details in all my paintings: how to get out different emotions and reactions from people through the form and movement of the human figure. In the composition of my paintings, absolute simplicity is one of the main points.

The texture in my painting is one of the focal points. I used an old medium, the fresco, in a new and contemporary way. During the Renaissance this was the most beautiful, challenging and important medium of expression. In the past, fresco was the medium of many paintings, however, I think it has been all but forgotten in our times. That was the inspiration for me; to integrate and explore this method in order to give my paintings the effect of cracking and an antique style, but at the same time, create a solid effect for the present times.

Utilizing gesso, modeling paste, sand, different mediums and water, I have created the desired effect, the look of a fresco from the past. Because I have explored using this medium on both panel and canvas, I can say that the mix can be used

successfully on any hard surface. This technique works best when the materials can run freely in different directions over the canvas or panel to create the cracking effect.

The evolution of my thesis was the realization of previous influences from artists of the Renaissance era through to our modern times. I wanted to combine aspects of some famous artists who, having created a peculiar and personal touch, also created that which we know as the art of all times.

The variations in these works as well as some similarities are the artistic influences, which have the fundamental characteristics that led to the realization of my artistic work. Michelangelo, Van Gogh, Picasso and Matisse, among others, have had a great influence on my work.

**“Configurations”** has a personal and particular thematic approach. It has to be analyzed with reference to these artists.

## *Statement*

***“We are all together, but intimately apart”***

Day and night together.

God and men separate.

We search and cannot find.

We feel and do not act.

