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Going Places

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

by

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Table of Contents

Artist Statement.....	iii
Introduction	1
Aesthetics.....	1
Influences.....	3
Paintings	4
Mixed Media.....	6
Three Dimensions	8
Conclusion	9
Bibliography	11
Appendix	12
List of Figures.....	12
Figures	13
Resume.....	21

Artist Statement

I forget my keys and usually misplace my telephone but I know exactly where my camera is at any given moment. I capture moments for my artwork as well as my own personal benefit. Not all the images will be translated into paint or clay and not all the images are those filled with beauty. However, a bicycle leaning on the corner of a house in Key West and a two hundred dollar pair of shoes from when I was single are a few of the memories that evolved from snapshot to artwork. My photographs inspire my colorful paintings and patterned clay work. I use them as a way to document my personal journeys and evolution of my life.

Going Places

Introduction

My interest in art began when I was a child and my parents needed to find a way to keep my hands busy. Art was not a course that was offered in the private school I attended. It was not until my freshmen year at a public high school that I was enrolled in my first formal art class. I felt a connection and kindred spirit with the teacher and my classmates. I wanted to soak up everything that was around me. The art room, the smell of the paint, the feel of the clay, and seeing the magic of a photograph evolve out of developer stimulated me to the point that I looked forward to going to school.

Then, I went to college with the purpose of finding a job. I was unaware that pursuing art making could be a career. I had grown up seeing parents who worked and were dissatisfied with their jobs. I wanted to find something that I would enjoy doing for a living and enrolled in Art Education. My first teaching job was at the elementary level. After transferring to a high school teaching position, and planning lessons for that level, I began to feel more creative. I started taking classes in the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts (MIS-IAR) Program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to reconnect to my artistic self. I was searching for a way to be creative that did not involve a high school lesson plan.

Aesthetics

My work is a visual documentation of my personal journeys. During the MIS-IAR Program, I captured my life from being a single woman to a married mother of two. I also incorporated elements of my travels into these works. I have never been the type

of person to feel attachment to objects or souvenirs. I hold most dear my photographs. They help me hold on to moments in my life. I feel more of a sense of ownership and connection to my work when it has a personal tie. Travel is an important part of my life. Growing up in a small town I always had a desire to see the places I read about in books.

I heard the phrase once *be a traveler not a tourist*. When I visit new places I immerse myself in the local culture. As a way of recording my experiences, I carry my camera everywhere with me. I capture local elements that specifically reflect the particular places I visit. When I look at my photograph of Hemmingway's brightly painted yellow house in Key West, I am reminded of my last trip with my husband before we became parents. Looking at the image of a blue door on one of my clay vessels reminds me of how alive the streets of New Orleans are during Mardi Gras. It's from these snapshots that I draw my inspiration. From these photos, I conjure images in my mind's eye that I want to realize. The type of image that evolves into a painting is usually one that reflects the essence about the place I visited.

I use a variety of media in creating a range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional pieces. These media include tissue paper, paint, newspaper, pages from books, fabric, wire, cardboard, plaster, clay, and found objects. I begin to make marks and build form as I experiment with merging the concept with the material. I am open to the possibilities that present themselves as I begin to work with different media. A snapshot that starts out as a painting often evolves into a painting combined with mixed media and transfers.

Influences

I feel most connected to the nineteenth-century Fauvist and Post-Impressionist movements in art. These movements were interested in intense use of color and the distortion of form to create an expressive effect. Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) said of his work “I shall become an arbitrary colourist, for whereas the Impressionists and others sought to reproduce reality, I use colour more arbitrarily, in order to express myself more forcibly.” (Harris, 56) Like Van Gogh, I paint expressively through the use of bold color. Often, the color is arbitrary and reflects the general colors of the environment or my feelings about a place.

I was first introduced to Henri Matisse’s (1869-1954) artwork on a trip to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Henri Matisse was part of the Fauvist and Modernism movements in art. His painting *Open Window* (1905) intrigued me because of the non-naturalistic use of color. I appreciated how he explored the use of complementary colors. This painting seemed to me to be full of life and had a sense of movement. Matisse’s use of color challenged the viewer, he also implemented thick, painterly strokes that reminded me of the palette knife paintings of Van Gogh.

