

An abstract painting with thick, expressive brushstrokes in a variety of colors including red, yellow, green, blue, and black. The composition is dense and layered, with some areas appearing more saturated than others.

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ART 493: SMP 1, FALL 2016

**AN INVESTIGATION IN
FIGURATIVE PAINTING**

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

I STARED OUT OF THE CAR WINDOW, MY HAIR BLOWING IN THE COLD WINTER WIND, THE PACK OF BRIGHT COLORS HELD LOOSELY IN MY SMALL CHILDHOOD HAND. IN THAT MOMENT I WAS WATCHING THE COLORS, THOSE MAKERS WHICH I USED TO CREATE MY FAVORITE THINGS ON A PAGE, FLYING AGAINST THE EVER CHANGING LANDSCAPE. "PULL YOUR HAND BACK IN THE CAR OR YOU'LL LOSE THEM!" MY DAD WARNED ME. BUT THE JOY OF SEEING THE COLORS RIDING ALONGSIDE ME IN THE WIND OUTWEIGHED THE RISKS. SURE ENOUGH, MY FEEBLE GRIP WEAKENED, AND IN ONE TRAGIC MOMENT MY MARKERS WE LOST TO THE 45 MPH WINDS OF THE AUTOMOBILE. MY PARENTS, OH MY LOVING PARENTS TURNED THE CAR AROUND TO LOOK FOR THEM (OR PERHAPS I WAS SO HYSTERICAL FROM MY GRIEF THAT IT WAS THEIR ONLY WAY TO GAIN PEACE), BUT OF NO LUCK. MY FAVORITE MARKERS WERE GONE.

I THINK ABOUT THIS MOMENT OFTEN; I THINK IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I THOUGHT OF AN ACTION AS AN ARTWORK. I WAS USING MY MARKERS AS A VISUAL ELEMENT IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE WIND OUTSIDE THE CAR WINDOW. THE TRAGIC DROPPING OF THE MARKERS WAS THE PERFECT END TO THE NARRATIVE. NOW, YEARS LATER, I AM STILL EXPERIMENTING WITH MATERIALS. I TAKE RISKS IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AROUND ME. THE FOLLOWING PAGES DOCUMENT THE RISKS I HAVE TAKEN AND THE IDEAS I HAVE PUT TO PAPER OVER THE COURSE OF THIS PAST SEMESTER. FOLLOWING A LOOSE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, I HOPE THIS OFFERS A GLIMPSE INTO ALL THE WORK AND THOUGHTS BEHIND THE ART.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Each brushstroke is an expression, a small piece of the full visualization, and a physical record of the transitory emotion. It therefore it is also an expression of the self, and more specifically the self as a change agent in our contemporary world. With inspirations ranging from Gustave Courbet to Willem de Kooning, I use my art to convey an idea to the viewer, while also developing my own identity and understanding of the world. My work draws from the historic understanding of the painting, from the classical orthogonals to the modern objective shape, to create a unified, harmonious (yet not necessarily pleasing) image which will convey not only literal representation and symbolic meaning but also emotion, all through an understanding of the physical nature of the materials.

More specifically, I use abstraction and color to create a togetherness within the composition of the artwork, deforming reality into a new idea through the process of painting. I do not follow the illusion of the painting as a window, but rather create the art as an object in and of itself, using our understanding of visual language to communicate my ideas on the two dimensional picture plane. My paintings speak through both subject matter and compositional relations.

Taking inspiration from the powerful, if failed, utopic dreams of the Modernists, I seek a new paradigm in my work which can help to usher in a new visual language. I wish to find a voice paramount to our time. Beyond even the Postmodern is something new: the future of our culture. A large-scale societal shift must happen if we are to avoid the destructive effects of our current worldview. Tackling subjects such as the failure of our system to uphold justice, our cultural apathy, and the importance of political activism, I use my paintings as a medium to understand our global trajectory, and how we can change things for the better.

THE MARATHON

Beginning this semester without direction, it was vital to create a large and varied body of work from which to hone in on a particular subject. Much of the challenge being an artist is simply knowing what to make. The idea behind the marathon was to not worry so much about the product and just dive into the creative process. The result was everything from abstract paintings to ready-made sculpture.

