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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
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In Candidacy for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

A Revelation of Thought

By

Katherine A. Parks

6/15/10

Thesis Approval

**A Revelation of Thought
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Abstract

This work is about self-exploration, reinvention, and constant evolution that result from questioning the reason for being. Throughout the whole creation process I have tried to reinvent myself, and evolve by questioning the purpose of existence. I use my work to depict emotions and feelings. Sculpture, monotype, and paint are the techniques I used for this recent body of work. Each is an intuitive, aesthetic response to the subject, both in color and surface, thus leading to further investigation of form and space.

Through the inner struggle that takes place during the creation of each work of art, I convey figures that are symbolic of what I've endured on the evolutionary journey as a person and an artist. The figures are intended to express characteristics of my inner self. They concurrently represent obvious and hidden relationships, the struggles of life, and the difficulty of developing an identity as an artist.

My art is designed to evoke personal interpretations based on what the viewer sees and feels. It encourages the viewer to form a connection to it and allows them to create their own narrative based on what they feel is going on in each piece.

-Katherine Parks

"In a word, man must create his own essence, it is in throwing himself into the world, in suffering it, in struggling with it, that-little by little-he defines himself."

-Sartre, 1944

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ORIGINAL THESIS PROPOSAL

I propose to create a series of artworks that interlock my internal experience with the external reality I create on the canvas. My goal is to reflect the self-exploration, reinvention, and constant evolution that result from questioning the reason for being. Research on Giacometti, the artist, and Sartre, the philosopher, will be combined with more contemporary artists to develop symbolic, abstract figures that will represent my activity as a creative, thinking, feeling person. Distinctive brushstrokes used in developing these figures also play a role in expressing inner feelings.

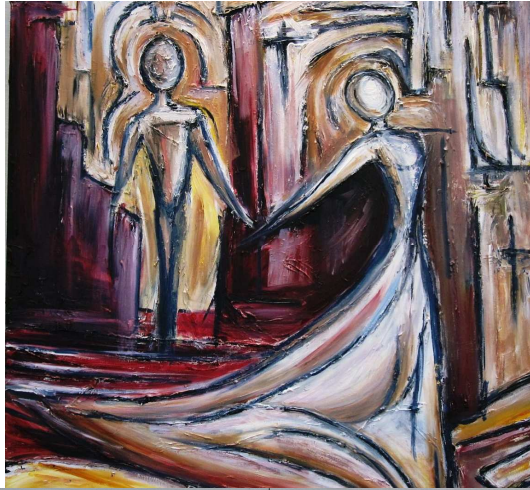
Artists like Giacometti and Bacon use art as a tool to express their ideas and let it reflect their evolution as both a person and an artist. Their existential ideas are partly based on questioning God and the purpose for being, and they've caused me to question myself. I use my work to depict emotions and feelings of the constant inner struggle to emerge as my own identity.

It's not questioning my belief in God, but belief in myself as I fight with the world to establish my own entity. Positive and negative experiences in life make us who we are, were, and will become. I will convey figures that are symbolic of what I've endured on my evolutionary journey as a person and an artist. There will be lots of room to experiment as I continue to take new events that are happening in my life and show promise, as life is still uncertain. Expressive brushwork along with continued exploration with gel medium and other ways to texturize the surface will be the tools to express inner struggles with emotion, life and identity.

It is my intent that being exposed to my art will cause the viewer to have a better understanding of who I am as an artist, individual, and spiritual being.¹



¹ This page, left, (*Figure 1*, 4'X2,' Oil on Canvas, Katherine Parks); right, (*Figure Red*, 4'X3,' Oil on Canvas, Katherine Parks); next page, top, (*Figure 2*, 4'X4,' Oil on Canvas, Katherine Parks); bottom, (*Figure 3*, 4'X6,' Oil on Canvas, Katherine Parks)



CHAPTER I-WWII: Art and Writing

“In a word, man must create his own essence, it is in throwing himself into the world, in suffering it, in struggling with it, that-little by little-he defines himself.”