I learned of Raoul Dufy (1877-1953) while in the MIS-IAR Program. I felt an instant connection to his work. Dufy was a Fauvist painter who painted in the Impressionistic style but he used brighter colors. His use of watercolor washes with bold colors and heavy brush strokes inspired me to pick up a paint brush. After seeing some of his paintings, I was compelled to do some research on my own. I discovered that he also did work for fashion designers through fabric design. This was inspiring to me because I include the use of pattern in my work. Upon further research I found some of

his ceramics to be equally intriguing, they prompted me to include ceramics into my body of work.

Each of these three artists has influenced my work in a different way. Van Gogh inspired me to include texture into my painting. He influenced me to put down the paint brush and try different tools, such as a palette knife. Matisse made color seem fun and alive, so I put away my brown and tan paint. I often paint with complementary colors thanks to Matisse's influence. Stumbling upon Dufy's work caused me to explore mixed media and revisit my ceramics as a medium. All three of these artists utilized color to create an emotional response which I too was trying to create in my artwork.

Paintings

Travel is an escape and an adventure for me. Through my excursions I am able to escape from the normal routine of life and its schedules. When I am painting, the memory of my travel experience enables me to escape back to that moment in time.

My life and its changes are also reflected in my paintings. The hardest part about packing used to be trying to fit a different pair of stilettos for each outfit into my suitcase. Now when packing, I am more concerned about making sure there are enough diapers and the pacifier is an arm's reach away. I have documented these large and small life changes with my camera, and then translated them into my painting. They are a record of my life.

My early works revolved around still life imagery that represented materialistic status symbols in my lifestyle as a single female. An example of this would be *The Lineup* (Appendix,1), a painting of the back view of a pair of Christian Louboutin

stilettos. In this piece, I focused on using color that sparked a memory from a trip and a particular period of time. So, I painted the shoes in bright pinks, similar to the colors that I once saw in old San Juan, Puerto Rico. However, still life imagery did not satisfy my quest to capture the emotional experience I was trying to communicate in my artwork.

Using my photographs of my travels as a reference helped me to better capture a memory on canvas. For example, *On the Corner* (Appendix, 2) is a painting of a bicycle leaning on the corner of a house. This seemingly ordinary image stopped me in my tracks, as I was on the way to Ernest Hemmingway's house in Key West, Florida. This ordinary image seemed to tell a story to me. My mind began to drift to why and who had left the bike leaning against the house. When it came time to paint this image I knew I wanted to use color of the local surroundings to convey my experience. Therefore, I used vibrant and tropical colors. The white house in my photograph became a house with canary yellow and orange siding. The same canary yellow combined with magenta became the color of the brick walkway on which the bicycle rested. The bicycle was actually red but the bright blue tires were inspired by the color of the deep ocean waters around the Keys. I was using my palette to reflect the environment and heighten the memories.

My next painting, *Carry On Baggage* (Appendix, 3), is of suitcases. I painted this work on wood. In this piece, I wanted to incorporate more surface texture because I felt that texture would enhance the visual experience. I started by painting the suitcases, then I painted on top of them in their complementary color. Next, I painted on top of the complementary color with its analogous color. At this point, I used sandpaper to

remove some of the layers of paint, thereby revealing parts of each layer. I kept the wood grain visible as the background because it created a sense of pattern that balanced my composition.

I was learning to manipulate the paint to create the colors in my mind's eye, as well as use the paint to create a surface texture. Paint allowed me to become more playful with color and it was a good media to use when recalling my memories. However, I felt something was lacking in my paintings. I was not able to fully express myself in paint alone.

