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My Garden

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 family has influenced my identity and motivated me to be creative as I navigate through my journey of self-exploration. In my photography and paintings I explore the visual and symbolic aspects of flowers. I photograph flowers and in turn use the images to help guide me when painting florals. I encompass the characteristics and symbolic meanings of each flower, creating paintings that highlight the qualities found in my relationships with others. Flowers and life do not last forever but in my work I try to keep memories alive.

In my photography, I focus attention on the vibrant colors and small details of the flowers revealing their unique pigmentation and velvety soft petals. To emphasize these features of the flower, I scan and manipulate my images on the computer. I use these altered images as models for my paintings.

In acrylic on canvas, I paint flowers in homage to my relatives. Certain flowers have symbolic meanings, such as roses that signify happiness or sunflowers that signify power. I use some of these traditional meanings and sometimes create my own implications when painting. Collectively, my family creates a colorful and vivacious bouquet.

My Garden

Introduction

When I was six years old my mother gave me the greatest gift, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) movie. My best memory was fast forwarding through the black and white tornado scene to get to the colorful Land of Oz. I was intrigued with the bright and vibrant colors in the costumes and the magical environments depicted on The Yellow Brick Road on the way to the Emerald City. The shift to color in this movie changed the mood of the film and triggered a surge of excitement in me. From that moment on, I was hooked on the world of color and decided to follow my own yellow brick road in pursuing art.

Growing up, I always took advantage of the art classes offered at school. I found art to be a special way to express how I felt. Later at Radford University, I was able to continue my art making while being surrounded by the rolling mountains. Coming from a city life, I was immediately drawn to the magnificence and colors of nature in this Southwest Virginia area. I enjoyed learning about painting and photography the most, and used this beautiful surrounding landscape as inspiration for my work which focused on flowers.

After graduation, I was hired as an art educator at an elementary school. Being an educator sparked a desire in me to return to academia. I decided to pursue my master's degree and enrolled in Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program. It was refreshing to get back in touch with ideas in a heightened learning environment, and to create my own projects again.

I started the program focusing on digital photography and was introduced to new

processes. For the first time, I used a scanner as a tool. Scanned and digital images can be manipulated in computer programs and this allowed me to emphasize the color and details in flowers. My other area of interest was painting. In these works, I used my photographs and scans as inspiration. With acrylic paint, I further explored the intense colors and intricate details of flowers.

Aesthetics

My process begins with photographing or scanning flowers on dark grounds. This dark negative space helps to accentuate the tonal variations in the flowers. The resulting image is then manipulated on the computer. I emphasize the color, re-scale the image, and crop it.

The coloration in my work is inspired by Technicolor movies, Pop art, and flowers. I emphasize the rich and high-saturated colors of flowers to stimulate the viewer's visual experience, and to express and capture my own emotions. I identify with the flowers and use them as a visual vocabulary to reflect my feelings about influential family members. I use controlled brushstrokes in shifting color to create illusionistic and expressive imagery.

I focus on one single breed of flower in each work. I choose each flower for its unique, organic shape and captivating petal form. I am drawn to the pinching and sharp folds of the petals, sometimes twisting in a pinwheel-like form or cascading with pronounced curling ends. I maintain a contrast between the flowers and the ground to anchor the attention on color. Sometimes, I use flat, solid colors for the ground or I use a textural ground. My choice of ground is used to enhance the color and definition of the flower, and is either contrasting or complementary.

Influences

As a child, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) opened my eyes to the vast range of color and how it can be manipulated for expressive meaning. The film starts out, in black and white, in Kansas. The colorless environment evokes emotions of sadness and reflects a hard life on a vast Midwestern farm. Just as I found myself feeling sorry for Dorothy's life on the farm, the film takes a dramatic turn into a Technicolor world. Technicolor was a process developed in 1916 and is recognized for its highly saturated coloration. Being immersed in colors lifted my emotions; I felt optimistic as the characters made their journey down The Yellow Brick Road. As a result, this film influenced my understanding of how colors can evoke emotions, especially positive ones.

My own yellow brick road led me to college in Southwest Virginia. Instantly, the natural splendor of my surroundings gave me a feeling of calmness and serenity. The colorful and open landscapes were far from the crowded, gray city I had come from, and I felt like I was in a new colorful world of Oz. I found myself soaking up the bright colors and capturing everything I could with my camera. Specifically, I found myself influenced by the abundance of rare, vibrant flowers. Flowers became the vehicle for me to explore color.

An artist who influenced my work is Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986). She also found inspiration in nature and used its imagery in her work. She magnified the scale of flowers and painted them in vibrant colors; her artwork intensified the magnificence of nature. She focused on single flowers, paying close attention to their unique forms and structures. Her brilliant colors and increased scale inspired me to further explore my surroundings and incorporate those aspects into my work.