Jean-Paul Sartre, 1944

After WWII ended in 1945 and throughout the fifties, there was a philosophical movement that stressed man’s solitude, freedom, and responsibility. This movement entered into the art world through many different authors and philosophers, one important one being Jean-Paul Sartre. Writings like his caused artists to question themselves and the world they lived in. Artists David Smith, Jackson Pollock, Alberto Giacometti, and Francis Bacon were strongly influenced by this movement; some were directly motivated by Sartre himself, which caused these artists to go back to primal stages and thoughts to find themselves by reinventing their artwork. This philosophical movement was named existentialism, (philosophical movement centered on individual existence).

Artists like Giacometti, and Bacon used visual art as a tool to express their ideas and to reflect their evolution as both artists and people. Their existential ideas are partly based on questioning the existence of God and the purpose for being, and they’ve caused me to question myself. I use my work to depict emotions and feelings of the constant inner struggle to emerge as my own identity. It’s not questioning my belief in God, but belief in myself as I fight with the world to establish my own entity. Positive and negative experiences in life make us who we are, were, and will become. This existential movement has inspired me to produce art that interlocks my internal experience with the external reality I create on canvas. My goal is to reflect the self-exploration, reinvention and constant evolution that evolve from questioning the reason for being. Research on Giacometti, the artist, and Sartre, the philosopher, is combined with more contemporary artists to develop symbolic, abstract, figures that represent my search, to gain a better understanding of myself.

Existentialism stresses the individual’s existence without spiritual connotation. There is no connection to a god or a divine plan. According to Patka, many who study and explore the aspects of this philosophy feel that once their place on this earth is done, there is no afterlife, no hope, no essence or meaning for their life. There is no reason for us being other than the path we choose, and the existence we decide to create. Man is endowed with an ability to think and reason, and under this kind of philosophy they come face-to-face with the fact that this world is irrational. Everything just exists as it is without any justification to its existence. This can cause a person to feel isolated, fearful, lonely, and any number of other uncomfortable emotions and thoughts. Man has to search for an inner truth through his/her own evolution.²

Basically, we exist, not for any specific reason, but still go through a (life) process. This evolution and experience formulates who we are and who we will become. There is knowledge of what the existentialists refer to as “nothingness,” which is an awareness of everything else in the universe that has nothing to do with man’s individual existence, but everything to do with what a person could become. It is irrational to ask for a meaning, absurd even, and so man comes to his own definition of truth and existence.

² (Patka, 1962) (Molina, 1962) (Danto, 1975) (Caws, 1979)

Based on his own views, experiences, and knowledge man feels as if everything goes on as it does in his own individual world. Man is responsible for him/herself and the choices he makes, which determine his individual existence; and yet, there is also the doubt that comes with these choices and their consequences. There is a gateway that leads to fear and leads man to question his very existence and actions, and with Sartre, this fear is the possibility of facing nothingness.

Born in Paris, Sartre experienced life filled with pain and disappointments, but he became a very well educated man. His adult life began during the transitional years between WWI and WWII; serving in the WWII French military. He was then captured by the Nazis and held as a POW for one year. After the war, Sartre became one of the most respected leaders of the post-war French culture. He studied philosophy and was influenced most by Descartes, Kant, Marx, Husserl, and Heidegger. Sartre was recognized as both an atheist, and a well-known philosopher who influenced post-war existentialism. Despite his beliefs, he still felt a sense of good faith when facing what he considered the truth of one's existence. In two of his many articles, *l'Etre et le neant*, (1943) and *l'Existentialism est un humanisme*, (1946), Sartre explains certain existential ideologies about human existence, faith, human dignity, and our responsibilities.³

The first article, written in 1943, outlines an account of human existence. It illustrates how there are objects that just exist by themselves, that just are, and also those human beings that take independent actions. He emphasizes emotion as a spontaneous action of consciousness, which is turned into reality. He stresses humans' freedom for their actions and warns of the consequences that come with the "bad faith," which leads people to make excuses for their actions. Sartre describes a summary of the human condition in the second article/lecture of 1946, which basically outlines that freedom equals total responsibility, and that "human dignity" can only be acquired through acceptance of emotions like anguish, forlornness, and despair. It is man's solitude, freedom and responsibility that are the main focus of Sartre's writings. In one philosophy book, Sartre states that, "man is imprisoned in the human consciousness which is alienated from everything." He believes that through a "reduction to the absurd" he can focus attention on human responsibility and tries to prove the existence of the latter through emphasizing its absence.

