

Stony Brook University



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Restless

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis will describe my progression and development during my time at Stony Brook University. I will be explaining how major figures, specifically Richard Diebenkorn, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, and Francis Bacon became influential to my painting. I will also be discussing the importance of paint, process and content within my work, and how it developed over the three-year period.

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Introduction

Choosing to be an artist has been something I've deliberated over for a long time. Both of my parents were artists: my father a musician, my mother a visual artist. Creativity was always encouraged amongst my brothers and I, even though it never brought financial security to our household. I had a knack for the visual arts and was encouraged to pursue them. My mom would enroll me in painting classes and art programs and would tell me that I should draw more, to which my usual reply was "but I don't know what to draw."

I didn't know what to draw because I didn't know why I should draw it. The exception was the human figure. I recall drawing people and creating personalities through the expressions I made on their faces. There was a phase I went through where I would only use a straight horizontal line for their mouth, thinking to myself that the characters weren't happy or sad, just felt normal.

The question now, which may be the same question I was subconsciously struggling with is, how do I draw or make something of value or that has meaning? I've gone through many different stages of what meaning might include, and will be discussing them further through the first half of this thesis.

I've found through process that the actual act of doing something, in this case painting, allows me to figure out what to do as I'm doing it. Before I realized the importance of process in finding meaning, I always had a deep interest in bringing ideas to some kind of visual or physical reality. I enjoyed creating. I was attracted to painting and drawing because I found them both enjoyable and challenging. I could create anything I imagined within them.

I completed my Bachelors of Fine Art at Green Mountain College in 2003. There I continued to work with painting and drawing, and developed an interest in ceramics. During this time my focus was mostly on formal elements and the program at Green Mountain encouraged developing a strong foundation. Painting was my real interest during my undergraduate years, but my dilemma came from feeling like my paintings lacked meaning. The work lacked meaning because I was mainly working from observation, as a way to learn and practice techniques. This

practice was meaningful experience, but the painting product was not saying anything beyond executing an exercise. I ended up doing lots of self-portraits, perhaps as a way to explore or understand myself, which at the very least was meaningful to me. By the end of my time at Green Mountain I had a decent formal understanding of drawing and painting, but my work mostly consisted of observational depictions, which didn't really hold much substance beyond their formal and aesthetic elements. Unsure of how to resolve this, I had turned to ceramics, specifically functional pottery, to make things that had more use to people. Pottery had utilitarian function, people liked mugs and bowls as objects and so they bought them. At the time I was also unsure how I would support myself after graduation. Pottery conveniently had inherent meaning through its use and was saleable. At my senior show almost all the pottery sold, but not one painting had a red dot next to it.

After college I was fortunate enough to get a job as an art teacher's assistant at an elementary school, and had my own small business selling pottery and various ceramic garden decorations. I had a steady income, was supporting myself and living comfortably. But over time this began to drain me. The ceramics business became a repetitive and meaningless act of pushing pieces out of molds and throwing mugs. There were moments when teaching was rewarding but most of the time working within the public school system felt like I had to enforce discipline more than work with students who were interested in art. In general I felt too young and restless to be so settled down in my life. So I saved my money, left the business and my job and backpacked around Europe for three months.

During my time in Europe I kept a sketchbook. I drew people I saw in public, and I saw as much art as possible. Upon returning to the states I knew that graduate school was the next step since the majority of my trip had focused on seeing and making art. It became obvious to me that I had to accept this as my passion. I was still nervous about how I would support myself, but hoped that teaching at the college level was something I would have an interest in. I also looked at graduate school as a way to bring meaning to my work by developing its content. After my undergraduate years I had continued painting and was beginning to think more

about the metaphorical qualities of objects and images. I wanted to explore the content of images because it dealt with ideas and went beyond my ability to paint accurately from life.

I spent a year building my portfolio, applying to schools and working. My portfolio remained mostly formal and touched upon some conceptual ideas I was interested in. I painted lidded jars (see fig. 1) as a way to metaphorically explore how people contain their experience and perceive the world through their skewed or subjective perspective. I was interested in how the jars distorted whatever was behind them when I looked through the glass. I also did a group of expressionistic self-portraits (see fig. 2) where I posed in the mirror while I was painting, as a way to explore human emotions and expression.

I chose the MFA program at Stony Brook University due to its emphasis on teaching, proximity to the art in New York City, large facilities, and three-year program, which would give me enough time to develop. This thesis will describe my progression and development during my time at Stony Brook University. I will be explaining how major figures, specifically Richard Diebenkorn, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, and Francis Bacon became influential to my painting. I will also be discussing the importance of paint, process and content within my work, and how it developed over the three-year period.

