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Travel Log

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Travel Log

Artists generally begin their craft by relating to what is most familiar to them. It is in this comfort zone that my journey into painting began. From my first painting of the Chrysler Building in New York City to the countryside in Tuscany, my work tells the story of my travels. When I began to create jewelry that contained elements of my paintings, I expanded on the concept of documenting my travels. Further experimentation with new materials used in jewelry making allowed me to create a visual correlation between my paintings and my wearable jewelry.

Travel Log

Introduction

I was reintroduced to oil painting through a course being offered by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in my county of Fairfax, Virginia. Taking a class was a fresh approach for me, since I had not painted in the past sixteen years as a teacher. This renewed interest in creating my own work led me to pursue my Master of Interdisciplinary Studies (MIS) in VCU's Off-Campus Program starting in 2003. This rebirth of my own interests has opened many new doors for me, both in and out of the classroom. The opportunity to travel, paint, create jewelry, experiment with textural materials, and share this new love of creating art has spilled over into many aspects of my life. As I continue to explore new methods and techniques, I feel I have a greater personal connection with my work.

Growth and Development

One of the most difficult challenges I faced when I began to paint was to choose a subject for my work. For instance, on a trip I made to New York City I took pictures of many things including the Chrysler Building and Times Square. I decided to change the intensity of the color of each picture. I wanted a look that visually communicated the vibrancy and the intensity of the night light. I scanned the photos into my computer and made alterations to the color. The results were neon highlighted cityscapes that I couldn't wait to paint.

When my professor saw my first composition he immediately remarked that it reminded him of work that was done by Yvonne Jacquette (b.1934). I ordered one of her books to begin my research. In *Aerial Muse, The Art of Yvonne Jacquette* (2002), I found some fascinating work that appealed to my senses. Her architectural compositions, vibrant use of color, and reflective night scenes prompted me to continue to work on my New York cityscapes. The results were three panels of Times Square that were meant to be viewed as one cityscape when placed side by side. The neon colors coupled with the reflection on the glass buildings made my paintings, *Times Square*, (Appendix, 1), vibrant. When I began working on the painting of the *Chrysler Building* (Appendix, 2), I started to experiment with silver leaf. Visually, I was trying to achieve a connection with the raw materials of the architecture and how that could be conveyed in my painting. The delicate material I was using was in sharp contrast to the structural surface of the Chrysler Building. So, I decided to use silver leaf as a ground for inscribing into the surface of the painting. I referenced text that had a direct connection to the structure, such as location and architect. The addition of this text gave another dimension to my work. The results of the silver leaf opened yet another door to a variety of paintings that I would subsequently create. It became very clear that all of the photographs I took had to have an interesting composition and subject matter that would lend itself to textural enhancement.

The more I painted, the more interested I became in finding new and exciting subject matter for my work, such as *The Palace Urn* (Appendix, 3). On a trip to Williamsburg,

Virginia, I took pictures of a beautiful brass garden urn that was heavily encrusted with floral designs and swags made out of brass. The appearance of this urn appealed to me because of its textural qualities and imposing form. This is precisely the kind of subject matter I was looking for to use in my paintings.

In the Spring of 2003, I took my Centreville High School students to Italy and France. It was there that I was able to define what the subject matter of my work would be. I was enthralled by the architecture, the skyline, the colors of Italy, and the textural quality of each piece of work that I saw. It all seemed so comfortable to me and I couldn't wait to capture those impressions on canvas. I began to make a connection with the works by Martha Diamond (b.1944) who is best known for her big, sweeping, gestural brush strokes in creating her cityscape abstractions. In addition, I was still inspired by Yvonne Jacquette's aerial views and colorful architectural paintings of Manhattan. The fascination with human-made structures became my focus, as I created paintings from my trips abroad.

While in Italy, I became interested in the sculptural work of a Baroque Italian sculptor, painter, and architect, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). There is power and expression in the sculptures he produced. I found I was taking roll after roll of film of his works. I especially related to the heavily textured surfaces of his massive marble sculptures. So, the pictures I painted of the *Trevi Fountain* (Appendix, 4) and *St. Longinus* from Saint Peter's Basilica (Appendix, 5) had to convey this feeling of massiveness. It was through the use of modeling paste that I was able to achieve an

impasto effect on my paintings. The application process for using the modeling paste was also experimental, first I applied it by hand and then I used a pastry tube filled with the paste. The textural quality of each piece became more pronounced as I progressed. The paintings no longer appeared as flat renderings of my photographs but represented the massiveness and three dimensional qualities of the original sculptures.

As I began to review the earlier paintings of my New York City subjects, I could see a progression in my technique and a purposeful approach to the application of the textural materials. Texture and color were now being used to create an emotional impact on the viewer. Along with the increased usage of textures, I instinctively began painting on a larger scale. Now the subject matter, the mass, the scale, and the color created the visual marriage I had been seeking. Each painting led me to a new and more exciting idea.

Jewelry Making

I chose jewelry making as my second area of concentration for my MIS program. I decided to explore the possibility of marrying my paintings to jewelry. I immediately felt that I could make this connection. I also discovered the potential for recreating the context of my paintings in a three-dimensional medium.

