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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

DISPLACEMENT

by

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May 21, 07

To Dr. Stephen and Stephanie Mandzyk
12/10/1911-3/17/2006; 1/09/1939-7/19/2003

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of my thesis was to create paintings that were meaningful to me in a personal way. What about me is unique and different? Well, I am Ukrainian and it is a big part of my life. My family is really important to me so I decided to paint something related to my sense of growing up Ukrainian. This thesis is about the journey to find myself as a Ukrainian-American artist. I struggled to find my vision and grew up with an insatiable need to draw and use color. As the present body of work developed, a theme of displacement evolved.

Displacement is a broad term that I use in the sense of a person being displaced from their culture and land of origin as in my father's case. Displacement is also used as a term to describe my feelings of growing up displaced from my family language and culture because I was growing up in America where being different is normal but assimilation into being an American is key. While a number of artists who influenced how I paint, my paintings began using a personal symbolism as I created poetic pictures that were full of meaning. At the same time they were abstract and sometimes puzzling to the viewer without any explanation from me. I'm interested in how my paintings, as a body of work, look abstract and seem, at first, to be about only color and shape but become so much more in depth and personal and have stories behind them as they are explained. I experimented with pictorial representations that explain my identity and feelings as a Ukrainian-American with regard to my parents and

childhood. In the future I will continue to enhance my vision and the relation of myself to my paintings.

ARTIST'S BACKGROUND

My painting is a process of evolution. As a child, I always loved to draw. When I was in a Ukrainian nursery school and we drew pictures of the sun on blank pieces of paper. My hand seemed to flow with the way of the circle and it was so natural and easy for me and I could tell it was not so easy for others. I knew then, at three or four, that I had a talent for drawing. I was continually praised for my artwork throughout grade school. I learned to love art class and my art teachers. My parents encouraged me to pursue art and gave me the support to realize my talent. They enrolled me in an Arts Academy even though my sisters were attending Catholic school.

I started still-life painting while a high school student at the Buffalo Academy for Visual and Performing Arts, a public magnet school which trains students to specialize in Art, Communication Arts, Dance, Theater Arts or Music. As a high school student studying art, I learned how to paint with oil and acrylic paints, and then began to engage in printmaking. My first prints were dry point; gradually I learned more intaglio methods. My paintings evolved from still life to imaginary representations. Throughout my undergraduate years at the University at Buffalo, I explored collage and painting representations of fruit, vases, pottery, figures, portraits, landscapes and other academic subject matter, in a rather expressionist manner.

My use of color in painting was initially inspired through the study of the artist Matisse. I admired how he set complementary colors next to each other in

purposefully simple compositions, reworking each composition many times, until he achieved a sense of balance. His works are masterpieces of color, combined with shapes and patterns that harmonize. "Matisse refrained from modulation, to express simple, luminous areas in subjective equilibrium...He belonged to the Paris group Les Fauves." (Itten 1970) I believe that because I studied Matisse so intently I learned how to use color. I usually get complements on the color choices in my paintings.

In graduate school my aim was to paint abstractly, so I worked for a full year on experimenting with paint. For the paint experiments I used representational themes I was comfortable with so that content issues would not get in the way of the experimental focus on paint. At first, I painted floral themes using a colorful palette with an ethnic flair. Palettes can sometimes be drab or neutral yet my palette was about bright colors that looked like the embroidery of the shirts and skirts of the costumes of my Eastern European heritage. I splashed paint around, purposefully painting naïve and simple memories of the landscapes of Palestine, where I had just gone on a pilgrimage the year before. I had also visited my father's country that summer to visit my extended family. All the while I was on a journey to find my voice in the abstract realm.

Finally towards the summer months, I discovered a way of painting in an abstract manner, utilizing the theme of displacement. This style and theme made sense to me, and merged ethnic memory with abstract notions.

THE THEME OF DISPLACEMENT

In this abstract body of work for my thesis, I created a personal symbolism where the canvas is primarily divided into equal sections; space is divided into parts that harmonize through symmetry and color. These visual images of separation and harmonization represent a symbolic division from the mainstream. My intention in this series of paintings is to symbolically represent the separation of “in place” people from “out of place” people. “Out of place” or “displaced” refers to those people who are forcefully migrated from their homeland, and challenged to live in places where they feel they don't belong. The reasons for their forced migration are numerous: political persecution, political partition, violence, war, natural or man-made disasters, or economic hardship.