The Figure and Abstraction - Richard Diebenkorn

“A successful painting has to have something of you and your experience within it...I like to sense *the search* in a painting.” - Diebenkorn (qtd. in Norland et al 19)

I came to graduate school with a formal portfolio, but knew I wanted to make the switch to abstract painting. Abstract expressionism was something I was curious about but didn't really understand. I was attracted to its freedom and openness, but was hesitant to engage in it due to my somewhat rigid formal training.

I was also attracted to the gestural qualities of abstract expressionism and interested in how the movement of a mark could seize and evoke human movement. I wanted to find a way to connect the figurative gesture of abstract expressionism with actual figures.

At the time this felt like an inconceivable task – at the very least daunting. I held a lot of value in paint and canvas as a material. The media was beautiful in and of itself, which made me feel as if I had to conserve or savor it. This limited my ability to experiment because I didn't feel I could freely use the material with open abandon. Through abstraction there seemed to be an open door that didn't require paint to have a definitive end within physical observation. My formal background had caused painting to become marks which rendered form; meaning in the painting came through accurately depicting three dimensional form on a two dimensional plane. I was reliant upon working from life. To break these habits, I began experimenting with abstraction in a very systematic and geometric way.

I first encountered Richard Diebenkorn while studying at Green Mountain College. My Professor, Richard Weinstein had shown me a book of Diebenkorn because of my interest in the figure. It was the first time I began to see legitimacy in abstraction. Diebenkorn's simplistic abstraction of the figure and objects within space began to intrigue me. I also began to look at his "pure" abstractions, and the Ocean Park series. I found the Ocean Park series beautiful but didn't know what to connect it to. As a painter I saw many elements coming together. Color, shape, line, texture, and opacity, all abstract qualities, spoke to each other in some kind of delicate but solid and coherent way. His painting exposed a searching that made meaning part of a larger process. I was intrigued by how his work seemed more about exploring, or understanding through process. As a viewer I could see his consideration of things and how he reevaluates decisions, by leaving previous layers exposed, or visible.

In addition to feeling like I could experience insight into Diebenkorn's process through looking at his work, I was also interested in how his figures could convey emotion and how something could be communicated through the demeanor of the body. Thinking back, I probably subconsciously found this interesting

because I myself struggled with expressing myself verbally and thought I could communicate through my own demeanor, only to realize much later on that people can't really understand what you're thinking just because your posture is slumped a certain way. It was not a good way to communicate within life, but I did realize that through its ambiguity demeanor could suggest and direct emotional interpretations in art.

For me, Diebenkorn gave meaning to both paint and content within painting. Paint could be a depiction of process, and subject matter could portray emotional states through the human form. Trying to combine these ideas would become my way of painting.

In the first paintings I worked on at Stony Brook in 2006 I wanted to move towards abstraction. I was thinking about how the world as an abstract thing, which could be broken down into parts and put back together in different ways. I liked the idea that there were multiple ways of perceiving, or experiencing one thing, and that cubism could expand beyond its simplistic geometric renditions of life. I also liked the idea of using intuition as a way to approach something without an overly directed plan. This allowed space for things to unfold and room for improvisation.

Diebenkorn's Ocean Park series gave me a structure and process that I felt I could deconstruct and understand. Through a first series of twenty small-scale abstract paintings I did in 2006, I created a structured method to paint within. My process consisted of creating a layer and then going over it by using a squeegee and acrylic gloss medium. Through this method I was trying to understand abstraction. I would let the layer dry and then go over it again with a new layer of color. *Sun Spots* (see fig. 3) is an example of one of these paintings. Ultimately, this process felt too methodical and rigid, too structured. My automatic reaction was to go towards the opposite extreme.

Going for the opposite has become a common practice for me. In this case I felt I was working too much in a geometric, or structural form, so I broke that habit by becoming more fluid and organic. The idea is that by breaking my habits I will fluctuate between extremes – eventually working towards a balance between the two that integrates multiple elements into the work. As I've matured I've started to

realize that trying to find a balance between things and seeing value in both things, is advantageous as opposed to just going directly for an opposite and eliminating one alternative. Both possibilities and the infinite amount of variability between them are equally important. Through fluctuating between extremes, I discovered a process of finding meaning through finding balance.

Willem de Kooning

“If you are an artist the problem is to make a picture work whether you are happy or not” –de Kooning (qtd. in Stevens and Swan 232)

I hated de Kooning the first time I saw his work. *Woman on a Bicycle*: the painting repelled me as it probably did a lot of people in its time. Although it turned me off, I’ve always had a tendency to give things a second chance, and I’m intrigued by things I don’t like. I was curious how other artists were dealing with depicting the figure through abstraction.

