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Angles in Light

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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Artist Statement

My work on canvas and in jewelry focuses on the tension between the hard edges of geometric shape and soft lines of organic form. Light plays an important part in the viewing of these opposing forms. It reflects off the shapes and textures creating sharp contrasts and enhancing the individual sections as they relate to the whole.

In my paintings, I set organic floral forms against geometric architectural structures. I create texture and contrast by adding digitally enhanced transfers, torn paper, and acrylic putty. In my jewelry, I also set organic forms against geometric shapes, by adding stone, wire, and various types of metal to the raised surfaces. The different textures in both of my focus areas attract and reflect light, allowing the look and character of the piece to change as the light changes.

Angles in Light

Introduction

When I enrolled in my first course in Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program, little did I realize that I was embarking on three years of self-growth and exploration into myself as a teacher and an artist. I had been teaching art for over fifteen years and raising children for more than two decades, I was ready to find and complete a master's degree. I looked into several different programs, most of which sought to increase my understanding of the theories behind the educational make up of today's classrooms and students. However, the art classroom doesn't neatly fit into the stereotype of the systems discussed and so I continued to look for one that fit me.

While taking a course at my local community college, my professor suggested I look into VCU's Off-Campus Program. This program emphasized studio art over educational theories. I felt that the best way to increase the knowledge of my students was to increase my knowledge of the different disciplines I teach on a weekly basis. The MIS-IAR Program gave me that opportunity. Since enrolling in the program, I have seen advancements in my students' work and understanding. What I hadn't counted on was a realization that I am an artist first and that teaching is what I do, what I enjoy, but creating art is what I have to do. It is the fulfillment of myself as an artist that has given me a renewed sense of purpose and desire to enrich the lives of my students with creativity.

My focus areas in the MIS-IAR Program were painting and crafts, with a focus on jewelry. I chose painting because I felt it would provide the most information and knowledge to share with my students. It encompasses drawing, composition, and color. Crafts was an obvious choice for my second concentration because I had previously created pieces using precious metal clay (PMC) and semi-precious stones. I wanted to continue my exploration of this media. Both of these disciplines gave me a sense of serenity and provided me with opportunity to explore and experiment. As I grew as an artist, the need to help my students progress through standardized educational methods was tempered with the conviction that I could give them better instruction as a working artist.

Aesthetics

Throughout history light has been a sought after commodity. Fire, oil, gas, and now electricity have extended the time a person has to complete the work needed to survive, therefore allowing them additional time to be creative. Light also embodies the symbolic qualities of righteousness and purity. For example, in literature, light is often associated with the character that brings truth and goodness to the script. In art, European icon painters painted golden illuminating haloes around the Madonna and the righteous patrons with her. The light that radiates off pieces of adornment and jewels created the impression of leadership in early history. Whether it was the Celtic torque or the crown jewels of the kings of Europe, the highly polished surfaces of the jewelry brought forth the impression that the ruler was aglow with the favor of the heavens and therefore possessed goodness. This metaphoric use of light reflects the human idea

that with light comes goodness. For these reasons, I use light as an integral part of the literal and symbolic *landscapes* in both my paintings and my jewelry pieces.

I refer to both my painting and jewelry as landscapes. My paintings contain the traditional references to the elements of nature and architecture; my jewelry contains textured topographical surfaces found in landscapes. To increase the presence of light in my work, I modify the surfaces of my painting and jewelry. In my paintings, I add different media to the surface to create dimensional textures. I also paint illusional effects of light on objects. My jewelry pieces are also developed to catch and reflect light, as well as act as miniature relief landscapes in wearable form.

In my paintings, I typically depict large-scaled images of flowers set against a background of photographs, which depict the skeletal infrastructures of buildings. The photographs attached to the canvas have a glossy surface and reflect the light. Then, I add various materials, such as sand, paper, putty, and paint to my canvas, so that the light is softly absorbed by these raised matte surfaces. The effects of light on these uneven surfaces create topographical landscapes that interact with the depicted elements in the painted landscapes.