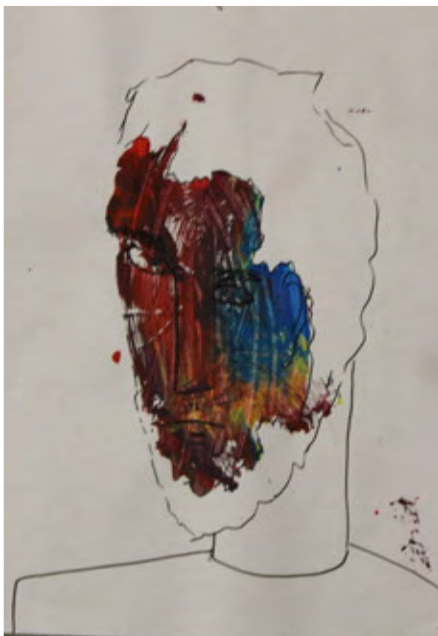


Untitled sculpture study
Paper
38 x 50 x 40 inches

WORKS FROM THE MARATHON



Portrait of Ennis
Acrylic on Canvas
18 x 24 inches



Untitled
Acrylic and ink on paper
11 x 8.5 inches



Gas Station
Acrylic mixed on canvas
11 x 14 inches

REFLECTION ON THE MARATHON

As viewers filed through my studio, I was pleased to gain feedback from all walks of life; professors, students, and my friends. Many people echoed thoughts which I had while working on the pieces; enlightening in knowing I was not alone in my critiques and thoughts. I found that lots of the feedback was on my developing a more dimensional and textured painting. Viewers admired the structure and stylistic choices of my figure paintings, but found them to be underdeveloped or flat. This echoes my own thoughts, and clarified that I must investigate form and material more in going forward. I have research points to start from; names of figurative painters who might offer me some inspiration. Less clear on how to proceed is my overall themes or ideas conveyed in my work. This was something that is not overtly shown in my paintings yet. Some viewers found my sculpture to be particularly satisfying, others were more interested in my paintings; which leaves me questioning which to focus on. I think I will be able to forge a path among both mediums by centering in on what I am trying to capture in my work on the portrait. The skeletal shapes of the human form through skin and in doing so finding an expressive mood. I need help in finding satisfactory material and balancing the exploration of material with the exploration and targeting of my subject matter and ideas.

I was suggested to look at the works of Frank Auerbach, the Bay Area Figurative painters (David Park, Diebenkorn, Bischoff), as well as Leon Kossoff (London School Dana Schultz. All of these artists are figurative painters that the new artist in residence thought I might like to check out. Professor Lisa Scheer directed me towards Anselm Kiefer for his use of natural materials and texture and sculptural approach to painting. I am thankful to have received so much feedback and have already begun learning a lot from these artists.

I want to connect my work to contemporary artists and painters. In the coming days I will research how I can fit into the contemporary conversation in figurative art and develop some larger themes I wish to address in my work, while at the same time exploring and enlarging my skills and materials knowledge.

Overall, the open studio gave me a feeling of accomplishment, pointed out ideas to follow and also things to abandon; and gave me inspiration for the coming weeks to really begin to dig into my work.

NEW AVENUES

After the Marathon, I felt stronger in my art making abilities and more focused on painting as my medium. I knew I wanted to make works relating to the human figure, expression through color and line, and conveying of a larger societal idea or critique. Through all of this I began to look at the London School of painters, as well as artists like Giacometti. In addition, I began studying the works of Cezanne to understand dynamic composition.



Sophie
Mixed media on paper
22 x 12 inches



Nick
Mixed media on paper
22 x 15 inches



Bathers (after Cezanne)
Charcoal on paper
18 x 24 inches



Self portrait
Acrylic on canvas
14 x 11 inches

REFLECTION: MID SEMESTER REVIEW

My paintings and drawings which I displayed did not have a cohesive voice, and did not show what I wanted to do. This is primarily because I am still figuring out my style and what I want to look into. Despite this, I got lots of good feedback about what I should look at and think about in my process. Since I want to develop figurative work investigating material and mark-making with a narrative, I got feedback to look at Max Beckmann as well to keep pursuing artist which I have already researched such as Eric Fischl. The big breakthrough with this conversation was the realisation that I need to begin each painting with intention. I must focus and plan before I begin, develop composition, underpainting, and structure before simply making unique marks and lines. I need to think; to build.

This feedback will help move my work forward certainly. The idea of coming into the studio hardened on an idea and working concisely and intelligently to build a painting is something I will take to heart. People differed on their idea of what my work should be about; (observed, mark-making, abstraction, narrative, etc.) but ultimately it is my responsibility to develop what my work is about. I am interested to hear the recordings of what everyone said to get a better idea of what is working and what is not in my work.

Next I will develop a strong and expressed idea for a piece in words and sketches before starting on an up-to-scale work. This will help me to have works which are deliberate, and honestly allow me to free my hand more in the work by building over the base structure rather than creating muddled inventions as I work.

New materials I would like to explore are more mediums for carrying pigment (matte mediums, gels, natural/found materials, layers of paper) to build my works up and expand on my ideas. I also need to research more artists to develop the crux of my artwork. To quote some feedback I got, I need to figure out what the “problem is that [I] am trying to solve” before I can begin positing conjectures. I need to write, to think, and to study before I even think about the canvas or putting marks on a surface. I need an hypothesis to my overall studies in art, and that is what I intend to develop in the coming days.



Game Theory
Acrylic on paper
38 x 50 inches

My first large scale work, this piece was the beginning of my attempts to combine what I had learned about composition, color, and expression to convey a larger idea.

REFLECTION ON STUDIO WALKTHROUGH

As the time for us to show quickly approaches; I grow anxious. Working on art and exhibiting it is placing your self-esteem into the hands of the viewers, in a way. I am confident in the work I do, but showing it to the world questions my confidence and points out all the things I would like to develop more. That is why having the SMP group see and talk about my work first is so helpful. By looking at each other's works it gives us insight into the mind of the viewer, and points out things we might want to be more intentional about.

In this review, I got many interpretations of my painting that I would not have predicted. I was quoting ancient classical sculpture and poses, but did not realize the impact of the setting, a tennis court, drawing so many influences and relations in the mind of the audience. The main take-away I got was that I need to be more intentional when I use subject matter which conjures so many relationships, and need to understand those relationships fully, (such as greco-roman sports and nudity) before including them in my painting.