The content of his articles on existentialism, combined with other philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard, influenced many artists' work in the nineteen forties and fifties. These artists tried to return to the primal principles in art to reinvent it for themselves as I do in my work. I go back to the basic elements and principles to reinvent the artwork and myself. This philosophy led them to feel a need to explore questions about the meaning of their own lives and so they focused their attention on direct experience as the only way to gain truth and knowledge. This sense of starting from the beginning, left only with immediate experience, is based on a concern of the unique experience of an individual. As Fineberg stated in his book, *Art Since 1940*, "action was the means of knowing oneself in the world."

³ (Patka, 1962) (Caws, 1979) (Danto, 1975) (CUMming, 1965) (Fineberg, 2000)

CHAPTER II: DAVID SMITH AND JACKSON POLLOCK

WW2 had a major impact on men, and as Existentialism entered into the art world, artists reinvented themselves and their artwork. One sculptor, David Smith, was a loud, chauvinistic man who believed art shows what man is made of. He once stated, “Art is the raw stuff that comes from the aggressiveness of men who got that way from fighting for survival.” (Fineberg, 2000) How illustrative this is of his personality! Smith is a self-taught craftsman, specializing in welding and woodworking. His whole process is built upon learning and investigating. In works like *Helmholtzian Landscape*, *The Letter*, and *Tank Totem # 1*, Smith experiments with metamorphic abstraction.



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He changes the physical form and is influenced by the ideas of Surrealism and the idea of the unconscious, especially in the forties. In his *Helmholtzian Landscape*, titled after Helmholtz who was a Progenitor of color theory, Smith integrates color into the sculpture to create the opposite effect that Clement Greenberg thought was so important for the idea of modernism, (the idea of no color).⁵ He uses a free form approach in *The Letter*, consisting of fluid lines, which created a similar effect comparable to abstract expressionists. This inspired me to add colored texture onto my steel sculptures instead of leaving only the smooth grey of the steel.

In 1952, Smith began working with a totem like figure. He created these sculptures by creating a kind of found object or collage like effect with tank parts, machine parts and industrial materials. *Tank Totem#1* consists of actual tank parts that he orders from a catalog and welds together in compositions to create a monument made to stand on its own power. These are basically little units he had constructed and welded together which are not representational in any way. He once said:

“My problem is to be able to look every day and to press my limitations beyond their endurance- these limitations are me.”

Smith’s personality completely takes over each piece focusing on the exploration of the artist’s true self and illustrating total harmony, personal identity and style which is like what I try to do with each work of mine. I began exploring the human form in

⁴ Raven III

David Smith, North American, American

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California, USA. 84.187 Gift of the Hamilton-Wells Collection

1959

Sculpture

steel

30 3/4 in. x 30 1/4 in. x 9 1/2 in. (78.11 cm x 76.84 cm x 24.13 cm)

CAMIO: SFMO.84.187

⁵ (As stated in Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art, Greenberg believed in not only the absence of color, but drawing attention to flatness and the 2-dimensional.)

sculptures created with welded found objects to better understand spatial relationships with the figure and its environment. Each piece is used to create a visual journey and expression of my thoughts and emotions, each time pushing myself beyond my comfort zone.



Another artist who is influenced by this idea of existentialism and self-exploration is Jackson Pollock, who experiments with unusual materials and different ways of application to move away from representation and focus increasingly on inner content and self-expression. (Fineberg, 2000) The artist, John Graham, who believed the unconscious mind held the link to the essential knowledge, and creative powers of the artist, encouraged him. Pollock searched for universal/mythic images within his own unconscious. From all biographical accounts of Jackson Pollock's life, we acknowledge the fact that this artist struggled with depression and alcoholism. From these deteriorating health conditions, Pollock suffered an emotional crisis that radically affected his art. Because of this, Pollock underwent a psychological analysis where he made drawings as a kind of personal therapy. He began a search for totemic images and connected them with universal, unconscious meaning.

