Painting Poetry

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract
Communication between people is a never-ending process, and relationships, from personal to global, often have such complex misunderstandings as well as meaningful understandings that the opportunities to portray them visually are endless. I am compelled by what the character of a figure communicates as well as the allegorical scenarios I am free to place them in; yet the allegories and metaphors I am presenting are powerful and real inside the human mind. The mind is driven by beliefs and understanding gained from the world. When we feel an emotion, is it not the ultimate experience, the truest concept at our fingertips in that very moment? It is our whole reality. I have chosen to distort spacial reality in painting in both personal and unknown narratives—without exploring the emotional moments in understanding and communication in cultures and minds other than my own, I am trapped in a void. This thesis has enabled me to explore challenging painting compositions, as well as challenging social interaction, in order to create something beyond my former vocabulary. The research I incorporated comes from art history, psychology, and interviews.

I am influenced by the honest portraits of Alice Neel, Oskar Kokoschka and his group of expressionists, and the impressionists, such as Van Gogh, Gaughin, Bonnard, and Cassatt. Visually I hope to push my use of color, conceptions of beauty, and body language—which brings up the work of Lucien Freud and others. The abstraction is a chance to expand on my ideas outside of my comfort zone.

Acknowledgements
Many thanks to my models, the faculty at Ball State for truly pushing me from nothing to something in mindset, knowledge, and know-how, my parents for valuing my education and desire to be an artist, and my fellow students who have received the short end of my attention span when they contribute so much more to my life and ideas than they estimate.

Mentor: David Hannon
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Before I begin on any of the paintings, I’m going to say that I could overturn my existential fundamentals, that I could question the painting as an object in society, and then I could acknowledge all of the attempts at thundering and impressive senior shows and one up them. But I don’t care about that anymore.

I am going to paint, using paints, on a canvas, using figures and things.

If these things express something within me, more than just by accident, you’ll know I wasn’t lying to you this time around. It is ironic how painting is similar to storytelling, which in some instances can be seen as falsities. When it comes to the moments we hide from one another, I’m going to use other people to represent me because I am still too afraid to reveal myself, thereby being untruthful but also not providing any explanation at all for the moment I create.

Next, I will interview other people in situations that interest me, such as in a nursing home, and ask them about these moments. I will ask what images they would be interested in being in, young or old.

As an artist, why am I expected to encompass true creativity and genius without using the vast source that is the universe? I’m not. The books only hint that it’s done that way. It’s not.

Anyway, I heard about a photographer who did it. She put ads in little town’s papers.

Then I’m going to choose interesting models at will. Then I’m going to step into a kingdom of Me and question aesthetic, and my desire to arrange the composition with the figures close to the front, arranged on a flat plane, and little depth of field behind them. I know why: I want to see them as well as possible. Many artists have operated like that. Yet, now that I know what I want, it seems I’m going to have to up my scale to a threatening proportion unless I want to keep squinting.

I want to reference The Colossus, Adam and Eve Expelled from Eden or something similar, and male nudes. That’s the first one. There will be a blender involved. I’ll tell you more later.

Are penises allowed in this gallery?

Friday, January 30, 2009

Penises are allowed in the gallery, but that doesn’t mean they are new to the scene.

With art these days, creativity has burst so wide open that one can no longer just “one up” the previous person, one has to decide one’s images from a large range. Unless one does not have a large range.
Anyway, looking at all the art out there dealing with the ideas I’m touching on, I realize I can’t expect my version of gay men to be more touching or insightful than the thousands of images out there.

I’ve been looking at a lot of art using objects and places as part of the narratives. There’s a lot of cutesy and quirky narrative art out there. Instead of following suit and trying to be weird for weird’s sake, I’m really trying to incorporate my taste in poetry. I’m not sure the two will fuse. So, instead of involving literary poetry, I’m going to focus on the process of creating a painting and the narratives that will follow my care for the painting being born. That is, the painting didn’t start turning out like it was in my head even after I sketched it out, which has to do with proportion and drawing from my imagination. I can’t just hit “print” from my imagination. It morphs. So I’m left with a painting that will have to fight its way into goodness.

Will there be a blender there? I don’t know yet.

My next few paintings are up in the air as well.