Working with Precious Metal Clay (PMC) was new to me. I had taken jewelry classes many years ago in college and was familiar with the techniques of silversmithing. PMC had a totally different quality than the silver I had used in the past. I quickly

adapted to the use of PMC and how beautifully I could apply the textural qualities of my paintings into pieces of jewelry. I was able to make a visual connection between my paintings and jewelry. My goal was to extract components from my paintings and create a piece of complementary jewelry. Initially, this idea required many hours of sketching ideas and working with the PMC. The flexibility of this material provided an opportunity for me to manipulate the clay and create minute details in each piece of jewelry, as in *Charm Bracelet* (Appendix, 6). I moved quickly from construction to stone setting, and then to the making of findings (clasps and attachments used to join jewelry) to complete each piece.

When I began working with a material that was as fragile as PMC, it was not a given that the end results would be successful. My first successful project was a necklace and earring set in which I had incorporated elements from the Chrysler Building. By layering and inscribing the PMC, I was able to create depth and show detailed components of my painting, which served as my model for *Chrysler Windows* (Appendix, 7).

I was continually looking at ways to create texture, which had become a characteristic of my paintings, in something as delicate as silver jewelry. Some of my pieces of jewelry, although not as textural, were most definitely representational of particular paintings. In a pin, *Palace Urn Pendant* (Appendix, 8), I created a component of a finial from the garden urn I had seen in Williamsburg, Virginia. In this piece, I was able to capture the delicacy of the bronze leaf by simply etching into the PMC.

Blackening the finished piece helped to emphasize the textural qualities. I was satisfied that this pendant did not need to have heavy texture to allude to the essence of the painting. It was through the use of varied jewelry making materials, such as blackening agents and enamels that I was able to achieve the visual impact I was seeking.

During my jewelry classes, I was introduced to polymer clay. I discovered creative ways to incorporate this new material into my art pieces. I began by hand-building small decorative frames, which I embellished. I digitally reproduced images of my paintings to fit within these small frames. I then turned these small frames into wearable pieces of jewelry. The possibilities became endless for marrying my two disciplines. Miniature reproductions of my paintings were being incorporated into my jewelry and components of my paintings were transformed into textural and wearable works of art, as in *View of Florence* (Appendix, 9).

The concept of looking at jewelry more as an art form rather than as an accessory became more defined as I continued to create pieces. One particular piece that was a very successful project for me was sculpting a wildflower necklace, *Breath of Spring* (Appendix, 10), out of polymer clay. My inspiration for this piece came from a necklace that was created using glass. My goal was to use the same idea of sculpting three dimensional wildflowers but use a different medium. The detailed sculptural piece had texture, three-dimensional quality, and a high glossy finish. With this painterly piece of jewelry, the two disciplines of painting and jewelry making had come together as one.

Conclusion

Now that I have completed the course requirements for the MIS program, my goal is to continue to paint, sculpt jewelry, and exhibit my work. During these past two and a half years of working on my own projects, I found that I have added many new components to the work that I assign my advanced students. Working through problem-solving situations with my own work has reacquainted me with the student side of the classroom. Through my new experiences, I find I am better equipped to offer sound advice. My knowledge of the use of color was developed under the tutelage of my painting professor John Figura, and new insights into contemporary painting and current trends have broadened my view and affected the way I look at my own work.

The MIS program has given me a place in which I have been able to grow as an artist and a teacher. The interaction with my colleagues could not have been achieved had I not been enrolled in a continuing education program. The ideas and the feedback that I received from them has proved to be one of the most beneficial side effects of this program. Shared strategies, communal ideas, innovative approaches to problem solving, and the collegiality with my peers has enriched me personally and professionally. It is my sincere desire to continue to grow as an artist by working in and out of the classroom. When I look back on my first graduate painting class and then look at the work that I am now producing, it amazes me that I have come so far in such a short amount of time. I feel as though I have really just begun.

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Appendix

List of Slides

1. *Times Square*, acrylic on three canvases, 40"x 60", 2003.
2. *The Chrysler Building*, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 24", 2004.
3. *The Palace Urn*, oil on canvas, 36" x 30", 2004.
4. *Trevi Fountain*, oil on canvas, 48" x 40", 2004.
5. *St. Longinus*, oil on canvas, 40" x 48", 2004.
6. *Charm Bracelet*, Precious Metal Clay, 1"x 8"x 1/16", 2005.
7. *Chrysler Windows*, Precious Metal Clay, amulet, 2" x 1.5" x 1/8", earrings, 1" x 1/2" x 1/32", 2005.
8. *Palace Urn Pendant*, Precious Metal Clay, 1 1/2" x 1" x 1/32", 2005.
9. *View of Florence*, Sculpy and computer reproduction, 2" x 1.5" x 1/4", 2005.
10. *Breath of Spring*, Sculpy and wire, 2" x 18" x 1", 2005.

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- 2006 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies
 Painting and Crafts
 Virginia Commonwealth University
 Richmond, Virginia
- 1970 Bachelor of Arts
 Art Education K-12
 University of Delaware
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TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

- 1988 to present Resource Teacher
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RELATED EXPERIENCES:

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 Elementary and Middle School students
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 Fairfax County Public Schools
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PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS/MEMBERSHIPS:

- 1998 to present Alpha Delta Kappa
 International Honorary Sorority for Women Educators
 Centreville Virginia, Tau Chapter
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- 1998 to present National Art Education Association
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EXHIBITIONS:

- 2006 **Thesis Exhibition – *Travel Log***
 Fairfax Railroad Museum
 Fairfax, Virginia
- 2002 to present ***Recent Works Exhibition and Sale*** (Annual)
 Fairfax Railroad Museum
 Fairfax, Virginia
- 1998, 1999 ***Retrospective in Watercolor***
 Wilcox Public Library
 Wilcox, Pennsylvania