In the years 1942-48, many of Pollock's compositions, including the drip paintings, were given mythic titles with primitive overtones like *Moon Woman*, *Totem Lesson*, *The She-Wolf*, and others. By 1952, most of the titles were numbered as Pollock sought to make his themes more universal, but in 1953, he resumed his recognizable

⁶ Sculpture (top of page) *Untitled, 4'X2'* Katherine Parks, Welded Steel

totemic figures and mythic titles. In one piece, *Male and Female*, there is a detached quality that is more disconnected than in previous works. The eyes, numbers, and impulsive action of the brushwork all seem to be randomly put together, but remarkably, they pull together quite well in a flurry of chaotic activity.



JACKSON POLLOCK
SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Pollock developed an all-over approach or automatic process in which he discovered content through unconscious activity and then goes back into the picture where he reworked and organized his thoughts. He was basically attempting to illustrate the spontaneity of the unconscious by using active brushwork to express his inner world of energy and motion. No one had ever painted like Pollock before and this idea of becoming part of the painting was a whole new experience for other artists and viewers alike. This new sort of reality that he created was a re-invention of himself that was no longer defined by an outside source. Through the process of action painting, Jackson Pollock tapped into an unconscious, but controlled, process, which allowed him to explore who he really was and in a sense, developed knowledge of his place in this world.

⁷ Guardians of the Secret

Jackson Pollock

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California, USA. 45.1308 Albert M. Bender Collection, Albert M. Bender Bequest Fundpurchase

1943

Paintings

Oil on canvas

48 3/8 in. x 75 3/8 in.

CAMIO: SFMO.O45.1308

Like Pollock, I too like to use an all over approach to my painting so that the composition becomes well connected and I avoid overworking any one area. I paint in the whole picture and then go back into the composition and paint over certain areas. I continue to adjust, add or subtract selections until my painting is balanced and I am intuitively satisfied with the work in progress. I also approach each work by first establishing a pictorial mood or an emotional response to the subject matter content with an emotional action, which then guides my decisions for a color palette, as well as size and aggressiveness of my brushstroke.

I modified my studio workspace by listening to specific music selections that reflected my mood or captured the emotional effects that I wanted to intentionally create. The musical rhythm and emotions interpreted through the music itself all contributed to color selections and energy reflected in my art. As a painting tool, I used a palette knife that provided a free, loose quality in my strokes, and allowed me to keep the gestural energy I sought, while working with a complex color palette.

CHAPTER III: INSPIRATIONS THAT LED TO MY ABSTRACT FIGURES

Other Existentialism authors and philosophers impacted the thinking and artistic expression of many visual artists, but Alberto Giacometti was directly influenced by Sartre and his article *Being and Nothingness*. (Fineberg, 2000) His sculptures have a haunting quality that is very sketchy and impressionistic, described as tall and gangly with a rough surface blurred to the naked eye. This blurriness and haunting quality suggested the ungraspable, a characterization of fragility that allowed them to disappear gradually into non-existence. The theme of Existentialism stressed a radical reduction to the beginning of things and these figures are cut back to an unfinished quality.



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The artist tried to break away from all training to discover reality through the process of working. In his *City Square*, the gangly figures have enlarged feet that are tied, or cemented, to the ground. The intentional connection of the feet to land symbolized the figures as being part of the earth. These figures again illustrated walking in solitude, alone, as the path they walked never cross the paths of any other figures. His figures were never separate from the background they were always tied to their setting. Giacometti believed that it is impossible to ever really finish anything because he, the artist, was constantly evolving. Therefore, because the artist identified himself as being in a state of existence that was constantly changing, he could never come to a finite conclusion.

Giacometti's drawings were very gestural, adding layers upon layers until the lines melded together to create the image. There is also a gestural quality in his sculptures, which are made of wax or plaster and then cast in bronze, and have a very textured

⁸ Annette Seated

Alberto Giacometti, European, Swiss, 1901-1966

The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan, USA. 60.88 Founders Society Purchase, Friends of Modern Art Fund 1958

Paintings

Oil and pencil on canvas

115.5 cm x 88.9 cm

CAMIO: DIA_60.88

surface. He created very long bodied figures that seemed cemented in the ground. After studying his work, I began abstracting my art more. Creating figures of my own, I combined colors that would capture a stronger sense of melancholy in the work. I enjoyed making art that created tension, and a sense of mystery that I hoped made the viewer seem uncomfortable, because that is how I felt. The strokes changed, the subject matter changed, and the colors grew darker.