In my jewelry, I use geometric shapes as a base for raised and textural surfaces that echo the topographic nature of my painting. To offset the sharp shine that reflects off of the polished metal, I incorporate freeform objects that are embossed with various textures and organic pieces that are applied to the surface. I use precious metal clay (PMC), which can be manipulated by pressing designs into it, as well as adding stones, glass, and found objects. By combining textured metal and set stones, I create miniature relief sculptures. These textures create areas that attract and retain the light

and reflect it throughout the piece. The finished wearable sculptures embody the topographic and abstract nature of a landscape by allowing the light to flow in and around the pieces.

Inspiration

My inspirations come from a variety of sources such as art history, flowers, botanical drawings, and the effects of light on the local architecture. While studying the Impressionist movement of the nineteenth-century, I became intrigued with their philosophy that light had a tremendous effect upon the visual perception of objects. Claude Monet (1840-1926) translated the effects of the transient light on flowers, landscapes, and architecture. He did this by juxtaposing dabs of analogous colors with their complements, creating a visual “impression” of the objects as a result of the reflected light. I studied his and other Impressionist’s techniques and approaches in order to address light in my own work. I added the illusion of light to my landscapes with dabs and dashes of contrasting colors. In addition to creating the transitory nature of light in my paintings, I wanted to include flowers and plants in a naturalistic manner. So, I turned to a twentieth-century artist as an influence.

Georgia O’Keeffe’s (1887-1986) inspiration for her own work came from nature in the areas where she lived and visited. During her floral period, she created large-scaled, close-up paintings of flowers that contain vibrant light-infused centers. The flowers that dominated the canvas were anatomically correct. Her attention to the underlying structure of flowers fed into my need to understand how the different parts of the flowers fit together. So, I began studying the botanical drawings of herbs and

flowers. These drawings showed the detailed infrastructure of the plants and allowed me to render them in a scientifically correct way. This led me to investigate the infrastructures of various other features in the area I live and have visited. These features include buildings that are being constructed or renovated, overpasses that overlap and reflect the evening light, bridges built using linear steel I-beams, and Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture.

After touring Frank Lloyd Wright's (1867-1959) house at Woodlawn, in Alexandria, Virginia, I began studying his work as an architect and designer. I thought his philosophy that an architectural structure should have a relationship with the environment in which it was situated was an idea that I could incorporate into my work. The majority of his buildings are geometric in their structure. He often used rectangular blocks stacked one upon another, as in *Falling Waters* (1909) situated in Mill Run, Pennsylvania. *Falling Waters* mimics the layers of stratus rock that the house is built on. The stacked, concentric circles in Wright's *Guggenheim Museum* (1949-1959), located in New York, New York, creates a counterpoint to the vertical buildings that surround it. He also created structures that combine organic elements, within the shell of his geometric buildings, as in the *Johnson Wax Headquarters* (1936-1939) in Racine, Wisconsin. Its large, open rooms have ceilings suspended on steel-reinforced cement dendriform (tree-shaped) columns. Frank Lloyd Wright's clean geometric shapes highlight the interaction of light. He employed strategically placed angles and geometric stained glass windows to reflect the light around the inside of his structures as well as off the exteriors. The use of angles that create a counterpoint between geometric structure and organic softness is a feature I emulate in my work.

My paintings combine the geometric feel of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, the organic feel of the flowers of Georgia O'Keeffe, and the soft transient light of the Impressionists to create unique landscapes. My jewelry is also uniquely influenced by the geometric foundations used in Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture and the more organic abstract flowers painted by Georgia O'Keeffe. In both of my focus media, I incorporate textures to reflect the light throughout the surface and to enhance the juxtaposition of geometric and organic forms to produce unique landscapes.

Painting

When I returned to painting, after several years of working with my jewelry, I chose to paint the cactus flower that blooms every year in my backyard. *Shadows of a Cactus Flower* (Appendix, 1) is painted in black and white acrylic on textured paper. It is a study of light on the petals of the flower. In this piece, I wanted the light to reflect off the textured and painted surfaces, and become part of the work by casting shadows throughout the piece.