What began to interest me the most about DeKooning was how paint was symbolic of flesh, or the sensuality inherent in the human body. This showed both through the paints’ physicality and the gesture with which it was applied. De Kooning’s work also implied freedom. He did what was important to him and made painting his number one priority. Through my second year at Stony Brook University, I was reading de Kooning’s biography by Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan and found his obsessive dedication towards painting inspirational. Stevens and Swan describe: “On many evenings Elaine would stop by his studio and yell up from the street, asking him to join her at a party. He would stick his head out the window and reply, “No, I’m still working. You go on ahead and I’ll come by later.” But he rarely showed up, and would instead work through most of the night until he collapsed, exhausted, on his ratty studio cot.” (232)

Beyond de Kooning's painting, people admired his ability and dedication to work. He seemed to grasp a careless control that strove for abandon and freedom within life itself, and he developed a language that brought a broader vocabulary to painting. The structure I had created for my paintings was too controlled, too easy to execute and didn't reach much further beyond what I already knew about paint. De Kooning challenged my already strong work ethic and encouraged a curiosity in the conceptual implication of paint having inherent metaphorical qualities that could be explored further.

Thanks to de Kooning, I began letting go of the structural elements holding my paintings together. I wanted the looseness and viscosity of DeKooning. I limited my drawing and built up layer upon layer. The work became solely about process and an exploration of paint. Although this became an important time of development, it was also an extremely frustrating exploration. The paintings had no end, and there was very little direction. I recall painting layer after layer with stubborn amounts of energy but without knowing what I had painted. I would stop for a second, look at the work and say, "what is this?" I had no answer for myself and would continue to paint over again. I believed that if I continued to practice the rigorous work ethic of DeKooning that eventually I would arrive at something great. But work alone was not a way to arrive at good art.

I had so much trouble finding content within abstraction and the figures were vague. My color and mark made shapes that were sporadic and without control. As the deadline for my first solo show, *Magnetic Tensions*, approached, it seemed as if I was consistently painting – but always in anguish.

Magnetic Tensions

Magnetic Tensions was my first solo exhibition while at Stony Brook University. The intended content of the show had to do with forces that pull people together but result in disconnection. The paintings were largely abstract and

contained what I considered to be two figures immersed in chaotic spaces facing each other in moments of disconnect. I was trying to portray a certain dissonance that sometimes occurs within human relationships but it was questionable whether this was actually coming across to the viewer. The figures in the paintings were not representational in any way; they were flat, ambiguous forms that slightly alluded to some kind of human sensuality. The paintings were predominantly flat, their spaces were neither perspective nor atmospherically spatial. During this time I was heavily immersed in my work, and perhaps as a result less concerned with my social life. It seemed as if the people I was meeting and relationships I was having were less substantial, and I felt as if I couldn't really go too far beyond their surfaces. Perhaps it's coincidental, but the works themselves, through their flatness, became very much about painterly surfaces and not so much about the depth of paint (see fig. 4 & 5).

Even though I was aware of a particular content within my work, I wasn't necessarily able to depict it well because I was trying to better understand paint. Paint had become a way of expression and emotional release. The influence of de Kooning and the abstract expressionists was obvious, but I was not looking to be labeled as one of them. The integrity of work ethic, the sensuality of paint, and expression through gesture were all things I had been concerned with through looking at de Kooning. In this sense the work was strong. I had made it over the hurdle of paint as a precious material and had let intuition and process guide me.

Color had also become intuitive and a somewhat aesthetic choice. In my earlier abstract paintings color had been reliant on complementary clashes that attempted to bring vibrant, pure, unexpected color combination together. As I looked at de Kooning I was not only interested in the sensuality he portrayed through the viscosity of paint but also through his fleshy pinks. Both the paint and its color represented something outside of itself.

My development was also an exploration of mark making. I wanted the fluidity of de Kooning's application of paint. Beyond becoming comfortable with the medium, I had to loosen my body. I employed many different kinds of exercises to achieve this. Working on the floor, attaching my brushes to long sticks, dancing to

music, and thrusting my entire body at the work became a way of shutting off the mind, practicing actively, and relying upon intuition. Some of these antics were more valuable than others in trying to focus on paint and painting (see fig. 6).

Overall, the rules I set up for myself were a way of creating a structure that allowed for a more organic process than I had been allowing myself before. In reflecting, my original goal had been to find a balance between what was felt and what was thought. Ultimately this was not being achieved due to the amount of energy that was being put into exploring paint. My process erred more on the side of what was felt and understanding abstraction. Inevitably the content was there, but it was not clear because I had not been focusing on it. The paintings were read as painterly, colorful and beautiful. People saw integrity within the work, but I felt that they were contained within the classical abstract expressionist tradition and were not registering as contemporary painting. They were stagnating within a tradition I appreciated but were not in line with current times, and my interest of being a contemporary artist. This was not what I wanted as an artist or for my paintings. The work was missing things. Content, space, time, structure, narrative and humor were all elements important to experiencing life, and had been my original sources of inspiration. After the semester ended I felt I needed a break and began to think more seriously about what I wanted my images to convey to the viewer.