I chose to explore the concept of displaced people, because of my personal experiences growing up with my father, who was an immigrant to the United States from Ukraine. After the conflicts of World War II, he became a displaced person, forced to leave his native country to escape communism and the Soviet system. Even though he lived in America for more than half of his life, my father immersed himself in his homeland's culture in many ways. As I grew up, my father, a zealous Ukrainian patriot, taught me about his native land and its rich cultural traditions. I was taught to speak my parent's language before even speaking English. American traditions were constantly compared to Ukrainian ones. American soil was different than the motherland's soil, American foods

were different, American children acted differently than Ukrainian children would. What I unequivocally understood, through childhood and into adulthood, was my father's deep yearning to live in his motherland, and the desire he had for his children to consider themselves part of his homeland. Even though he lived in a land that welcomed him, his profound feelings of unsettlement, and displacement from the land that he was forced from, deeply colored his perceptions of life. I wonder how much of his feelings colored my own perceptions. This discomfort is a theme that I explore in my series of paintings.

The concept of not belonging is, in a sense, part of belonging, because we are all unique, yet we are all integrally related to one another. This paradox is the reason I created this visual symbolism—it is a truth that I have come to understand.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Through introspection, I realized that my chosen theme displacement was something that I had been contemplating for a long time, starting as a child growing up Ukrainian-American. Looking back on memories, I realized that even that in the home I lived in, one seemed transported from the old city of Lviv in Western Ukraine. In the kitchen, decorated with icons and prints depicting traditional village life, my mother and father spoke only Ukrainian and cooked ethnic foods: pyrogies, borscht, sauerkraut and sausage and schnitzels. The entire home was decorated with traditional embroidered linens and bookshelves filled with books in the Ukrainian language. My favorite book was a huge edition of "The Kobzar" by Taras Shevchenko who is the Ukrainian hero, a poet and artist who lived in the 19th century. I drew in the book with my crayons and covered the poetry and Shevchenko prints with my four-year-old scrawl and scribble. Photographs of relatives back in my family's country were present in the house as well but only from my mother's side. My father said that all his photographs burned when the German city of Dresden was bombed during World War II and my father's apartment was burned down. He lived there during the war to escape the worse situation in the country of his birthplace. There he studied medicine and eventually became a doctor in America after not knowing where to go after the war. He did not want to marry a German woman and become a German citizen because he wanted to marry a woman from his background, which he eventually did. The radio in our transposed kitchen blared

Ukrainian AM radio broadcasts from Buffalo and Toronto, and my mother would sometimes dance a fast polka in the kitchen, if the mood struck her. I was enveloped with a warm blanket of Ukrainian culture and family throughout childhood.

The backyard of our home resembled a family farm, rather than a normal, American city backyard: it was filled with an enormous vegetable and fruit garden, featuring a wide range of offerings from the standard cucumbers, tomatoes and beets offerings, to the more exotic, such as horseradish, plums, red currants and gooseberries. Every morning in the summer time I would go to the garden to play on the swing set and talk to my father as we watered the plants and fruit trees.

My father missed Ukraine. This was apparent to me, even as a child. Back then, I would tell him that the spring weather in Buffalo was beautiful, and my father's response would be that it did not even compare to the beautiful early spring of his beloved motherland. Nothing compared to the Ukrainian culture, the language, the weather- everything there was better. I longed to go there and make this comparison myself, and so did my father. We had this opportunity to visit together in 1997. Seeing the village where he grew up, unchanged in many aspects, led me to understand him much better. In fact, my father's dying wish was to return to his land of origin for one last time. I have visited my family's homeland a total of four times in my lifetime, and though it is not my birthplace, it is very special to me because it is my heritage.

THE PROCESS

By experimenting with shape, composition and color combinations in my series "Displacement," I abstractly illustrate the boundaries and sense of discomfort faced by displaced people. I create visual representations of displacement and boundary layers of water by using simple half circles, frames and borders in my paintings. Contained enclosures are represented by negative sections of color, placed underneath and surrounded by frames and borders. My work has content, yet the subject is abstracted into painterly relationships with shape, space and color. I chose to depart from representation, and in its place, distort the subject matter toward my own notion of reality, rather than to that perceived through regular vision.

The Color Field painters, who made abstract work by using formal devices, are of great interest and inspiration to me. In some ways Color Field painting inspires my artwork. "Most obvious among the shared formal characteristics of this painting is its emphasis on color- on relationships of hue and saturation rather than value differences- as the chief determinant of pictorial organization. As a corollary, it has evolved a typical pictorial structure, which exhibits a tenuous, pulsating flatness and a strong bent toward a unitary effect as opposed to a hierarchical or relational arrangement of discreet parts. It has arrived at abstractness more radical than that of any art before it, imageless and devoid of all literary or symbolic associations. Yet it is not an exercise in

formalism and turns out to be much more decorative. Form- especially color- is conceived of as the vehicle of feeling: feeling and form are one". (Colt 1970) In my paintings three-dimensional space is flattened out and there is a shallow picture frame.

