Self-Portrait Series

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These paintings represent a series that began as a clear idea to integrate self-portrait with tarot cards. After completing a ten-card spread and reading, I began to draw upon the cards as issues for me to work on in my paintings. What began simply, and at times unsuccessfully began to take on a life of its own near the end and turned into a series that, I feel, is no longer coherent to the viewer as a series but as a record of artistic growth. I am pleased with the results either way.

Paintings:

The Minor Arcana
- Four of Wands - Perfection
- Seven of Cups - Illusions of Success
- Six of Cups - Happiness
- Seven of Wands - Courage

The Major Arcana
- The High Priestess
- The Moon
- The Universe

The Court Cards
- Princess of Swords
This painting is based on the card that stands for perfection. While the reading of this card includes an interpretation of the meaning to be "take action at the right moment; excitement and growth" I chose to interpret the card in more literal notion of perfection. "Perfection" is a painting that deals with the idea of perfect in several ways. First it is a juxtaposition of a real woman with an idealized, manufactured woman, Barbie. Second it places the idealized woman on background of newspaper headlines that tout the troubles of the world around us. While we are reporting, reading and acting on these problems, at the same time we are promoting an image of a false, unrealistic icon, Barbie, to our children. Barbie is a woman created by adults for children, she is marketed to children and often she is bought by children. We are offended by the horrors of reality and yet instead of teaching our children to become responsible participants in society, we sell them the idea of fantasy that includes a figure of a woman who is nothing and does nothing. This painting, then, also deals with the dichotomy between our observations of our surroundings and our promotion of a quick-fix, idyllic world.
Illusions of Success

“Hidden problems emerging. More realistic outlook.” is the reading of this card, the Seven of Cups. In my painting I chose to show a figure seated amidst empty wine bottles, the ladder going up but the figure on the ground. The background of this painting is made of a combination of cloth and paint. On a personal level the cloth is a symbol for my family, especially the matriarch, my grandmother. She is a quilter and the scraps of fabric in the painting give form the idea of being cut from the cloth of our surroundings. Grandmother’s religion does not allow imbibery of any sort. While this was the religion in which I grew up, I do not hold this tenent. So in the vein of a self-portrait, this image gives life to the conflict of my upbringing and my own ideas.
This painting based on the card Six of Cups is about happiness, however the card being reversed gives it a different meaning than it would appear to have. The reading and interpretation of this card includes “The happy moment may be passing.” To illustrate this idea in my own work a dark, seated figure is placed in a cramped space of dark box shapes. Giving the figure a close space and placing her amidst these boxes is to suggest the cycle of rebirth. While the happy moment may be passing, the old ideas and thoughts being boxed up and put away, it is clear that new thoughts and ideas are emerging. While this may be a time for introspection and self-examination, it is also about a new beginning for the self, thus the light beginning to illuminate the figure from her surroundings.
Courage

This painting is based on the card Seven of Wands, a card of liberation whose divinitory meanings include “Courage and daring; using one’s power for transformation.” While I feel that this painting is one of the most successful images in the series, it is a very personal work sorting through my ideas of sexuality and religion. In a more sophisticated manner than I normally work, this painting deals with images clipped from a video and altered on a computer and then collaged into the painting. Being a painting in a series of self-portraits, this image also confronts issues shared by many people and should be interpreted by each individual viewer for its significance to them and their ideas concerning these issues. This painting is more open ended for interpretation than much of my other work and has given me ideas for a new way of thinking about the combination of painting and photograph, which I hope the viewer can share. Rather than painting on a photograph, photographs are collaged into the painting to illustrate things that exist right now. The painting and the photograph begin to become one, suggesting both the issues and the thoughts about these issues.
The High Priestess is a card that has divinatory meanings that include "Commitment in romance." As a self-portrait I chose to illustrate my own relationship frustrations. Having a long distance relationship requires commitment, understanding and trust, and the only bond between man and woman in such a relationship is the telephone. This painting is about the commitment to each other in the vortex of distance bound together by a mere telephone cord. The cord’s strength is evident at times, bringing the two closer together for only brief periods of time, stretching across a room and across the miles. The bond of the cord will stretch only a limited distance and it is up to both parties to remember this.
The Moon

Fantasies, daydreams, imagination and sources of creativity are the meanings of the Moon card. This painting is the result of a social visit to a friend who works in the head trauma ward of a local hospital. On my visit she took me to see a man in a coma who was in a drinking and driving accident. In the accident his skull was broken which is the only thing that saved his life, she said. Due to the break in the skull, his brain was allowed to expand when it became swollen and while his head looked quite like a battered pumpkin he lived through the accident. The most striking thing to me however was the huge needle protruding from his shorn skull. The syringe was attached to a drainage tube, releasing the fluids from his brain. While my friend’s motive was to illustrate the dangers of drinking and driving in a personal way to me, she did not know that I was struggling with a painting based on dreams. Her pointed lesson inspired “The Moon” which became a painting about nightmare creatures, and also an illustration that just as most of us cannot control our dreams we cannot always control events in our lives.

During my last conversation with her I found out that he was a young medical student who was married with a young son. She also told me that he had gone into renal failure and soon would die.
The Universe

"Satisfaction; Life opening up" are two divinatory meanings for this card. While pondering these ideas I began working in a way I had never tried before. I feel that this painting is a success for me in that I am growing more able to treat a painting as a painting as well as an image that communicates an idea. I began simply by washing acrylics over the canvas, mixing them on the canvas laid upon the floor instead of the easel. Onto this background a drawing was created in paintsticks, the idea being to work on a scribble and pull images from it. I ended up with an image I think of as "Three Friends" and the divinatory meaning of the card became the creation of the artwork, not the subject.
Princess of Swords

Isis is depicted upon the face of this card, being the goddess of love, dance and ecstasy. The divinatory meanings of this card are "A powerful figure, confident and dynamic." Again in this painting, the reading began to apply to the artwork and not the subject matter. Working in much the same manner as with the previous painting, I began to feel confident of the turn my work has taken. A move to abstraction and paintings based on ideas instead of subject matter has been a goal of mine for some time, however, I have felt bound by my subject matter until now. These paintings have given me the freedom to grow away from an attempt to recreate life on canvas through clear imagery and to use the paint, the marks, the brushstrokes and the colors to suggest recreation of life on canvas without clear subject matter.