Philip Guston – Summer 2008

“Of course that’s what it’s about. Freedom. That’s the only possession an artist has—freedom to do whatever you can imagine.” - Guston (Stiles and Selz 252)

During the summer of 2008, the Morgan Library put on an exhibition concentrating on the two-year period when Philip Guston stopped painting and just did drawings. He wanted to move away from pure abstraction and move into

portraying more figurative ideas. The show was extremely influential for me. I associated so much with Guston's predicament. Like Guston, I had been doing "pure" abstraction but had a great interest in the figure. My sketchbook had always been filled with countless cartoony figures having strange interactions with each other (see fig. 7). I could never figure out how to integrate them into my paintings though. Perhaps I felt they weren't serious enough to be considered for paint. Paint tends to have such a heavy past as a medium that it can be burdensome and difficult to remember that as an artist I can do whatever I want with the medium. This is what Guston reminded me. It wasn't that I particularly understood what he was painting or had some kind of interest in his subject matter, but more that he allowed himself to have the freedom to do what he wanted within his work. I came back to the studio and granted myself permission to take the ideas from my sketchbook and develop them into large-scale paintings. Not only did this allow me to relax, but it also allowed me to explore the content of my work. What were these human interactions I was trying to depict? What was their relationship?

In addition to Guston, Jean Michell Basquiat was another artist's work I was looking at. His conviction seemed to allow him to be free. I became interested in the paintings in which he collaborated with Andy Warhol. The combining of their different styles reminded me of the internal conflict I was having with my paintings. On one hand I had the gestural, organic abstraction and on the other I had these tight, stylized ideas. I wanted to see how I could bring these seemingly opposite things together the way Warhol and Basquiat had. I also thought that the characters within my work were somehow enacting the interactions and relationship Basquiat and Warhol might have had. I found myself asking, "How do they manage to negotiate each other's space?"

As summer went on, I quickly tired of the simplistic cartoon like paintings I was making (see fig. 8). Along with being indecisive, I am also easily bored. These traits go hand in hand. If I am bored, I usually default into making some kind of decision to defuse my boredom. This is a trait about myself that I am not particular fond of. I feel that it's important that I intend things and make conscious choices not just out of default – especially as an artist who can have an influence beyond my

own life. The work was becoming too easy, and I was afraid that I was only illustrating ideas – which have always been a dime a dozen to me. Furthermore, I was forgetting about paint, which was still something that interested me. Although the two-year process of exploring abstraction had been somewhat painstaking, it had a valuable purpose and I knew that paint could say something beyond an image.

During the summer I had also had the pleasure of seeing two Diebenkorn shows. The first was of his early abstractions while living in New Mexico. The second was a small collection of monotypes and drawings from the Ocean Park series. The monotype show was particularly influential. If I wanted to bring the drawings of my sketchbook and my painterly abstraction together, why not do it through printmaking? The medium acted as a way to bridge that gap. I was most interested in the prints that Diebenkorn made in black and white. Simplifying my process even further through eliminating color seemed like a great idea because I could focus more on how to connect painting with drawings of my sketchbook.

I feel that painting is incredibly complex, and at times can be incapacitating, leaving me stuck or feeling as if I am unable to move. It can feel like painting resists my urge to act. The complexity of the process and medium can become overwhelming if overly scrutinized. It can be helpful to reevaluate the process and medium by coming at it from a different direction. The simplicity of drawing seemed to have allowed Guston to break from painting and reevaluate what he wanted to do with his work. Drawing did this for me as well. To bring drawing back to painting I went to printmaking. Working with monotypes had the same directness of drawing but the painterliness of painting, allowing me to bridge the two (see fig. 9). The monotypes also allowed me to work the prints up to a certain point, and not over work them. After working the plate and deciding to print it I was able to consider it done, and would move onto the next one. Although de Kooning had shown me the power of dedication and a strong work ethic, my aimless, intuitive direction never gave me a place to stop. A lot of the earlier paintings became over worked and clogged, unable to breath as I obsessively layered the work to no end. Printmaking gave me a definitive end point inherent in the process

and made me decide when the piece was finished. I was able to fight my indecisiveness by employing a new type of structure.

Missed Connections

My second solo show culminated in a mixture of stylistic shifts exposing my chronological process. I wanted to connect more with my viewer than I had in the previous show, through the content of my work. The show was not organized in a particular order, but could have been classified into three groups, the cartoony paintings, the monotypes, and the abstract figurative paintings. Although stylistically my work was going through multiple transitions, the content was consistent. All the work was dealing with relationships between people and was pointing to the moments of tension, dissonance and miscommunication. I titled the show *Missed Connections* due to the disconnection within the subject matter, and because I was struggling to bring all these different elements together in my paintings.