Mark Rothko, the abstract artist known as a Color-Field painter, interests me because space, luminosity and color are the primary considerations in his work. My work explores similar composition format considerations and abstracted quality that Rothko pioneered. In 1949 Rothko developed a simple and effective format that he would use to paint pictures for the rest of his life –a full twenty years. Rothko's signature image, so to speak, consisted of broad rectangular shapes placed one above the other in a tall and massive stack. This stark and simple format supported an outstanding and monumental body of work, paintings which elicit rapt attention, deep emotion, even awe". (Chave 1983) I am enthralled with how his canvases are divided into two halves, with an upper and lower portion and colors framed with resonating, accentuating colors. His colors are harmonious and leave a spiritual impression. I would hope that my work reflects his, since I admire it so much. His canvases are much larger than mine but the idea of dividing the canvas is the same, and so is the overall abstract look of the pieces. Rothko's blocks of color seem to float on the background color like clouds or auras. In his paintings the color is applied with brushstrokes that cannot be seen and there are no visible edges. In contrast, my paintings brushstrokes are seen and make up certain images, and edges are well defined.

Rothko has said that his paintings can be described as “facades” because they tell little. His paintings are about subjects but he did not “tell all”.

My subject could be an archetypal image that I achieved through automatism. Carl Jung, a great psychologist coined the term archetype as an idea that is present in the unconscious of an individual and is derived from the experience of the race. Automatism is a term coined by Andre Breton, one of the first Surrealists, who describes a method of working from the unconscious to arrive at imagery. Many Abstract Expressionists, like Rothko used this working method. In doing a series of work related to symbols, repetition might make the image archetypal or at least symbolic. Jung wrote “ The living symbol shapes and formulates an essential unconscious factor, and the more generally this factor prevails, the more general is operation of the symbol; for in every soul it touches a chord”. (Arnason 1982)

My thesis series began in the studio with a small painting that was reminiscent of a sunset (figure 1). I painted the background yellow then contained the yellow in a frame of murky purple. Above the yellow I placed red and then bands of turquoise and other colors above the vessel shape. It was like a porthole to a sunset on the water, and as soon as I painted it I knew this was the direction my thesis was going in. It seemed that the water was in a vessel and that it was in the process of movement either down or up. When something is placed in water, the water around it is naturally displaced. This is Archimedes law of water displacement. He was the Greek scientist who cried Eureka after

noticing that the bath water was displaced in the public baths. Archimedes was thinking along the same lines as Newton. He was thinking about the physical world we live in. Instead of gravity he was thinking about water displacement. The porthole or cave like entrance is a view onto the water. This is a perfect metaphor for my father's displacement. After this painting I painted three more



Figure 1: Distant Motherland

the same size (figures 2 and 3) with different color harmonies and my idea was on its way. The color values in the painting achieved a tactile quality. There is a sensation of recession and advancement because the yellow in the center is so

bright and warm that it seems to advance while the darker and cooler color of murky purple recedes. I exploited the properties of colors in all the works where there is a sense of coming forward and going back to express a sense of space. The proportions of the shapes lend to the composition a sense of space as well. The yellow, or color in the center is prominent, while the purple is on the edge



Figure 2: Displaced Water

and only frames the vessel. The fluid in the vessel is being displaced by the bands of color going across the vessel on the inside, changing the color on the

top horizontal portion of the container, or so that is the illusion. Like the displaced water in the painting, people are displaced by circumstances beyond their control. People are displaced like the yellow fluid at the bottom of the vessel. They are brought to a higher level as the water around them rises due to the painting being placed like a porthole in the water. The organically shaped purple frame is like a window of a cave entrance to a view of a horizon. The water is moving suggested by the wavy lines at the top yet at the same time pressurized by the weight of the heavy bands of colors above it. The apparent simplicity of design repeats itself in all of my work in this series.

I studied Josef Albers during my first year of graduate school and really enjoyed reading about his color theory. He ascertained that color changes depending on the color placed next to it. He demonstrated how many plates of color change when another color is placed adjacent to it. For example a yellow square of color would change its hue if it were placed adjacent to the color white,



Figure 3:
Eureka

compared to its placement next to the color, black. He was aware of the interdependence of color with form and placement. He demonstrated through many examples of various patches of color in many combinations that basically “no normal eye, not even the most trained one, is foolproof against color deception. He who claims to see colors independent of their illusionary changes fools only himself, and no one else.” (Albers 1963) He demonstrated the reason why we are all fooled by our eyes in regard to color by showing examples of the effects of after-images of colors. He also shows examples of how two different colors can look the same depending on what colors are placed around them. Albers’ color theory changed my thoughts about color, and influenced my juxtaposition of colors in my painting series. I also deeply appreciated how Albers’ paintings are simplified squares and use rich colors in layers. I started using flat sections of color with compartments and borders, resembling Albers color theory compositions (figure 4). Using bands and spheres of color juxtaposed with alternating colors with hard edges in my paintings I compared colors not based on theories and examples of interactions of color but according to my own sense of harmony. Harmony in painting is very subjective however there are objective considerations that can be learned like combining complementary colors or creating compositions with secondary colors. “Color effects are in the eye of the beholder. Yet the deepest and truest secrets of color effect are, I know, invisible even to the eye, and are beheld by the heart alone. The essential eludes conceptual formation.” (Itten 1970) I used my three

quarters full circles with different color harmonies and layers to express Josef Alber's belief in his color theory, a theory he expressed in some of his poetry:

When I paint and construct
I try to develop visual articulation
I do not think then – about abstraction
And just as little – about expression
I do not look for isms
And not at momentary fashion
I see
That art essentially is purpose
And seeing (schauen)
That form demands
Multiple presentation
Manifold performance
I do not see
That forced individualism
Or forced exaltation
are the source
Of convincing formulation
Of lasting meaning
In my own work
I am content to compete

With myself

And to search with simple palette

And with simple color

For manifold instrumentation

So I dare further variants



Figure 4: Portholes

A PERSONAL SYMBOLISM

Using squares and horizontal bands of color, my painting "Pool Focus" (figure 5) could be an homage to Josef Albers' painting "Homage to the Square."



Figure 5: Pool Focus

The most prevalent color in the painting is the mint-green square symbolizing a pool of water. Above it lays a horizontal, thick band of orange, then thinner pink, and dark green bands. The top part of my painting is reminiscent of Albers because he uses bands of color that surround other larger shapes. They are like boundaries that separate yet still connect different colors. A comparison is made between the top half and bottom half. In "Pool Focus" the serene California pool signifies the potential human gene pool, across boundaries of countries. This tranquil, pleasant painting uses color harmonies, as well as compositional elements to convey a halcyon setting. In my painting the viewer is invited into the scene as the view becomes more in focus. The top half of the painting are geometric shapes that suggest a scene while the viewer is led to recognize a representation of a pool on the bottom half of the canvas which is made from the same geometric shapes. On the bottom of the canvas the shapes are in focus and the details form a pool with orange glass tiles, and a green hedge lining a pink wall.

The pool invites all of us in as we merge together as a united people who eventually may not be of any ethnicity or color. They say that languages are disappearing each year; perhaps, different ethnicities are disappearing each year as well. Someday we may all be the same mixed race and ethnicity and speak the same language. The pool is beautiful and tropically colored like a wonderful pool that describes all the potentials of a newborn to look a certain way

depending on the parent's characteristics. It may someday be a thing of the past to have a certain ethnicity or different heritage from everyone else. I have olive skin with dark hair and brown eyes. I have a round Eastern European face with Eastern European features like a small pointed nose and thin lips. Each country in Europe has its own look. In Scandinavian countries the gene pool makes one blonde, blue eyed and tall generally. It was a terrible mistake to try to create an ideal race that was Arian in the days of WWII. Differences exist in people from all countries and no people are superior to any other. However if someday differences in people are lessened occurring naturally over many ages, then stereo-types and prejudices may disappear as well.

In my painting the pool is painted in colors that look like warm weather colors for walls around pools. For this painting I used a lot of fantasy and dreaming to come up with a paradise pool picture. I feel that it is a strong piece in that the abstraction of the shapes and the color are well balanced. To create "Pool Focus," as well as for most of my compositions, I referred to a book on color harmony. It showed different color harmonies which, when combined, conveyed moods, ethnicity, or intense expressions. I utilized Color-aid (Color Aid Corp 1989) cards, to create just the right shade, tint, or mixture of certain colors that were not available straight out of the tube. I used my book on color harmony and my Color-aid cards for almost all my paintings. Sometimes just finding the right color harmony would be the beginning of a painting. In the book that was given to me by a fellow graduate student, some color harmonies would be

pleasant, others would represent certain ethnicities and others still would be moody. The book on color harmony is entitled 'Designer's Guide To Color 5' and in it strength can be depicted by incorporating a few colors that are bold and graphic and using color schemes of contrasting hues. In my painting "Pool Focus" I use the color bright pink. "Pink is essential because it is the symbol of happiness. It is the main color for the expression of pleasantness. With respect to the image associated with each color, orange is merry and robust." (Ikuyoshi and Takahashi 1991) I picked the colors that suited me. Having read Wassily Kandinsky's book entitled "Concerning The Spiritual In Art", I picked colors that were representative of certain realities. "Kandinsky began painting non-objective pictures about 1908. He contended that every color has its proper expressional value, and that it is therefore possible to create meaningful realities without representing objects." (Itten 1970) I used this approach in all of my paintings as well. There is a constructive effort in painting, and according to Kandinsky, my compositions are melodic. He states that there is what he refers to as a "simple composition, which is regulated according to an obvious and simple form." (Kandinsky 1977) In my paintings the simple form of the vessels with the bands all created with certain harmonizing colors cause it to be melodic because it is a simple composition. In general, I avoided using the color black directly from a tube, as in the tradition of the Impressionists, who would recreate the color using dark blue, brown and purple. Kandinsky said that black has its own properties of recalling death, grief and has a totally dead silence.