I want to use a certain model I have in mind, and then myself as well. I want to take this psychology book on my shelf and use the things that make me go, “Aha! I am so incredibly normal and this is the human condition” and bring them into narratives.

I know my work doesn’t begin to breach the thresholds I will have to cross to be fearlessly artistic. I’m aware that I’m in danger of making my theme “all over the place.” The content may not be unified in a series, but I’ve always sucked at doing series, because by the second or third I really don’t feel like reapplying something. That’s not how it always goes, though. I understand the need for unity. Plus, each one can have a life of its own without just coughing out something similar to the last one.

I’ve spent time on paintings with artists in mind. I’ve also put other artists out of my mind. Either way, what I’ve been exposed to is relatively little compared to what’s out there. What I need to do now is paint fast enough and often enough, to then rework it enough, to find something beyond my predictable range.

It’s Friday night now, and all of my social issues and plans are piled on my brain. Remember I said I would try to be honest in a painting and use someone else as me because I have embarrassing things to admit? That’s a little vague for a reason. It’s true that my personal experience is a hard river to wade through. So I hope nothing sentimental finds its way into the artwork, but brainstorming is the best remedy.

Painting 1: the colossi
It’s only called that in reference to my framing it like Goya’s. Here goes—it’s big, and I have to back up a lot to see what I am painting. That’s already a plus in learning. It’s from my head so far, but I’m going to have to see some nude male figures to push it past that awkward from-imagination moment. Van Gogh more or less refused to work from his imagination. He thought things were awkward and bad that way. Yet, immediately we see. So I’m going to try to balance this—obviously it’s not like Van Gogh’s work is ultra-realism. It’s about the small details and volumes we all subconsciously now, interpreted.

February 6th, 2009

I started another layer on my painting roughly entitled The Colossi, and was glad to know that by using references of male statues and my own face, I could believably create the human body expressively. The body, no matter how expressive, seems to work best as though still resting on an armature, and showing sense of structure no matter how warped. Then again, this is my brainwashing. A book I found called Mexican Mural Painters, which features three of the big names, contains a lot of the painting I would have seen myself doing in the future. Now that I have seen it, I’d like to know if I can advance "past it." Those paintings were meant for those times, and whereas thematically are eternal, are not about the now.

Visiting artist Sean Foley spoke yesterday. I know just how traditional I am. Even Orozco uses multiple heads on one body to convey motion, as Chuck Berry did, as Sean Foley took off of. Yet, I dunno, I’m just picky about all that right now.

As for putting objects in "my work" for "the viewer to come to their own poetic conclusion," I’m a little burned out on art lingo. I, of course, want to like my work. And with this desire, I fight with the desire to impress people.

I want that wall power and attention. Yet, wanting to go down in history and so on doesn't help me with what I want to say now.

What is art even for in my life?

When I was a kid, I drew a picture of my dad in heaven, and while looking at it as though it were real, I wrote him a letter. I cried after he was done reading it.

So, if I do a self portrait, I don't want just another self portrait so introspective that the only content in it is my face (see big collection of my faces). Sure, a hand here and there, and something conveying this or that. I am part of a society, a world, a group, a time, and putting myself there has been philosophically hard enough as it is.

Rivera’s work specifically gives interpretation to history as it fits with his time—we see, in what seems biased but is not at all, the stages of Mexico. Mayan sacrifice, native jungle tribes, murders, wealth and poverty, birth and death, agriculture, dancing, cities, and on and on, all woven into tremendous murals. It as though he also memorized each face on the bus he ever saw—they are there. He doesn't keep the "whites" out of Mexican history, the good or the bad, and he doesn’t lie about war. Looking at the mural helps a citizen there form an identity in society even as they already saw it, or articulating it beyond what they were able to.

Plus these painters were underdogs. Who wants to be successful just because he or she is privileged? I’d pout if I were the underdog, and yet I am, too. My confidence and purpose are a sine wave. Who better to write my story than the members of my story?
And so that is one of the next paintings: a summation of the last four paragraphs.

The next is of a beautiful black model, whom I want to use to convey her own power and size (I feel like she is 6 feet tall, which may not be the case). I plan on asking her questions to decide her pose and narrative in the painting. And then, the painting will be closer to square than the others, which will cause her to have to cram into an awkward pose. I am intimidated at the suggestion that this painting will inherently have to be beautiful, but I shake it off when the paint needs to hit the canvas.

That is, if I can schedule her in and vice versa.

And now, a little more about process and the problems I ran into: in painting big, I have to switch brushes more often to achieve the right look, instead of using one or two little and medium brushes for the whole piece. And then, whatever brush I have doesn’t hold enough paint to make more than two strokes. That can be irritating considered I want to be aggressive with the painting. So that’s the key; lift the brush, dip the brush, lift, dip, getting paint on the canvas whether I’m ready for it or not. Squeeze the tube, and forget about the dollars per square inch of paint. Just push it. That is how I am getting it done.

On ugly stages of painting: get out of my studio. This isn’t instant art, and I am going to have awkward phases and stupid days of stupid painting. By assuming the position of the underdog, my paintings can pop out as celebrities at the end of their creation, at the shock of everyone who was mean to me. Right? I guess we’re not in junior high any more...

If the internet crashed right now, because I’m using it to write this, I’d do what I did yesterday when my car was towed: store it in the repressed memory section so I can move on with my life.

I’m doing so much artwork now, in six studios, that I just don’t know what to do. I mean, do as in content. I can use any one of these studios to explore in a new direction. Abstract has been my bane. So, how am I going to concentrate hard enough to let my seemingly conservative self color out of the lines?

Not that I am conservative. Dave Johnson, the printmaking prof, says he doesn’t believe in the word "creative," that people use it the wrong way and too often. He also says kids these days worry too much. Myself included. Well I believe in creativity, and that it exists in degrees, and that technical creativity and content-related creativity and so on, are all ok to do one at a time. Good for you who can remake yourself overnight. Good for me that I sometimes can calm down and accept my own pace. Sometimes.

2/7/09

I went to a show in Indianapolis last night at the Harrison Center. Duncan Ford and Jessica Ford had some work in a hallway—I wondered around the whole building to see what I could, because Ross wasn’t interested in walking around. He’d seen it before. Well, as it is with those centers, an anxiety comes over me. One, that I am guilty for feeling better than everyone there. Two, that I feel doomed to a similar local celebrity and want more than my own belief that it’s not true. Three, it’s crowded. Four, I want to
come home and paint my own stuff immediately.

Duncan is incredibly imaginative and also renews the romance of our time period with his own style—his prints are exciting and edgy and traditional all in one. Jessica was doing some still lifes of crabs and cicada shells with pastels. They are just busy folk. There's a minor scuff in my brain about not liking Kyle Herrington’s work, although he’s been featured here and there and has a romantic studio in the basement of the Harrison. But I do like some of the subtle content, that of the dull simple reality as poetry. For example, the Jesus series: I’ve often felt the same way. Standing in a muddy corn field, with the letters indicating "Jesus is real" written in the air. Really? In this? Why? And what for? I agree with Kyle. His cheekier stuff is interesting, but it’s the process and surface that drives me crazy. Even ugliness has to be done just right for me to like it.

Ross and him were pals in school. I wasn’t there. I’m free to be negative. Right?

And then some other chic (you like my professionalism?) did paintings quickly, varying her numerous colors and strokes from thin to think, from line to volume, and dealt with some good content, cowboys, Indians, women, so on. Yet, I felt she was trapped and done with with these ok paintings. She’s on the list of people who make me wheeze a tad bit because I am afraid I am associated with her in style. I am. So was Picasso: to every crappy modernist. Poor guy. You’ve got to learn early how to deal with the good, the bad, the ugly, and those In Your Category of Content and Goodness. Otherwise you’ll die old and scared and alone, and so on. So I say.

I also just watched a Picasso short documentary on YouTube. I love how his figures contain enough information, give me what I want in terms of figure, character, and emotion, and yet he’s perfectly modernist. He fits my labeled degree of High Creativity. Thinking about this with my show, I don’t think I want to head many modernist directions yet. In architecture, we talk about the difference between just adding architectural elements and designs to a building that becomes an assemblage and the building that is inherently unified by design and style. Paintings can do this as well. An artist shouldn't freak out too much about their influences showing in their work, or this "unity" thing—that is, until they cease to push back and create these unified expressions and creations.

Anyhow, in reference to my show, all of this creates in me a desire to push it into "inevitably awesome" work so's I'm not doomed to any sort of bad (or falsely successful) artist's life.

Just as it is in writing, so it is in art: it's all in the reworking. And just the same in life: if you can take your Self and rethink this or that aspect and rework it without straining your neck into the past and getting it stuck there, you’ve done well.

I also flipped through a Donald Kuspit book. Oh snap. Now that is some crazy thinking about different kinds of avant guarde artists. Watch your back, though, because either you are one of the categories he created, or you’ll get stuck in guilt and terror trying to find out if you are one of those types. It’s better to keep a distance when reading these things. It’s better to assume that if you do have flawed motives, they'll straighten out in time.

Let’s talk about the society of artists. They are cool. Try thinking about ugly artists. Try imagining some random person on the bus as a genius with an insightful and tender heart. Look at a young person who smells like patchouli, has great hair, wears the neatest vintage outfit, is thin and cute (guy or gal) and let your judgment of them run anywhere from idiot to great intellect to poser to true
deal. You can't know. You know? And at art events, everyone is going to try to know. About everyone there. See somebody with bad make-up and jewelry? See some old lady wearing purple? You're going to try to assume what kind of bad taste she has. You're going to successfully guess several times in a row about these people, to your own loss. Because you can't know-- you want to think so, but clothes and money and priorities of style and carriage and even facial habits are all lies about what images mean to a person, or what they do or don't know about everything else. This is the art world. We're supposed to be closer to truth than even most Christians. Yet look at us! Anyways, at least go to these events, and practice good judgment, which means, if you're going to buy, buy the art, not the artist, if you can. Cuz someday, you might have made the right person the Big Deal, and that's an important investment.

If you're me, however, just stop freaking about how you feel like a totally uninteresting looking person. Who cares. The interest comes with interaction. Plus I got me some vintage duds for the next time I do something like this. Conformist much? Heh. No. I like what I got at Goodwill... it's my look. Don't mess.

2/13

I don't have a lot of in-tune things to say. We just reviewed some thesis artwork of other majors and the shows are going to be nice. Terry Flores--I wonder about his future. Some very vaginal artwork.

My mom has been talking to me about the advertising business. I'm interested to a degree, and not against having a nice job. I'm just not educated the way one would be when seeking that position.

The oil painting is now to a stage of big finishing decisions. It's a little "pretty." But, there will be no blender, in fact, few objects in this one, and the poetry I am seeking is in the setting and figures themselves. The painting I am talking about is still roughly titled "The Colossi." Yet, that term has been reborn because of a video game...

In all of my studios, some serious thinking needs to happen. What to do expressively with all of these media? I may do my best, neither for an awesome portfolio, anything so hard I can't eat or sleep, or just thrown together.

I've got to run downstairs to cover my clay up. Else, it will ruin.

2/18

Ross has files of artists he likes on the computer, and considering it's a new Mac, they fly around and shuffle, enlarge when moused-over. They list. In the list, you will see every painter he likes is male. This is just because they are his staples. This doesn't mean too much. For the most part.

He's going to apply for New American Paintings, a periodical catalogue feature thing. I'm shocked. After all, I think a lot of people turn to it to find the new people out there. Maybe it's not as glamourous as I imagine, but considering I didn't think he was ready to
show anything of his... turns out, he just didn’t want to mess than anything less than the most useful. That is, the best.

It’s the first night he didn’t call me to say he went to the bar with a friend and he’s been out for hours and I’m going to go to bed after this. What does this have to do with art? It’s led me to think about what I’m doing after graduation, and why I want alone time on a longer timeframe to check his influence over me. After all of this comparing and art schooling and analyzing, it will be me in the world deciding what it means to be an artist. Sometimes his view overpowers mine. Mostly because we are so similar. Home is another thing entirely—he paints here, I paint at school.

I guess I’m smoldering over his not calling me or not calling to say he’s still out and will be home such and such a time. Because for some moments tonight, I was bored enough to think of more than I usually do. That is, school.

Which will end.

Here he comes now.

And my next painting will want, direly, to be another exploration in technique, but really needs to be part of a series. So. I will somehow use it to slice myself open.

Yes, I am concerned that Ross will have been more insightful than myself, more subtle, more intuitive, or just better. I am concerned that I will have been blind to any of my inappropriately passive actions in our relationship. I am worried I will be forgotten. Yet, when it comes down to it, my love of what I do will overpower the fears. Especially if they are out of mind entirely, which is when I am working and planning.

Yet this is a relationship I wish to keep.

It’s the way it is, with coupled egotistical giants in the arts.

2/20

I just won first place at Minnetrista, which wasn’t on the agenda, to say the least. I’m shocked and glad and at the same time, aware of the circumstances of all of this subjective bliss. I’m already planning on writing reimbursement checks to those peeps of mine who should at least get their money back for entering—plus if I like their artwork, they are deserving and poor like I am. Of course, I want to think I am special, and that someone noticed. Ross won, too, and his name was called before mine so I clapped for him and assumed I didn’t win anything. His paintings are really nice. A woman also bought my painting, which was the cheapest one in the room; she commissioned one for me, too. So. I liked seeing everyone there, and they are the characters of my life. Yes, I could support them into the art world, and yes, some of it won’t matter at all. It only matters now, that now is appreciated and the people they are now are fleeting and worthy of praise, that all praise, whether printed in a book placed on a shelf full of the note-worthy elite, and those will collect dust, too. The artists' work will live on, maybe in some gallery basements or shows or somebody’s wall or
attic, but in the end that life is far more valuable than the art, even though I love it. It's true I know nothing of Bonnard and Gaughin and Van Gogh from digging through their slides. It's also very false that I know nothing of them from looking at their slides.

So maybe I'm caught up in a flurry of success and near-success, though I felt a little like a strange puppet being introduced to my painting's buyer and then listening to the buyer compliment her own taste. I felt like the attention was in a weird place, you know? But I got lots of compliments, and so on, and the buyer's art collection does sound wonderful. I suspect she runs the estate of Jim Davis? Or Garfield? But that's not important right now.

I know I'll be tempted to throw in what David Johnson calls "cuisine" into my artwork until it becomes what Scott Anderson calls "gimmicks," so I'll have to learn and learn.

I'm thinking about staying in Muncie longer so's to finish my trains of thought and get ready to leave, which I am increasingly unable to see myself doing.

In a good way.

2/22/09

My breaks went out. I spent my prize money on fixing them.

Monday, March 30, 2009

A whole month has gone by, and in it the reason for my distraction.
The painting "The Colossi" was almost wrapped up and was critiqued at "The Hot Seat" by students and faculty.
Visiting artists Dina Sherman and Tom Burkhardt came and went, along with me getting a little oil painting into the student show and questioning the juror's taste as do most rejects. I still question his taste.
Candice Jackson at long last modeled for me and is sketched out on the canvas. Of course I couldn't entirely control what the result was, but now I have several unfinished skeletons staring at me.
Other manifesto-related events happened, such as several talks with Hannah Barnes about the trajectory of my work. It seems I am somewhat of a performer, and fall into a league of "fine art," held back oil painters who tend toward creating "precious works"—these being the words I've heard in the past few weeks, not criticisms of Hannah, who encourages me to develop the part of me that explores freely. One might make more sense of this seeing my sketchbook art versus my oil paintings. I'm not too concerned; I feel like exploration after graduation will leave plenty of room to include more crude in my finery.
Another painting making its way into the body is that of my best friend Jessica. She sat for me shortly, and I've been taking photos of models since there's no way I can take the hours from their lives. The plan is to make her reflection in the included mirror a black version of herself. I'm struggling with the paint! I've chosen things that are hard for me, and since I like fast and easy painting (I'm not saying I don't have taste), I know I'm going to keep struggling until it works.
But let's take into account the three weeks I have to finish these paintings and let them dry and frame them if needed.
Let’s look and see that as of April 1st, I have three weeks until April 27th, the hanging. Of the show...

Which brings up the thesis questions of unifying the works and what I am getting at.

Candice talked to me during her painting about certain stereotypes of black women and problems that black people face socially. I decided to focus on her person, her clothes, her face, and am so far going to place her in a basketball stadium. Now, we have the problem that the painting of the male nudes doesn’t include many concrete objects indicating the space to be realistic. Her space is a little too realistic. Yet I have implied she is a giant as well (and about 5’11”) but the deciding issue is going to be paint.

With painting women, especially Jessica who wants to be seen as attractive, and Candice, who wasn’t necessarily interested in the painting being her except to help me out, I have to ignore their opinions. I painted my mom this summer and faced the same issue: I haven’t ever straight out committed to the beautifying features of women, aka eyelashes and lip accentuation, in years.

So now that they aren’t in the room, I’ll have to be rough with their faces until the paint, well, “matches” the current painting style I’m using.

Next up is the question of how to incorporate the looser part of my manifesto, which is that art can be anything, only I have a history of only displaying more traditionally finished works. Hm.

Yet I have to admit that taking 21 hours of art related classes I am no conservative and static artist. Photography has pushed me conceptually, and ceramics has given my sculptural side something to do.

Psychology is a science word that sort of swims around with poetry, which is a searching word for language, and making my point just needs one more thing: a title.

Just so I don’t forget, there are two philosophies to being part of an art, in this case, visual. The first is that one is searching for a manifesto, an ultimately good collection to refer to, and people and artworks that emphasize the truly kindred statements of visual art aesthetic and content. The part that separates the two philosophies is the reaction. In reaction to this need to sort, one becomes a judge, and wants to define good from bad. This is not bad until it becomes a nature that can’t be stopped, and one is carving their manifesto using the people and art day after day and ultimately will come to be competitive. This will foster a desire to define oneself with the chosen manifesto and create a fear of falling short of it, or being piled with those who “don’t get it.” A little humility wipes that away easily enough; but the other philosophy is that the number of people and artworks we will see in our lifetime is finite. It’s true that in our age images inundate us daily, but in terms of the arts, the people who are making art today are alive, and the work we see around us is currently in good shape. This philosophy takes a lighter approach to carving out manifesto and naturally avoids condemning works of art. Condemning, though a harsh word, in this case means labeling someone or something to fall into a different line of aesthetic, so on, and in some cases, immediately comparing it/them to ourselves competitively. What combats this is a little respect. If we respect every image we come across and be patient with our place in the world (pleasing mankind is a rough ride in itself), the latter philosophy I’m referring to takes down some unnecessary defenses and doesn’t deter us from seeking out kindred spirits and finding our own success with our art.

Diversity

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Is my thesis about diversity? It’s true I am concerned with it. It’s true I have gays and blacks in my show, which immediately labels it if one is trying to be fast about it, and yet I am including some self portraits.
I am currently perusing a book on interpersonal human communication, and I am communicating, with figures and metaphorical spaces, instances of their desires and truths, in what I believe to be visual poetry. Using the word poetry is unnecessary and I think I will cut it from the context. So, if my show is about communication and diversity, with some research and consideration on my part, that’s a start. But the truth is, under this umbrella, there are probably about fifty paintings I could do in exploration of my idea.

My place in the world...

Is changing. It’s just like a self-image, in that I am blind to it and formed by what has been revealed to me. It’s shaped by me, yet objective without me. I’m just now in a time where, after graduation, I am ready to take risks in volunteering, traveling, and breaking down parts of what I’ll call innocence in regard to the global population and what I can do for it.
Tuesday, April 21, 2009

I started the portrait of my friend Jessica looking in the mirror, and I of course struggled with her face, as I am trying to make it look like her and am not as loose as I would be with a self portrait. Still, I am trying to remain aggressive.

I named my thesis “Painting poetry.” So many other students were using the words psychology and subconscious in their theses that I decided to crop mine down to something sincere and open. This way I can focus on my intentions in each painting.

I can’t wait to graduate in terms of having a period devoid of academic opinion. Or outside opinion. This is my last academically “performed” body of work, and I’m hoping to display several other works from other studios exploring what I’m capable of. I’ve gotten comments that I’m making art that no one would ever guess is mine: am I so conservative? Yet oil portraits are a little traditional. Still, I hope I am making mine current, and I’m looking forward to some feedback about all sorts of strange art they let me hang.

As for prep, all the stuff is going down well enough. Postcards, food, painting, presentation, artist statement... I’m sure I forgot something important.

April 25th

I began trying to put an image of my dad in behind my self portrait, going along with putting an element of unrealistic but thought provoking scenarios. The problem was that the more I painted him, the more I realized I’d have to adhere to the photo to make it as complete as my own portrait done from a mirror—and I couldn’t have totally reproduced the picture because I didn’t recognize him. Since he died when I was 9, I can only remember an essence of him that isn’t going to be captured in a painting I do now. I tried to paint his eyes open, then closed, then smeared out, and found that art was truly bringing me to a point I had forgotten about: learning and conversing with painting. In the end, drawing in his eyes with line symbolized how I couldn’t wake him. I painted his hair free flowing because some part of me still wants to believe he is the part of nature he always wanted to be, and is free.

