

**Vanitas and the Terrible Sublime**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

in conjunction with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Senior Project in Painting

by

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The following photographs and explanations are documentation of a Ball State honors thesis in conjunction with my senior project for completion of a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. The final exhibition consisted of twelve large works (4 1/2' x 3 1/2') and ten small pieces (11" x 9") on Arches paper. Most of the paper was first painted with gesso, an acrylic coating which strengthens paper and prepares it to handle a variety of materials, including oil based media. Then, true to form, a variety of materials were used: charcoal, acrylic gel medium, chalk, acrylic paints, small amounts of oil paint for tinting, watercolor, colored pencil, oil pastels, bronze and gold powders, china markers, etc.

Three formal exhibitions were held. One was in the top floor of Elliot Hall, a lofty long space with checkered tile. The space had to be cleaned, painted and lit, which, with two other art students, gave me an opportunity to experience the work that goes into creating an exhibition space. This show was up for one night-- May 9. The reception was lively and populated, but another exhibition was scheduled for longer exposure. During the week of June 14-20 the work was shown in the Brown Lounge of the Ball State Museum of Art. The small paintings were also shown in the gathering area outside the Honors College for two weeks.

The artist's statement that follows was displayed at each show. It makes more references to content and theme. Nine pieces have been reproduced as well with some statements regarding their conception. The first four pictured are reproductions of smaller paintings; the last five are examples of the larger work.

"Vanitas" is a word given to early Dutch still lives that preached the presence of all stages of life and death. They might have within them, for example, evidence of budding, new life, flowers in full bloom, and withered, bug-eaten shells.

## Artist's Statement-- Angela Garrels

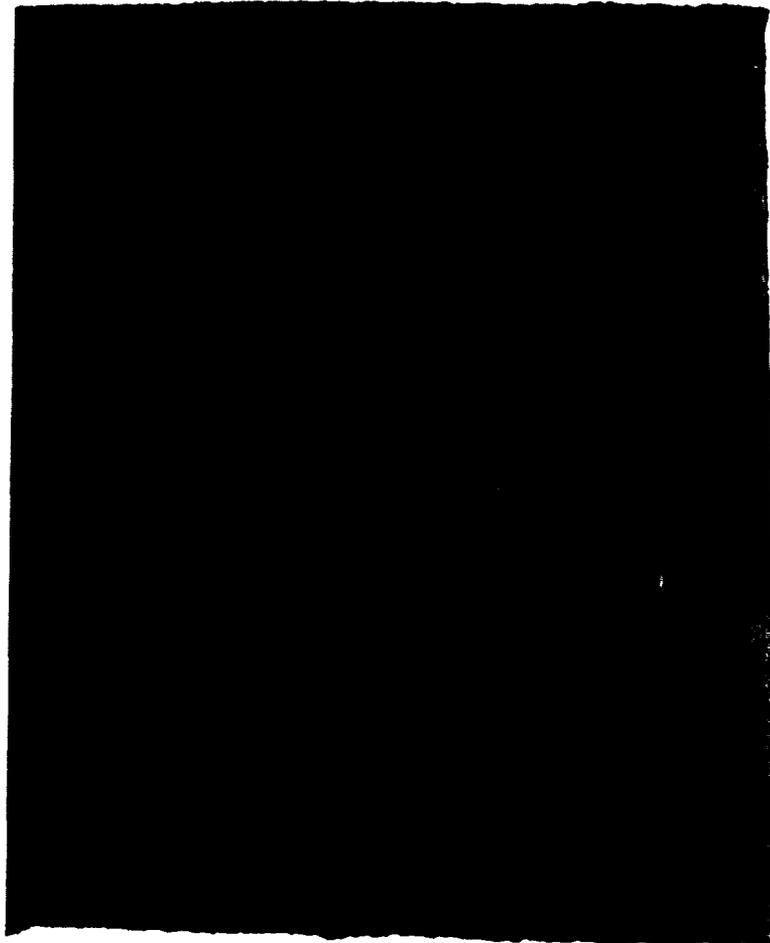
When I began this series of drawings, I told myself specifically not to theorize or philosophize in preparation, but just to draw. I imagined that the theme of the work would make itself apparent and would not be bound by any predetermined direction. For various reasons, the series came together as a series and I found an emotional connection with the pieces, especially while working. I have a love of making things from nothing and a curiosity about the way two dimensions can be shoved and tugged into the creation of a new space. The layers of the images and materials I've been using give me endless possibilities to explore. I've heard many people express their frustration with being unable to "get what's in my head on to paper." For me, the process of working and responding to accidents and experiments brings me to a drawing far more unique than any construction I have in my brain.