An earlier painting of mine, *Cathedral*, is a 30"X40" work of art that has an immediate, dark, ominous presence. Dark, strong colors engulf a looming figure seen over the top of a broken down cathedral. A haunting scene of figures with arms upraised towards the large figure, scattered in an almost grave like location, draws you towards the inclination of death. The texture of the paint scrapes into the figures, disintegrating the colors and images into one another, almost as if in a dark storm of showers. The layers built up contain the gestural energy inspired by Giacometti and the thick, dark colored texture of Anselm Kiefer.



⁹ Top Painting, (*Cathedral*, 30"X40," Oil on Canvas, Katherine Parks); Bottom (*Untitled*, 4'X6, Oil on Canvas, Katherine Parks), next page, (*Untitled*, 2'X2', Oil on Canvas, Katherine Parks)



This work was created shortly after the death of my grandfather, and I wanted to let the dark emotion within me come out in the painting. I had taken the image from an

earlier pen and ink sketch I had created in which the vertical lines added to a melancholy atmosphere created by the cathedral and figures.

For the past two years, I had been struggling with my belief in God and the afterlife, and was fascinated by the existential movement. So much is focused on creation in Christianity, but because of the loss of a grandparent, death had bestowed upon me a curiosity of the afterlife and the coming of the end of creation. I've often been told that before the judgment of the living, the dead will rise up from the grave. At this time, I became very depressed, and began researching existentialism. I researched the artist Giacometti who believed there was no hope, and no meaning to life. This inspired me to convey my depression onto canvas as a means of reflecting and analyzing my inner struggle.

CHAPTER IV: Francis Bacon

There were many artists that were influenced by existentialism, but none with as horrific artwork as Francis Bacon. His works grip the viewer with a “primal terror” that is illustrated by harsh, sadistic, and violent subject matter. (Fineberg, 2000) Bacon takes early artistic examples and influences and turns them into bloody heaps, attempting to symbolize the rising above the gore of this world. His figures are transformed by the uses and threats perceived in the object by the primitive drives of his unleashed, unconscious mind to glorify the bloody gruesomeness he relishes.

In one painting, Bacon does a study after Velasquez’s portrait in which the brushstrokes close in on an uncomfortable, claustrophobic space around the subject. The eyes of the figure look out forlornly, but make no contact with the viewer. The artist gradually discovered the emotional reality of his subject matter through the use of chance, irrational reality, and by permitting one image to suggest the other. The emotional meaning is hidden from the consciousness until he chooses to let it out, and then it is unleashed in this primal, gruesome terror that shocks and horrifies the viewer.

As a youth, Bacon suffered terribly, and WWII did not help. The Velasquez portrait was influenced by being overlaid with imagery from the film, “Potemkin,” which has the horrifying effect similar to what Bacon creates, as he uses shocks and effects to manipulate his audience. If someone asked Bacon to explain his work, he would say it is like explaining your instincts. It is this concept, this primal aspect of chaotic activity that captures loss of control that provides a sense of helplessness and terror.



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10 Study for Portrait

Francis Bacon, European, British, Irish
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. 95.71 Donated by Mr. and Mrs. Edmond R. Ruben, 1995

Oil on canvas

Unframed 24-1/8 x 20-1/8 x 1/2"

CAMIO: WAC_95.71

The acceptance and knowledge of these emotions are the very forces civilization tries to repress in everyone, and Bacon glorifies it. (Fineberg, 2000) Like Bacon, I too try to approach my art in a way that will get the viewer to react. Each painting holds a spiritual element but also gets a visual interpretation to inform the viewer. He uses color and brushstroke to emphasize the context of his work, as do I.

Post-war culture in Europe caused philosophers to question their existence and meaning in life, which leads to questions like, “Why are we here? What am I responsible for? What is the point?” These questions, this existentialist thought of being alone and responsible for our own path only to face nothingness and cease to exist when the time is up for an individual, led artists to redirect their painting. Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock, David Smith, and Alberto Giacometti are all individuals who sought to find themselves through the action and process of creating. This is an ever-changing process, an existential ideal that is written about and discussed in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre.