In addition, this review was eye-opening in that I realized how much there is I still need to do before the show at the end of the month. There is a lot on my mind, but I must make myself a dedicated practice if I wish to build a cohesive series for the show. The self-promise to work on a painting every day (not a new one every day but rather conceptually thinking, researching, and sketching out compositions to build a larger art) is something which came from this walk-through. It is also good to see where the group needs to go before the show so that we can help each other to get there.

I got positive reviews of my work, but in seeing it while others view it, I found things I dislike that I can improve. The colors in the back are too strong, it makes the painting seem muddled and unintelligent. I need to direct the painting to go where I wish it; not take a passive voice in my own expression. Intention is the key, I must work my voice into every brushstroke.

END OF SEMESTER SHOW

Soon enough, it was time for our group exhibition. I had been furthering my understanding and composition through a series of abstracted self portraits. These self portraits also informed my larger work, and were shown together in the gallery.



Untitled Self Portraits (1-8)
Acrylic on canvas
10 x 8 inches

END OF SEMESTER SHOW

This large-scale piece is an accumulation of all the things I have learned this semester. I have found a potent subject matter, dynamic composition, and a material style in my work. The concepts I have built in this semester will be my foundation for my practice next semester, to tackle larger ideas and go deeper into my work.



March from Plato's Allegory
Acrylic on paper
38 x 50 inches

QUESTIONNAIRES

The following pages contain my research into other artists and how they relate to my own work. In a question then answer form, I seek to understand the core tenants of the artist so that I may find my own voice in my work. The first questionnaire started broadly, covering overall ideas and artistic movements. The second focuses on Gustave Courbet, and the third on Eric Fischl. These artists can be compared as two of the strongest voices for modern and postmodern figurative painting respectively. Therefore they are my predecessors, and my work can relate to theirs in a chronological development of ideas.

QUESTIONNAIRE 1

AFFINITIES

I feel an affinity with the work/ideas of Lucian Freud, Gustave Courbet, Alberto Giacometti and Robert Frank

Tell how your work shows evidence of this interest? Or related ideas?

1 In my work, I want to capture form and shape as well as material texture. This is something that Lucian Freud and Giacometti both delve into with their work. I want my works to succeed both in being something in their own right and also capturing the world, which I observe, in a novel and truthful way.

2 I am not yet developing my subject matter to a place that I would like it, but I wish to portray my time and the people of this time. Courbet argued that the only thing an artist could do sincerely was to paint his time. Robert Frank also did this with his photographs. I want my work to capture the passing moment so in the future it can serve as a mirror onto the past.

3 I also want my work to have a pointed purpose. I look to Courbet and his political messages captured in the, at first glance, rather innocuous paintings. I love that clever second level to a work, and wish mine to do even a bit of that. I want the viewer to enjoy the painting to look at, but be made to think about what it is saying. I see this in the works of Kara Walker, Kehinde Wiley, and Cindy Sherman. I want my work to be beautiful, but on a second level to be necessarily uncomfortable and challenging.

UNDERSTANDING CONNECTIONS (past)

Based on research I have already completed, I have learned and grown to appreciate that there are connections between the work that I have done in the past and the following art movements/artistic traditions in a geographic area or culture/artists (name at least 3):

1. The Realism Movement in late 1800s Paris

Courbet, Manet, and their contemporaries (such as the naturalists) developed a viewpoint on beauty and what to paint that I feel connected to. The idea that beauty is in the current world around you, and that it is the artist's job to bring out such interesting things makes sense. I do not wish to create something new, but rather accurately comment and portray the feelings, thoughts, and moods that go along with daily experience.

2. The Environmental Art Movement and Patricia Johanson

In the past I have developed sculptures from found natural materials in an attempt to reduce my harm to the world and bring about ideas of synergy between human beings and the rest of the earth. *Growth*, a sculpture I did last year, was made from bamboo, an invasive species to our ecosystem. This takes my work a step further than visually being harmonious with our environment but actually doing something to accommodate and help the ecosystem, much like Johanson's gardens and sculptures.

3. Figure Painting/portraiture

There is a rich history in art of the portrait, and of painting other people, both known and unknown. The relationship between the sitter and the artist is one which is investigated in the works of Lucian Freud, Alberto Giacometti, Manet, and almost any artist who paints human beings from life. I have painted people in the past, and want to continue doing so in the future. I feel a style in my portraits, but they are not yet fully developed, and often are not directly from life. Learning where I fit in the history of figure painting will be an important step towards a cohesive style and drawing more from the artists of the past will help me.

SEEKING CONNECTIONS - CONTEXT (future)

I think that there are connections between the work that I plan to do in the future and these art movements/artistic traditions in a geographic area or culture (name at least 3)

1. Aliza Nisenbaum

Nisenbaum is a contemporary figure painter who captures specific people; immigrants to the United States from Latin America. Her work both captures individual personalities, color and is pleasing to look at, but also makes the viewer aware of social issues surrounding her subjects. I want my work to do something similar.

2. Luc Tuymans

Technically (rather than conceptually), Luc Tuymans art is simplistic but materially successful. I want to work more with subdued tones and watercolors/ ink and paper. Right now I am working with mainly acrylic paint, so Tuymans will be a good inspiration for more depth and cooler tones.

