

**PERCEPTIONS OF LIFE AND DEATH THROUGH THE METAPHOR
OF PAINT;
CONSTRUCTION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF FORM**

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper will explore classical and contemporary methods of painting applied to the portrait. It will emphasize the metaphor of paint as flesh and the connotations of the breakdown of the painted form that stands in for flesh as it relates to our preoccupations with our own mortality. Borrowing from influences like Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and Francis Bacon, the artwork explores the creation of a form that is physical and confrontational, and is intended to provoke a psychological response in the viewer. This series of figuration bases its processes on traditional methods, while borrowing from modern art devices to interpret intangible human characteristics that clarify the representation of the subject and the moment being captured. The ultimate product of this two-fold approach is an image that is a tightly rendered representational portrait that simultaneously lends itself to gestural study.

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INTRODUCTION

For as long as I remember creating art, I have been drawing portraits. My fascination with the portrait dates back to my childhood. My earliest memories of art were watching my mother absentmindedly doodle faces, which I was in awe of. She was the first person with any real artistic talent I knew, and being fascinated with the subject, I attempted to draw just like her. Unfortunately she only drew profiles, and as I got better over time, I felt drawing profiles to be too limiting. Later, searching for new perspectives, I turned to fashion magazines to reproduce the models in cosmetic advertisements. They were beautiful, smiling, and fake, and the magazines were an abundant resource for a teenage girl. Cosmetic ads continued to be a primary drawing reference throughout high school. Fortunately college broadened my artistic horizons and brought me out of that particular rut. In college art classes, I worked from live human models, studied facial anatomy and proportions, and was introduced to art history, which provided new references for me to try to emulate (Fig. 1). Just as my mother had awed me with her skill in my earlier years, the old masters of painting awed me with their portraits and figures. A new benchmark had been set. I wanted to paint like a master.



Figure 1: “Self-Portrait in a Red Coat”, Anton Raphael Mengs, 1744, Pastel Drawing. 22” x 18”



Figure 2: "Prodrome XXXI", by Author, 2010, Oil Painting. 24" x 24"

Yet, I didn't want to paint exactly like the old masters. By college, I was concerned with creating art that was in some way distinctly mine. I subjected the references I was using to facial distortions through Photoshop before painting them, thereby differentiating my art from the original and creating a surreal aesthetic that grew out of my interest in the Pop/Neo-Surreal movement (Fig. 2). When distorting the references, I was careful to leave intact the areas that I felt to be the most successfully rendered. These areas offered opportunity for me to improve technically. My goal was the creation of an image that was highly refined and gave the illusion of a three dimensional form in two dimensional space, as painting and drawing traditionally did.

Conceptually, I was interested in presenting this biomorphic distortion to question the source artist's representation of the subject. Historically, portraits have offered flattering representations of patrons who commissioned the work. However, hundreds of years removed from these people, we have no way of ascertaining if these representations are faithful. Any

grace of poise or mark of beauty could have been greatly exaggerated to benefit the sitter. The effect created in this initial graduate school series of distorted portraits was unsettling. The posture of the model reflected a cool confidence, but the face opened up in a garish, monstrous kind of way. Furthermore, the atypical color schemes augmented a sense of the surreal, finding its influence in the psychedelic rock posters of the 60s, specifically those of Victor Moscoso (Fig. 7). The psychedelic reference reinforced the figural distortion, suggesting a hallucinatory disruption in the perception of the image.

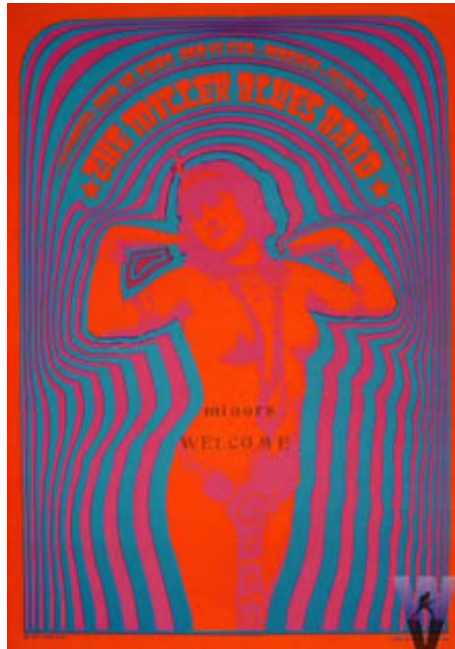


Figure 3: "Neon #2", Victor Moscoso, 1967, Lithograph. 14" x 20"

The floral ornamentation and line patterns often included in these posters further influenced many of my warped portraits as seen in figure 4. Another source for this decorative addition is Kehinde Wiley (Fig. 5), whose work is also classically referential, and is recognizable for its

scrolling botanical adornments that occupy both the background and foreground in relation to the figure; a technique that I explore in the thesis series.



