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GENIUS LOCI

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GENIUS LOCI

Documentation submitted 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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May, 2012

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Artist Statement

I attempt to capture the simple and fleeting beauty of Washington, DC, before it folds into time. In my representational paintings and monotypes, I want to convey the elegance and serenity of the streets, cars, pedestrians, and the majestic buildings of our nation's capital. As a native Washingtonian, I've always admired the view of the city from across the Potomac River, from sunrise to sunset. I want to share these views and these experiences of my daily life with the viewer.

GENIUS LOCI

Introduction

Several years ago, I attended my first class after being accepted into the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). At the time, I was a self-employed artist and instructor teaching art at multiple schools, both private and public. The MIS-IAR Program was recommended to me by Pam Farrell, Supervisor of the Arts in Arlington County Public Schools, who understood my interest in teaching art full time.

I was excited about furthering my education and looked forward to attending graduate art classes with the hope of obtaining a master's degree. I found that the classes provided new techniques as well as an opportunity to exchange information and ideas with fellow art teachers. During my first course, I fell in love with the medium of monotypes and chose printmaking as one of my concentrations, my other concentration was painting. These disciplines seemed like natural complements to each other.

The MIS-IAR Program provided me an opportunity to solidify my vision for a large body of work that I entitled *GENIUS LOCI*. This series included both oil and acrylic paintings as well as prints. The combination of painting and printmaking classes, with qualified professors, helped me to create this series of cityscapes and become a more accomplished artist. I looked forward to each class for feedback and discussion in regards to the arts.

Aesthetics

My series, *GENIUS LOCI*, started forming in my mind at an early age as I traveled, from

day to night, along the George Washington Parkway digesting the view of Washington, DC. During one of my early morning commutes to work, I looked at the monuments and bridges in the dark, then slowly watched the sensational sunrise. This was when I decided to produce a series of works that would reflect the beauty of my daily commute. At that point, I started to paint Washington, DC from the viewpoint of a commuter, artist, and native.

Genius loci is Latin for “a sense of place” and refers to a location's distinctive atmosphere. In this series of small scaled works, I wanted to express a feeling about my life in the Washington, DC environs. I’ve witnessed the vivid colors of orange, pink, red, and purple in the winter sunrises. I wanted to convey how beautiful the city and the monuments looked when it was overcast, when the winter was severely cold, and when I was stuck in traffic. However, I noticed that many people seemed to drive, bike, or jog without pausing to look. These views of cities are often not perceived as beautiful but as a comment on our busy, modern lives. I want my viewers to remember to take a moment to view the environs and see the beauty that I see. I want viewers to notice that Washington, DC is a dynamic city on clear, blue days, and it softens to a hush on monochromatic, overcast days.

I first started painting the city from a distant vantage point where I captured the skyline and atmospheric effects. Then, I moved to a viewpoint closer to the city along the Potomac River and depicted cars, bicyclists, and people traversing the city. Next, I entered into the city itself and painted street scenes with the traffic lights and street lamps, and the nation’s buildings in the distance.

Finally, I made prints of the same images using the painterly process of a monotype. I found monotypes to be an expedient process for creating the experience of being out in the city. Placing my 8”x10” photo of a cityscene under a Plexiglas plate, I would sketch the image with a

Sharpie marker. I would then flip the Plexiglas and paint the image in reverse using either watercolors or oil paints. In one session, I could make up to three prints using the same image. Creating multiple editions from one plate allowed me to explore the possibilities in a single view.

Influences

My art is inspired by three nineteenth-century European painters. These artists are the Romantic landscape painter J.M.W. Turner (1789-1862), the Tonalist James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), and the Impressionist Claude Monet (1840-1926). The features of these artists' works that resonated strongly with me were their city views and painterly brushwork. All of these artists were particular about their color palette and lived at a time when new pigments, including cobalts and cadmiums, became available to artists.