3. John Sabraw and Chris Jordan

I like these artists because they bring awareness to environmental degradation and pollution while also making visually interesting artwork. This seems stronger to me than typical environmental art (Goldsworthy etc.) because it has an educational element as well as an aesthetic one.

SEEKING CONNECTIONS – ARTISTS (future)

When I think about the work I would like to make in the future there are some artists that I think about, whose work and ideas could guide my path to creating new work. Who are these artists? Tell what it is about their work that makes you feel a connection? Subject matter, the message conveyed, materials, techniques, scale, all or some of these things?

I think I am starting to get to a point where I understand what I want to do with my art. I wish to capture the beauty of the everyday human existence and indeed make something beautiful in the process. On a second level, I want my work to speak of the costs of our society and the effects on the environment and oppressed groups so that the work also acts as a form of social justice and activism. I want my works to be materially grounded. I want texture to arise from the painting, but not be superficially applied. When I am painting I will also be sculpting. I want to capture the human form truly to my observation. It is interesting that artists such as Egon Schiele, Giacometti, Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, Marlene Dumas and so on seem to capture and express the human more accurately than a hyperrealist might. This power of expression is what I wish to focus on. I wish to use it as a tool to make the viewer think about our culture and times.

READING BIOGRAPHIES

I've read biographies on these artists (what you've read up until this moment in time):

Manet and the Modern Tradition by Anne C. Hanson

Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution by TJ Clark

Antony Gormley: *Standing Matter* and other books

Giacometti: *A Biography*

Whether or not my work looks like these artists' work, I connect with what the artist's and/or author's ideas about form, color, and subject matter. All of these artists have given me ideas about how to go about making art and what to capture in my work.

PARTNER LIBRARY VISIT

I chose these books FOR my partner (3 books):

In addition to listing the title and author, briefly state why you chose these books for your partner

1 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

Juliana is interested in doing a web comic for her SMP. This book is unbelievable in how it describes the power of comics. It also does a great job of placing comics into art history and would give Juliana a good basis to start from and other comic artists to research.

2 Jane Tolmie, *Drawing from Life: Memory and Subjectivity in Comic Art* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

Looking at Juliana's work, I see she is strong with visual thinking and converts things seen to a simplified, smoother style (such as Ivy's portrait.) This book sounds perfect in developing this skill and striking a good balance between 'realism' of drawing from life and 'cartooning.'

3 Frederick L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (New York: Kodansha International, 1983).

From her style and interests, I thought this would be a good book to connect Juliana with other artists, both contemporary and historic in her field of interest. Manga has influenced western art and comics as well, and would be valuable to have a working knowledge of in starting a web comic.

These are the books chosen FOR ME by my partner (3 books)

Add these books to your Bibliography & provide a full bibliographic entry here PLUS your preliminary thoughts about why your partner chose these books, i.e., how the subject or artist may be or is related to your work and ideas:

1 Smith, Stan. *Anatomy Perspective and Composition For the Artist* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1984).

Since I have been painting lots of figures and shown interest in the human form, Morgan probably picked this book to develop my composition and accurate rendering of the human form. It will help me to better understand anatomy from a studio artist's perspective.

2 Leland, Nita. *Exploring Color* (Cincinnati: North Light Books, 1985).

I have been experimenting with color more than any other time in my art making. I typically stick to line and form and color as an afterthought. This book will help me to delve into the world of color, mixing my own hues and combining them on the canvas in a satisfactory way.

3 Loran, Erle. *Cézanne's Composition: Analysis of His Form with Diagrams and Photographs of His Motifs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950).

Cezanne is great at texture and material feeling in his paintings. This is something I am definitely interested in. He also is able to capture a scene in a unique style, commenting on technique and also on the visible world. For this, an analysis of his work will be quite helpful for my practice.

ASKING QUESTIONS

I am interested to combine my interest in political activism with investigations in form/the visible world through art. I want my work to have a social purpose and to say something. I also am very interested in material, color, and the physicality of art making. By combining these interests; my overall desire to make a difference in the world with my desire to make something beautiful in art, I will be able to create a work that adds to the world and will push for a better future.

NEW UNDERSTANDINGS

I have read about and looked with keen interest at the work of Jeff Wall and fine art photography in general, and there are things about the work I don't understand, or connections to art of the past that I need more information about. Tell more about this here.

I am still rather uneducated on the world of fine art filmography. In addition I love how Jeff Wall quotes and plays off of historical paintings and literature. I wish to do the same thing in my work to connect it to art history, but need help understanding where I fit into this conversation.

I NEED HELP

I need to learn and know more about figure artists who also challenged the political status quo throughout history but in particular in the United States; but need help finding more information and/or understanding how this movement/artists relate to my own work and to create a dialogue between my own ideas and those of the past. To dive into this subject I have learned more on the birth of the modern art movement in opposition to the bourgeois Academy of Paris and also some of the more overtly political/ feminist art of the 1970s. Still, I find connections to my present day tenuous at best, and need help finding the best way my art can have a voice.

QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Artist:

Gustave Courbet

June 10, 1819- December 31, 1877

3 books you have checked out of the library on your artist:

Clark, T.J. *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.

