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A Sense Of Place

A thesis
presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Art and Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by
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Dr. Scott Koterbay

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ABSTRACT

A Sense Of Place

by

Neli Ouzounova

Concerned with anxiety and displacement, the artist explores a sense of place within the self. Personal experiences are presented as an accumulation of fragmented symbols, texture and pattern. Symbolic imagery is created, influenced by a devaluation of established norms and a reorganization of cultural identity. The individual's interaction with the surrounding world affirms their idiosyncratic symbolism. The artwork is a visual language that through the use of disparate segments sets up the portrayal of the fragmented self and psychological journeys of the artist.

Individuals establish themselves in many ways, including gestures as part of expression. This expression can be in the visual plane, such as works of art with their color and exploration of ideas. Thus there is continuity in life being established by the artist, while looking for meaning in the apprehended sense of place created in response to natural instinct and intuition.

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Thanks to my dad, who is my role model.

Thanks to all my professors who are unlike my dad and talk about art all the time.

Thanks to my friends, who listen to me talk all the time.



Neli Ouzounova

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I explore a sense of place within the self, concerned with anxiety and displacement. The canvas becomes an expression of personal experiences conveying an inner turmoil in splashes of discordant colors that layer over one another, each failing to overpower the previous on the picture plane. Symbols are derived from various sources such as the influence from Byzantine art, Bulgarian society, Persian culture, and other religious signs. These symbols can have multiple meanings and their function is playfully left to the interpretation of the viewer. The use of pattern creates a lyrical notion of fragility, nostalgia as well as the feminine in the paintings. Creating a sense of the lyrical notion of fragility, nostalgia and the feminine, pattern, because of its unifying qualities, essentially acts as the rhythm according to which havoc develops in the painting. It beckons the eye to follow disorder and anxiety in an orderly manner. There is a search for a sense of place in the expression of inner chaos, anxiety, and self-conscious insecurities. In order to better understand myself as an individual, I then, examine visual language, its connection with reality, and how it pours forth from the painting.

Certain existentialist philosophy influences this work providing an understanding of the individual, and, an exploration of the notion that my concept of reality may not be reasonable to someone else. I am creating a representation of

a mental image that originates somewhere in my subconscious. The reasons for its apprehension are a true synthesis. With the use of a personal visual language, I translate the actual subjectivity, highlighted with a certain notion of fear. The 20th Century German philosopher Martin Heidegger termed that sense of fear anxiety, which is based on the individual's insecurity of being unable to justify for the choices that are made in life.

History proves that even the deepest established social norms can become transitory. Despite all the questioning that people have done, there is still no clear view of the self, making each successive generation more doubt-ridden than the previous. Standardization has strangled individuality and has possibly created an objectification of the sense of self. Artists often have a sensitive attitude towards existence and through their works can communicate their concerns. By exploring the tension between disparate visual elements such as gestural color, line, symbolism and pattern, as an artist, I question what it is to be an individual when at present the personal and the intimate have lost meaning.

The following Chapter 1 will discuss the motive and expression of a mental image in my paintings. The first part examines the effect of modern society upon me as an individual. Both the second part, dealing with symbolism, and the third, dealing with the use of pattern, are elements acquired through my interaction with the world. And lastly, the fourth part will be an exploration for the justification of my search for understanding oneself through a visual language, translating to a discussion of philosophical influences in Chapter 2.

Affects of Culture Upon the Individual

“...Speech is free perhaps but I am less free than before: I no longer succeed in knowing what I want, the space is so saturated, the pressure so great from all who want to make themselves heard” (Baudrillard, 132). At present people live in great confusion. The subjective world of feelings, emotions, and human sentiment are given less attention. The reality of contemporary culture is no longer compared on a human scale. Communication consists of an intensity of networks that infuse us with fascination and ecstasy reflecting our lives into a screen that brings an abundance of superficial saturation. It is easy to get an impression that the function of the individual is abolished through this “ecstasy of communication”.

If one thinks about it, people no longer project themselves into their objects, with their affects and their representations, their fantasies of possession, loss, mourning, jealousy: the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished, and even if it can always be marked out in detail, one feels that it is not really there that things are being played out (Baudrillard, 127).