We are form, movement, and feeling

In a world without ideas

Where the unity of our soul is a point in the distance,

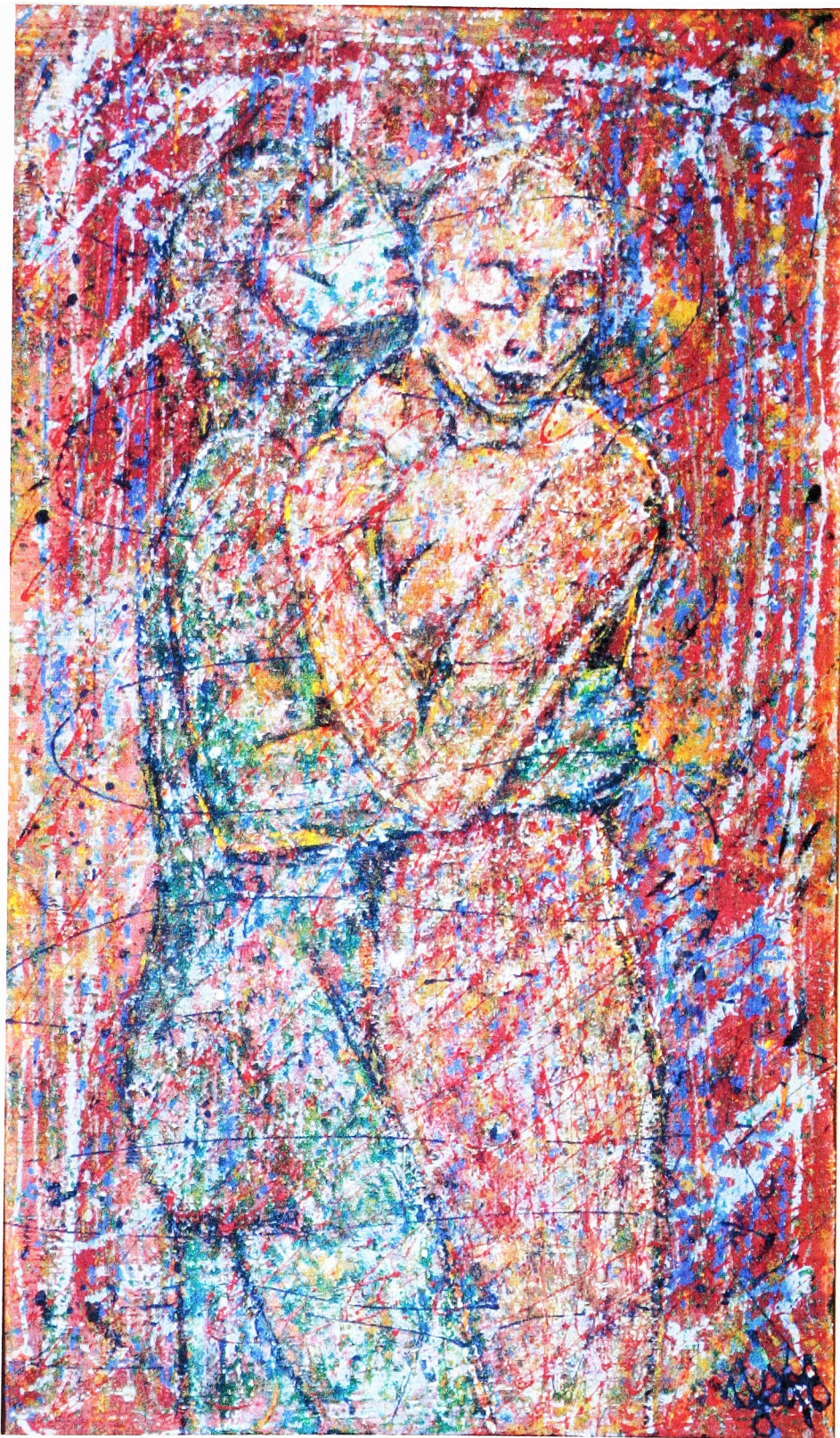
Which we cannot be but we can feel

Within our inner selves.

***Written by: Yelitza Serrano***

# *Paintings*





*"Unguarded Soul"*

Acrylic on canvas

48" x 28"

Fig. 1





*"Soul in Harmony"*  
Acrylic on canvas  
36"x24"  
Fig. 2





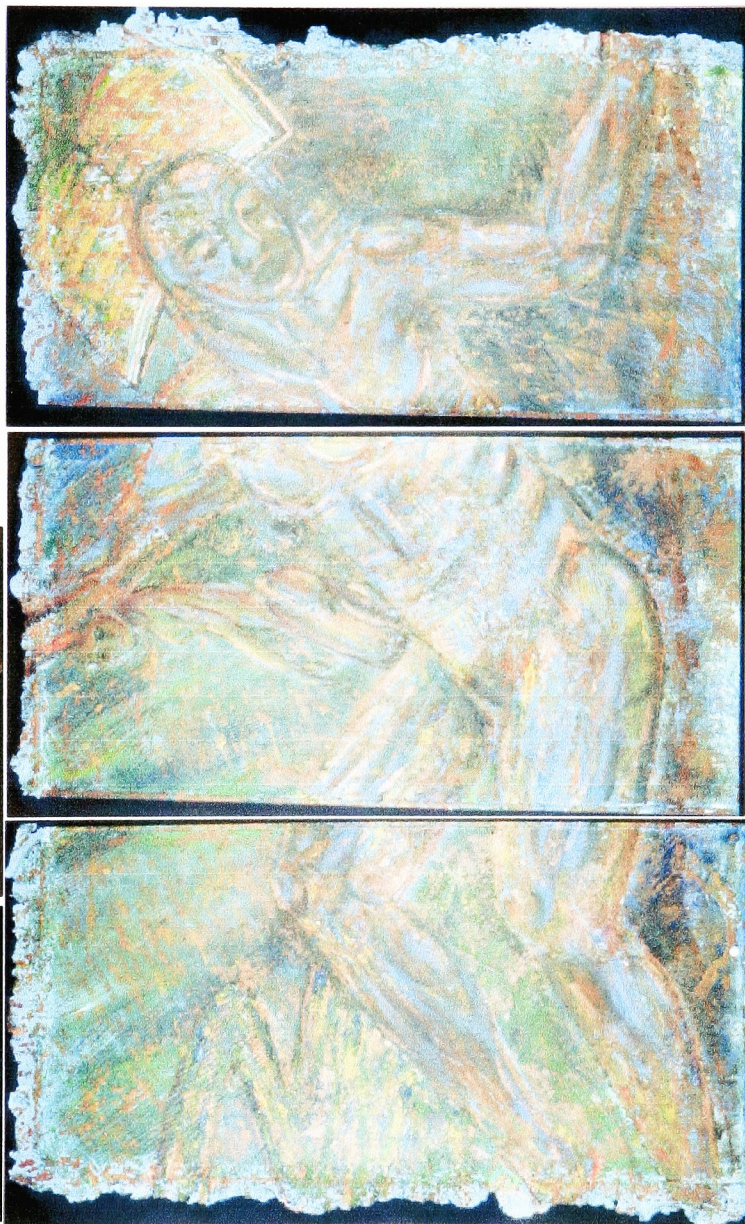
*"Forgiveness"*  
Acrylic on canvas  
30"x 20"  
Fig. 3





*"The Unity of Our Soul"*  
Mixed media on panel  
3 panels 4' x 4'  
2 panels 1' ½" x 1' ½"

Fig.4







*“Sacrifice – The Soul within Us”*

Acrylic on canvas

80" x 30"