Figure 4: "Prodrome XXXVI", by Author, 2010, Oil Painting. 24" x 24"



Figure 5: "Sleep", Kehinde Wiley, 2008, Oil Painting. 132" x 300"

Surrealism and Pop-Surrealism can also be identified as significant influences to this body of work. Dali was one the first artists to really inspire me. I found the stretched and melting figures (Fig. 6) and objects in his paintings to be captivating and this no doubt played a significant part in my decision to distort my imagery through digital manipulation before painting or drawing it. Later, I came across the Pop-Surreal movement. Artists like Mark Ryden (Fig. 7), Joe Sorren (Fig. 8), and Travis Louie (Fig. 9) became my new inspirations. Like Dali, their work also distorted the figures to create a surreal aesthetic.

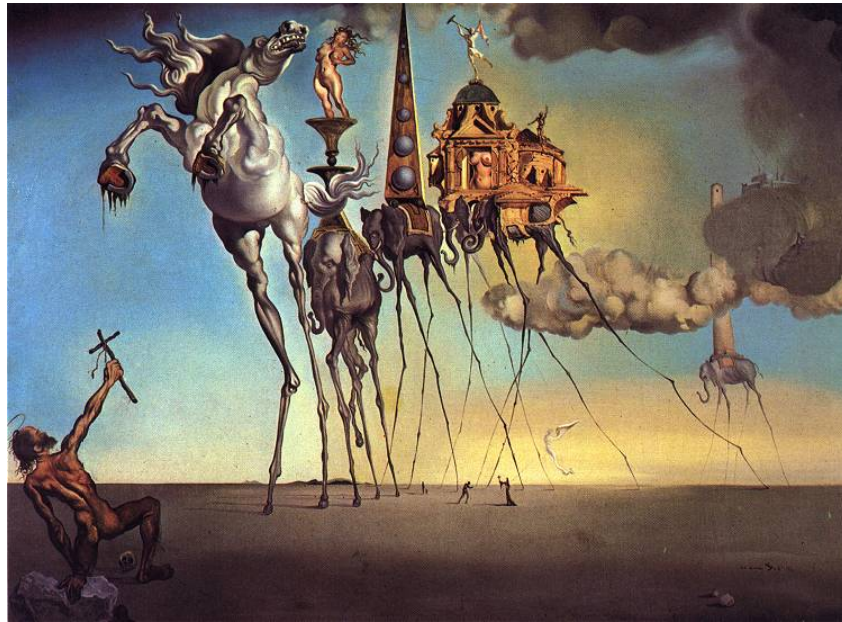


Figure 6: "The Temptation of St. Anthony", Salvador Dali, 1946, Oil Painting. 35" x 47"



Figure 7: "The Ringmaster", Mark Ryden, 2001, Oil Painting. 20" x 28"

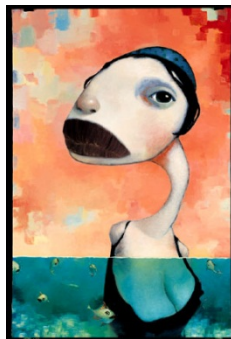


Figure 8: "Lilly Anne and the Fish Parade", Joe Sorren, 2000, Acrylic Painting. 20" x 25"



Figure 9: "Posehn", Travis Louie, 2011, Acrylic Painting. 10" x 8"

I should also note that the discovery of Chuck Close was a significant moment for me as well. His photo-realist style surpassed even the careful execution of the masters of art history. The giant heads he painted at the start of his career were intimidating in their exactitude. Close set the bar for realism in this body of work (Fig. 10). By the time I had become aware of him, I was already heavily indebted to photography as a reference in my work, in large part because of its ease of accessibility, the immobility of the image, and cost effectiveness relative to using a model. His work employed photography to capture a heightened sense of realism that superseded the classical realism of the old masters. Photorealism marked yet another level of mastery.

