

Fight for Freedom: Voicing the Silent

An Honors Thesis

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Guenin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ball State University

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April, 2003

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Abstract:

The presentation of the show, "Fight for Freedom: Voicing the Silent," included the production of 12 drawings, 6 paintings, an artist statement, and gallery space. The show was a culmination of research, travel, writing, drawing, painting, and experimentation. Research included traveling to several exhibitions, searching the library and researching artists and styles. Extensive writing and journaling helped evolve the concept for the show to appeal to a broad audience at social, academic, and spiritual levels. Creating the artwork was an intentionally experimental process to find the best possible way to illustrate the ideas of the show. The final presentation created a new venue for art within low-income neighborhoods and provided an opportunity to expose the ideas of social justice through art.

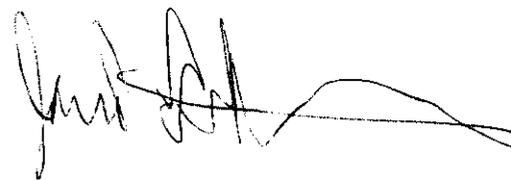
Fight For Freedom: Voicing the Silent

Artist Statement

The theme of this show is social justice and spiritual implications. My interest in this theme has developed over a few years through a series of volunteer and work experiences. Working with the youth, the poor and looking outward to the world sparks an intense awareness of social injustices and the spiritual, political, financial, and even religious barriers that prevent freedom.

The layout of the pieces is strategic to the message of my show. The progression is intended to develop an understanding of the ideas leading to reconciliation. The opening piece, immediately to the left upon entering, is a spiritual picture of the glory of God glimpsed through lattice of a window. The painting is drawn from scripture in Song of Solomon describing a lover looking in through a window. The *Minority* series, a set of three, describe the city academically based on imagery by a 19th century German philosopher who studies how cities and minorities within cities grow and become isolated. The dots represent different populations of people and geographic location. The next series of eight shifts focus to an intimate spiritual battle. The series describes the personal vulnerability, represented by the nude figure, yet the woman is protected in the close space. The piece on the other wall, closest to the window, is a street level description of the plight of the poor in the city. This idea is contrasted by the worshipping figures in the background, in various stages of engagement. The next series is a macro view, looking at the city through different filters: spiritual, informational, aesthetic, and historical. The last painting, *Sobre la Mesa*, is given as a blueprint for reconciliation. It is based on an idea to encourage relationship and community.

It is a personal mission for me to bring art and worship to the poor. Socially marginalized people are concerned with things like food, clothing, and shelter, while art becomes an unnecessary luxury. Yet, many oppressed people have the need to express passions and desires. Many times this need is expressed through destructive means, but art can be a positive expression and even a healing and reconstructive expression. In addition, the location of my show is very important. The show is first and foremost for the community- the surrounding neighborhood- and is designed to facilitate an experience of "true" community by mixing several stratifications of the local community. By connecting factions of the city, I hope to spark discussion between and an awareness of people who may act different, look different, and smell different.



Jared A. Gilbert

Social Justice and Spiritual Implications

January 2003

The initial idea for the show was to highlight social problems through drawings. I had ambitions of creating ten drawings and four paintings. I would display these drawings at a local mission. The intended audience was a mix of community members, Ball State students, and people from the neighborhood. At the beginning, I approached the project with an attitude of political lobbyist. My goal was to create emotionally charged, nearly political pieces, demanding attention to the injustices of the social structure.

As I began work on the project, ideas came slowly. The first drawings created, were experiments with different layers and media. Many of the first drawings I abused with a variety of media, building a thick surface to find a balance of drawing and painting skills.

February 2003

A trip to Atlanta became a great jump-start to my ideas. "Paris," an exhibition of Parisian Impressionists at the High Museum of Art, highlighted artists who were most avant-garde in subject and style. Many of the artists were highly criticized, at the turn of the century, for portraying street life, the poor, and the seedy underworld of Paris. Rather than creating wall decorations for the rich, the new artists began producing work that showed the world as they saw it, without idealizing, embellishing, or editing. Surprisingly, these same artists were painting and drawing far less representational than their predecessors, even though they were representing a more representational world.