CHAPTER V: ANSELM KIEFER

Recently, I had been looking at the art of Anselm Kiefer. I had originally seen his work at the Albright Knox Art Gallery, where a huge painting shows a crop field damaged by war. His work is similar to mine in that there is a lot of textural build up of layers and colors. In many paintings, there is war and damage of nature. I was inspired mostly by the texture of his work, and experimented with different ways to achieve the strongest textural quality. His paintings are very dark, and expressive, looking to explain to the viewer the destruction and suffering the war put his country through.

Much like Kiefer, I, too, use broken color and texture to depict the agony of the individual faced with death. *Cathedral* is representative of my Christian faith. Sometimes, I picture myself and other followers like this because there is so much that is unknown in our faith. Is the God we worship really all we believe him to be? Sometimes Christian's carry a blind faith, told they will be rewarded in the end with eternal life. One wants to believe their loved one is in heaven, but if they're not judged until the end, what happens to their spirit in the meantime? Maybe we're all just hoping for something that will never come, and will be reaching up, our souls agonizing to find the spirit who will save them from death.

The dark colors were chosen to enhance the darkness shown within the imagery. I believe the scraped texture also adds to the energy and emotion as my sadness and anger went into my work. Overall, I've combined imagery and textured brushstroke to create an energy that I hope will evoke an unsettling and questioning plot in the head of the viewer. I want viewers to look at the scene and get a sense that this may be the Day of Judgment.

At this point I was still experimenting with what direction I wanted my work to focus upon, so I looked at artists who have similar styles to me who would to inspire and challenge me. Giacometti has the gestural energy portrayed in my work, and Monet inspired the broken color. The most recent artist, Anselm Kiefer, was used as a resource of war, damage, and destruction in my work, as well as the textural build up he creates. In my work, I tried reacting to the paint and the energy of the object instead of focusing exactly on what the object looked like. I studied which colors could be mixed to create shadows and highlights, how thick the paint had to be to keep it workable, and struggled to keep the paint from getting muddy. This kind of textured effect allowed the paint to move, and almost take on a life of its own. This was a breaking point for me, and was the deciding factor to keep studying, and creating paintings to further develop my own style.

CHAPTER VI: MY WORKS

In developing the idea for this thesis, I've struggled with many new ideas, but my favorites have been the figurative subject matter I've worked with. All my research has been on artists like Giacometti, Sartre, Bacon, and other artists who use art as a tool to express their ideas and self-reinvention. They let it reflect their evolution as both a person and an artist. Their existential ideas are partly based on questioning the existence of a god and the purpose for being. As I struggled with a fulltime job, grad school and a new relationship, I felt thrown into all these things at once and at times feel like my life was falling apart. Each one needed a strong focus that was sometimes draining and there was a search to define exactly who I was and what I wanted to do with my life.

The one outlet that I have relied upon is my art. It has been used to show loneliness, inner fears, dissolving of my identity. It reflected the three deaths that have drained me emotionally and left me bare, but out of all that, there's some good that's come out of this struggle and uncertainty. In the current path my life is taking me, I feel like there is a light surrounding me and protecting me from all the bad that has happened and promising a new future, and instead of expressing the melancholy emotion of the past, I wanted my new paintings to reflect my current state of mind.

My original proposal stated that I would convey figures that are symbolic of what I've endured on my evolutionary journey as a person and an artist. There was lots of room to experiment as I continued to take new events that were happening in my life and showed promise, as life is still uncertain. Expressive brushwork along with continued exploration with a gel medium became tools to express inner struggles with emotion, life and identity.

I created a series of sketches in preparation for the new body of work. This series was not to depict portraits, but to put the figures in a dramatic environment. Each work seemed to be part of each other as they conveyed a conversation or narrative with each other. The figures portrayed in each painting are not still, but move together almost as if in a choreographed dance as a couple. It is my intent through the art that the viewer will have a better understanding of who I am as an artist, individual and spiritual being. These figures are intended to give expression to my inner self. Although they suggest reference to the human figure, the emphasis is not on representational accuracy, but of images extracted from my imagination, what I think and feel rather than what I see. I now had the challenge to combine the freedom and imagination of abstract paintings with recognizable, representation of figurative art, striving to bring life to the paintings.