Mixed Media

Soon, I began making paintings that also incorporated photo transfers. At this point, I found my artistic voice and my personal style began to emerge. By combining the use of my photographs, paint, and photo transfers I was able to add more visual elements and surface texture to my work. Using computer software to create the transfers allowed me to digitally manipulate and create the utopian images from my journeys. Photo transfers also allowed me to be more playful when creating surface texture while keeping my original photographed image intact. I began to pour paint, build up texture, and add collage elements on top of the transfers. I used a combination of soft wax and shellac to help bring out any colors that had been dulled during my creative process. The wax and shellac layers also allowed me to continue painting on the piece and to add more surface texture.

At the Fair (Appendix, 4) is an example of transfers combined with paint and collage media. In this piece, I combined transfers with tissue paper from my baby

shower and a page from a book. The Ferris wheel and the funnel cake stand are two separate transfers. The collage media was suited to capture this memory. I remembered walking down the crowded midway of the fair. There were so many different colors, sounds, and smells. I felt that in order to convey this colorful chaos I needed to have a composition that used bright colors and was filled with various patterns and texts.

Using a variety of materials inspired me to move away from the original photographed image, and allowed me the freedom to alter the image in the effort to heighten the visual experience and my memory. For example, in *Winner, Winner Chicken Dinner* (Appendix, 5), the original photograph was of The Venetian hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. By using computer software, I was able to zoom in on an architectural element that emphasized the Italianate elements. I then cropped and replicated pieces of the image and changed the sizes of certain cropped pieces. Then, I transferred those images onto a canvas which I had poured watered-down acrylic paint on. I was now able, with the help of multiple media and new techniques, to express my memories more poetically.

I soon began to use transfers on surfaces other than canvas. I was inspired to use fabric as a support after reading one of my son's books that was made from cloth. *Rt. 1 The Beginning* (Appendix, 6) was another work inspired by my travels to Key West, Florida. It was made with a combination of a gel medium and a photo transfer placed on to fabric. I layered the top piece of fabric with transfer images. Then, I hand and machine stitched this fabric to several other layers of fabric. The use of hand and machine stitching was another way of mark making. Using fabric as a base allowed me

to manipulate the different layers and see and plan the end result. Previously, when I worked with transfers on canvas it was a gamble how the image would turn out. This was due to the fact that the image was printed in reverse and placed face down when transferred. By using fabric, I was able to plan my composition by moving the pieces of fabric around before committing to their placement. Being able to see and plan my images, face up, made it easier to see how the piece would develop. To emphasize that I was working on fabric, these pieces were finished by fraying the edges.

Three Dimensions

Next, I ventured into working in three dimensions, specifically clay. In my journeys, I noticed there were always souvenir shops with postcards for sale. These shops gave me the idea to incorporate my imagery into clay piece, as if they were three-dimensional postcards. For example, *Bourbon Street* (Appendix, 7) is a vase I made from clay, its surface was finished with transfers which used gesso as the transferring agent.. The central image was a blue door from Bourbon Street in New Orleans. The same image, only smaller and manipulated using computer software, was used around the larger door. *Sail Away* (Appendix, 8) is another example of the combination of ceramics and gesso transfers. In this piece, the imagery was inspired from a photograph of a person parasailing that I took while visiting the Eastern Shore.

To create both these pieces the clay vessels first had to be fired. Once the clay had been fired, I applied gesso transfers to the surfaces of my vases. For each piece I chose to emphasize one main image, and then smaller images were added around this large image. The smaller images were harder to control and frequently ripped. So, I

decided to use sandpaper to purposefully take off parts of the ripped pieces. This added to the surface detail and texture. I completed the vases by adding paint and wax to the surface. Then, a heavy layer of shellac was applied which made the vase look glazed.

The transfers helped me tie in my subject matter of travel with the ceramic pieces. I was also able to add painting to this process and was able work back on top of the transfers. Working with ceramics helped me combine my interest in three-dimensional art while creating a new format for transfers and paint.

Conclusion

Taking classes in the MIS-IAR Program has allowed me to have a set time to create. There were days that I was tired from being pregnant and teaching all day. However, when I got to class and began to create my energies were renewed. I did not have to feed, rock, or answer to cries of two beautiful baby boys. The time I had in class was uninterrupted and it was all mine.