The first drawing I created that became a part of the show was a compilation of ideas I had sketched in Atlanta. I spent several days working the surface of the paper. I was intentional about portraying the dirt and wear of a city, particularly the aesthetic of the poor, neglected areas of urban fabric. To break up the space, I added lines, which could be interpreted as divisions, layers, or spatial elements of a landscape. The imagery of the piece comes from three separate sketching series. I developed a skyline of Atlanta from a series of sketches, to match the horizontal lines; I wanted to emphasize the vertical elements dwarfing the everyday life of a city. From a mission in downtown Atlanta, I sketched figures worshiping during a church service. These figures become illusive elements that appear and fade at different angles and lighting conditions. The final element, the cup, is a composite of academic sketches made in the studio. The overall composition is derived from a photo taken of Manhattan from across the east river, shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11. In the foreground are barren overgrown lots. The middle ground is a cemetery, camouflaged by the skyline of Manhattan in the background. There are a number of figures among the gravestones, almost imperceptible. The light of the late afternoon homogenizes the colors,

blending the figures, grave stoves, and skyline into a seamless vista. The cup becomes a broken and bleeding vessel in the foreground. The figures and the skyline blend into each other. The images are strong and self descriptive, however, the most important elements are the layers worked into the surface and the nearly overwhelmed figures worshipping and expressing, even under such oppression. This piece was titled, "The Worshipping Poor."

Meanwhile, I began work on a large piece on canvas, incorporating drawing and painting. The piece did not end up as a part of my show; however, I was able to use the work to develop ideas and themes that played into the other pieces. The vision for this painting was a political poster. I began with dramatic imagery of good and evil separated by an impenetrable cloud between. The ideas were particularly influenced by prophetic images, both biblical and contemporary. I incorporated stark text and scrawled messages addressing social depression. More abstractly, I depicted a violent spiritual battle. The more I worked the canvas, the painting transformed to resemble a landscape, and a jumble of images. My personal style is to never erase, but to continue to build until the desired image appears, and so I slowly began to obliterate the images and applying glazes and washes. Quickly the painting took on a completely new appearance. The new washes and colors easily muted the strong color scheme and images beneath.

March 2003

Following a trip to Los Angeles, I began working very quickly. The trip had sparked new passion for social justice, after an extensive tour of the city through both affluent and slum neighborhoods, most of which existed within blocks of each other. I began working on a series based on the work of a German social philosopher, who used visual demonstrations using colored dots that represented the demographics of a city. The drawings began with cont-e on paper. Envisioning the layers and images in three-dimensional space, I attempted to heighten the sense of space by rendering the under-drawing as columns and dividers. On top of these I added a variety of acrylic layers and mediums. The series consists of three pieces; the first explores layers of colors and depth. The second is a development of the images of the dots; this piece became the most reminiscent of pop art. The third piece was the most heavily layered. The paper became so saturated and loaded with medium, the natural texture of the acrylic caused an embossing effect.

A second series was created by collage and more experiments with washes. The collage pieces were scraps of discarded oil paintings on paper. The pieces were arranged to resemble city blocks and streets. The concept for the pieces is realized in the washes. The series looks at the city through conceptual filters, just as a spiritual filter, historical filter, etc. The first piece I choose for the show was a look at the city through a spiritual filter. The colors are mostly monochromatic, representing the state of religion in the city, but the washes are murky and even chaotic. The second piece

represents the city through a filter of information. Besides dark and heavily pigmented washes, the surface is covered with scraps of phonebook pages and newspaper clippings. The third piece captures the aesthetic of a city. The washes emulate the dirt and wear of a city, as well as, a sense of decay and passing of time. The last piece used in the series, looked at the city through a filter of historical significance. The collage pieces were arranged to match an intersection in central Paris, France. The paper contains many layers, which were preserved to demonstrate the process.

Yet another series began with four ink figure drawings on paper. Each of the drawings, 10x10 inches, showed the same figure, in the same space, with different poses. The idea for the series came from 14th century woodcarvings of St. Catherine. The wood series depicted the same woman in the same space working, praying, and meditating alone. The series of drawing I created depict a spiritual battle. Although the series first consisted of several drawings, I narrowed them down to four essential pieces. The works are titled: "Surrender, Commanding Angels, Rescue, and Waiting on the Wind." To compliment the four drawings, I created four oil paintings of the same size. These are abstract pieces that are intended to evoke a mood that is demonstrated by each drawing. The four oil paintings were used to experiment with oil glazing and the effects of different media on the paint. While I achieved the desired effects, the experiments led to several surprises that worked to my advantage.