I used black tube-paint on only one painting (figure 6) to create a sense of outer space. This painting reflected a mathematical approach to the containment series as it looks like a chalkboard from childhood math class. I decided that the circles were very geometric but I had not represented this facet of the sphere yet. Circles were part of the math we learn in high school in geometry class. They are universal and every student must learn that there are 360 degrees and that half is 180 degrees. In Ukraine the mathematical subjects are taught and encouraged more than the arts.



Figure 6: World Upside Down

Everyday on the way to class, I passed evergreen trees and appreciated the way the sunlight would sit on their branches. As a result I decided to add them to my painting. The evergreen plants represented under the brown,

express a view of the world upside-down. They symbolized the never-dying love for a distant motherland that I live with, inherited from my father. In Ukraine there are many forests and many evergreen trees. When I was a young girl going to Plast camp that is like Girl Scout camp for Ukrainians, I would see large evergreens in the forests around the camp. There was one forest that smelled great and had a carpet of pine needles on the ground that I loved to play in.

In my painting the brown above the trees buries them and it seems that the world is upside down but it is simply a personal symbol. When one is displaced it seems like the world is upside down because nothing is familiar. Things are different in Ukraine from America. The cars are different because they are small and compact and have old-time styling. The streets are cobblestone and twist all around the old city where streetcar rails twist in all directions along side. On Sundays there are only people and streetcars, no cars are allowed. Coffee shops serve Turkish coffee that is strong and dark with the grounds on the bottom. The shops are far from modern. The buildings are all older, some even from the 15th century. The architecture is very beautiful and the colors of the buildings are very natural. How different Buffalo and Rochester are to Lviv, Ukraine. When he was in his birthplace, my father told people that the streets in the U.S. were so smooth they seem made of glass. How different from the pothole filled one-lane highways they have in my father's homeland. The bathrooms in the rest stops had just a hole in the floor. How different from the touch-free, self-flushing toilets with the touch-free sink faucets that we have

here in America. Ukraine is called “the old country” and it truly is behind in so many ways. Things that we take for granted in western countries are taken as luxuries like indoor bathrooms. Life is different in the villages. People make their own food from milk taken from the cows in the morning and grow their own wheat to make bread. Life was really upside down for my father when he came to live in this country as an immigrant from a faraway, in time and place country.

“Time Delay” compares the same scene over time. The top of the composition is the “before” section, and the bottom section, separated by horizontal bands, represents the “after” with time elapsed. In the top image, “the before”, I visually represent an image of a desolate, still lake. On the bottom of the canvas, “the after” a settlement of camps is symbolized by triangular refugee tents on the bank of the lake. On the lake, there is commotion with movement symbolized by squiggles of thrown paint across the now un-calm lake. This painting demonstrates how people who have moved and been displaced into a region make new settlements albeit temporary. This painting relates to all forced migrants, but is influenced by those displaced because of war and violence. In “Time Delay” (figure 7) my color choices are inspired by the landscapes of the southwestern United States, with the intense turquoise, country blues, coral and white colors. The use of this southwestern palette was intentional, paying homage to the settlement of pioneers into the Great Frontier of the This migration of foreigners to the southwest is not merely a fact of history: today, new immigrants to the United States are migrating westward and northward to cities

like Phoenix, Arizona and Las Vegas, Nevada, where they settle in search of the American dream.



Figure 7: Time Delay

In my series, I also included a uniquely American type of flag painting (figure 8) that I felt compelled to paint after the tragedy of 9/11 during 2001. This tragedy occurred during the second year of graduate school in the beginning of

the quarter. Professor Alan Singer was conducting a class in the basement of RIT; he left the classroom to go to the library to get another projector for slides. When he came back, he told the class that the World Trade Center had just been struck by an airplane. It was so shocking to all of us that no one said anything; there was complete silence as we looked at each other in amazement and horror. I don't remember much about the slides that we were shown that morning,