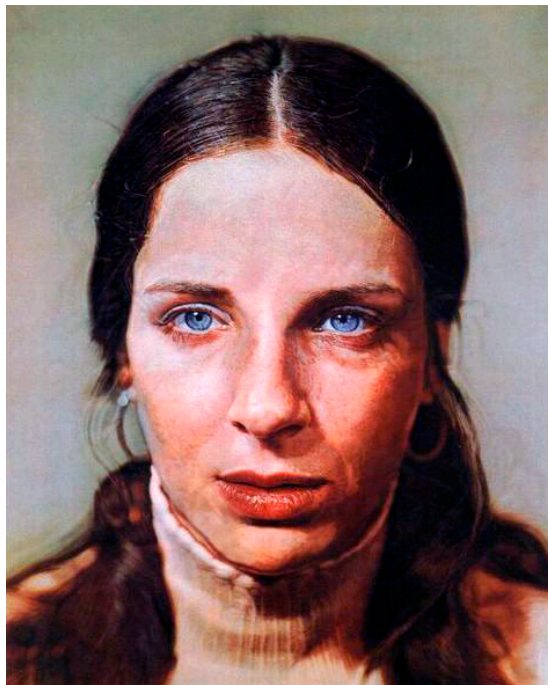


Figure 10: “Leslie”, Chuck Close, 1973, Watercolor Painting. 72.5” x 57”



Figure 11: "Self Portrait", by Author, 2011, Oil Painting. 30" x 30".



Figure 12: "Branded", Jenny Saville, 1992, Oil Painting. 84" x 72"

As I became more familiar with contemporary art, my interest grew to include paintings that highlighted the expressive capabilities of the medium. This led to a more straightforward portrait series that showed a looser surface handling and less blending, shown in figure 11. The work marked my first attempt at natural flesh tones and gestural mark making. In that series, I began to consider how less traditional rendering could create images that were more psychologically impactful. Artists like Chuck Close, Jenny Saville, and Lucian Freud played a large part in inspiring this series. It was Jenny Saville's painting, "Branded" (Fig. 12) which first

instilled the impetus for me to start applying paint in a blotchy manner that contradicted the smooth, gradual shifts of tone and color the masters advocated. The composition of the head on the canvas was born from Chuck Close's *Big Head* series. And it was the weariness and drain I perceived in the models portrayed in Lucian Freud's work which inspired vacant stares and unsmiling faces in my own (Figures 13, 14)

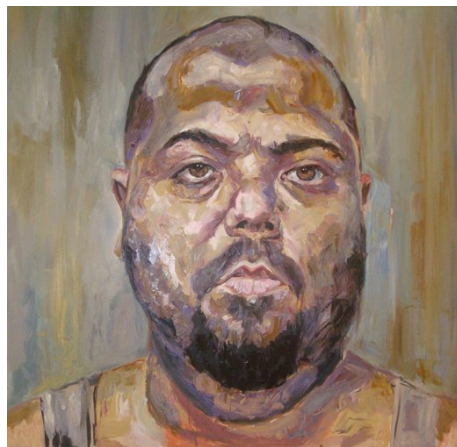


Figure 13: "Gabe", by Author, 2011, Oil Painting. 48" x 48"



Figure 14: "Jeremy", by Author, 2011, Oil Painting. 30" x 30"

The portrait continues to engage me as a subject of study. The glossiness of the eyes, the smoothness of skin, and the texture of hair promote a range of different methods of rendering. These variations suggest myriad opportunities for me to create focal points and centers of visual interest. The eyes of the sitter offer an essential focal point, immediately pulling the viewer in, and inviting the gaze to wander over the curves and recesses of the visage, noting whatever distinguishing features occupy a subject's face. We spend so much of our lives looking at ourselves and others. The human face is familiar ground. It is relatable.

In the past, the portrait was a legacy of the sitter that endured beyond his or her life. The portrait is a record of one's existence. Similarly, portraits are the legacy of the artists who created them; a manifestation of their perceptions and their ambitions to make a record of images in their lives. I created this series not only to immortalize my subjects, but to immortalize myself and to infuse a sense of purpose into what can sometimes feel like an absurd and pointless existence.

This current series of portraits is an outgrowth of my previous works, intended to continue my quest to master the medium not only as a skilled crafter, but as someone who understands the full physical range of possibilities that paint can offer. Realism continues to figure prominently in this thesis body of work, but I still feel compelled to explore the results of a more intuited way of painting that is free from the rigors required in academic art.