April 2003

Two paintings already in progress came together very quickly in the last few weeks. These two were intended to serve as an introduction piece and a concluding piece for the show. The introduction piece, inspired by Russian avant-garde, was created with repeated layers of color and glazes. As the surface built up, some areas were rubbed out, and others enhanced by more highlights; this technique created depth and texture. Four basic colors emerged from the initial under painting, achieved by blending shades of the primary colors and white. By slowing enhancing and highlighting various areas of color, the resulting colors emerged.

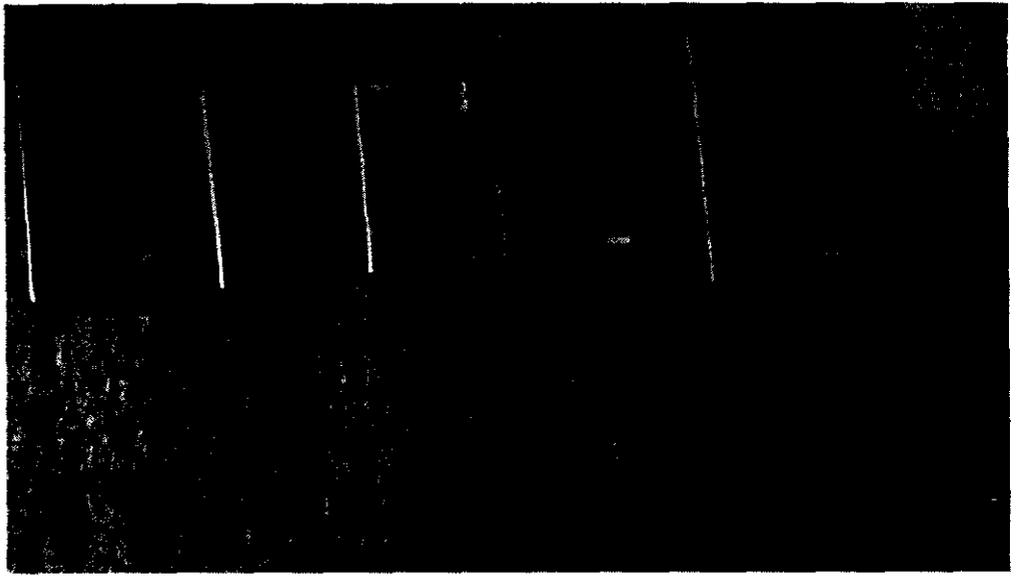
At this point, I began to piece together a narrative for my show with the arrangement of the works. The opening piece was titled, "Glory through a lattice." The title comes from a biblical reference in Song of Solomon when the lover down from the mountains to greet the Shulemite through the lattice of a window. Next came the "Minority" series, to emphasize a necessary assessment of the state of the city. Following, was the eight parts of the spiritual warfare series. These are an initial answer to the state of the city. The next piece was "The Worshipping Poor." Following spiritual battle, grassroots manifestations of a working community begin to emerge. Next came "The City" series. Once relationships of a real community begin the problems of society can be individually addressed by identifying and removing the traditions that darken our cities. The concluding painting of the show presented a plan of action. "Sobre la Mesa," which means

across the table, continues the idea of a spiritual battle, fighting for relationships.

The last piece I finished was the concluding painting; this was once again influenced by Russian avant-garde. The painting incorporated a skewed grid system, interrupted by curved forms and dissecting lines. These lines serve to bound many different levels of three-dimensional space. The painting combined the colors used through out the show and with the grid tied together many of the design themes of the other works.

For the presentation of the show, I needed to transform a dark warehouse space to suitably display art. A stack of surplus OSB served to cover the brightly painted walls and provided a surface to display without marring the original walls. Due to the glossy glazes on the oil paintings, I rigged up shop halogen lights that reflected from the ceiling to provide indirect lighting that complimented the art.

The show finally opened successfully. I achieved my objectives of introducing art into the neighborhood, while encouraging Ball State and other outsiders to mix with the people of the immediate neighborhood. Another aspect of the show was to introduce my personal passion for the arts and the poor.



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