The cartoony paintings were bringing my sketchbook to the canvas. It was a simple, immediate and clever way to make my content more obvious. The monotypes simplified the paintings by eliminating color, and brought the brushwork of painting to the drawings from my sketchbook. The figurative abstract work attempted to bring painterly abstraction back to the paintings.

Another concern I had at this time was that paintings were accumulating around my studio. It was as if the layers within the paintings were physically reproducing themselves through a mass accumulation of paintings within my actual studio space. These large objects imbued with my heavy energy and meaning, didn't feel like they had much use beyond being influential to my development. They were becoming burdensome. I was depicting interactive moments within my work, but the paintings themselves seemed like such solid unmoving objects. Their static existence contradicted what I was trying to portray. I started to examine how I

could resolve this within the paintings by reexamining my imagery. How could a painting be more ephemeral? The physicality of the painting was solid, but I wanted to bring a sense of time and space to experiencing the work.

The one abstract figurative work in the exhibition that I felt was successful was titled *Unseen* (see fig. 10). It suggests two figures, one bending over backwards, and the other hanging upside down. They both sustain their awkward positions for each other, but neither sees the pain they go through for the other. Likewise, we as the viewers can barely see them, as they seem somewhat lost but connected through a foggy atmosphere.

Unseen was loosely based upon my parent's relationship. As the oldest son, I have watched and been an integral part of their relationship through my lifetime. They felt a strong need to keep family together, but they were also very different people who had different ways of going about things. This caused a certain tension or resentment towards each other, even though their love was deep. Essentially their goals were the same: create and raise a family with as much love and support as they could provide. How to accomplish that became their conflict. I eventually realized, especially after I moved away from home, how simple and common their struggle was. Two strong willed people with a common goal personally feel as if they've compromised their lives, but they feel as if neither really sees how much the other has changed for them.

Unseen started as a pure abstraction and developed into a cartoony painting. After it reached its cartoony state I spent a great deal of time considering it. I decided that it was symbolically illustrating an idea instead of embodying a common experience. As I began to paint into it again I was thinking about how the inexplicability of experience could be suggested through the nuance of paint. *Unseen* touched on an ephemeral sensibility I was trying to achieve and was labeled by many as the strongest work in the show. The only issue I had with the painting was that it lacked the humor found in a lot of the other work, and I worried that it risked the danger of becoming re-entrenched within the seriousness and heaviness of paint.

Humor had become the antidote to the heaviness of paint. And as I write now I realize the potentiality of humor having ephemeral effects. In general painting is not considered a funny act. Although I enjoy painting, the act of doing it isn't usually funny. There are times when I am looking at something I've just created and do laugh out loud, but this is only after I've made it. When that happens I'm usually on to something. In my life I make an effort to have a sense of humor. Between my undergraduate and graduate years I had spent a lot of time creating comics, (see fig. 11) which encapsulated a narrative and punch line all within one frame. My sketchbook was filled with a multitude of strange characters all exuding a wacky playfulness. That was not coming across in the early abstract work. For me to be honest with myself, I had to let my comical side come thorough, so it was important that humor be integrated into the work. Humor also acts as a buffer in both my life and my painting. What better way to bring a viewer into the "pretentiousness" of paint, or ease the tension in an awkward situation with another person than by laughing or telling a joke? *Muga Muga* (see fig. 12) was the first painting I did from a drawing in my sketchbook. That sketch eventually developed into *Let's Break Up!* (see fig. 13).

2009 Thesis Exhibition and Francis Bacon

My section of the thesis exhibition consisted of four large-scale paintings (fig. 16-17) with the intention of trying to combine abstraction, figuration, narrative and humor in a way that finds balance between formal aspects of paint and content. In *Missed Connections* I had explored content through figuration, abstraction, narrative and humor. I wanted to attempt to fuse all these elements together in single paintings.

During the making of these four paintings, my approach towards painting changed yet again. I've always spent a lot of time sitting in front of the canvas staring at the work as I'm making it. This was still the case, but I began spending

more time trying to correlate that with the actual marks I made. I was also concentrating more on certain sections for a moment and considering what I had just changed, making sure to be aware of not over working the canvas. In other words, my action was becoming more deliberate, controlled, and thoughtful. This was also starting to become the case with color. Although it didn't have specific symbolic meaning, I was beginning to make more specific color comparisons. I felt like I wanted to paint invisibly. I would start by trying to mix the color of the canvas or a dominant color already in the painting. I would draw something and then paint over it with that color as a way to make it invisible. I felt that making past marks invisible symbolized or showed the passage of time; the moment happens, but then is gone. The action is momentary, leaving a slight, eventually forgotten residue.