Figure 15: "Chad", by Author, 2012, Oil Painting. 72" x 60"

IMPERMANENCE

The influence from my prior two years of painting is obvious in this current thesis body of work. In the eyes of each portrait, there is a careful attention to detail. Elsewhere, particularly the fleshy areas, the care in rendering is abandoned for a more spontaneous paint application (Fig.15). My reverence for classical art forbids me from completely deserting the academic principles inherent in the tradition of painting. I continue to cling to Realism because it offers a chance to demonstrate skill. For this reason, I was careful to construct these paintings in the

tradition of the old masters. Each painting was initiated with a monochromatic tonal study which was taken to a high degree of resolution (Fig. 16). Only after that was achieved did I apply the colors, which I glazed in with a series of semi-transparent layers. But in this series I want to represent a more unconstrained image and surface as well. By opting for an improvisational method of working, I am creating opportunities for exciting interpretations of flesh and figure.



Figure 16: Tonal Study for David, by Author, 2012.

Consequently, in these paintings you see a juxtaposition of realism and abstracted realism. I use these contrasting styles to complement one another. By using a highly rendered development in some places, leading into a looser and sometimes tactile construction in others, I demonstrate a breakdown of form that mimics nature when organisms age and die. The degradation of the image not only creates a metaphor for death, but parallels our memories of people as they fade

from our minds over time. The figures appear as if in a snapshot and, as such, they mirror the memories that we try to hold on to through modern devices to keep memories of people alive. The abstract environment these figures exist in surround and begin to envelope them, serving to block our perception of the person represented. Just as our bodies are susceptible to the ravages of time, so too are our minds and relationships.

This morose outlook is echoed in the work of my primary influences: Jenny Saville, Francis Bacon, and Lucian Freud, all of whom are distinguished masters at painting flesh. Their work imbues a sense of fatalism, provoking an unsettled response from viewers as they are confronted with varying forms of assault on the flesh. Figures are bloodied, bruised, discolored and distorted. The mottled flesh of the figures of Freud and Saville speak of age, abuse and disease. In Bacon's work the figure is distorted or even exploded, as in figure 17.



Figure 17: "Three Studies for a Crucifixion", Francis Bacon, 1962, Oil Painting, Central Panel of Triptych, Each Panel Measuring 37" x 29"

My work references the exploration of flesh as a material that is both sumptuous and grotesque. I am exploring all intrinsic properties. As Saville says, “(Flesh) is all things. Ugly, beautiful, repulsive, compelling, anxious, neurotic, dead, alive...” (Jenny Saville *Evokes the Ghost of Lucian Freud*).

EXISTENTIALISM IN ART

The presence of existential thought in work containing dead or dying things is obvious, but the philosophy is also associated with the varying forms of abstract art that became popular in the 40s and 50s. Coming into fashion at about the same time existential philosophy did, these movements supplanted the social optimism and Marxist ideology that thrived in the art community before World War II. They embodied the anxiety, alienation, and tumult that society felt after experiencing the horrors of war and economic depression first hand. The lack of identifiable form gave no suggestion of ideology, which was a welcome change. One could only infer an existential or even nihilistic impetus in its creation. Many artists now turned inward for an individualistic kind of expression that turned away from the communal spirit of the prior art scene. Harold Rosenberg wrote in the magazine *Possibilities*, that artists did not now speak as a group, as they often did in the thirties, but were making “an individual, sensual, psychic, and intellectual effort to live actively in the present.” (Stevens, Swan, 267).

One of the prominent artists of the time, Willem de Kooning, deeply affected and influenced the work of Jenny Saville and Chuck Close. While Chuck Close inevitably went on to pursue a more realistic type of art, his years in college were spent working abstractly. It was his interest in the typically large abstract compositions that spurred him to create his portraits at such an epic scale (Finch, 120). Saville praised de Kooning by saying, “The marriage of [Francis] Bacon and [Willem] de Kooning -- Bacon’s figurative skills and de Kooning’s painting skills -- would make the best painter who ever lived.” (Biography of Jenny Saville).

In my examination of de Kooning's work I found he does indeed possess a passion for exploring the medium in a psychologically expressive manner. His work, shown in figure 18, emphasized the visual experience rather than the accuracy of the image. In de Kooning's work I see a more frenetic, even explosive style of mark-making. His work took abstraction to a level that dissolved the form beyond any kind of coherent physical description. In his work, the marks, color, and composition became instruments to denote an inner turmoil.