Historically, people transform societal models as a reaction against the previous established norms in culture, brought about with the emergence of a new type of social life. At the moment, there is a dominant way of life and people are seeking resolutions to occurring contradictions. As they react to classifications, the creation of art heightens their feelings of identification and also enables them to

share emotional experiences. The notion of freedom can thus be linked with the creation of expressive art.

Due to their ability to perceive, artists are able to evaluate their environment. Interaction with reality encourages the inner expressive urge that they possess. As one interacts with other living things, attitudes about the world are formed. So there is a formation of a sense, or a notion that is represented in a pattern of images indisputable in our apprehension.

Art is produced from the arrangement of different materials to serve a specific value and significance. Such are our feelings, which were it not for expression, would be vague and diffused in our reality. As part of our human nature, the qualities of instinct and intuition are inherent to people. The psychologist Carl Jung defines the former as a “purposive impulse to carry out some complicated action” (cited in Campbell, 51). The latter, intuition, he terms an unconscious quality and calls it “purposive apprehension of a highly complicated situation” (cited in Campbell, 51). Intuition, therefore, contains what is important to me as an artist: apprehension and perception.

The unconscious is a collection of forms and images that the artist pours from the self into the world. An objective evaluation of personal experiences becomes very much attached with personal mores. Outside influences cultivate within the artistic sense that sometimes what is clear in the artistic mind may not be as clear a link with reality to everyone else. After all, the artist is preoccupied with the presentation and reception of the material itself.

...In his efforts to defend himself he attacks things that to outsiders seem utterly unimportant. Because of the subjectivization of consciousness resulting from his lack of relationship to the object, what secretly concerns his own person now seems to him of extreme importance. He begins to confuse his own subjective truth with his own personality (Campbell, 244).

Thus, it can be said that I create a sense of place in order to identify myself.

Personal experiences are turned into a rich, responsive visual language of color and symbolic imagery. The theme becomes self-preservation due again to the educational appeals of a person's life and advertising's blatant "...effort to lull them into a state of delusional contentment" (Horkheimer, 129).

The Use of Symbols

Symbolism aids in artistic evaluation of the phenomenon of our time. It is a means to justify content and answer questions of the psyche exposed in the work and interrelated with its time. "The whole inner psychic reality of each individual is ultimately oriented towards this archetypal symbol of the Self" (Franz, 215).

There is a loss of convictions that once governed the practice of art. I no longer feel sure of how to distinguish an idea from the pressure of having to make it distinctively modern. Since the WWII, a whole generation in Europe has struggled to respond to the breakdown of values they received as a result of twentieth Century history (Gilmour, 3).

I am coincidentally burdened with the uncertainty of the change of historical events and experiencing other cultures for brief moments, so I have developed the use of symbols in order to speculate an evaluation of my surroundings. Symbolism in my paintings is drawn from a lot of sources – just as my verbal vocabulary consists of pieces of information from different language structures, a varied order of spoken words, words with multiple meanings, untranslatable jokes even – all inherent to a specific culture but yet all coexisting and applicable in a different place and time from their origin.

Art historian and critic Frederic Jameson defines the complicated compilations of symbolism and stylistic imagery as shifts in tempo, training to feel shifts from one thing to another, as Jameson coins it: “perceiving difference”, or the perception of difference becomes a meaning within itself, not one containing content, but one that is a new form of unity. It is simply a way of associating the acknowledgement of difference as a positive activity in your mind (Stephanson, 29-54).

A similar parallel can be developed about the visual vocabulary that I have developed. Images from various influences are interacting forces in my mind, creating a synthesis of tradition, the present, and the rational. The specific symbols in my work will exemplify what inspires me. The symbolic imagery that I use is a provocative mixture, depicting my assumptions about the surrounding reality. Symbols denote how I formulate my visions.

Symbolic significance can be imposed upon anything: man-made objects, natural objects, and more. It is human nature to create symbols by unconsciously endowing objects or forms with psychological importance. In the case of the personal expression, symbols are used to depict issues of concern to me as an artist. The French Existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, defines symbols as a combination of images that through the thought process are selected out of the unconscious as a mode of organizing activity (cited in Cumming). The icon is one example of a profound symbolic and very associative imagery.