During this time, I was introduced to the art of painter, Lowell Nesbitt (1933-1993). He

painted botanical series of flowers in close-up views which were dramatic and full of rich color.

The petals filled the picture plane, absorbing the viewer in the beauty of color and form.

Nesbitt's, as well as O'Keeffe's, large-scaled imagery inspired me to increase the scale of my flowers, and increase the format of my pieces. The increased scale allowed me to focus on a flower's shape and accentuate the saturated colors of the petals, with no distracting background.

In my work, I have combined my inspirations from cinema, nature, and other artists.

Similar to the methods employed by O'Keeffe and Nesbitt, I have captured flowers with a focus on color, clarity, and scale.

Photography

I began my coursework with photography. While maneuvering through new computer programs, and searching for a process to capture the essence of flowers, I came across *scanography*. Scanography, also known as *scanner photography*, is a process that uses a flatbed scanner to create digital images from three-dimensional objects. I began experimenting with this process and purchased fresh flowers as an alternative to finding species in nature, which were often inaccessible to me. I waited until the flowers blossomed to the height of their maturity and then scanned them. At this point, a flower is at its most attractive state; the colors are clear and the petals and interior structures are receptive to pollination. The scans captured the flower images with acute sharpness and intense color saturation, with limited depth of field. The limited depth of field isolated the flower, blurring the background and focusing on the flower. I enhanced and increased the scale of these scanned images to showcase brilliant colors, fluid forms, and extraordinary details. Scanography was an excellent way for me to create powerful images of flowers by using a new photographic technology.

Scanners are primarily used to capture text documents and involve a moving light source. This light source does not penetrate far beyond the glass scanning surface and photographs within a shallow depth of field. This creates an image with no competing background and focuses in on the object closest to the glass, picking up minute detail. Therefore, I experimented with different ways to hold, lay, and hang my flowers as I scanned them into the computer.

The scans were so accurate that they picked up dust particles. It was important to digitally touch-up areas on and around the flower to make the images as pristine as possible. I wanted the focus to stay on the coloration without interference from technical issues. Additionally, color was sometimes lost in areas as a result of the moving light from the scanner. I would digitally manipulate and clean up these parts to correct the color. I also eliminated any flaws that were on the flower, such as pollen that stained the petals or had fallen onto the glass while scanning. Sometimes, cracks in the petals would appear as a result of the flower being out of water for too long. So, I captured the flowers as quickly as possible.

In *Electric Fuchsia* (Appendix, 1), I scanned a stargazer lily because of its dramatic star shape and bright colors. I identified with the flower's symbolic meaning of innocence and youthfulness. The curling petals were representative of my own shyness and slow growing confidence. Similar to the pink colors that stretched across the white petals, I felt like I was evolving but still had room to grow.

I wanted to keep this scan simplified with no surrounding distractions. So, I carefully held the open flower directly over the scanner bed with the stamens fanning out, surrounded by the petals and creating an open star-shape. The shallow depth of field worked to my advantage because it did not display my arm or hand which held the flower in place. Instead, it illuminated

the gently curved tips of the vibrant fuchsia petals. To photograph the flower, the lid of the scanner was left open. This created a black ground for the lily, and emphasized the creamy softness of the petals and flamboyant form. Once I was satisfied with my scan, I edited it by removing the evidence of pollen and dust.

In my next piece, I wanted to use a flower that did not have as much pollen as the stargazer lily. Cleaning the stamen's pollen off the flower became a very time consuming process. So, in *Golden Amber* (Appendix, 2) I worked with two sunflowers. The symbolic meaning of the sunflower is power and loyalty. As such, the two sunflowers represent the dedication and love I have received from my parents. Throughout my life, they have continued to provide me nourishment and support. Their influence and support have continued to be a very bright light in my life.

The sunflower itself is actually a composite flower, made up of several hundred tiny flowers, known as *florets*, which compose the large seed head. I wanted to show off all of these spiraling florets against the bright, golden petals that surrounded them. I decided that using two flowers would obscure more of the black ground and make the flowers appear larger and fuller. Additionally, some petals extended beyond the picture plane which helped me exaggerate the size of the flowers. Finally, I cleaned up the picture and created a higher saturation of colors. The final image reveals oversized, buttery petals with golden amber colors. Like a sunflower that stands tall over the entire garden, my parents have continued to watch over me.

In *Ruby Red* (Appendix, 3) I decided to use multiple roses. Roses are representative of sincerity, love, and respect. They are one of the oldest flowers in cultivation and are personal symbols of the eldest members in my family, my grandparents. The deep red within the roses represent the love and devotion I have for the both of them. While one of the roses is facing

forward, the other rose that is turned away and fading signifies my deceased grandfather. In making this piece, I waited for the roses to bloom and reveal their gradually unfolding petals. I wanted to create the sense of a blooming garden and excluded some of the negative space around the rose. I added some green foliage which naturally complemented the velvety, ruby red rose petals. The sharp contours of the foliage contrasted with the roses' soft petals. The scanned image accentuated the many layers of the unwrapping petals. Roses have represented love for centuries, and the love I have for my grandparents will forever remain in my heart.