Figure 18: "Woman I", Willem de Kooning, 1950-52, Oil Painting. 75 7/8" x 58"



Figure 19: Untitled XIV, Willem de Kooning, 1984, Oil Painting. 69 3/4" x 80"

De Kooning worked across the spectrum of abstract movements, at times embracing figurative abstraction, by referencing female figures which he harshly distorted. At other times he worked less representationally as with non-objective art that has no reference in nature and deals with shape, line, and color (Fig. 19). He is also closely associated with Abstract Expressionism (Fig. 20), often termed gestural abstraction, which references the emotional intensity of German Expressionism in a non-representational manner. The movement of Abstract Expressionism is often associated with its subset of Action Painting, which takes the idea of gesture even further, putting emphasis on the gestural movement necessary to produce the work. The work is more about the production of a thing, rather than the thing itself, making the painting a byproduct of the struggle of creation. Action painting was considered a pure expression of self, being so far removed from identifiable imagery. To this point, art critic, Harold Rosenberg, described the process of Abstract Expressionist action painting as an existential exercise in self-expression that was revelatory to the nature or mood of the artist, and Clement Greenberg, another prominent art

critic of the day defined abstract paintings as ‘documents of the artists’ existential struggle’ (Wolf).

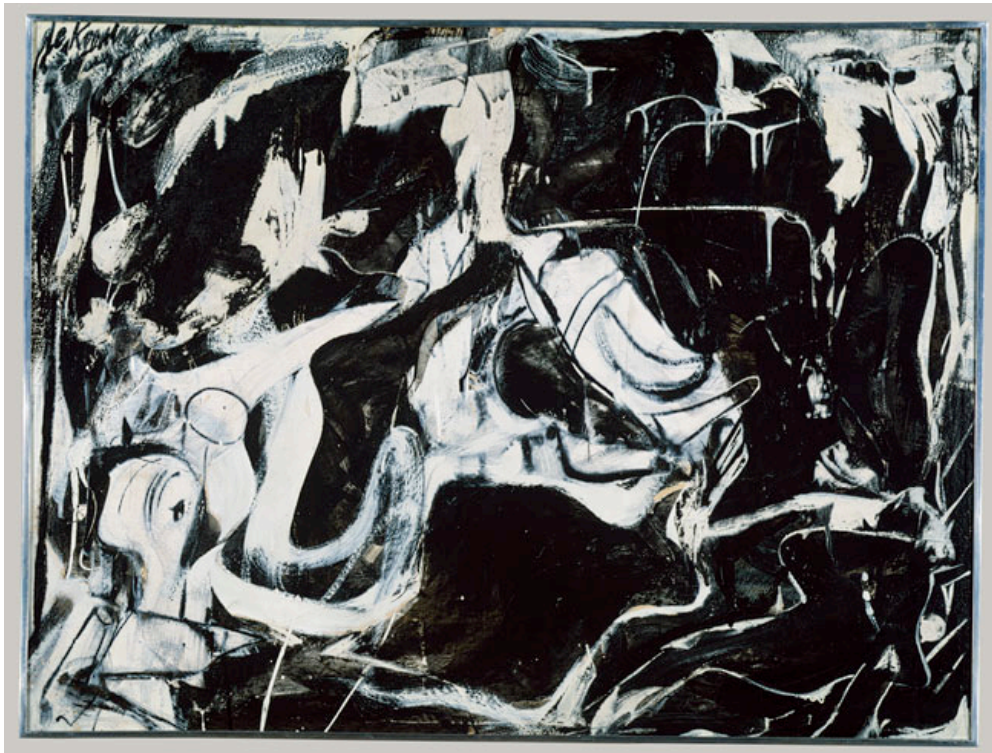


Figure 20: "Untitled Black", Willem de Kooning, 1948, Oil Painting. 29 7/8" x 40 1/4"

A manner by which an artist reveals himself through abstract painting is through the process of automatism, or automatic drawing, which constitutes creating a work of art without a formulated plan. Much like stream-of-consciousness writing, it is intended to unlock some hidden truth in the author/creator. This practice was initially employed by the Surrealists as a method of manifesting unconscious thoughts into their work. Abstract Expressionist and Non-Objective Abstract artists used this method in gestural ways to express their inner state in an uncalculated

manner. As with automatic writing, the content produced through this improvised activity was thought to unveil the subconscious, primal self. The gestural expression of this working manner in turn generated an emotive or psychological portrayal of the artist. The marks made in these compositions became a kind of signature of the artist - each signature being unique to him or herself. In this series of work, I am exploring my unique signature in the areas of the portrait where I allow myself the freedom to break away from the control I feel is required to form a fully realistic and well rendered image. In the creation of these paintings I worked as extemporaneously as possible to translate a pure expression of self, but years of drawing and painting carefully to achieve realistic aims stifled my ability to fully let go.