After the creation of the drawings, I decided on five sketches that would let me embark on a new experiment. I would not create in one day, but instead work over time so each painting would have a relationship with each other stylistically. I started by drawing the composition in charcoal, and overlaying it with a gel medium to give it texture. (This would give me the ability to use less paint to build up the surface; in this way I could focus on color at another time). I spent two weeks blocking in color so I could see how the colors related to each other before I get one area more worked than the others. Blocking in all the colors took a long time, but allowed them to all have the same process. I struggled with the lower section of my paintings and had to raise paintings up higher on the wall because the movement of my hand was limited and the lower part of the drawing was getting lost. Once I went in with the values, the paintings began to make

sense. It was frustrating to take time to let each of the layers dry before I could move onto the next process. Once the layers were dry I really wanted to go back into the painting with the brush to redraw the lines because compositionally some lines didn't look right, but the gel medium made reworking difficult because the lines were permanently embedded under the paint. I struggled to keep the final outcome full of energy and power that my drawings had but soon realized I had to break away from the drawings so the paintings could start evolving on their own, each one growing from each other.

The paintings have a clear color range and I noticed a tension between the figure and the space. As I got into other paintings I struggled mostly with either proportion or making the objects feel comfortable with one another. I learned that you really need to walk away for a little bit and then come back to examine the painting with a fresh eye. Up close, the painter focuses on the little hints of color and usually does not focus anywhere but that one spot. Stepping back and seeing the painting from a distance helps you judge the relationships between the objects so you can see what needs to be fixed. It's ok to go back and scrape off part of the painting and rework it, and there are also sacrifices made when doing that. I had to decide what I was willing to leave and what I had to change so it would feel comfortable with the rest of the painting. I learned that I can and should sacrifice some good parts if they don't help the whole because I was able to equal or exceed the quality of the sacrificed part of the painting.

As I worked through this problem, I felt I was getting too distracted by the color and wanted to explore the relationships between figure and space in a different way.

CHAPTER VII: CONTEMPORARY ARTIST INFLUENCES

I researched other artists who were doing similar paintings in subject matter or technique and found two artists whose work stood out both in style and in criteria for creating the art itself. Now that the paintings were starting to come to life I was questioning the space around them and what kind of dialogue they illustrated.

One of the artists that I researched, Daniel Paulo, created a series of “angels” in which he had depicted an impression of a figure against a background in which they seem to both appear and disappear at the same time. Their meaning is not entirely certain. In his artist statement, Daniel states:

Art is a search for something indefinable and inconsistent...there can never be an end to the questing, for the answers are always like half glimpses, like the sighting of an angel...and yet something tangible does result.

His paintings are built on expressive gestures and unidentifiable shapes that are stated to “encourage us to look for the human subject in (and) amongst the deluge of amorphous forms to draw the viewer through an intense maze of lines” creating an illusion between what is seen and what is inferred. This is very much like the effect I am trying to get with my works.

Donna Engstrom is another artist who inspired me because of the way she works and because of her medium, which is sculpture. This artist gets into “the zone. She believes great things can happen “when an artist connects with the collective consciousness and their higher creative power.” I realized that this is what my paintings had lost! Donna honed her intuition and was excited to paint by reducing figures to their simplest forms and designing with color and shape. She believed in experimenting with different media, much like myself. I decided to explore my figures in sculptural form, reflecting back to the investigations I had conducted which were also like Giacometti. But instead of working with bronze, I was going to use steel to create abstract forms. This would allow me to work solely with positive and negative space, as well as with the relationships each form established with another. At this point, exploring the forms sculpturally seemed more important in helping to create a balance between the figures that I wanted to bring into my paintings. The sculptures developed very well and had a strength in not being overworked, but created by pure intuition. Creating these new sculptures rejuvenated my inspiration again, and using gold and silver leaf, I began to play with texture on one of the sculptures.

Another thing I decided to do was to weave saplings together to create two kneeling figures in a similar style to the figures in my paintings. These were then placed next to each other utilizing the negative space in between them to create a conversation between the two figures. I was happy with my results and ready to continue with my paintings.

As I continued to work on my paintings, I found myself reworking areas over and over, until each work seemed somewhat overworked. I struggled with what to do, now fixing each painting instead of intuitively creating. Something was lost. I felt these could move forward more. I felt that there was too much broken color and I glanced at a print I had done in college. That’s it! What if I could print onto my paintings? This was something I had never done. I began taping off sections of the substrate and then I

created stencil shapes from wax paper to create my desired shapes. In the end, this got rid of some problem areas while adding a new freshness to the works.