J.M.W. Turner was a vibrant colorist diligently learning about modern pigments from his friend, William Winsor, owner of Winsor & Newton oil paints. Using brilliant colors and multiple glazes, Turner's skies influenced my cityscapes with their ethereal effect. Turner used color, brushstrokes, and layering to create a sense of the moment. Like Turner, I tried to convey what I saw, what I remembered, and how I felt. This allowed me to capture and interpret the features that indicate a single moment in time. Working from life and trying to make my colors as vivid as possible were also influenced by Turner's approach.

James Whistler was known for his palette of soft, subtle tones of earth colors. He used his subdued palette to create a moody atmosphere in his paintings. Whistler's technique of adding touches of pure, bright hues to a tonal range of colors inspired my night scenes. After studying his work, I used his classical palette of earth colors and the three primary colors. I incorporated cobalts and cadmiums amongst monochromatic tones much like Whistler's

Nocturne in Blue and Gold Old Battlesea Bridge (1872). By following his example, I was able to make convincing low light or nighttime scenes.

Claude Monet, my strongest influence, set the example of a plein-air landscape painter. Monet often created multiple versions of the same view at different times of day, as in his series of Rouen Cathedral (1892-1894). His painterly brushstrokes and juxtaposed complementary colors also captured a sense of a moment in time. Using the new cadmiums and cobalts, Monet managed to depict foggy days as well as bright sunsets. After understanding his approach, I left my traditional palette and started to experiment with different variations of the colors. However, I mindfully limited myself to a range of six to eight colors per painting. I found that this limitation brought more visual cohesion to my work. Like Monet, I also revisited the same scene at different times of day and under different weather conditions.

Turner, Whistler, and Monet's cityscapes were not simply postcard recreations of a places they had seen. Instead, their work expressed a sense of a fleeting moment. I studied and experimented with different palettes, then settled on pigments similar to those used by these artists. Their works allowed me to take my pigment selection seriously. I started to use Winsor & Newton's best cadmiums and cobalts in order to paint with the most saturated hues. In addition to their approaches to color, these artists took complicated city scenes and simplified the architecture and put an emphasis on the effects of light and atmosphere. These are the elements that I seek to incorporate in my own work.

Painting

I was always inspired by city views and I decided to paint my commute. I began by painting plein-air along Columbia Pike and the George Washington Parkway in the winter. I

painted *Slick Commute* (Appendix, 1) from a foot bridge over the George Washington Parkway. Georgetown and Key Bridge are depicted in the background but the main focus is the cars in the rain. I depicted two cars dangerously close together on the wet tarmac. I used multiple layers of paint and glazes to create the effect of rain. Thicker paint for the sky and horizon created an atmospheric haze. By painting this scene, I wanted the viewer to take in spring's beauty and the bright green glow of the new growth, balanced against the elegance of Georgetown's buildings, during their own commutes.

I found the parks along George Washington Parkway the safest places to work on site. Iwo Jima park, near the Potomac River, became one of my favorite places to paint. In *Early Commute* (Appendix, 2), the sky has faded from the typical pink and yellow sunrise to a cold, gray morning. The cars are dark and appear ominous against the pastel silhouette of our nation's buildings. Many joggers passed by me with their earphones on and didn't turn their heads to take in the beautiful sunrise. Meanwhile, one lone driver is about to merge with another as both focus on getting to their destination. Again, this painting portrays the view that I want people to experience on their daily commutes.

One afternoon, I was driving home from the beach and got stuck in traffic. My first response was to get out my camera and take some pictures. It was a sunny, clear day and the Capitol glowed against the cerulean sky. I took several photographs that became the inspiration for *Stuck in Traffic* (Appendix, 3). Unlike the previous two paintings of nebulous building on the horizon, I chose to focus on the Capitol taking in every minute detail. I was aware that most everyone's attention seemed to be focused on the next movement of their vehicle. It was really the taillights of this rhythmic line of cars, with their cobalt blue roofs and cadmium red lights, which inspired me to make this painting.