Fruit and seeds are the valves, bulbs and pipes of living bodies-- they are age and newness and decay and juicy fullness. I imagine the fruit in my paintings being able to twirl and burst and float and wither. They are mostly fictitious, a playground of organic form and structure, but they reference every pod and berry I've picked up off of the street or seen in books. My affair with swimming is a love/fear relationship. I'm an addict and an escapee. It makes sense, then, that I should dream about water and fish in connection to stress in waking life. My proximity to fish grows as tension does. There is a close relationship between things that move me with their apparent beauty and things that make me squeamish. It seems that learning demands an intensity and variety of experience.

I would like to express my gratitude to Ball State University, which includes the College of Fine Arts, which includes the Department of Art, which includes a diverse and supportive faculty. I am grateful, also, to the Honors College of Ball State for their influence in promoting multi-disciplinary learning. I would like especially to thank Endi Poskovic, faculty mentor for this project, for his time and overwhelming enthusiasm in helping me bring the show to completion.

## **What I saw on the Edge of Waking**

These are some of the slithery concerns that creep around in my sleep. Wild, lovely and intimidatingly mysterious.



**Floater**

This is simply aquatic. Waves of cursive, lilting music, the effects of water-spread.



### **At the Tips, Over Tops**

Balance your icons... flip 'em like tarot... be aware of your idolatries. Have some fun.

Reexamine your assumptions. Push the envelope. Celebrate your inconsistencies.

And so on and so forth.



## **Birthing the As-yet-unaccomplished**

This is the pregnancy and delivery of that itchy creative urge. It builds and explodes; it is incubated; it leaks from the cracks.



## Gold and Bones

Someone once held me between his palms-- one hand on my breastbone beneath my clavicles and one between my shoulder blades-- and he said, "Someday you're going to die." At these strange in between times we realize our mortality. Our bodies encase the brains that work overtime and tend to ignore the frailty of tissue. It's not so scary. It's golden.



## **Big Microscopic**

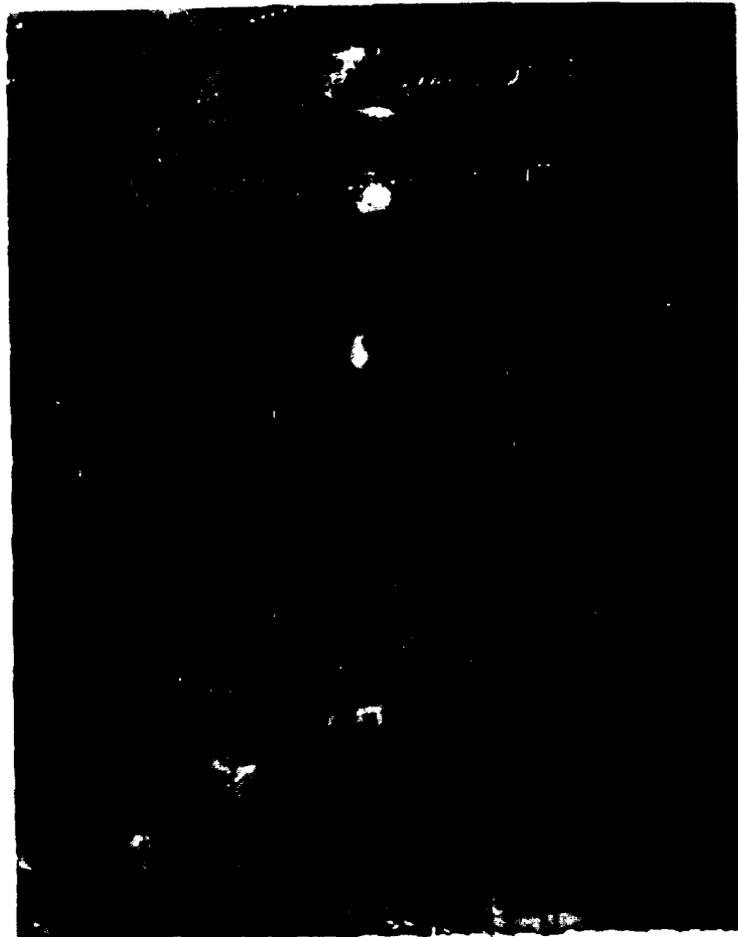
Natural form is delightful. Microscopic and macroscopic work under the same laws.

Life's symmetry, radial, bilateral, etc., astounds me here and there.



**Halfhead (In the Dark, Recording)**

This is a tribute to the beauty and mystery of beauty and mystery. I record and rehearse, I make countless conclusions and am contradicted and reaffirmed.



## Reinterpretation of a Dome

Okay, so this one is full of symbology. A renovated pisces sign... the metamorphic moth... the exaltation of mathematical pattern... evidence of work and learning and religious architecture. For all of its shortcomings, the education I have received has been invaluable to my perceptions of the world. The shapes of things seen and unseen become clearer by increased knowledge in every field.



## **Vanitas and the Terrible Sublime**

There is a certain duality to the way life serves up pain and ecstasy. Life and death play a continual battle but are also marriageable and codependent. Enlightenment brings with it the challenge of continued growth.