I then went back to the art of an old college professor, Dennis Barraclough, a printmaker whose work I responded very well to. His artist statement reads:

Monotype, collage, paint are the techniques for these recent works. I start out printing several layers of color on a plate with the etching press, which creates a visual stimulus for the work. I respond to this in a completely intuitive way aesthetically, responding to color or surface, where this might lead, nothing beyond that. During this process the piece becomes more complex, thus leading to further investigation. To say anything more than this would seem superficial. This is my process, the way I work.

As an artist this was the process my evolution was beginning to define for itself. Instead of creating the figure and then adding a background, what if I first created the background and then put the figure into it. Printing with acrylic paint would allow me to immediately place layer upon layer, decreasing the drying time and preserving the automatic intuition of the original idea. I began by mixing a color on paper and then scraping it off, to reveal the colors underneath. I worked with various shapes until I was satisfied with the results. These final prints had solved many of the issues I initially had with the other paintings. The works on paper seemed to take on a life of their own. I was becoming my own entity.

¹¹



¹¹ Red Lounge, 24'X36," Monotype, Katherine Parks

EPILOGUE

Art has always intrigued me, and I've always had the dream of one day becoming a working artist. After high school I decided to go to college to obtain a B.S. in Visual Arts Education. This allowed me to explore various media from drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, computer graphics, pottery, and sculpture. Throughout my career as a student at Daemen College, I thoroughly enjoyed the painting and drawing courses. In my sophomore year at Daemen, I took an Introduction to Acrylic Painting class, which allowed the students in the class to explore various styles including cubism, impressionism, broken color techniques and abstract art, as well as numerous still life studies. For the project in broken color, we looked at artists like Cezanne and Van Gogh for inspiration and had to create a textured background on which I painted a pumpkin. I loved discovering the different effects the palette knife gave to the painting and wished to continue exploring that style, unfortunately this was the last project I was able to do in this class.

I tried getting into another painting class, but was unable to do so until my senior year when I took an Introduction to Oil Painting course with the same instructor. Because of my previous background in painting, I was able to enter a whole new level of development and exploration. Still inspired by my previous broken color style, I wished to explore this process more. I have always enjoyed the art of Monet and Cezanne, and believe they help to inspire this style as well. Through still life studies I began to take control of this new technique and loved what it did with the subject matter in the painting. Finally at the end of the course I picked a large scale (30"X40") canvas and just let the ideas flow. I didn't hold back and just painted with the joy of discovery while classical music played in the background. I loved how colors intertwined with each other and instead of shading, one had to know the different color relationships to add the right colors to create depth and lighting. The paint allows the subject matter to take on a life of it's own and intrigue the viewer to take a closer look. In the end, I felt I reached a breaking point and desired to continue my education to further explore my painterly potential.

Many art teachers go on to get a Master's in Art Education, but I wanted to get a degree that would enhance my own creative potential and allow me to further the opportunity to become a working artist and to possibly teach college. The MFA lent itself to developing my own artistic dreams of becoming a better painter. I found a style that I really enjoyed as an undergraduate, but because of the education requirements was unable to further my experience as a painter in other courses. I was willing to take chances and not hold back when it came to ideas, inspiration and new ways of painting. I want to expand my knowledge of art history and enhance my own artistic abilities. I want to teach but I need to combine that with being a working artist. This MFA degree will help achieve that goal and is the next step in opening that door of opportunity that would otherwise be closed to me. Much of the work that I create still depends on the emotional state that I'm in. I choose a subject matter because the composition strikes me, or a line I make turns into a figure, which develops an environment of its own. All of these artistic influences have melded together to create a style that includes gesture, texture, fragmentation, and emotional elements, all inspired by the artists that inspire me. My style has not demanded that I produce a consistent brushstroke, but all of it captures a

gestural energy that is unique to the subject and emotion I'm trying to create as I search to define what I think, feel and believe. I grant myself lots of room for experimentation as I continue to take the new events that are happening in my life and examine their contribution in my creative work that I would like to convey that is more figurative. I will continue to create more prints in the future and continue to be influenced by the artists that believe in self-exploration, reinvention, constant evolution of the artist, and questioning the reason for being.

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