My process became a balancing act between abstraction and figuration. Some of the works seem to be more abstract, others more figurative. I sometimes think I come to a balance by showing the works together. This seems to flesh out the multitude of problems I'm trying to reconcile. It's putting all the elements in front of the public, with no perfect painting, and shows that I'm still searching. It's similar to how Diebenkorn leaves his under painting or process exposed, except sometimes I have to let my process emerge through a group of works.

While creating this body of work I was mostly looking at Francis Bacon. His ability to suggest time and space alluded to the ephemeral experience I was trying to convey in my work, and his use of the accident as a way to spur on moments of inspiration related to my interest in a conscious but intuitive process that tried to find balance between abstraction and figuration. In an interview with Michael Peppiatt, Bacon explains. "What I do believe is that chance and accident are the most fertile things at any artists disposal at the present time. I'm trying to do some portraits now and I'm just hoping that they'll come about by chance. I want to capture an appearance without it being an illustrated appearance." (Far et al 47)

My process has increasingly become more dependent upon looking into abstract moments, which I then try to decipher and direct. Bacon also looked for abstract moments or mistakes as a way to find the subject matter of the painting. He

starts with a general idea and then works off, or improvises upon the inevitable accident. I tend not to start with any idea, or feel that the ideas are already there. The impending accident triggers the idea.

Through his painting, Bacon also suggests figurative elements existing within the uncertainty of time and space. Both his use of a distorted perspective and the disfiguring of human form reflect the uncertainty, and fragility within life. For me it brought clarity to why the edges of Cézannes table tops didn't line up. Perception was not concrete fact and varied within human experience.

Like Bacon, I wanted my paintings to show the experience of space and time. It wasn't something that I wanted to capture, but I wanted space and time to live within the work. I kept visualizing *The Arnolfini Wedding* by Jan Van Eyck and how its purpose seemed to be about capturing and holding onto a moment in time. This was not what I wanted my painting to be. I was more interested in the fleeting quality of human perception and how we experience, opposed to solidifying a staged moment.

The paintings in the thesis exhibition showed human interactions, either between two people or between a person and themselves (see fig. 17). They are about our experiences and how we can become overly concerned with our situations and end up wallowing in our self-consumption. The paintings and the process move through a fluctuation between the inevitability of this self-involvement and trying to see outside of it. This oscillation is comparable to the uncertainty of experience, and thus I depicted uncertain figurative moments in abstracted and fleeting spaces.

Idle Hands (see fig. 16) is a good example of uncertain figurative moments in abstracted and fleeting spaces. I see myself sitting, stuck in my head unable to produce some kind of physicality to a thought. In this painting the figurative moments are vague and open to question. *Idle Hands* hints at figurative elements that cause the viewer to take a second look and explore the painting further. The moment and figure seem to exist within a combusting burst of energy. My intension is to keep the paintings somewhat ambiguous, to encourage the viewer to interpret and relate to the characters situations. The work does have specific meaning

relating to my own life though. The bear in “Tough Love” (see fig. 14) grew out of one of my childhood stuffed animals come to life. Most of the time the paintings contain people who I’m close to, and a lot of the time I show up as a person in the work as well. Although my subjective account of life seeps into the paintings, I strive to create work that is open ended for the viewer. This allows others to bring their own experience to it. Human experience, although billowing with nuance, contains similarities from person to person. I’m trying to create something that allows us to relate or empathize with each other.

Conclusion

“I think art is an obsession with life...” - Bacon (Stiles and Selz 202)

Through my emergence as a painter, I’ve found a way to infuse my life with the meaning I sought in other, less productive avenues. Through painting, I am given an avenue of reflection. Though oftentimes ambiguous, these moments have allowed me to become more comfortable with the persistent ambiguity of life, the refusal for the complex moments of our existence to resolve themselves into a distinct meaning or value. Painting has become a way to find, explore, create and share meaning. Through a process of reflection, I examine ambiguous moments of tension that exist within interactive human experiences. I investigate relationships that provoke empathy with, and help us relate to, our human condition. In the moments when we feel most fully present in our individual strife, we can attempt to find communion with others, and ourselves in the sensation rather than the explanation.

I am a physical thing within an ephemeral state. Perhaps this tension is the source of our human struggles, seemingly solid things within fleeting moments. I think most people can associate with the feeling that we struggle to relate and communicate with each other. We feel our way through new situations, a process of extending ourselves and recoiling. My awareness fluctuates, and I feel as if I

constantly must readjust. As I involve myself with new people and even as I write this thesis, I feel doubtful that I can entirely articulate myself, or clearly express what I want to say, but I attempt in search of some kind of meaningful pursuit.