Nochlin, Linda. *Gustave Courbet: A Study of Style and Society*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1976.

Riat, Georges. *Gustave Courbet*. New York: Parkstone Press, 2008.

Fried, Michael. *Courbet's Realism*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990.

You must have read the Introduction and 1 chapter from these books – tell what you have read:

I have read the introductions and skimmed the rest of these books. Nochlin's book I read more deeply into Courbet's early work and how it informs his later ideas. Riat's writing focuses mainly on form and less on the political content of the work, whereas Clark gives historical context for Courbet.

List 2 books you have checked out of the library on art movements related to your artist

Needham, Gerald. *19th Century Realist Art*. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

Nochlin, Linda. *Realism*. London: Penguin, 1971.

You must have read the Introduction and 1 chapter from these books – tell what you have read:

I have read the introductions to these books and skimmed throughout to gain a better understanding on the definition of "Realism" vs. realism and the various cultural associations around the term and how it applies to the movement in art.

Subject matter(s) of artist focuses on:

Close relatives (recognizable, real people), poor country life, current and seemingly unimportant events made monumental through the painting. Much of his subject matter is intended to shock.

Materials and techniques of artist:

Painting in the large-scale and formal language of the academy, although diverging from norms in the academy by the content of the works and playing with the viewer's relationship to the work, as well as unconventional portrayal of space. His work is much different than the academy painting, but it is hard to explain what he has done differently; "Courbet has undoubtedly dropped traditional schemata and formal vocabulary...it is hard, at first glance, to state precisely what he has substituted for them."¹

Art historians and art critics have written this about my artist - according to art historians and art critics, the three most important aspects of my artist's work are ...

1. Capturing contemporary ideas and characters in an ironic and unideal way:

"One critic in 1853 called the great naked bourgeoisie who steps from the water in *The Bathers* 'this heap of matter, powerfully rendered, cynically turning its back on the beholder.' That could stand as a motto for Courbet's art as a whole between 1849 and 1856."² As we can see from Clark's reading of an old critic at the time, the materiality of the current time shocked the viewers. Like the turned backs in *After Dinner in Ornans*, these works have an aura of mockery or irony directed at the viewer; they act internally as their own and do not wish to have the viewer present; and yet the viewer sees these contemporary scenes, typically never put under the scope of academic painting.

2. Developing a new approach to seeing in that the artist is trying to capture the real in a new stylistic voice:

"True and complete expression of realism in works like *Burial at Ornans*, *the Stone-breakers*, and *the Peasants of Flagey*, works that were truly daring and revolutionary not merely in their subjects, but in their stylistic character as a whole."³ It was not only his portrayal of shocking and new subject matter which was important but his entire approach to the art.

3. Breaking away from traditional painting techniques

"[The depiction] is felt to resist the closure of the picture space relative to the painter-beholder and thus to suggest the possibility that the painter-beholder succeeded in absorbing himself as corporeally in the painting."⁴ This quote from Fried focuses on Courbet's treatment of proximity and figures in the immediate foreground. We can see his techniques were doing something entirely different from the works predating him.

¹ Nochlin, Linda. *Gustave Courbet: A Study of Style and Society*

² Clark, T.J. *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*.

³ Nochlin, Linda *Gustave Courbet: A Study of Style and Society*

⁴ Fried, Michael. *Courbet's Realism*.

Art historical movements (at least 2) that provide context for artist's work and ideas.

1. French Academic Painting: The state of painting before Courbet began his more famous and shocking works was that of Romantic painting at the Academy. There was a very precise language to the paintings here, and it was based around formal, classical studies and idealized fictional scenes.
2. Dutch Genre Painting: Before Courbet and his contemporaries began painting people of the modern time, the Dutch were painting what was called 'genre scenes' of everyday people. Often these pictures have some overarching moral implication. This inspired the rest of the art world to follow in their footsteps, but with idyllic depictions of moral and happy peasants (such as the works of Scottish painter Faed).
3. French Realism: It is impossible to separate Courbet from Realism or Realism from Courbet. His was the work which developed this school of thought and laid out the groundwork for following artists (see Courbet's Letter to Students). Distinct from Naturalism or realistic painting, Realism was tasked with painting that of the modern, focusing on non-idealised images of the world such as funerals, peasants, or bohemians.

Why it is important to understand the art historical context that preceded the work of my artist.

In order to understand Gustave Courbet, it is requisite to understand the world in which he was painting. Before him, all painting in France was academic, falling into a set theory of subject matter and style and not at all grounded in the current times. In addition to this, the bourgeois ignored the poor of the country outside of Paris while also relying on the for infrastructure work (i.e. *Stonebreakers*) and food production. All of this swirls into the shocking (at the time) and powerful works of Courbet.

How does the combination of form (composition, materials, size, etc.) and subject matter create meaning (the content of a work art)?