Figure 21: "Jet of Water", Francis Bacon, 1988, Oil Painting. 78" x 58"

Francis Bacon (Fig. 21) repeatedly extolled the benefit of ‘chance’ in his creative process. For him, it was only through chance that the true nature of a piece could be expressed. He

considered drawing to be a rigid practice, but painting was a spontaneous exercise that allowed for accidents which would intuitively shape the piece and evoke the most visceral reaction in the viewer. (Schmeid, 88) If Bacon felt that a piece had become too stale, he would throw handfuls of paint at the canvas in an effort to liberate it from its visual rut. He said of this technique, “I can only hope that the throwing of the paint onto the already-made image or half-made image will either re-form the image or that I will be able to manipulate this paint further into – anyway, for me – a greater intensity.” (Sylevester, 90)



Figure 22: “Heather”, by Author, 2012, Oil Painting. 72" x 60"

I considered this statement when hitting my own visual ruts in this series. One such rut was with the portrait, *Heather*, figure 22. Heather’s eye was a particularly aggravating feature that I struggled to make right. After several attempts at reworking the feature, I painted over this eye

with red in an impulsive fit of frustration. This impulsivity led to the formation of the atmospheric foreground/background that is shown in each of the paintings in the series – a kind of loosely geometric abstract environment.

Generally speaking, spontaneity did not come effortlessly for me. Too beholden to the principles of classical art, it was difficult for me to achieve an uninhibited approach. Ultimately I seek to find a complementary balance of opposing styles and methods. Other artists in my reading have been similarly afflicted with this struggle. In de Kooning's 20s and 30s he confronted his academic schooling in Holland, and hoped, like his idol Picasso, to be able to translate that into a successful Modernist style to fit the art of the new era, (Stevens, Swan, 139) once remarking that he would like to paint like Ingres and Soutine at the same time. (Gaugh, 16)



Figure 23: “Innocent X”, Diego Velazquez, 1650, Oil Painting. 55” X 47”



Figure 24: Francis Bacon, "Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Innocent X", 1948, Oil Painting. 46" x 60"

In Francis Bacon's struggle between tradition and Modernism he referenced Velazquez's portrayal of "Innocent X" obsessively, using it as an unapproachable benchmark that set the standard for his own work (Figures 23 and 24). Bacon's futile endeavor forced the realization that he must accept his limitations, but it encouraged his impulses to pursue an unreachable goal. (Schmied, 19)

In this way he is an existential hero of sorts. Existential philosophy maintains that you create who you are through the actions and choices you make, despite the apparent absurdity and meaninglessness of life. Bacon, de Kooning, and other artists tied into this philosophical movement demonstrated a Sisyphean determination despite the apparent futility of their

endeavors in their less successful years, and in the face of their own self-doubt. I can relate. In my current situation I find myself dissatisfied with my capabilities, broke, and not selling work, yet still there is nothing else I would rather do with my time than create because it is creation that gives meaning to my existence. As Camus said of Sisyphus in his book, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart."(Marino, 492).

THE VISCERAL RESPONSE

I strive for my work to create an immediate visceral impact in viewers. In the past, I achieved this with bright colors and grotesque distortions. Jenny Saville (Fig. 26), Chuck Close (Fig. 25), and abstract artists like de Kooning and Pollock – created work on a grand scale that was physically and emotionally confrontational to the viewer. Like these artists, I aim to create work that beckons the viewer from across a room. I want my work to dominate a space and catch peoples' eye the second they enter it. From these artists, I am inspired to work at a grand scale to achieve this result.