Lee's Thoughts (Appendix, 4) depicts a view from Memorial Bridge looking back at Arlington Cemetery and Robert E. Lee's mansion, Arlington House. For this afternoon fall scene, I subdued the trees by using purple to emphasize atmospheric perspective. I painted the distant sidewalk with pedestrians in a warm yellow, complementing the purple trees and tarmac. For this painting, I limited my palette to cadmium yellow light, cadmium red light, ultramarine blue, Winsor Blue, Winsor Green, and permanent rose. This particular palette was introduced to me by the artist, Kevin Macpherson, in his book about the manipulation of light and color. The cool and powerful Winsor Green and Blue helped me mix beautiful pastels from grays to deep blacks. The warm cadmiums allowed the skies and street lights to appear to brightly glow. These few colors made my portable, plein-air easel light in the field, and I'm reassured knowing that I have all the colors I need to render any setting.

Though most of my paintings are oil paintings, in the winter I often use acrylics. I am actually allergic to oils so the accumulation of the fumes indoors affect me adversely. I want my acrylics to resemble my oil paintings, so I paint in layers using matte medium and brown washes. *Golden Hour* (Appendix, 5) is an aerial view of Key Bridge, Georgetown, and the National Cathedral. I found this vantage point from one of the skyscrapers in Rosslyn, Virginia. Inside the arches of Key Bridge, the yellow and orange from the setting sun looked surreal. The blue cars moved quickly across the bridge as the commuters headed home, while the elegant National Cathedral glows in an orange tint on the blue horizon. Since the acrylics dry faster than oils, I found that I could quickly work back into my painting with another layer of media instead of waiting several days.

Another aerial view was found in Crystal City one night as I was celebrating my birthday at Sky Dome, a rotating restaurant. *A Brilliant Commute* (Appendix, 6) was composed by using

multiple diagonals, horizontal, and vertical lines as an infrastructure for the elements in the painting. The focal points are marked by the red and yellow-white lights of the cars. The lights dot the roadway into the distant horizon. Using Winsor Green and Blue, I was able to create the robins'-egg blue sky behind the Washington Monument. I chose pastel colors to bring a cheerful interpretation to what might seem a hectic ride home on one of those bridges.

Printmaking

Printmaking is a great way to reproduce an image quickly and in multiple versions. *Lincoln's Thoughts* (Appendix, 7) is an aquatint on a metal plate. I chose the Lincoln Memorial to be stark white with a few details above the columns. I have found this view of the Memorial to be one of my favorites, particularly at night. In this print, I used only black ink to suggest a night view. In a later version, I used my oils and painted color instead of ink on the plate for a fall scene. This process makes the plate available to me to revisit and explore at a later time.

Spring Growth (Appendix, 8) is a monotype painted in oil on a Plexiglas plate. This is a classic, if not commercial, view of Key Bridge and Georgetown. I rapidly painted this with highly saturated colors for my soft, spring greens against the gray bridge and structure. I used very few brush strokes and allowed the white of the paper to show through the paint. The red dock from the green and white boat house signifies that the rowers are out and summer is approaching.

In *Capitol Commute* (Appendix, 9), the glowing Capitol in the distance is emphasized by the linear perspective of the rows of street lights and trees. The pastel sky and tinted Capitol are faded in the distance against the hustle of the cars. The green light signifies a time to move on. I printed multiple versions of this scene experimenting with different colors. This exploration of a

scene, which might take weeks to paint on canvas, gave me the opportunity to assess a variety of color choices.

GENIUS LOCI is reflective of my experience of living in Washington, DC in the twenty-first century. I spend a lot of time in awe of the elegance of this city and chose to paint commuting scenes as beautiful moments. I want the viewer to also recognize that the nation's buildings are picture perfect juxtaposed against the movement of people and cars.

Conclusion

The MIS-IAR Program has provided opportunities for me to expand my series of paintings and to include printmaking. My professors have offered me feedback and helped me to learn to develop my ideas about relaying a sense of place. This program has been supportive in guiding me to become a more professional and accomplished artist. I am also grateful to have been introduced to new printmaking techniques which I have brought into my classrooms.

Bibliography

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Appendix

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- Figure 2. *Early Commute*, oil on canvas, 20"x16", 2009.
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Figure 1. *Slick Commute*, oil on canvas, 8"x8", 2011.