The painting *After Dinner at Ornans* was the first of Courbet's extremely influential works. Portraying actual people rather than idealized characters, it focuses on an intimately contemporary scene. The scale of the painting (the figures are near life size) dictates a history painting, but the subject matter of Courbet's friends and family enjoying a personal moment is odd in such a setting. Furthermore the figures are turned completely away from the viewer, creating a feeling of 'spying' or unwelcome towards the audience. Using the techniques of the academy, but drastically throwing an intimate contemporary scene in the focus creates the power of this work. Furthermore, the subject matter of country people, in the same year as the 1848 revolution would be quite unsettling and provoking to the high class art world.⁵

⁵ Clark, T.J. *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*

I find the work to be powerful not only from all of this historical context but through its visual language. It is a dark painting, but casts a mood of comfort and sedentary peace; the feeling of rest after a long day and a good dinner. Although the bourgeois might not have related to this painting, I feel an urge to partake in its relaxing moment; to listen to the music being played in the scene. You can tell these are real people; they have weight and are integrally related to the surrounding scene. Even the dog gives off a feel of authenticity and mood of after dinner relaxation.

3 contemporary artists related to my artist. Provide 1 image each plus a website/link below.

John Meyer



AGAINST ALL ODDS
114 x 153 cm (45 x 60 inches)

<http://www.johnmeyerpaintings.com/?m=1>

John Meyer is a South African artist. His work is realist, in that it mirrors how the world looks; but frames the context of the work similar to how Courbet does. He also portrays

contemporary scenes, even including things such as laptop computers; signs that the scene is of the times, much like Courbet.

Terry Rodgers



<http://www.terryrodgers.com/>

Terry Rodgers has a photographic quality to his work, capturing the world in snapshots. He is interested in people of the time, like Courbet, and paints the figure and average people. Photorealism is different to what the French Realists were trying to do because they were interested in capturing real, local people. Rodgers' works are also constructed in a studio to look like a real scene, exactly like Courbet worked. Read more about contemporary realism here:

<http://www.widewalls.ch/realism-contemporary-art/>

Eric Fischl



<http://www.ericfischl.com/>

Eric Fischl paints people from life in a realistic style. His subjects are not abstracted and work more as pieces which he assembles into a final painting. Courbet was also a studio painter, capturing 'real' moments in time but actually creating them in his studio; posed models to capture the overarching idea.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Part 1

I aspire to have my work related to this artist in several key ways. First, I wish to portray the world of my time, to paint from what I know. This is an idea that before Courbet academic art never did. Painters created fictional scenes from history or literature. I want to learn and develop my works from what is around me, and do so truthfully. Courbet used 'real' and contemporary subjects to convey a larger idea; often criticizing the society in which he lived or subverting norms to make a point. I want my work to have this clever spin to it.

Below you will see Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* and a painting of my own, *Sisyphus*. Both works focus on the artist as the subject. Although Courbet is noted as Realist, he plays with the notion of the real; as seen in the oxymoronic title of this painting of a "real allegory." The power of the painting comes from this idea; that it is based in reality yet somehow an allegory of the artist's life. In my work, I am equating the work of an artist as that of the greek myth of Sisyphus; the man who every day rolled an enormous boulder to the top of a mountain only for it to roll down and him to toil again the next day for eternity. I used my own studio as the subject



The Painter's Studio: A real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life

Gustave Courbet

Oil on canvas

142 in × 235 in

1855

Part 2

The ideas I have for my work are also different from this artist. While Courbet does focus on scenes from modern life, most are less about the individual person and more about the type of person they are (i.e. paintings of peasants or rural life, or female nudes). I am interested in capturing more individual character in my paintings. Seen below is Courbet's portrait of his friend Proudhon; a less famous work of his. Although the work is focused on an individual, Courbet is making sure the viewer understands that Proudhon is a literary, with placement of the books as a symbol for this. Elsewhere my works diverge from Courbet is my abandon from the technically rigorous portrayal of the realistic. I wish to capture truth in my work, like the realists did, but I am less interested in the direct ties between what the world looks like and what I am capturing in the paint. In my painting, items like packs of cigarettes and bottles are abstracted into simple forms and combined into patterns. The picture plane is rendered extremely flat. This is something Courbet would never take to such an extreme.



Pierre Joseph Proudhon and his Children in 1853

Gustave Courbet

78 in x 58 in

Oil on Canvas

1853-1865

QUESTIONNAIRE 3

Artist: Eric Fischl

Born: March 9, 1948 (age 68)

3 Books on my artist:

Ammann, Jean-Christophe, et al. *It's Where I Look...It's How I See...Their World, My World, The World (with help from my friends)*. New York: Mary Boone Gallery, 2005.

Goodden, Sky. 2014. "A Q&A WITH Eric Fischl." *Modern Painters* 26, no. 3: 72. *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 14, 2016)
<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=d4e152f1-a41f-4270-aa9d-98b9>

Schjeldahl, Peter. *Eric Fischl: Witness Essay*. New York: Art in America, 1988. Print.

Van Tuyl, Gijs, et al. *Eric Fischl: Paintings and Drawings 1979-2001*. Kunstmuseum: Wolfsburg, 2003.

Reading Notes:

The first book on the list is a collection of Eric Fischl's works along with several writings on him. I have read all the essays in conjunction with a visual analysis of the works. The second source is a Q and A, which I have read in full and was valuable because it allowed me to hear the artist's own voice. Finally, I found 2 reproductions books of his work from galleries and exhibitions past. They both included essays in review of his paintings.

2 books on art movements related to Fischl:

Rosenblum, Robert. *On Modern American Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999.