In *Water lily* (Appendix, 2 and 3), I added paper and acrylic putty to the canvas to create a variety of depths and textures for the petals. I then applied paint using dabs of color in contrasting hues and pale variations of analogous colors. The paint enhances the flow of light throughout the painting and emphasizes the texture of the flower's petals. I set the flower against a contrasting colored background to increase the illusion of depth.

In my next work, *Ocean Pier* (Appendix, 4), I used a canvas that was previously painted with sunflowers. To this textured, painted surface I applied my original

photographs of the pier and old power station in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. I digitally manipulated the size, color, and direction of the buildings and landscapes before I printed them out. These printouts were transferred onto the canvas using an emulsion process. Using this process, I found that I could use multiple printouts and overlap them to create collages. I also attached old abstract watercolors to the canvas. The watercolors helped to reference water in the painting. To complete the picture, I painted flowers in acrylic over the transfers and then a varnish was added to cover the entire surface. The varnish gives the surface a glossy look that reflects the light.

I wanted to expand my compositions to include both the emulsion process, and increase the texture of the superimposed flowers. In my painting *Blue Lily and Casino* (Appendix, 5), I used transferred imagery of the Casino Building between Asbury Park and Ocean Grove, New Jersey, that I photographed. The structure was being disassembled by the local preservation society. The skeletal infrastructure of the Casino created unique vistas and sharp angles. I saw it as more than the girders and vacant window sashes, it was a landscape to be explored. I enlarged the picture and printed it out onto two pages. Then, I transferred the two large printouts onto my canvas. I was not concerned with getting them to transfer perfectly. These imperfections allowed the painted areas and the photographs to merge seamlessly. Then, I added texture to my canvas using acrylic putty. Next, I painted the blue lilies on the textured surfaces to create a contrast to the flat ground. The dabs of paint were used to enhance the depth of the texture and increase the flow of light. To further increase this feeling of depth, I added a wooden frame and continued the petals of the

flowers onto it, as if they were growing out over the frame. The multiple layers of geometric shapes, textures, and paint compose my landscapes.

Jewelry

My jewelry is made from a combination of precious metal clay (PMC), wire, beads, and semi-precious stones. In *Hinged Breastplate* (Appendix, 6) I used a combination of all of these materials. The silver plate was designed around and for the central hand-blown glass bead. Once I decided on this focal point I completed a detailed drawing of the plan for the piece. The drawing showed me how the piece would be assembled and gave me the opportunity to decide on textures and the placement of the stones.

In *Hinged Breastplate* (detail) (Appendix, 7), the base surface texture is pressed into the silver PMC. Then, on top of this base texture I added leaves and vines. Next, I set several peridot and sapphire stones on the breastplate. Both the silver PMC and the stones were fired in a kiln. After they cooled, I polished and assembled the piece. The two sides of the asymmetrical breastplate are attached using a pin that runs through the hinges and the central focal bead. A chain is used to balance the piece and secure the breastplate to the findings. To keep the dual side chains from sliding, and to create additional interest, I added mother of pearl beads to the chains midway up both sides. I intended this piece to be a small, wearable sculpture that catches light and reflects it throughout the piece, resembling a miniature abstract landscape.

I continued the layering of materials with *Pendant* (Appendix, 8) by firing a thin layer of silver PMC onto a bronze PMC concave pendant. Then, I wired a stone into the

center of the piece using bronze intersecting wire. Choosing the correct findings and chains to suspend the piece is as important as the piece itself. For this piece, a plain, black leather cord is used to support the pendant allowing the pendant and stone to be the emphasis.

In *Chained Breastplate* (Appendix, 9), the stone is again the focal point. It is wired to a silver PMC backing. I used several different materials in necklace to set off the piece. Elongated, faceted, silver beads were individually strung on silver wire creating individual strains. Then, the strains were assembled so that they radiate out from the central stone to a series of spacers that decrease in the number of strands from eight to six. The second spacer decreases the beaded strains from six to a series of four chains, which are then merged to a single chain. The facets of the beads, the silver, and the stone all bounce the light off of their surfaces in several directions.