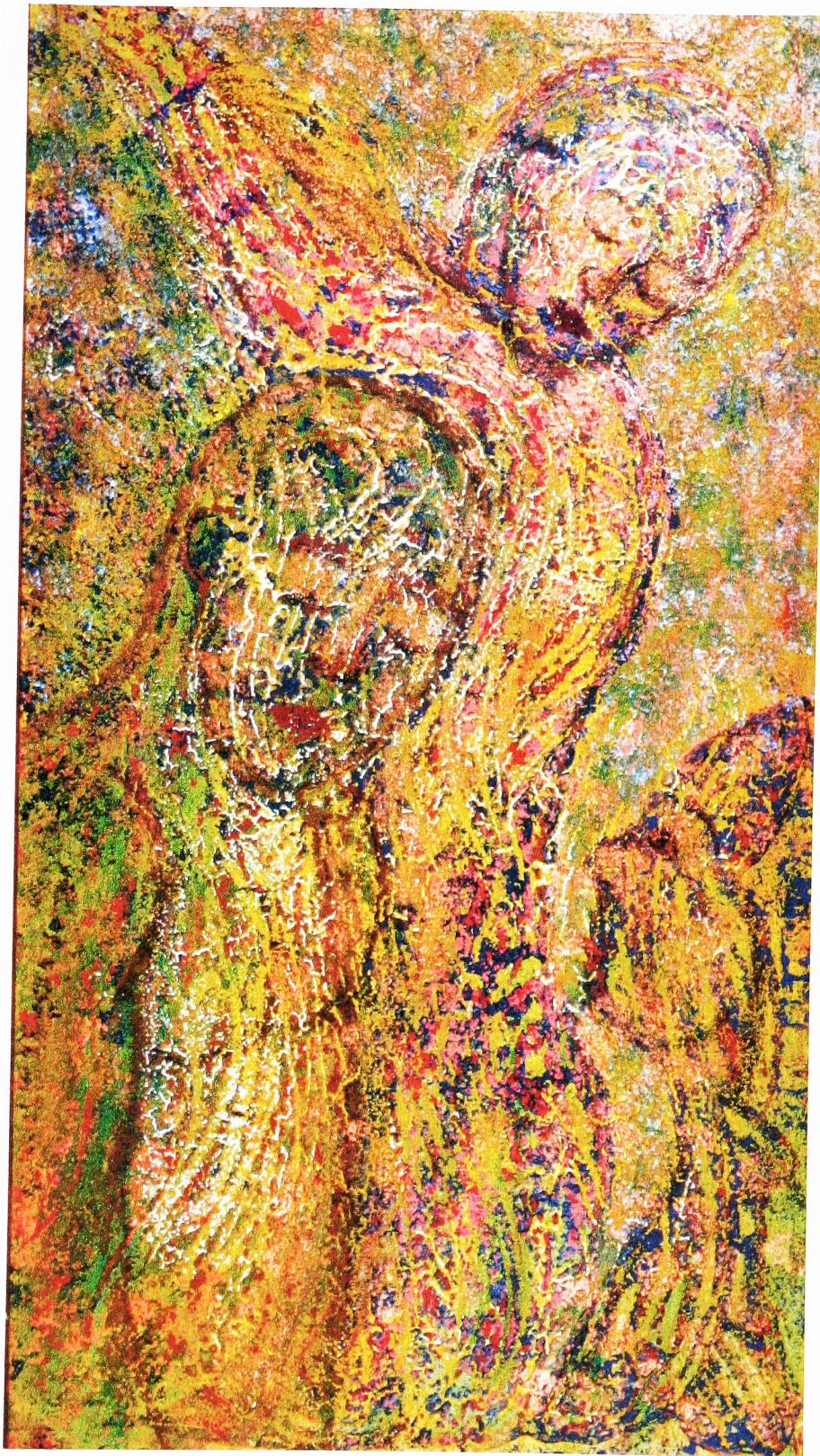
Fig.5





*"Struggle for Existence"*  
Acrylic on canvas  
4'  
Fig. 6





*"Scattered Soul"*  
Acrylic on panel  
48"x28"  
Fig.7

## *The Body of Work*

*“Unguarded Soul”* (fig. 1) was created in honor of the feeling of love. It has a mixture of colors and textures that goes directly into expressing the different facets of that concept.

The interesting point with this painting is the different emotions felt by the audience. The theme is singular, however, the reactions that it transmits are different; positive and negative, desire and rejection.

In searching for information and comparisons for this theme, I found the masterpiece of Pablo Picasso: *The Lovers*. The composition of the figures and theme is similar to my painting, but its texture and colors are in opposition to it.