Figure 2. *Early Commute*, oil on canvas, 20"x16", 2009.



Figure 3. *Stuck in Traffic*, oil on canvas, 16"x20", 2008.



Figure 4. *Lee's Thoughts*, oil on canvas, 20"x16", 2011.



Figure 5. *Golden Hour*, acrylic on canvas, 8"x8", 2010.



Figure 6. *A Brilliant Commute*, oil on canvas, 8"x10", 2010.



Figure 7. *Lincoln's Thoughts*, aquatint, 5"x5", 2011.

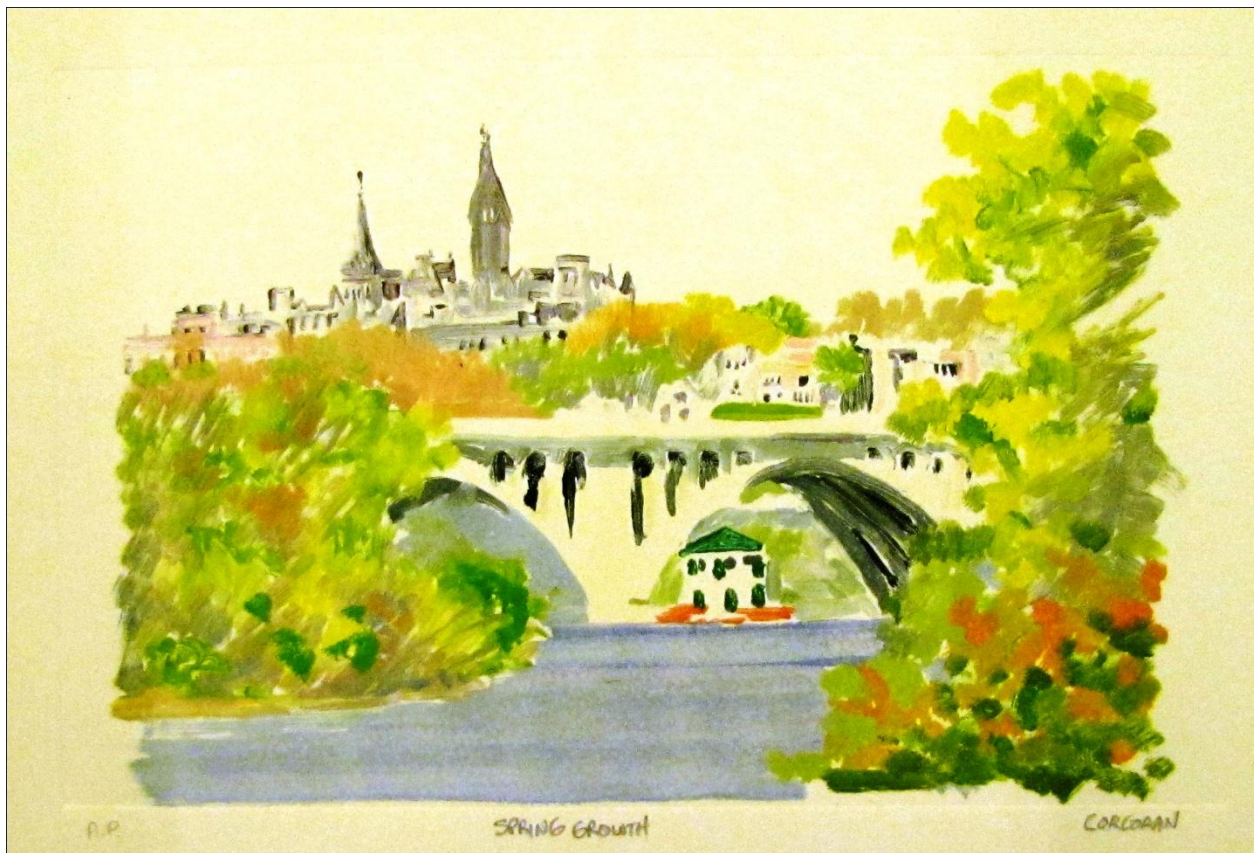


Figure 8. *Spring Growth*, monotype, 8"x11", 2011.