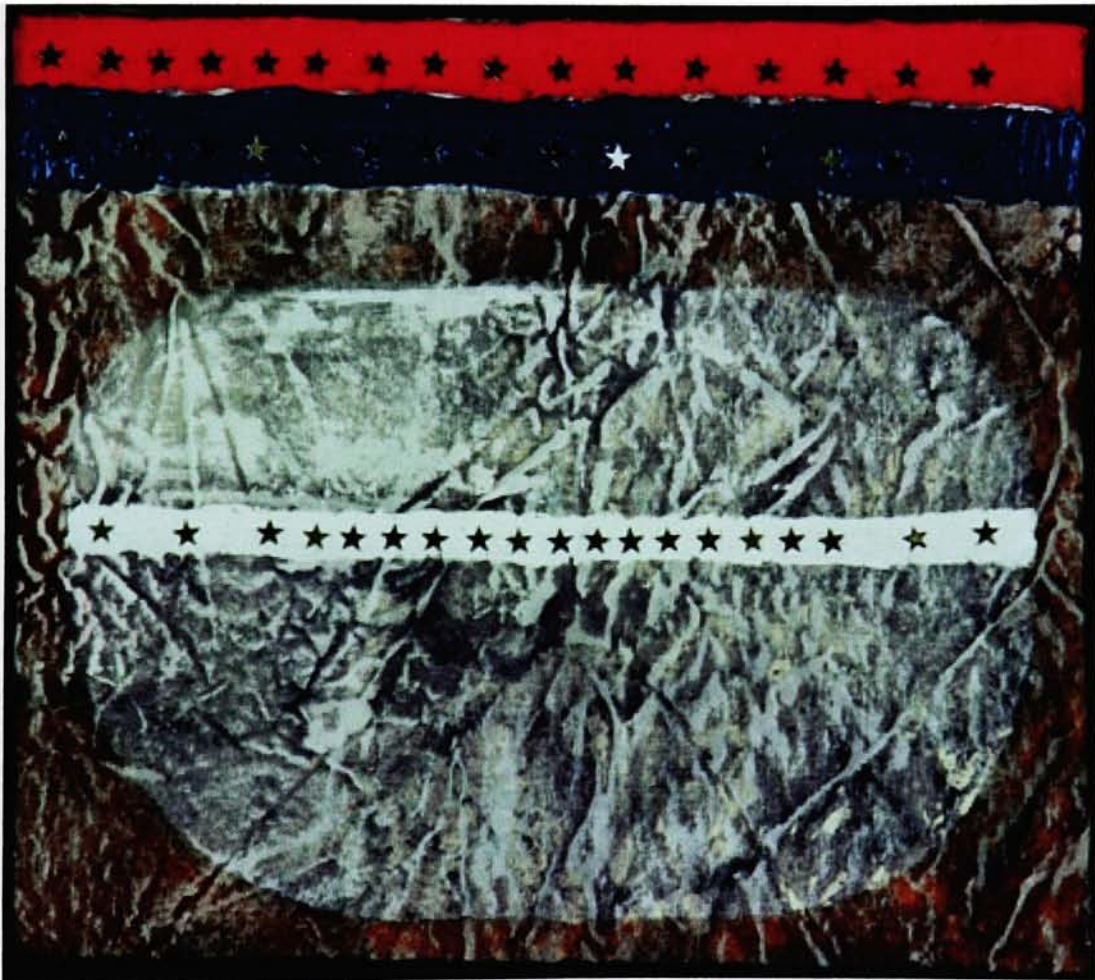


Figure 8: American Flag

because I was horrified. After the class I went upstairs and walked around and talked to people about what happened. I skipped painting for that day, and went home to sit mesmerized before the surreal, live television coverage. I prayed for people that were killed and injured, and hoped that the catastrophe would not damage many lives. Afterward, in my studio, in the days that followed, putting aside the political issues of American involvement with oil and the Middle East, I thought about how proud, and lucky I was to be an American. The 9/11 tragedies brought my identity questions to the forefront. The painting I was inspired to create was overtly patriotic, and relates to my general theme, and the conflict of identity that I feel as a Ukrainian-American.

In the painting, the vessel under the horizontal bands of red with silver stars was dyed using a technique similar to stonewashing denim. I used Ukrainian pysanky (Easter egg) dye to color the canvas, which is a technique similar to batik. [I also used pysanky dye for staining the water in "Time Delay."] Staining is a technique that is not new to artists: many Color-Field artists employed this technique to achieve their desired results. The colors I used were red, white and blue and the stars of the American flag were stuck into wood block oil, as an adhesive. My finished canvas looked and felt as American to me as an old, broken-in pair of Levi blue jeans.

The painting "Identity Crisis" (figure 9) in the series continues on the theme of identity and displacement by exploring the concept of questioning whether I was Ukrainian or American. The painting is obviously about a crisis of



Figure 9: Identity Crisis

some sort. The broken vessels and vases that are glued back together signifying the fragility of not knowing who you are. For me, the vase and myself, are pieced and glued together: I am American just like every other American. After the World Trade Center tragedy, I noticed a commercial playing on television, depicting a diverse group of people proudly declaring: "I'm American." I wondered if I belonged in that group: would I be compelled to proudly say: "I'm American?"

The flowers depicted in this piece are three-dimensional and were created by twisting canvas, affixing glue onto cotton rolls and painting them with acrylic paint. The cakes on the plates are pieces of the American pie being divided and ready to serve on dishes made up of shattered identities. The candy floating around signifies the abundance found in America. The background of the painting is a vessel shaped outline. Everything in the painting is floating around in a state of confusion. I tried to recreate the feeling of being a child, feeling confused about identity.