Diebenkorn, de Kooning, Guston and Bacon were engaged in the struggle of life and paint. I think of them as artists who have guided me through their work, and inspired me to press on and continue exploring the nuance and challenge of life and painting. Examining and relating to their processes amidst my own development has encouraged my growth and inspired an openness to change through my own self-direction. Beyond these artists, my work is greatly influenced by my own personal experience. A multitude of human characteristics influence my life and thus my work. The struggle, humor, love, fear, doubt, longing, joy and understanding, all play a part in my ability to live, paint, experience, change and process living. For me painting has the potential to evoke moments of utmost sincerity that give us a glimpse into how we experience life as individuals and a human collective.



Figure 1. *Jar no. 9*, 2004. 8"x10"

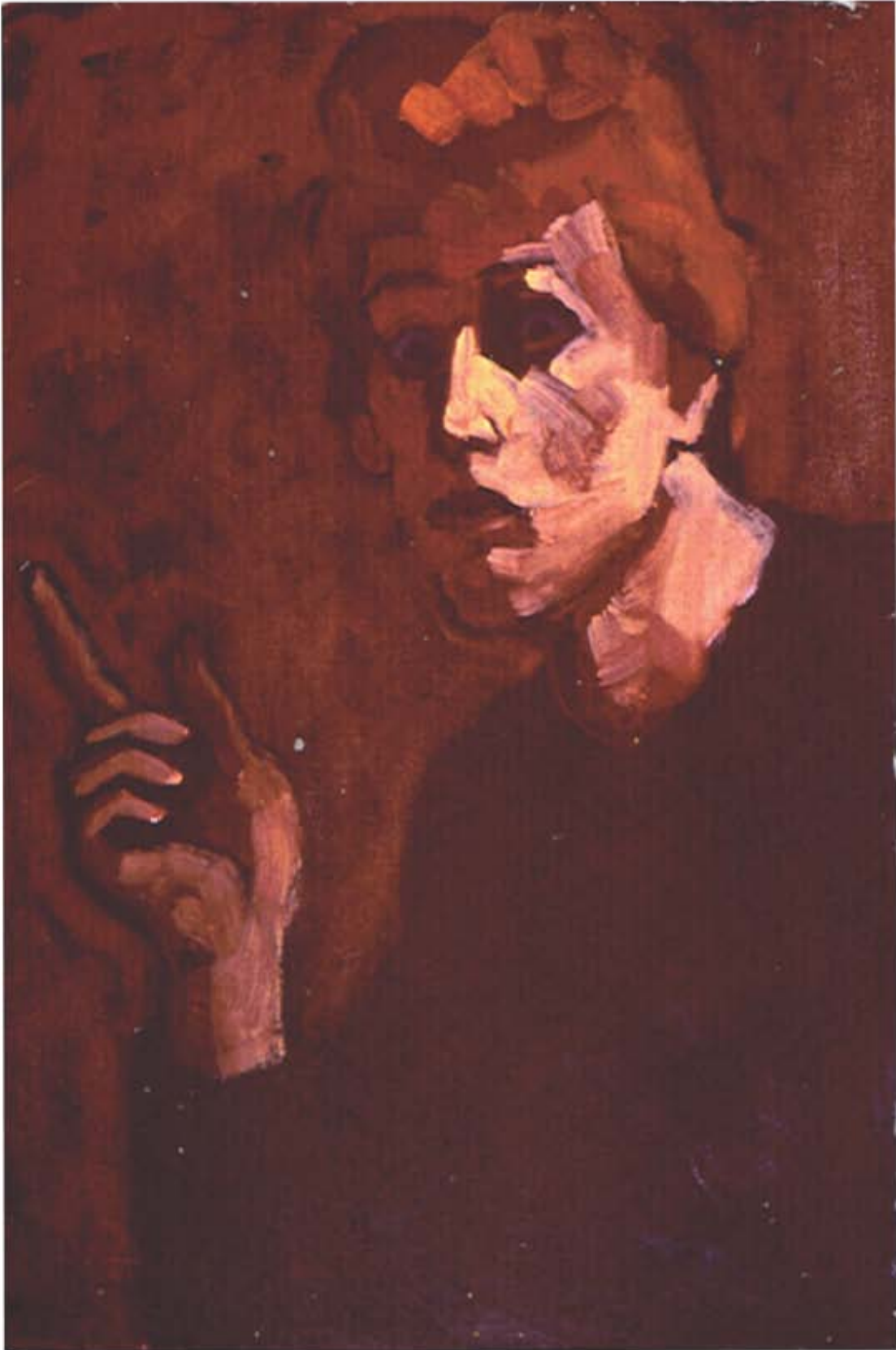


Figure 2. Untitled (self portrait), 2005. 20"x28"



Figure 3. *Sun Spots*, 2006. 16"x11"



Figure 4. *Injection - Projection*, 2008. 68"x52"



Figure 5. *A Fleeting Meeting*, 2008. 62"x50"



Figure 6. *Magnetic Tensions*, 2008. 8"x6"

This photograph was used as the exhibition card for *Magnetic tensions*. The intention was to give a glimpse into the energetic studio practice I was sustaining at the time.