These differences give my artwork a unique and controversial style with deep feeling. My artistic expression has something in common with “*The Lovers*” as it is described, “The first quality that may strike the viewer is the complex tenderness of this painting”.<sup>1</sup>

One of the characteristics of Picasso’s female figure that inspired me was the look in her eyes, a strong and powerful control of the situation. I emphasized in my

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<sup>1</sup> Celebrations in Art; Alexandra Bonfane. Warren



painting the unguarded way in which the lady approached the male figure and how the male figure expresses his obsession through his posture, which expresses physical strength.

As I mentioned before this painting evokes a positive and negative reaction in the viewer. It is, however, one theme, Love, expressed by color and movement in a figurative painting.

***“Soul in Harmony” (fig. 2)*** was inspired by the connection between man and nature where many times man finds an inexplicable peace. This painting symbolizes the struggle between the external and internal parts of human beings. The internal peace comes through the external peace around us. Today in our society, many people worry about the environment, knowing the importance of the unity between human life and organic life. The peace felt in the environment feeds our interior feeling through our senses. Everything around us gives us the tranquility that we need to live in this society: Aromas feed our senses, the bird singing can teach us harmony, and the breeze calms us.

Calm is symbolized by this painting through the movement of the figure and the blue color of the leaves printed on it. As Picasso used colors to express concepts and feelings, for me the color blue reflects the calm of the human spirit.



The posture of the figure taking or admiring a leaf reminds me of Eve taking the apple, which has a connection with nature, God, humanity and sin in Christianity. In the High Renaissance Raffaello Sanzio<sup>1</sup> who was the chief rival of Michelangelo was commissioned to create four frescoes, three of which are devoted to theology, philosophy, and law. He had his own remarkable contribution to make, the muscular bodies and energetic poses with a natural background. This is an inspiration for my painting.

With the painting *“Forgiveness”* (fig.3), the suffering and frustration of human beings are represented by a mix of primary colors and simple texture. The contrast and integration of the figure, texture and color express a deep feeling of suffering. The color blue and yellow create the visual effect of running water, emphasized much more with the waves created through the texture that runs through the figure.

This painting was carefully created to integrate the figure with movement; the texture and color are not too hard or too soft. In that way the feeling is one concept and the viewer can relate to it.

My research about this kind of creativity led me to the symbolist Decade (1890 – 1900), Proto- Expressionism, where form, movement, and color mix to express feelings. As an example Van Gogh’s “The Starry Night” has characteristics of strong texture and bright colors. Van Gogh, the pioneer of this concept, mixed

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<sup>1</sup>Art in Perspective: A Brief History, Henry Dorra

agitated, parallel lines and disturbing visionary strokes and movement in his paintings to reflect life in an ambiguous world.

Edvard Munch with “The Cry” 1893, shared Van Gogh’s concern to express human suffering in art, and also invented new pictorial means to visualize his feelings. He reflected in his art the self-conscious exploration of pain and mixed in a powerful, expression of color, line, and stroke.

I want to make clear that my painting was directed toward that goal, but it has the exploration and greater definition of the human body as well. The body reflects, the idea of suffering and begging. The body is defined by line. The movement of the body is expressed by the posture of a woman. The expression in her face and posture reflect the intention.

Munch wrote, “ No more interiors with men reading and women knitting”, “There must be living beings who breathe and feel and love and suffer. I would paint such pictures in a cycle. People would understand the sacredness of them and take off their hats as if they were in church”.<sup>1</sup>

As Michelangelo began with hundreds of drawings to invent figures and compositions to express his themes, I also started with drawings to reflect and visualize the idea of my painting *“The Unity of Our Soul”* (fig. 4). It has a

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<sup>1</sup> Modern Art; Sam Hunter. John Jacobus

figurative composition like the masterpiece of the creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel.

In simple terms, the audience can associate the human posture of that one man in my painting with the position of Adam in the creation of man in Michelangelo's work.

The concept in my painting has a deeply, modern, and different meaning. The integration of different objects around the human body in the painting symbolizes human characteristics with a sense of spirituality.

The division of the panels has three simple meanings. In the first panel we can see the upper part of the body, the head, which represents the mind of a person with the knowledge to choose between good of evil. Behind that structure there is a book representing knowledge, which can be, for me, the Bible, and for others, a book that teaches different subjects about life in general.

The second panel is the middle part of the body where the sensual and sexual aspects of humans lie (men or women). It is clear the body of the woman in the distance is related to the sexual aspect. For centuries, men and women have experienced loneliness, and companionship correlates to the two most important reasons for being human, to procreate and love, which is important for the survival of the species.