Knudsen, Stephen. "Beyond Postmodernism. Putting a Face on Metamodernism Without the Easy Clichés." *ARTPULSE MAGAZINE*. Accessed November 17, 2016.
<http://artpulsemagazine.com/beyond-postmodernism-putting-a-face-on-metamodernism>

Gaggi, Silvio. *Modern/Postmodern: A study in 20th century arts and ideas*. Philadelphia: University of PA press, 1989.

Reading Notes:

I have read the article from *artpulse* which tries to define what comes after postmodernism, and how Eric Fischl's work relates to modernists and comments/questions modernist ideals. By defining Fischl in relation to modernists it puts him into a chronology to artists I have already looked at, and helps to define where my voice will land in the succession. I have also jumped around in *On Modern American Art*. It is a large survey of Modern American art, and has a chapter specifically on Fischl's work. It was helpful in putting him into a larger context of the art world and other artists, specifically developing his portrayal of the psychological and sexual.

Subject matter(s) of artist focuses on:

Fischl's work focuses on people, specifically noted as contemporary by recognizable locations, narratives, and clothing. This acts as a commentary on our society, and points to the language of figurative art. The subjects are wealthy, and American. His work captures sex and postmodern apathy and thereby ironically subverts the idea of the American Dream.

Materials and techniques of artist:

Fischl works in oil paint. It is informative to look at his drawings, because it shows how he thinks about creating a larger image. He uses individual drawings and layers them, mostly on tracing paper or glassine (transparent surfaces), so he can move around subjects in relation to each other on a larger paper.

Art historians and art critics have written this about my artist: according to art historians and art critics, the three most important aspects of my artist's work are ...

1. The Sexual

"Again and Again, Fischl makes us empathize with these at once private and universal disclosures of sexual ignition...so psychologically incisive that the disarming depiction somehow registers as poignant rather than pornographic."

2. The American

"His morally ambitious, tragi-comic images reflect the frittering away of American expansiveness, American economic and culture swagger...Fischl's work baffles most Europeans with its deadpan humor and avoidance of apparent ideological or obsessive edge. It nonplusses Americans too, but in a way that thrills many: with the intimacy and [suddenness] of its address, as if you were in a room where you thought you were alone, someone spoke in your ear. That room is the besieged mental space of American innocence."

3. The Composition

“The ritual is present. Yet these moments in time belong to different periods of time. A linear construction does not correspond to the method of Eric Fischl. These are fields of perception which contain observations.”

A large part of Eric Fischl's work is his portrayal of sexual tension, not overtly as sexual actions but of the nude body in narratives. Often he creates an uncomfortable relation between the innocent and the sexual, and disturbing Freudian childhood images such as in *Daddy's Girl*, *Bad Boy*, or *Sleepwalker*. The images become all the more disturbing in their familiar landscapes of American domestic life.

How does Fischl accomplish such an American feeling in his works? The inclusion of the familiar, anything from a backyard pool to a glass of iced tea, to hair curlers all pull on our nostalgic and unconscious understanding of our country. Often compared to Edward Hopper in his pure American feeling, he draws from the heavy sunlight, bright colors of a nostalgic summer day.

His development of his pieces is unique, and comes from a nonlinear place. He constructs his compositions piece by piece, as seen in the glassine drawings. This is a unique approach in a post-realist, post-abstract expressionist art world; and a refreshing take on the oil painting. As a result, his compositions are dynamic, packed with color and movement, and play with sense of space.

Art historical movements (at least 2) that provide context for artist's work and ideas:

The Early Modernists of Europe

Following the modernists, but certainly not modernist, Fischl creates an ironic play on the pure ideals of modernism. Critical of the utopic, he points out the unseen flaws of our society, and questions the future of our current path. This ironic question is associated with what some call the 'postmodern.' In place of the dreams and belief in the future seen in Modern art, Eric Fischl's work is steeped in apathy.

We can see Fischl is directly critiquing the ideas of past modern painters and bringing them into a new setting. For example, *Master Bedroom*, and image of a woman hugging a dog, nude on a bed, confronting the viewer standing above with her eyes; draws inspiration from "...the head-on confrontation with bed linens and prurient flesh that Manet disclosed in *Olympia*." Indeed, the entire idea of Fischl's work focused in the hidden moments of the upper-middle class to wealthy Americans mimics Manet's, (and Courbet's) challenge of the French Bourgeois with those things they chose to ignore (i.e. prostitutes, Degas' ballerinas, the rural poor). Instead of calling for change, or a revolution, like many of the modernist groups, Eric Fischl is purposely voiceless on his ethics. He simply makes the viewer uncomfortable and left to draw their own conclusions.

Early American Realists:

The typical imagery of life in the United States is idealized. One only needs to go as far as Ed Hopper, Norman Rockwell, or Winslow Homer, (not to mention the romanticized landscapes by the Hudson River school or the painters of the West) to see America as the

expansive land of plenty, and full of hardworking pure-hearted people. Eric Fischl takes the trope of the innocent American and shows a subverted vision; perhaps a more truthful one. No longer are there great adventurers, thinkers, and businessmen. Instead America is diluted to the fake smiles of a backyard barbecue, weakly hiding the real drivers of our society; the primal urges of sexual desire and material greed.

Why it is important to understand the art historical context that preceded the work of my artist.