Grit Robbins Daniel Striped Ass Tiger

Figure 7. *Muga Muga*, 2008. 8"x11"

This is an excerpt from my sketchbook starting to play with the negotiation of distance and connection.



Figure 8. *Dependency*, 2008. 68"x52"



Figure 9. *Momentary*, 2008. 24"x18"



Figure 10. *Unseen*, 2008. 54"x45

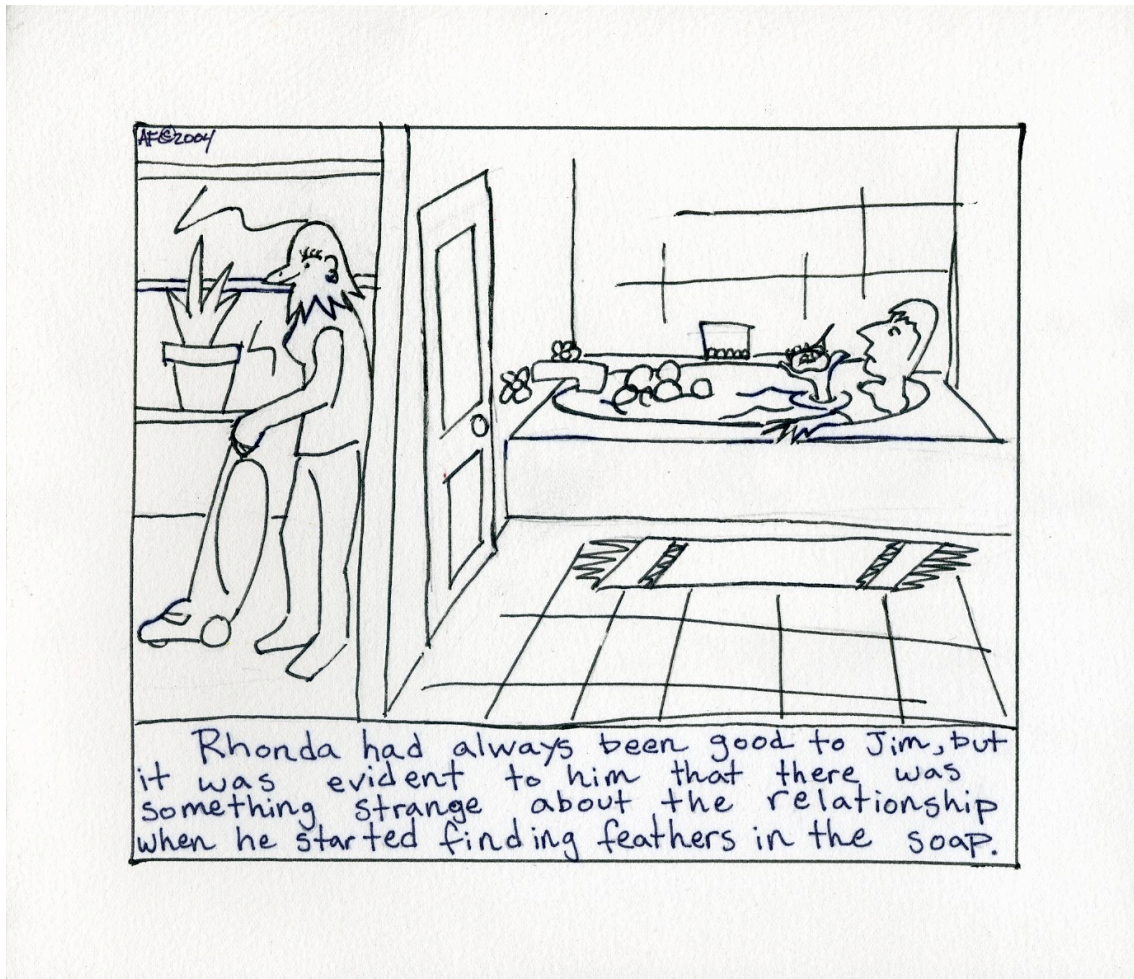


Figure 11. Bird Wife Comic, 2004. 7"x6"



Figure 12. *Muga Muga*, 2008. 8"x10"



Figure 13. *"Let's Break Up!"* 2008. 68"x52"



Figure 14. *Tough Love*, 2009. 82"x64"



Figure 15. *Cradled*, 2009. 82"x64"



Figure 16. *Idle Hands*, 2009. 82"x66"



Figure 17 *Restless*, 2009. 82"x64"

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