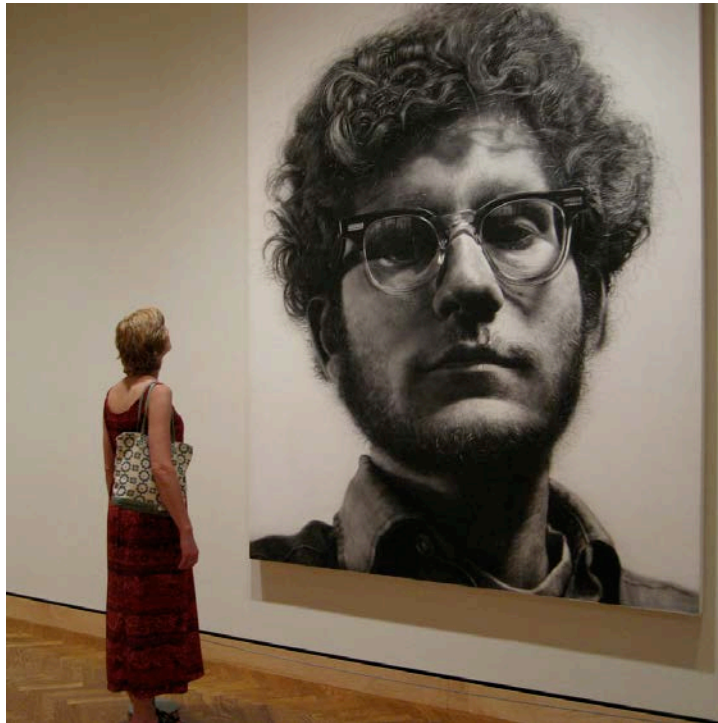


Figure 25: "Frank", Chuck Close, 1969, Acrylic Painting. 108" x 84"



Figure 26: “Hyphen”, Jenny Saville, 1999, Oil Painting. 108" x 144"

Saville’s work adds the element of anxiety and revulsion to our perceptions of the figure. Her decision to work on a large scale is confrontational, forcing her viewers to deal with female nudes that are unconventional in the tradition of figure painting. She says in an interview with Simon Schama, “I like the spaces that a large scale offers. The different space of encountering a painting from a distance to being very close-up to a painting, the physical relationship of your body to that scale of object and mark-making (*sic*).” (Schama, 125)

Jenny Saville spread the body beyond the reaches of the canvas, creating a cropped form that stretches from end to end. She continues in that interview by saying, "...the frame is important, especially in my earlier paintings – I made a body that was too big for the frame, literally too big for the frame of art history. That's how I imagined it, at least. I wanted them to confront you and to exist." (Schama, 127). Much like her paintings, I want my work to "exist" or carry a presence that is provocative and undeniable.

Use of Distortion

Distortion has been a primary device in much of my work. It is apparent in the early work through the use of Photoshop and speaks to our potentially skewed interpretations (Fig. 27).



Figure 27: "Prodrome X", by Author, 2009, Oil Painting. 24" x 24"

Saville's early works distorted the human figure through exaggerated foreshortening and showed the body in the processes of traumatic alteration (i.e. surgery or abuse). Freud's models seem to warp and skew as well. And Bacon's portraits seemingly collapse in on themselves. The use of distortion in art creates a jarring break from reality as we typically perceive it. It shocks the senses. Even in this thesis series, the work is subjected to a degree of distortion where the flesh transforms from flat and representational to layered chunks of paint. The image partially degrades around the edges into a field of segmented color blocks, and is likewise obfuscated in some areas from the viewer (Fig. 28). Much like my past work, there is no clear and uninterrupted representation. Distortion is always present, either through preliminary Photoshop manipulation, gestural embellishment, or even through lens distortion when working from a photographic reference.



Figure 28: "Melissa", by Author, 2012, Oil Painting. 72" x 60"

DUALITY

This body of work is imbued with various dichotomous positions. I am embracing these differences because I feel that there are dualities to just about everything. In many situations one can find good and bad, but it is up to the individual to ultimately determine how he or she will interpret and act. Our choices define us, even our choices in perspective. To this point in the paper, I have already discussed traditional and modern approaches of painting. This extends to consciousness and unconsciousness, for the highly representational areas are built consciously through traditional means, whereas the abstracted areas were created more spontaneously. The consideration of modern versus traditional extends to the use of the photograph and computer to create a realistic image. Just as Chuck Close turned to the photograph instead of the model to produce as near an approximation to our visually perceived reality as he could, I too utilize a photo resource to produce as near a fully-formed realism as I am able. By using Photoshop as I examine the photo reference, I am able to zoom tightly into an area to pull out as much detail as I can.