Printmaking is an important component to this series. The prints became reflections of the paintings in my series. At first many of my prints involved tree themes. But soon, I started using wash with toner to achieve large splashes that looked like paint but was actually toner mixed with chemicals to create vessel-like shapes that were spontaneous. I placed them one on top of another, and I was excited to see that they related to my paintings. While my paintings relate to color field painters, my prints relate to action painting because they use gesture

Figure 10:
Displaced



(figures 10, 11 and 13). As a whole I can see how the Abstract Expressionist movement and the professors I have had over the years who grew from out of that tradition influence my work. I really enjoyed the process of printmaking and became quite skilled at using the non-toxic method taught at R.I.T. I made many



Figure 11: Water Levels



Figure 12: Displacement

prints in black and white. I also tinted the black with blue and added touches of color for some. When I put up my thesis show I purposefully created a vessel like shape with the walls of the gallery around my work. I put up the prints on the outside of the space and then filled the inside with my paintings reflecting the symbol of the vessel.

The vessels in the prints are organic shapes, similar to cauldrons or containers, perhaps even bowls. Vases are feminine symbols, used since antiquity to hold food or mixtures of wine and water. These practical, utilitarian forms were made of clay, ceramic, metal, bronze, or other materials. These spheres hold spaces which are empty were it not for the color or washes of paint that give them stability and reassurance. The vase is a symbol I used to hold the fluid that is displaced. My half circles are like vessels from antiquity that hold water except that they are see through. The cauldrons that are actually half circles show the containment possible only with the ancient symbol of the vase or vessel. The containment of liquid that is being displaced possible only with a vessel type of utilitarian object is my central theme. "Vessels are not transparent windows into the past, but membranes that express their own properties and qualities. For the artist, historical pots are a *contemporary* reservoir of inspiration. They enlarge the vocabulary of a common ceramic language and enable new methods of combination and communication." (Frederick and Thompson 2003)

Displacement is a difficult thing to show in painting, like trying to show time, because it is an action and most paintings are about a subject not an action. The only way it was possible to show displacement was through an abstract, painterly language where water can stand up on its own between a frame and enclosure, bands of colors can layer upon each other to create a sense of movement. Since the vessels are see-through they are not decorated. Decorated vases have a long tradition that each culture throughout the ages used to signify their own story. Perhaps in the future my vessels will also be decorated. If they were decorated they would probably be decorated like the ancient pots of the Cucuteni culture of Western Ukraine from antiquity. In the Cucuteni culture the vases were decorated with the rain/water theme that is associated with the beak and eyes of the Cucuteni Goddess with broad bands of parallel lines painted over the neck and shoulders. (Gimbutas 1989) I believe that the spaces where the bands of color are in my paintings are perfect places for the symbols of the spirals and crescents reminiscent of the Cucuteni culture. The bands are already a type of decoration in the scheme of the abstract, painterly, symbolic language. They are useful to indicate separation and divide the space as a symbol of weight that is used to displace liquid. I can see how in future paintings the spirals and circles and crescents and even the animals used in the old Ukrainian culture of Cucuteni can be used as decoration. Other symbols I might use from the Cucuteni include zigzag patterns that are probably symbolic of water and the net design, which is used in the representations of fish.

Figure 13:
Holy
Communion



Spiritual renewal is yet another important theme in my images: Ukrainians are very religious people, with Catholicism being heavily related to patriotism. For the painting, "Communion" (figure 13), I studied the bowl-like fountains at churches, which are used to hold holy water. They inspired my painting, which is

about the Catholic and Ukrainian-Catholic practice of taking Holy Communion. In the painting there is a magenta bowl at the top, suspended in an aura of mist. Magenta as a color is utilized to symbolize the “blood of Christ.” On the bottom half of the painting, there is a misty area depicting a bowl that is a shell of a container, representing the “body of Christ.” The painting is about the spiritual renewal, or rebirth that happens when human sins are cleansed away by the rite of Holy Communion. The vessel on top of the painting holds wine, and the light above the container represents the holy light of renewal. The soul is represented under the vessel as a cleansed soul with some stains, but washed anew with forgiveness, which Catholics believe is bestowed on them after the rites of Holy Communion.

For my thesis show, I created a large painting (figure 14), taking two parts of the vessels and making them into an hourglass. The painting explores the concept of time and how it runs like water. Time was, and is, a continual concern of mine. A spiritual renewal or rebirth is evident in this painting through the growth of flowers in the color bands and within the purple color area. The purple color refers to the spring—the time of renewal. For myself, personally, a rebirth or reawakening inside the mind and body leads me to care about people and places. Sedimentary layers of sand, clay, grit, dirt, and “black soil” rich with nutrients are the same as the bands across the vessels like in the earlier paintings. The “black soil” rich with fertilizers and nutrients are reminiscent of