Figure 9. *Capitol Commute*, monotype, 8"x11", 2011.

Cecily Corcoran

EDUCATION:

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2012 | Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia |
| 2002 | Bachelor of Fine Art, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia
Honors: Dean's List 2000-2002 |

OTHER EDUCATION:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 2002-2004 | Graduate Education Classes, University of Virginia Off-Campus Program, Arlington, Virginia |
| 1991 | Bratislava Academy of the Fine Arts, Bratislava, Slovakia |
| 1988-90 | Lyme Academy of the Fine Arts, Old Lyme, Connecticut |
| 1987-1988 | Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania |

AWARDS AND HONORS:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1998-2000 | Phi Theta Kappa, Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria, Virginia |
| 1987 | National Scholastic Art Awards, Gold Portfolio Award, H.B. Woodlawn, Arlington, Virginia |

CERTIFICATION:

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 2006-2016 | Virginia PreK-12 Art Teaching License |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 2008-Present | Art Instructor, The Art League, Alexandria, Virginia |
| 1996-Present | Art Instructor, Cecily's Studio, Arlington, Virginia |
| 2001-2008 | Art Instructor, The Arlington Artists Alliance Academy, Arlington, Virginia |
| 1996-2006 | Art Teacher and Director, The Potomac School Summer Programs, McLean, Virginia |
| 2006 | Seventh Grade Art Teacher, The Potomac School, McLean, Virginia |
| 2005-2006 | Middle School Art Teacher, Thomas Jefferson Middle School, Arlington, Virginia |
| 2005 | High School Sculpture Teacher, Washington Lee High School, Arlington, Virginia |

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 2010-Present | Oil Painters of America |
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PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS (continued):

2007-Present	Member and Bin Gallery Artist, The Art League , Alexandria, Virginia
2004-Present	Columbia Pike Artists Studios, Arlington, Virginia Co-President 2010-2011, Board Member 2004-2005, Member 2004-Present
2004-2009	Mid-Atlantic Plein Air Painters
2002-2007	Board Member, Arlington Citizens for the Arts, Arlington, Virginia
2000-2010	Arlington Artists Alliance, Arlington, Virginia Member 2000-2010, Board Member 2000-2004

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

2012	<i>GENIUS LOCI</i> , Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia at The Art League, Alexandria, Virginia
2010, 2002, 1998	<i>Recent Works</i> , Arlington Education Center, Arlington, Virginia
2008	<i>Genus Loci</i> , Convergence Gallery, Alexandria, Virginia
2007	<i>Genus Loci</i> , Century 21 Gallery, Arlington, Virginia
2006	<i>Genus Loci</i> , Cassatt's, Arlington, Virginia
2004	<i>Recent Works</i> , Fischer Gallery, Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria, Virginia
2003	<i>Recent Works</i> , AnnMarie Garden Gallery, Solomons, Maryland
2002	<i>Recent Works</i> , George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia
2000, 1997	<i>Recent Works</i> , University Club, Washington, DC

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

2010	<i>Local Scenes</i> , Scene at the Harbor, National Harbor, Maryland
2003-2010	<i>Waterford Red Barn Exhibition</i> , Juried Group Show, Annual October Exhibition Waterford, Virginia Best in Show 2003

SELECTED GALLERY REPRESENTATION:

2009-Present	Kelly's Gallery, Alexandria, Virginia
2009-2010	Oerth Gallery, Alexandria, Virginia
1998-2006	Chesapeake Gallery, Prince Frederick, Maryland
1997-2000	Brynes Gallery, Middleburg, Virginia

PUBLICATIONS:

2010	<i>A Brilliant Commute</i> painting featured in Northern Virginia Magazine V, No. 6 (June 2010): 19.
2009	Megas, Natalia, "Glimpse of Beauty," painting and article featured in Elan Magazine V, No. 1 (October 2009): 46-49.