Copper Chains (Appendix, 10 and 11) is made from a combination of copper wire, copper PMC, and silver PMC. In this piece, the necklace not only enhances the piece but becomes part of the central pendant. The links for the large chain were bent and hammered flat to emulate the geometric setting of the central piece. The smaller tributary chains were attached and run through the central piece. The center copper piece is a combination of both copper and silver PMC and is reminiscent of the stem and leaves of reeds found along riverbanks. This piece is an abstract interpretation of a river scene with the organic forms set above a geometric background.

A waterfall is the inspiration for *Cascades* (Appendix, 12 and 13). Silver PMC coils around the silver wires ending in the snowflake obsidian stones dangling from chains. The wires and the movement of the chains simulate the movement of water

cascading down the fall. The stones at the end of the chains represent the rock at the foot of the waterfall. The silver PMC cylinder is highly polished and is intended to reflect light in and around the piece. The necklace is strung in irregular black onyx beads and highlighted with snowflake obsidian beads. These elements embody the rugged abstract nature of the landscapes found around waterfalls.

My jewelry, like my paintings, are a combination of geometric and organic forms juxtaposed to one another so that they capture the light and create intriguing, abstract topographic landscapes. I use layers of different materials to create interest in both disciplines. For my paintings I use photographs, texture mediums, and acrylic paint. In my jewelry I layer different metals, stones, beads, and wire. In both of my concentrations, I counterbalance organic and geometric elements.

Conclusion

As I conclude my Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art degree at Virginia Commonwealth University, I have learned that I am an artist not just an art teacher. I have expanded my skills by incorporating new techniques and processes in my work. The abstract and symbolic qualities of light have become an integral part of my work and will continue to be part of my landscapes. My enlightenment as an artist and a teacher will continue long after I graduate.

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Figure 1. *Shadows of a Cactus Flower*, acrylic on paper, 16"x12", 2009.



Figure 2. *Water lily*, acrylic on canvas, 10"x11", 2010



Figure 3. *Water lily* (detail), acrylic on canvas, 10"x11", 2010.



Figure 4. *Ocean Pier*, mixed media on canvas, 24"x18", 2011.



Figure 5. *Blue Lily and Casino*, mixed media on canvas, 20"x16", 2011.



Figure 6. *Hinged Breastplate*, silver PMC, art glass, peridot, and sapphire stones, plate 3"x7"x.25", necklace length 20", 2009.



Figure 7. *Hinged Breastplate* (detail), silver PMC, art glass, peridot, and sapphire stones, plate 3"x7"x.25", necklace length 20", 2009.



Figure 8. *Pendant*, bronze PMC, silver PMC, bronze wire, agate, 2"x1.25"x.3", 2009.



Figure 9. *Chained Breastplate*, silver PMC, silver wire, amazonite, plate 3"x6"x.25", necklace length 19", 2010.



Figure 10. *Copper Chains*, copper PMC, copper wire, sapphire, pendant with chains 2.5"x4.5", necklace length 17", 2010.



Figure 11. *Copper Chains* (detail), copper PMC, copper wire, sapphire, pendant with chains 2.5"x4.5", necklace length 17", 2010.



Figure 12. *Cascades*, silver PMC and snowflake obsidian stone, 3.5"x.5"x.5", necklace: onyx, snowflake obsidian, necklace length 18", 2011.



Figure 13. *Cascades*, (detail) silver PMC and snowflake obsidian stone, 3.5"x.5"x.5", necklace: onyx, snowflake obsidian, necklace length 18", 2011

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2012	<i>Angles in Light</i> , Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA at Sherwood Regional Library, Alexandria, Virginia
2004	<i>Heritage House 2004</i> , Heritage House, Wyckoff, New Jersey Juror: Joan Adams
1982	<i>Senior Show</i> , Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania