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## Memory of a Landscape

Elizabeth Halliday

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## **Memory of a Landscape**

A thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
December, 2016

## Table of Contents

|                        |     |
|------------------------|-----|
| Artist Statement ..... | iii |
| Introduction.....      | 1   |
| Aesthetics.....        | 3   |
| Influences.....        | 4   |
| Painting.....          | 7   |
| Mixed Media.....       | 9   |
| Conclusion .....       | 10  |
| Bibliography .....     | 12  |
| Appendix.....          | 13  |
| List of Figures .....  | 13  |
| Images .....           | 14  |
| Resume.....            | 22  |

## **Artist Statement**

Creativity is one of my strongest talents. As a visual person, I understand and interpret the world through observation and analysis. Nature intrigues me. I find it awe inspiring how the natural environment can change so dramatically day-to-day. As a result, I record my experiences and memories of landscapes and seascapes.

My areas of interest are painting and computers in the arts. I am an abstract painter and my media consists of acrylic, watercolor, mixed media, and digital imagery. I create low relief and rough textures with added materials, and develop layers of paint with a palette knife. In addition, I layer gel medium transfers using my own photographs.

Color is important in my work and encapsulates and expresses my feelings and memories. I use subtle color washes and add small amounts of bold color to create contrasts. This approach to coloration allows me to explore unexpected and unique combinations. I use color symbolically, such as a muted blue to display a calm and relaxed feeling that I get from experiencing nature. This also mimics the essence of sky and water. My goal is to capture the viewers' attention and show them my response to nature in hopes that they will relate it to their own experiences.

# **Memory of a Landscape**

## **Introduction**

Art has always been an important part of my life. Growing up in Buffalo, New York, I was lucky to have the Albright Knox Art Gallery close by. I have memories of being little and looking forward to walking into contemporary galleries and seeing artwork that was so different, exciting, and eye catching. My parents are also collectors of art and I grew up in a house decorated with paintings.

In high school, I became enthralled with photography and found myself spending more time in the darkroom than anywhere else. I took a summer college program at Syracuse University in upstate New York, and it was then I realized that art was my calling. This program placed me with others like myself who were searching for knowledge to feed their creative minds. For my undergraduate education I attended schools in New York State. First, I attended Pratt at Munson-Williams Proctor Arts Institute (Pratt at MWPAI) in Utica. There, I focused on communication design where I learned to create logos, videos, and basic designs. This was a small school and I received one-on-one attention. Unfortunately, the two-year program required me to continue my studies at the large Brooklyn campus. At the end of my junior year, I decided to transfer to Buffalo State College. The Brooklyn classes were very large and I wasn't getting faculty attention or gaining the knowledge that I wanted. Buffalo State College had smaller classes and I felt like I was better able to channel my inner creativity. My undergraduate experience was diverse and ultimately wonderful and it opened my eyes to different directions artists could take.

After graduating, I wasn't finding the work I was looking for as a graphic designer. Besides being a graphic designer, companies expected you to know coding and be a computer programmer. This was not what I was interested in and not what I spent years of honing my creative skills for. So, I decided to earn my k-12 art teaching certification at Buffalo State. I was interested in working with children and their creativity.

Growing up, I was active in volunteering and especially enjoyed working with children. Through zoo camps, softball, and Kohl's Cares for Kids, I knew that working with kids was something I was meant to do. In college, I took advantage of volunteer spring break programs. I helped food pantries, assisted the elderly, helped build houses, and worked with inner city children. It was important to me to give back to others and I found a great enjoyment working with children. I student taught at an elementary school and middle school in New York. I learned from each but realized I enjoyed working with the little ones more. Their eagerness to learn and positive energy made me happy to work with them.

I moved to Virginia for an elementary teaching position in art with Stafford County. After my first year of teaching I started looking into master's programs. When I found out about the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), it seemed to be just what I was looking for. I could retain my teaching position and pursue my degree with off-campus courses in my area. This program enabled me to continue experimenting and learning in the studio. I didn't want to go into a master's program based solely on teaching but rather wanted to continue creating artwork. I decided to focus on painting and computers in the arts. Painting allowed me to express my feelings and ideas on canvas and work with color and texture. Through computers in the arts, I have used many methods for making computer generated and mixed media work.

## **My Aesthetics**

I am drawn to the untouched beauty of nature. I focus on landscapes and seascapes as examples of pristine environments. Coupled with these elements is the ever-changing atmosphere of the sky. I want to present abstracted images that reflect peacefulness and wonder. To do this, I use multiple techniques and media. I layer materials, such as tissue paper and gel medium, and pay close attention to visual and psychological weight of color. Layering materials and manipulating color helps me to build images that reveal their complexity and unique features.

My process is experimental and intuitive, the layering of paint and mediums is integral to my practice. I begin with photographs that I have taken, as well as images that I have manipulated or designed on the computer. Then, to develop an underpainting, I transfer the image to a support with either a gel medium or an iron-on technique. Next, I build surface textures that mimic elements in the environment, such as water, sand, and sky. I scrape through layers to reveal earlier marks and pigments. In addition, I use a tool with a needle edge to sketch aspects of water, earth, and sky on a piece of foam board. I use the foam board as a stamp and press it onto the canvas while the paint is still wet. Sometimes, the stamp will lift sections and layers of paint, thereby adding more variation. Another technique is to begin work on the surface of a finished painting. This enables me to add additional layers of paint and texture for a more visual and tactile complexity. All these approaches to developing surface features help me to express my experiences of nature.

To conjure moods I blend and contrast colors. For example, the sky contains many different colors at any given time of the day or evening. In my work, I use multiple colors in dramatic combinations. When referencing a sky, I often choose hues for their symbolic weight,

such as blue for calmness and relaxation and yellow for pureness and brilliance.

I work using my memories, imagination, and a design sense to express creative freedom and emotional peacefulness. My goal is to make images that represent a moment captured in time.

## **Influences**

I find my work to be most influenced by the movements of Abstract Expressionism (c.1940s-1950s) and Color Field Painting (c.1950s). Abstract Expressionists focused on process, experimentation, and the use of non-traditional media. Their works were intuitive, spontaneous, and reflected their creative and actively physical process. Many of the Abstract Expressionist artists used wall paint and extremely large brushes to make their work. They used techniques such as splattering paint, dripping paint, and even allowing the paint to crack. These unique and different approaches let them break away from traditional observational realism. By following their ideas, I place emphasis on spontaneity and gestural marks to relay a sense of creative energy. Like Abstract Expressionists, I find process to be extremely important. Although I try to express a sense of tranquility in my work, the quickness, movement, and power encapsulates the energy I feel when I paint.

Color Field painting was a movement that addressed the emotional quality that color can have on the senses. Color Field painters moved away from a compositional approach of figure-ground arrangements, as seen in realistic images. Instead, they created abstracted fields of color that did not present a foreground and background. Strong verticals and horizontals were often seen in the pieces, along with blocks of color. Their color choices were bold and vivid and were presented as complements. The Color Field painters tried to elicit responses through color by



simplifying color and using symbolic color. My work also contains bold and bright complementary colors and symbolic associations of colors.

I am also interested in artists within these movements, and ones who were influenced by them. I am highly influenced by Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011), Anselm Kiefer (1945-), Wolf Kahn (1927-), and Herb Jackson (1945-). All of these artists seem to have taken chances and experimented in their work in a profound way to make influential art.

Helen Frankenthaler was both an Abstract Expressionist and Color Field painter. She started her career by making artworks that filled the canvas. Later, she became more interested in emphasizing negative (white) space within her compositions, and focused on line and areas of color. She had a yearning for trying new approaches and stated, "For me, as a picture develops, color always comes out of drawing...It's born out of idea, mood, luck, imagination risk, into what might even be ugly; then I let it tell me what might/ should be used next." (Smith, 13) I am inspired by her intuitive and spontaneous approach to her work. Her pieces were not pre-planned but evolved as she painted and layered media. As she continued to define and refine her work, she commented, "I...think that just as I had been influenced by many people...I hit a point of having exhausted my student message to myself and [my] investigations, and looked around or in a way...searched around for my own use and translation [of] a lot of what was happening." (Smith, 11) She showed me the importance of imagination and experimentation and developing your own approach. Painting for your own love and enjoyment of creativity is important in itself. So, I now create gestural works and intuitively choose from a range of expressive color combinations.

Anselm Kiefer is a German artist who focuses on memories as a result of World War II. His massive, expressive paintings are composed of materials such as straw, cardboard, lead, and

burlap. He also incorporates plants, flowers, and broken glass. I am influenced by Kiefer's rough textures and rawness of emotion in his work. He led me to experiment with dimensional textures. I am also inspired by his large scale formats and have worked on multiple sized canvases to see how scale can change the impact of work.

Wolf Kahn, a Color Field painter, added naturalistic imagery to fields of color. In his piece *Over-All Trees* (1992), Kahn shows a forest full of trees. The trees were made with vertical, gestural brushstrokes in a band of orange. His pieces are primarily about color and simplicity. He states that "All of my paintings come down to a simple issue-in this case a seesaw balance between one thing and another. And as far as I'm concerned, the simpler the issue, the better. When a work becomes too descriptive, too much involved with what's actually out there, then there's nothing else going on in the painting, and it dies on you." (Spring, 73) Like Kahn, I want my work to be a visual color experience. I also want to bring the viewer into my work through textures. He inspired me to appreciate how colors work together to produce a mood or feeling.

Another artist, Herb Jackson, is an abstract painter who focuses on expression by layering images and textures in his artwork. In describing his approach, Richard Shiff, the director of the Center for Study and Modernism and Chair of Art at The University of Texas at Austin, explains, "A painter's intuitions (our intuitions also) are thoughts that feel like feelings- thoughts in the form of sensation. And painting, too, is thought as sensation- non verbal though. Herb Jackson succeeds as an intuitive painter whose thinking presents itself to sight." (Jackson, 7) Jackson transforms his thoughts into paintings. He does this by layering images, shapes, and textures. Jackson lets some of his earlier layers of paint show through and covers other areas. This approach allows for levels of imagery and a range of expression and interpretations. Jackson

works from intuition based in his personal experiences and beliefs. He seems less interested in replicating what he sees and more interested in creating from within himself. From this example, I am focused on trusting my intuition.

I am influenced by the energy, quickness, and experimentation of Abstract Expressionism. I am also drawn to the impact of areas of bold colors in Color Field painting. Both have distinctive qualities but are similar in their yearning for ideas and use of imagination. By examining these movements and individual artists, I have learned to follow my intuition and gut feeling and let my mind become free with imagination, experimentation, and passion.

## **Painting**

In my abstracted and gestural paintings, my goal is to show my sense of being at one with nature. *Sky Over Mountains* (Appendix, 1) is a painting I made based on the serene beauty of the sky and calmness of nature. I layered acrylic paint with a wet on wet process. I made the paint smooth by running a brush over it in one side-to-side motion. Then, I carved cloud forms into a foam board with a knife tool. I used the foam board as a stamp and pressed it onto areas of the canvas. This created surface texture and irregular thick and thin lines resembling clouds, water, and land. My palette was comprised of pastel yellows, oranges, and pinks. By manipulating color and texture, I presented an abstracted memory of a landscape.

In my piece *Dancing Flowers* (Appendix, 2), I explored creating surface texture and layering pigments. I started by gluing layers of wrinkled tissue paper to the canvas to create irregular creases and lines in the work. These areas were meant to mimic the delicate and intricate details of flowers. Next, I layered acrylic paints focusing on primarily blue and green tones to reference water and as a contrast to the colors of the flowers. By following Herb

Jackson's example of layered work and textures, I was able to create a piece that referenced nature but equally explored pigments and surfaces.

In *Colorful* (Appendix, 3) I explored a bolder range of colors and marks. In this piece I focused on the sky. Like the Abstract Expressionist approach, I allowed wet paint to drip. Learning from Wolf Kahn's use of bold and contrasting colors, I presented dynamic and active aspects of the landscape with a range of high-keyed, non-naturalistic color. I focused on how large the sky feels compared to the town depicted on the bottom of the composition.

In addition to acrylic pigments I use watercolors. When mixing these it is my goal to achieve a layered effect by using pearlescent with opaque watercolors. The pearlescent colors cast a shimmer and sheen on the paper, which works well when trying to express the feeling of fog or overcast skies. I often use transfers, gel mediums, and rice paper in my watercolors. This creates a contrast between soft colors and surface textures.

*Intertwined* (Appendix, 4) was intended to present an abstraction of flower petals which can have delicate crevasses and subtle colorations. The flower can symbolically stand for love, beauty, and happiness. I wanted to point to these meanings in my work. To put together this work, I started by carving three petal shapes into foam board. I painted the shapes with watercolor and then pressed the boards down on the paper. After it dried, I placed textured rice paper on the center area of each of the petals to show texture and creasing. Through blending and manipulating colors and surface, I wanted to merge beauty, complexity, and sense of pureness in color.

In my paintings I apply gestural marks, use a range of colors, and manipulate layers of paint. I want to allow the process and my energy to be revealed in each piece. My intention is to express personal memories in paint.

## **Mixed Media**

I graduated in communication design as an undergraduate and enjoyed pursuing the area of computers in the arts in the MIS-IAR Program. This concentration focused on processes for creating mixed media artwork and altered photographs. I began by learning to transfer photographic images and quickly realized that what I first thought were mistakes became interesting variations as a result of process. This awareness freed me to explore and experiment with image alteration.

*Over the Sunset* (Appendix, 5) is an abstracted image that I designed on the computer working with shape and color. I started by creating a design of abstracted elements of a landscape through a software program. I wanted the design to reflect a sense of movement through color changes. After creating the digital image, I used iron-on printing paper to transfer the design to paper. I then added watercolor to enhance certain sections adjacent to the brown area (lower left) to create illusionistic three-dimensional textures. Lastly, I added gloss gel medium to unify the surface with a soft sheen.

*Sitting* (Appendix, 6) depicts blue water flowing above a band of colorful flowers. I began with a base of crinkled tissue paper on canvas. Then, I created a digital design of abstracted flowers. I printed the design on copier paper and transferred the image to canvas using a gel medium. This technique allowed me to present a smooth surface texture for the flowers in contrast to tissue foundation of the water. Lastly, I added blue watercolor to reference water, and emphasized the abstracted flowers with reds and blues.

*Crashing* (Appendix, 7) is an image of rushing water. In this piece, I wanted to further enhance the surface textures. To begin, I added a field of acrylic paint directly on the canvas.

Next, I manipulated and applied tissue paper to create a wave-like form. When dry, I added a bronze colored layer of acrylic paint to the wave. To unify the piece, I gesturally layered areas of blue and green. Then, with a dry brush I layered blue over the entire surface. The dry brushwork allowed for the textured areas to show through the final layer of paint. For this work, I wanted to focus on the rough three-dimensional wave and therefore omitted a unifying layer of gel medium.

*On the Water* (Appendix, 8) is an image that represents the feeling of calm freedom that I experience when watching the waves crash at the ocean. I intended this work to promote relaxation by contrasting the deep blue of the water with the pale yellow of the beach. In creating this piece, I used watercolor with a gel medium transfer and a self-leveling gel. I began by carving the beach into the foam board. Next, I added watercolor to the board by painting it on with my brush and created a print of the image. Then, I used a transfer of a design I created on the computer to the front left section of the beach. I wanted to have contrasting lines and surface textures to break up the strong horizontal of the water. As I view this piece, it seems that I was looking through a fish eye lens trying to capture the total view of my memory.

All of my work expresses different memories of landscapes. I try to create what I remember and make a work that is an experience in itself. Through gestures, colors, and texture, I reveal my memories.

## **Conclusion**

The MIS-IAR Program has helped me in multiple ways to grow as an artist. Through experienced professors who are open-minded and knowledgeable I have found myself yearning for more knowledge. I want to inspire this kind of learning in my students.