Figure 14: Black Soil

the soil in Ukraine where “black soil” is actually the term used to describe the rich earth there. Ukraine is known as the breadbasket of Europe because of the ample conditions there for growth of crops and vegetation. Unfortunately the

splendor of the harvest and its economic profit from wheat in naturally rich country is never fully realized because the people are so poor there that the machinery used to harvest the crops are old and barely work. No matter how much wheat is planted there is not enough technology to harvest the plentiful crop properly. In 1932-33 there was a “terror-famine” which the Stalinist State inflicted on the collectivized Ukrainian peasants by taking away all the food and help, starving millions. It was a forced starvation that would not naturally occur in such a fertile land as Ukraine. The painting’s image is a symbol for a sense of displacement of growth and renewal in a place where that may not be possible. In this work I refer to a landscape with layers of earth showing growth and potential but perhaps stifled, showing a sense of displacement from ordinary growth. The black soil is rich with flowers and the sky is blue and everything seems ideal for growth but the scene is encapsulated in a container with two parts where it seems to be analyzed and sectioned. The Spring-like colors tell of the rebirth of earth and its readiness for growth. However the color green, usually symbolizing growth, is absent.

The painting entitled “The Grass is Greener on the Other Side” (figure 15) is about how a displaced kid (me) feels growing up in an American world where it seems that the typical American family is the ideal. As a child of immigrants, I always felt that my family was the exception not the norm. Most children just want to be normal and fit in. As a youth I always felt different and compared myself often to other children who were much more American. Typical American



Figure 15: Grass is Greener

families ate typical American food and watched cartoons on Saturday mornings instead of being shuffled off to a Ukrainian school that I particularly hated. I

always thought how the grass must be greener on the American side. American kids seem to have it so much better. Now in my later age I cherish my background it's memories and the fact that I have a heritage and can speak the language. These things give me a sense of belonging to a greater whole known as the Ukrainian Diaspora, a group of people who I see at church, picnics, and other events I try to attend. As a grown-up, a person realizes these things not as a child. As a grown up, I can see how this identity has an advantage especially as an artist who can show in Ukrainian galleries. This painting was done in acrylic yet it seems like a watercolor painting because of the thin washes of paint. The colors are also spring-like. Here there is a sense of comparison of course, between the two halves of the picture composition. Among the various differences the most significant is that one side is a richer green than the other.

CONCLUSION

Much has happened in Ukraine since the beginning of my thesis. Yushenko was elected president after an Orange Revolution and there have been protests about the election. Much has happened but unfortunately much has stayed the same. Ukraine is still a very poor country, a third world economy in fact. It is still not part of the European Union even though talks are underway. I visited my family's homeland again and it was a very lovely visit. I went to Eastern Ukraine for the blessing of a cathedral in Donetsk. I stayed with the Bishop there and met Cardinal Hussar. I also flew to the western region and visited my family. I hope to return there someday soon to get more inspiration for my art and have another lovely visit with my family. I hope to take many photographs of people and places and paint landscapes and faces. I can not only show present-day Ukraine but also refer to the ancient past by incorporating the Cucuteni culture decoration motifs like spirals, zigzags, crescents, and nets in my work as I described before. I wish to study Ukrainian art as I have studied and been influenced by American art and artists and find a way to synthesize all my experimentation. I hope to keep my art themed on my father's homeland and based on my experience as a Ukrainian American and part of the Diaspora. The creation of the art will be enough for me, even if I don't ever have a show. "The artist has accepted his (/her) fate with open eyes, and I do not believe that he (/she) wishes any charity in relation to his (/her) self-assumed sacrifice. He (/She) wants nothing but the understanding and love of what he (/she) does.

There can be no other rewards. The forgoing therefore is not in the spirit of asking for a charitable contribution, but rather the clearing of the way for what is really motivating factor for this strange phenomenon: the creation of art.” (Rothko 2004)

My art, as I stated before, is in a process of evolution. I am constantly working on improving it and evolving it, making it better or different. I am willing to recreate myself and try new ideas that someday may mesh with my old ideas. I gave myself permission to be a bad artist as I try to work things out in my

Figure 16:
Torn



paintings and create something better. "By willing to be a bad artist, you have a chance to *be* an artist, and perhaps over time, a very good one." (Cameron 1992)

When the artist Elizabeth Murray came to visit our studios she held individual critiques of all our work. Listening to a famous artist critique some aspects of my thesis work negatively was difficult. She said that my work used a gimmick. I do not believe my symbolic language is a gimmick but a real strive toward archetypal imagery. The frustration I felt was painted into my work. A torn apart rose with scribbles of vibrant paint around it and a hanging painted mesh piece reveals that I learned that not all criticism should be taken seriously (figure 16). Criticism about one's art is inevitable and helps one create more art that is fresh and modified. In the end I think my series was successful in that it addressed some Ukrainian issues that are close to my heart. I have addressed a collective concern of displacement and created a metaphor about it in painterly language. The work I have created is thoughtful, colorful and poetic. I used symbols that are very wide ranging and appeal to the general audience not just to Ukrainian-Americans. I have experimented with, and created a personal symbolism: inspired by my childhood; by my personal and unique identity; by my father and my mother; and inspired by my place in time.

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