I was pleased with the final result of my botanical scans and how I could enhance the saturated colors in the flowers. Each flower was different in their hues and structures which helped me reveal the natural beauty and endless range of color in nature.

Painting

The colors I find in flowers carry over into my paintings. I use my photography and scans as a guide while working in acrylic on canvas. I explore the colors in my digital work and emulate them in my paintings. Each painting depicts different flowers capturing the many hues and fluent forms.

In *Jazzberry Lust* (Appendix, 4), I created a painting of a blooming rose. Pink roses symbolize gentleness and sweetness, the same qualities I find in my little sister, Renee. Roses also signify perfect happiness, and Renee was the completion to our happy family. I used my images of roses to develop silky petals that extended beyond the picture plane. This compositional approach was inspired by both O'Keeffe and Nesbitt. I wanted the viewer to be engaged in the essential features of this flower's petals. I emphasized the deep folds and bowed direction of each petal. When painting this piece, I took great care in blending various hues of

pinks to develop soft, delicate petals. Similar to the pink rose within my painting, I have watched my little sister blossom into an elegant young lady.

As I became more confident in my skills, I painted on a larger canvas. In *Passionate Plum* (Appendix, 5), I painted an orchid on a 24”x 30” canvas to reveal its exotic form and ravishing color. The larger scale symbolizes my older sister, Sara, and the large impact she has had on my life. There are many different species of orchids and an endless amount of qualities that I admire in my sister. The symmetry of the petals is similar to how I have always tried to mirror the actions of my older sister and embrace the wisdom she has provided to me. It is traditional that purple orchids are gifted to those you respect and look up to. I used complementary purples and oranges in my palette when painting the opened flower. I overlapped forms and blended areas to accurately depict the details and cupping shape of each petal and sepal. I focused on painting even the smallest of details on the inner lips, or edges, of this striking flower. The yellow textural ground complements the plum color of this succulent orchid.

In *Radiant Scarlet* (Appendix, 6), I chose a larger format and warmer colors for this ranunculus flower, revealing the bright fullness of its copious petals. Even though this is a smaller flower, I chose to paint it on a much larger scale to symbolize my growing love for my fiancé, Jason. This small charming flower represents the richness and attraction within our deepening relationship. The energetic colors embody the joy and happiness I feel when I am with him, and each petal represents the many memories we share together. In this piece, I wanted to showcase the flourishing velvety petals that were a blend of orange and red hues. In referencing the high-contrast scan, I painted a smooth, deep blue ground around the red of the petals. The dark ground illuminated the warm petals.

In each work, I altered the color of the flowers and their organic shapes with complementary or contrasting grounds. I also increased the scale of the images to more fully emphasize my focus on color. Each brushstroke blends together the colors captured in my scans and the vast assortment of colors found in nature.

Conclusion

While in the MIS-IAR Program, I discovered new techniques and approaches to my art. I was exposed to unique photographic methods which allowed me to capture colors found in nature. The enhanced colors of scanned flowers challenged me to explore colors and botanicals on canvas. I found it beneficial to discuss ideas with classmates and investigate new artists. My work has blossomed into a colorful garden, and I will continue to unwrap the countless colors found in nature.

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- Figure 2. *Golden Amber*, scanography, 14" x 11", 2010.
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Figure 1. *Electric Fuchsia*, scanography, 11" x 11", 2010.



Figure 2. *Golden Amber*, scanography, 14" x 11", 2010.



Figure 3. *Ruby Red*, scanography, 24" x 18", 2010.



Figure 4. *Jazzberry Lust*, acrylic on canvas, 18" x 18", 2012.



Figure 5. *Passionate Plum*, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30", 2012.



Figure 6. *Radiant Scarlet*, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 36", 2012.

Bianca Kramer

Education

- 2013 Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia
Painting and Photography
- 2008 Bachelor of Science
Radford University, Radford, Virginia
Art Education

Related Education

- 2007 Study Abroad in Greece
Radford University Summer Abroad Program
Radford University, Radford, Virginia

Certification

- 2008-Present Collegiate Professional License
Radford University, Radford, Virginia
Art Education Prek-12
- 2007-Present Child Abuse and Neglect
Recognize and report suspected child abuse and neglect
Radford University, Radford, Virginia

Teaching Experience

- 2008-Present Art Specialist
Cedar Lane Elementary School
Loudoun County Public Schools
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Related Experience

- 2008-Present Art Guild Club Director
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Professional Organizations

- 2008-Present National Art Education Association

Exhibitions

2013

My Garden

Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art Thesis Exhibition
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia
at Verizon Gallery, Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC)
Annandale, VA