The Program has helped my approach to teaching. I now feel students learn best through experimenting and trying new things. I am more capable of teaching them as a result of my experiences. I focus more on their ideas than a final product. The expression of their ideas will produce an image.

My work has changed over the years and I now feel I have a drive for abstraction. I am driven by color and texture and will let my work evolve as I learn more as an artist. Making art has become a major part of my life and I will continue to push myself to find ideas that drive my skill.

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## Appendix

### List of Figures

- Figure 1. *Sky Over Mountains*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", 2016.
- Figure 2. *Dancing Flowers*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", 2015.
- Figure 3. *Colorful*, acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16", 2015.
- Figure 4. *Intertwined*, watercolor on paper, 13.5" x 10", 2014.
- Figure 5. *Over the Sunset*, mixed media on paper, 5" x 8", 2013.
- Figure 6. *Sitting*, mixed media on canvas, 10" x 10", 2014.
- Figure 7. *Crashing*, mixed media on canvas, 4" x 12", 2014.
- Figure 8. *On the Water*, mixed media on paper with transfer, 6.5" x 12", 2014.



Figure 1. *Sky Over Mountains*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", 2016.





Figure 2. *Dancing Flowers*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 18", 2015.





Figure 3. *Colorful*, acrylic on canvas, 20" x 16", 2015.



Figure 4. *Intertwined*, watercolor on paper, 13.5" x 10", 2014.





Figure 5. *Over the Sunset*, mixed media on paper, 5" x 8", 2013.



Figure 6. *Sitting*, mixed media on canvas, 10" x 10", 2014.



Figure 7. *Crashing*, mixed media on canvas, 4" x 12", 2014.





Figure 8. *On the Water*, mixed media on paper with transfer, 6.5" x 12", 2014.

## **Elizabeth Halliday**

### **Education:**

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2016 | Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. Focus Areas: Painting and Computers and the Arts |
| 2008 | Bachelor of Fine Arts, State University of New York College at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York. Focus Area: Communication Design  |
| 2005 | Bachelor of Fine Arts, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York. Focus area: Communication Design   |

### **Certification:**

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2011 | Certification in Art Education k-12, State University of New York College at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York |
|------|---|

### **Teaching Experience:**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 2011- Present | Art Teacher, Park Ridge Elementary, Stafford, Virginia       |
| 2011          | Student Teacher, Heim Middle School, Williamsville, New York |
| 2011          | Student Teacher, Cloverbank Elementary, Hamburg, New York    |
| 2010          | Student Teacher, McKinley High School, Buffalo, New York     |

### **Related Experience:**

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2008 | Design Intern, Gelia Wells & Mohr, Clarence, New York    |
| 2007 | Design Intern, Buffalo Spree Magazine, Buffalo, New York |

### **Professional Organizations:**

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 2012- Present | Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia |
| 2011- Present | National Education Association, Washington, District of Columbia      |

**Exhibitions:**

- 2016      *Memory of a Landscape*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia at Backdoor Gallery, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- 2015      *Guest Artist Exhibition*, Brush Strokes Gallery, Fredericksburg, Virginia
- The Power of Small*, National Juried Exhibition, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Juror: Diego Sanchez
- 2014      *Celebrate with Color*, National Juried Exhibition, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Juror: Emma Lou Martin
- Visual Textures*, National Juried Exhibition, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Juror: Sarah Rebekah Byrd Mizer
- Regional Juried Exhibition*, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Juror: Brad Birchett
- 2013      *Abstraction & Reality*, Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Juror: Margret Hancock
- 2011      *Student Exhibition of the Visual Arts*, University at Buffalo Center for the Arts, Amherst, New York
- 2010, 2011      *Juried Student Exhibition*, State University of New York College at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York
- 2007      *Creative Visions Senior Exhibition*, Upton Hall, State University of New York College at Buffalo, Buffalo, New York
- 2005      *Student Show*, Pratt at Munson Williams Proctor Art Institute, Utica, New York