The topics of life and death provide further dichotomy. Though the tight areas in the painting are represented by youth and vitality in this metaphor of breakdown, it is the more abstracted areas, which would stand in for decay, that demonstrate the most vivacity. To this contradiction I say that as we live, we are all dying. We are in simultaneous states. It is up to the individual to frame how to perceive this information. One could celebrate life for as long as it lasts, or succumb to despair when pondering on its temporal nature.

Beauty and grotesqueness also figure heavily into my work. In the last ten years I have shied away from idealized portraiture and perfection. I am more interested in flaws because they are under-represented. The execution of my painting in this series is such that it creates a roughened appearance to some of these portraits, but for me that creates more visual interest that designates a unique kind of beauty. The coarseness of the surface lends character and compels a closer examination into the nuanced details of the paint. While the representation may not flatter, the subject is still aggrandized through the sheer monumentality of the canvas. Similarly my earlier Neo-Surreal portraits offered an elegant, aristocratic type of posturing in spite of their monstrously warped features (Fig. 29).



Figure 29: "Prodrome LVI", by Author, 2011, Pastel Drawing. 30.5" x 22.5"

Another dichotomy in my work is the juxtaposition of themes of creation and destruction. A substantial amount of time was spent preparing this work, from the precise development of the under-painting to the numerous layers of semi-transparent glazes. Yet, when abstracting, I approached the painting with a lack of planning, forcing myself to take risks with an image I initially nurtured and treated as precious. Not all results were favorable, but ultimately some interesting effects came to be. Like life, we get chiseled away, scarred, and broken... yet despite these reductions we end up better formed. Creation and destruction play off one another.



Figure 30: "Spider", by Author, 2012, Oil Painting. 72" x 60"



Figure 31: "David", by Author, 2012, Oil Painting. 72" x 60"

PERCEPTION

Notable Existential philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre's central way of thinking was that we are all alone in the universe without certitude of the existence of a higher power to offer meaning or structure to life. This thought leaves two ways of interpretation; one – that we are living a pointless existence fraught with anxiety, despair, and desolation, or two – that we are the masters of our own destinies, free to choose a life of our own making. This subjectivity of perception

echoes the theories of Phenomenology, which is itself concerned with problems with perceptual matters on both a sensory and philosophical level (Fletcher, 35-36).

In “The Phenomenology of Perception” by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the author separated the phenomenon of optical observation from form, color, space, etc. He concluded that the artist’s unconscious motivations cannot escape the interpretation of what is being viewed and translated in their work. In other words, they cannot help but imbue their own subjective perspectives into their art. This thought is also presented in his essay “Cezanne’s Doubt” in which he observed art is not an exact science but rather a means of capturing the complexities of what the eye observes. It was in the paintings of Cezanne, that art broke away from the strict rules of academic tradition and became a more emotionally interpretive process that influenced many subsequent Modern Art movements, including abstraction which has played into this thesis series of work.

How we perceive plays heavily into the themes of my work. Whether creating a psychedelic effect within a portrait to convey a distorted sense of perception, or manipulating color and brushwork to cue an emotional response, the issue of perception is a common thread throughout each series I have created.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the range of work I have produced during my three years in this graduate program has helped me to crystalize my intentions as an artist; I seek to show a wide range of abilities working with paint, both in creating highly developed realism, and in terms of creating an expressive gestural work that takes advantage of the flexibility of paint. Writing about this work has provided me with an opportunity to delve into my motivations for working the way I do, and the process has raised my self-awareness.

I have come to understand my attraction to the work of Freud, Saville, and Bacon because of their interest in finding new ways to render and express the human form from their personal perspectives and within the realm of their own aesthetic choices. Their themes - destruction, despair, and demise - rendered with skill and gestural emotion, parallel my interests and ambitions. In their art I see the perfect balance of realism and abstraction, which encourages me to continue to pursue my own artistic voice within this dualism.

I expect to continue my exploration of finding that perfect balance between these two manners of working, as I feel that I am just scraping the surface of what I can achieve in both realism and expressionism. The struggle to create work that aims for an impossible standard is a lifelong one for me. The benchmark will constantly be readjusted so that it is always just out of reach. Though the realization that I'll never be able to reach my own standards is deflating, it is necessary to further my growth as an artist.

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