The MIS-IAR Program has helped me become a better teacher. The program has exposed me to different art styles, processes, and artists. I have created bonds and connections with fellow artists and teachers. As a result of this program, I have started to have my students write about their work. I have introduced my students to new techniques that have sparked their personal creativity the way mine was ignited.

Overall, I have had a chance to expand myself as an artist. I have found a voice for my photographic journeys through the combination of photos, transfers, clay, and paint. As my personal style of painting has expanded, so has the complexity of my

subject matter. I have evolved from a Jimmy-Choo-wearing single woman to a diaper-bag-toting mother of two. I have rejuvenated myself as an artist, as well as an individual, through this program.

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Appendix

List of Figures

- Figure 1. *The Lineup*, Acrylic on Canvas, 20"x16", 2006.
- Figure 2. *On the Corner*, Acrylic on Canvas, 18"x 24", 2007.
- Figure 3. *Carry on Baggage*, Acrylic on Wood, 16"x18", 2010.
- Figure 4. *At the Fair*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 8"x8", 2008.
- Figure 5. *Winner, Winner, Chicken Dinner*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 16"x20", 2009.
- Figure 6. *Rt. 1 the Beginning*, Mixed Media on Fabric, 18"x8", 2009.
- Figure 7. *Bourbon Street*, Mixed Media on Ceramic, 10"x6"x3", 2008.
- Figure 8. *Sail Away*, Mixed Media on Ceramic, 10"x6"x2", 2008.



Figure 1. *The Lineup*, Acrylic on Canvas, 20"x16", 2006.



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Figure 4. *At the Fair*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 8"x8", 2008.



Figure 5. *Winner, Winner, Chicken Dinner*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 16"x20", 2009.



Figure 6. *Rt. 1 the Beginning*, Mixed Media on Fabric, 18"x8", 2009.



Figure 7. *Bourbon Street*, Mixed Media on Ceramic, 10"x6"x3", 2008.



Figure 8. *Sail Away*, Mixed Media on Ceramic, 10"x6"x2", 2008.

AMY R. LASERNA

EDUCATION

2011 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Arts
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Focus in Technology in Art and Painting

1997 Bachelor of Science in Art
Radford University, Radford, VA

CERTIFICATION

1997 Teaching Certificate Art PreK-12

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2003-Present Art Teacher, Spotsylvania and Massaponax High Schools,
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1998-2001 Art Teacher, Smith Station Elementary, Spotsylvania, VA

1997-1998 Special Education Teacher, Culpeper Middle School, Culpeper, VA

RELATED EXPERIENCE

2001-2002 Educational Coordinator, Sylvan Learning Center, Fredericksburg,
VA

1998 Art Director, Browne Academy Summer Day Camp, Alexandria, VA

1997 Art Director, Parks and Recreation, Culpeper, VA

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

2008-2010 Junior Class Sponsor and Prom Coordinator, Spotsylvania High
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2008-2009 Assistant Coach, Spotsylvania High School Dance Team,
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2008 Assistant Coach, Boys Spring Track, Spotsylvania High School,
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PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS or MEMBERSHIPS

1995-Present National Art Education Association

1995-Present Virginia Art Education Association

1998- 2001 Spotsylvania Education Association

EXHIBITIONS

2011 *Going Places*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary
Arts Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University,
Richmond, VA, at Fredericksburg Center for the Creative Arts,
Fredericksburg, VA

2009 *All Members Exhibition*, Fredericksburg Center for Creative Arts,
Fredericksburg, VA

EXHIBITIONS (CONTINUED)

- 2008 *Spotsylvania County Art Teachers Exhibition*, School Board Office,
Spotsylvania, VA
- 2003 *Mixed Media Small Works*, Colonial Art and Frame, Fredericksburg,
VA
- 1997 *Radford University's Student Exhibit*, Radford University, Radford,
VA

AWARDS AND HONORS

- 2007 Spotsylvania High School Teacher of the Month (May 2007),
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FIELDS OF INTEREST WITHIN PROFESSION

Photography, Painting, Ceramics, Jewelry making, Printmaking