Thursday, April 30th, 2009

Day of Opening
The gallery manager, or organizer, let me hang woodblock prints and encaustic (wax) paintings. I was glad to show other veins of visual thought that I felt followed the thought process of my thesis.

After all of this effort, it's interesting to get compliments, to have your paintings pointed at, ignored, and misunderstood, and so on. It's also incredibly and humorously boring.

Hannah Barnes, painting prof, and I talked about all the directions I took this semester and how many clashed with "fine art" stereotypes, and she said she was proud of me for pushing my limits. I am too. Considering that when you push your limits past traditional that some professors aren't going to approve or understand, you are really blazing a new path for yourself, the little approved-of honors student at times. I think my personality really was pushed during this process.

Friday, May 8, 2009
I graduate tomorrow!
Today in printmaking I traded loads of prints with everyone, trying to be as fair an unselfish as I could stand, yet saving my favorites.
I was juggling 21 credit hours and I see a great potential in myself in the future because of what I was able to do under so much pressure.
Visiting the shows of my friends was just as important to me as being visited. Signing their guest book and insisting "keep in touch" is the "good" part of Sarah LaBarge who is unafraid to do these sort of things, and who knows that fame is not the best result of any ability, hard work, or originality. It is the conversations i am privy to. And all of the paintings I accumulated are heading to my garage.
"The Colossi" Oil on Canvas 2009
"J's Bee-atch Look" Oil on Board 2009
“He Wouldn’t Wake in the Cemetery Wind: Dad” Oil on Board 2009
“Candice”
Oil on Canvas
2009
"Red and Black Nudes"
Watercolor on Paper
2009

"Nobility"
Watercolor and Woodcut on Paper
2008-9
“The Force of Falsity”
Encaustic on Panel
2009
“Now I Lay me Down to Sleep”
Encaustic on Board
2009

“Face to Face”
Encaustic on Board
2009
Summary

The show is over, and not exactly the huge birth of my ego delivered to the outer art market world. But good for me to accept it and sneak in as much work as I could! These paintings are the last paintings I will have completed at Ball State University as an undergrad, the last paintings to be commented on by teachers and students that seemed like trees in my life, but I was wrong. We will all move on. We're trees with feet.

The list of artwork contains Nudes, Figures, Self-Portraits, Portraits, and Abstract Art-- all that a traditional oil painter might have in a show. But what did I ever intend by calling this "Painting Poetry?" I intended to take the part of me that writes poetry recklessly and fuse it with the part of myself that composes portraits and traditional takes on oil painting. I have been bombarded with art language and manifesto, and before I bow out, would like to take an honest look at why I even paint at all. That is where each painting in this show stemmed from.

Take, for example, "The Colossi," two nude men towering over a landscape. It's amazing how little and how much someone can mean by saying to an artist, "I like it." Yet what flowed from me was just as foreign to me as them. Why can an artist, or myself, be so protective of the concept of a painting when he or she has only a few clues as to why the work even exists? Yet I feel a tender connection to my giant men, and they represent some part of myself, some awkward, romantic, nonconformist and highly personal moment blown up before all eyes. Hm.

"The Cemetery Wind: Dad," "Candice," "J's Bee-atch Look," are not my gimmicks. I'm too young for art gimmicks. I'd lie to you if I if tried to write a research paper and come up with a Useful Solution for Humanity. The journal is my solution. It is the human condition. I don't claim to be useful in any other way. So painting these 2D, floppy canvases, letting it be my last creative act at Ball State University is not a Broadway finish.

I've already moved on to seek what else I even paint for.
I've moved on to not caring why I paint so vigorously.

I can give you the artist statement, the abstract, the references, the influences, the portfolio, and the journal, then you will know as much as I do about "Painting Poetry." But you should have been there in person, and should have seen the paintings on the studio wall in process under the light. Pictures of paintings are a lot like pictures of people now dead.

-Sarah LaBarge, BFA Fine Arts