Eric Fischl is extremely aware of the language he is using. It is exactly the feeling of similarity between his work and his predecessors which creates the jarring realisation of just how contemporary his subjects are. Fischl uses our understanding of family snapshots and photo albums, the traditional language of early modernists, to create his work. We are typically accustomed to finding a passionate moral idea within realist works, but with Fischl, he gives us only a unsettling view of humanity.

How does the combination of form (composition, materials, size, etc.) and subject matter create meaning (the content of a work art)?



Saturday Night (The Aftermath Bath)
1980

Oil on Glassine.
72 x 84 in.

This work finds its meaning through its unique composition, narrative subject, and unconventional material use. By using sheets of Glassine (a transparent material) Fischl creates a dynamic composition which sits at different points of time throughout. Each figure is on a separate plane, layered over other subjects which both creates depth and questions it (For example, seeing that the boy in the tub is literally in front of the tub's edge, but the lines of the tub are showing through him.) The combination of this unique approach and material with the narrative subject and familiar objects leads the viewer into the space. The scene feels very private and mundane, but the woman is looking at the viewer, drawing you into the scene in an awkward way.

3 contemporary artists related to my artist.



Mr. Lucky
David Salle
Acrylic and oil on canvas and linen
1998
94 x 134 in.

David Salle began his career at a similar time to Fischl in the 1980s, when the ideals of modernism began to wane and larger criticism was at hand. His paintings are an amalgamation of many images, put together seemingly randomly. His commentary seems to focus on our image-dominated world, and how art functions within this system; what with advertising, media, etc. He relates to Fischl in his postmodern critique on our society, and of the United States in particular.

<http://www.davidsallestudio.net/>



The German Girl

Jerome Witkin

1997

Oil on canvas

80 x 124 in.

An American painter, Jerome Witkin's works have overt political meaning. Like Fischl, he paints in a realist style, but these works are much more emotionally and politically charged. His works are also much more visceral and dark than Fischl's sun-drenched palette.

<http://jeromewitkin.com/>



The Necklace
Balcomb Greene
1958
Oil on canvas
62 x 48 in.

I realize this artist is neither super related to Fischl or contemporary, but I stumbled onto his work and really liked what I saw. He was associated with the Abstract Expressionism movement and worked to try and gain public acceptance of abstract art. Honestly, his representational works are vastly better; as seen above they have interesting texture and layers. In an extremely limited palette these figurative works create a unique mood. I am reminded of Jenny Saville or Marlene Dumas.

http://www.berrycampbell.com/artist/Balcomb_Greene/works/1805

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Part 1

I aspire to have my work relate to this artist in several key ways:

My work is related to Fischl in its critique on our society. In Fischl's *Old Man's Boat*, the apathy of debauchery is present. The people in the background are having a good time, without any sort of care. In the foreground is the only non-nude figure. She is looking ahead, separated from the others by negative space, also wearing a life jacket. You get the sense that she isn't enjoying herself as much as the others, she is suspicious of the hedonist lifestyle. And yet she is still on the boat. I relate to this character. I am constantly finding myself at parties, trying to have fun, but deep down critical and desiring something more.

In my painting (see below,) I am quoting *Joy of Life* by Matisse, but in a darker palette. I do not wish to express joy; but instead this critical look at the world. Eric Fischl's work seems to be made by someone who wishes to divorce himself from the meaningless sex, drug-use, and drinking our society encourages, but unable to because of a desire to partake in community. My work is expressive in the brushstrokes. Also like Fischl, I put my subjects into a contemporary setting, a tennis court. The scene, like that of Fischl's boat, is not without symbolism. It represents the game of life, how there is nothing more than a back and forth; how sexual interaction is nothing and everything.



This is All There is, Nothing More

Benjamin Derlan

2016

Acrylic on Paper

50in. x 38in.



The Old Man's Boat and the Old Man's Dog

Eric Fischl

1982.

Oil on Canvas

84 x 84in.

Part 2

The ideas I have for my work are also different from this artist:

My work is expressive. Although Eric Fischl's work certainly is not photorealistic, it certainly has a feeling of snapshot-like capturing of scenes. I wish for my paint to be a medium through which to understand the images portrayed. I want the quality of color, line, etc to have an emotional effect on the viewer, not simply the composition and content of the piece. In my multi-media drawing seen below, am contrasting the realism of the photo scraps with the emotive power of the color and texture to give an emotional reaction in the viewer. Although this piece is not quite where I am trying to go, it does show the difference of treatment in materials between myself and Fischl. I want to have a politically charged message, like Fischl's 'island' diptych, but with more emotional expression in the material.



"A Visit To/A Visit From/The Island" (1983)

Eric Fischl

Oil on canvas

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly appreciative of St. Mary's College, and more specifically the Art department for allowing me to have such an amazing studio space to grow as an artist. I would like to extend thanks to Cristin Cash, the Boyden Gallery director for hosting our show. The Boyden Gallery installation expert, Selwyn Ramp was indispensable in hanging the show, as were all the Boyden student staff members. I am still honored by the Tom Rowe family to have received such a generous scholarship, allowing me to buy materials this past summer and entire semester. The art professors, old and new, have been so great about answering questions and opening new directions for my art. I also would like to thank the rest of the SMP studio art students for their help and encouragement along the way. Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Sue Johnson, our SMP mentor this semester for pushing me to work harder and learn more.