The third panel, the lower part of the person, his legs, which for me are used in real life, not only as an instrument given by God to move around, but also as instruments that help us through obstacles and challenges that we encounter through that path we call life. That path chosen is the one necessary for us to find the personal and spiritual fulfillment we need. The road in that panel represents Life itself.

At last, the two panels, which are hanging above these three panels, are the hands of man and the hand of the creator, trying to reach out to each other to be one.

The texture in “The Unity of Our Soul” is simple, but at the same time complex in the combination of colors and materials. It is not heavy at first sight, but rich in form. Created by color and lines, I integrated elements that are mixed together very well. Using recycled paper, a material that I like to use to demonstrate how we can also protect our environment, made the texture around the panels.

I consider this artwork as the masterpiece of my thesis, because of its complex composition, its size, and the integration of concepts. It is the one, which has the texture of the fresco medium. As I mentioned before, fresco is the art medium utilized in my paintings. Using the same technique in all my paintings I created a unique and personal style, while trying to integrate this ancient technique with modern art.

*“Sacrifice – The Soul without Us” (fig. 5)* is the painting more directed to spiritual meaning. Visually, it presents the image of the character, Christ, the centerpiece of Christianity. The posture of the figure praying or meditating creates a relationship to Christ since it is a common image in our society. Many people seem to identify with it because they look up to that image for guidance and strength to solve their problems or to calm their spirit.

For some, the idea of talking with “him” gives us the serenity to continue in life. It is more a tool to have in case we need it or it can be our companion for life because it becomes a part of us.

Be it from culture, influence or education, I believe in something or someone more powerful than me, someone who I can trust, someone to talk to, someone to ask for a miracle; the one who is there in my life unconditionally; the one who is my friend; the one who is my lover for eternity, the one who promises me the impossible in real life, “the eternal life”.

Black and white in this painting is very meaningful. Who knows what is the color of God, of the power, of the belief? The use of light and shadow in this painting represents walking through life trying to find that that is going to give us purpose.



*“Struggle for Existence”* (fig. 6) was the most challenging painting because it brought four canvases together, integrating many figures into a complex union. The colors orange, yellow and brown give to this particular piece the sensation of energy.

With this painting I wanted to present the courage of the human spirit and the need for each other. The unity of humanity is essential for humanity to survive.

The composition of this painting shows different postures of figures demonstrating the challenge to get to the top of the hill. It shows that we are a bunch of people on earth that are what they are because of themselves, but also because there are people who lead them and help them to be what they are.

We need each other as we need oxygen. We are an evolutionary chain using our experiences to reach our desired goals in life.

The texture in this painting made with paste and gesso, gives movement through the strokes running through it. The movement is directed to a focal point, where the figures go, to the top of the hill, to the goal: that people want to win.

With respect to the texture of my artwork, the *“Scattery Soul”* (fig. 7), was the culmination of this exploration to create the feel and look of a fresco integrated into a modern and romantic image but with a controversial theme. The interpretation of the three people together can be a love triangle or romance, but

also, a normal and honest friendly conversation. This painting is one where viewers can interpret it in different ways.

The expression in the faces of each figure can relate different stories and different feelings. The creation of this painting was the most authentic and fulfilling in terms of technique. The color and the texture are very united. The brush strokes reflect the ambiguous details of the figures and can only be appreciated by viewing it from a distance. The details, seen from the distance, are the same as in my other painting “The Unity of Our Soul” It shows the Matisse influence. We do not see at first what is there, but we realize what it is when we allow ourselves some distance for our eyes to focus.

This is another one of my masterpieces and brings together all that I wanted to do in my thesis. The texture in this painting is the climax of my thesis. The cracking effect in this painting was created by the medium and is the main interest for the viewer because of the deepness of the texture and its rich color and the overall mixture of all the elements.

## ***Conclusion***

I decided to write my thesis with a clear picture in my mind, but I did not know if I could translate this into words. However, my thesis might be interpreted with different feelings depending on viewer's perspective.

This thesis has been a passage of time through different art styles and one of encountered feelings. It has been my channel of expression through themes, visual, tact, and colors. It is the perspective of variations on ways to express my art inspired by various aspects of human beings.

As I mentioned in my thesis proposal, the psychological meaning of ***“Configuration”*** is: *(static or dynamic aggregate of sensations, feelings, reflexes, and ideas so organized as to function as a unit in individual behavior).*

This reflects what I wanted to get in my work, hoping this met the expectations of the art lover. I know it met all my expectations as an artist.



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