[It] ...was subordinated to the principles of Byzantine aesthetics throughout its development in East Orthodox culture. For its part it was formed on the basis of ancient and Middle East cultural heritage and exerted considerable influence on Medieval and Renaissance aesthetics (Matakieva-Lilkova, 5).

Iconic imagery is filled with specific ways of depicting a story. Use of such in implication of traditions becomes an impressive factor when related to modern time. Icons were illuminated with the worship of beauty and the sagacity of thought and spirit. They create a “magical identity” (Matakieva-Lilkova) that reveals clues of an expressive, in this case, Bulgarian, nature with a deep self-preoccupation, nobility, and self-awareness.

My use of symbolic imagery influenced from iconography can aid in the creation of dual meanings in an artwork. Originally playing a part in the salvation of the individual in a past epoch, symbols such as wings and a ladder may now be humorously viewed as ideals of unattainable aspect.

The image of a dog, which in religious imagery brings connotations of the shepherd and savior, in my works it is used to openly reference the use of the word that defines the subject and on the other hand it also signifies the unflattering connotations in Western slang. The psychologist Carl Jung interprets the use of an animal as a symbolizing aspect of “the Self”, representing our instinctive nature and its connectedness with a person’s surrounding. Jung has described the self as a center, which organizes our growth (cited in Sharp, 220, 162). Expressiveness no longer signifies the struggle between man and nature; it is in the scope of the self. There is a proposed interpretation but not a real meaning.

Painting a representation of the hands, the head, or the feet as symbols for the means with which to create an artwork is another symbolic depiction. These are also associations with the notion of creating a gesture as a means of expression. Because gesture is being viewed as an individual’s specific mark, like a signature, frequently compared to language as a means of communication, I have decided to use various gestures as I would communicate the mixtures that define a sole identity in me. My gestures are comprised of different ideas and scenarios that control my decision-making.

The paintings I thus create have a contradiction of manners of execution in order to reach an expression. And to express the confusion, uncertainty, or anxiety I use the portrayal of imagery of disparate origins, as well as create the visual uneasiness through a complete variety of mark making. Therefore, the painted

strokes along with the pouring of paint, solid shapes, and transparent layering all coexist on a canvas plane.

Identification of Gesture

Generally 'gesture' is taken as a behavior emitting a message with or without using one's voice. When we act, we make our bodies move in various ways. But all these movements are not necessarily called gestures. Gesture is, whether conscious or unconscious, a 'significant' movement of a body.

Art Historians have tried to seek the meaning of gestures, represented in the paintings they are dealing with, by relating them to the original "codes" which they can identify in the real world.

The depicted gesture, by being separated from the original context, will be charged with a high potential which cannot be exhausted by a contextual explanation. This changed function, the "aesthetic" function of the depicted gesture is the element which makes works compelling (Tetsuhiro, 39-51).

The first category of nonverbal behavior, called emblems, is formed by nonverbal acts that can be translated as consisting of a word or two, or even a phrase (Ekman and Friesen, 49-98). According to Ekman and Friesen, emblems occur during verbal exchange as well, although most frequently they occurrence is due to the inhibition of verbal exchange due to noise or some sort of impairment. The emblems people use are in most cases for the purpose of communication. The origins of emblems are learned through the specifics of culture (Ekman and Friesen, 49-98).

Attention must be called to the fact that gesture is a sign, always regarded as something in relation to language. Gesture is more than a mere language. Although it lacks voice, it ranks with the verbal language in other respects. Gesture is sometimes thought to take the place of language when use of language is blocked, that is, in the event of cultural barriers or disabilities. I use gesture as such a non-verbal communication.

Gesture is also seen as a superficial surface movement. It has been criticized for the truthfulness of the message it emits; therefore, those who receive a gesture are obligated to find out the concealed meaning behind that superficial appearance. “Gesture tends to lure the receiver to ‘interpret’ it” (Tetsuhiro, Kato).

As an artist, I have to play a dual role where I provide people with meanings for established cultural values as well as identifying new ones. So, issues and concerns appear in the artwork symbolically representing the gestures or marks. The whole visual synthesis of thought is expressed in elements along the surface made up of a grid or pattern.

The Use of Pattern

The development of pattern in itself lacks any inherent expressive qualities, so it is a befitting contradictive element to the fluid areas of color in an image. Pattern is a stylized arrangement of shapes with the use of line to create a sense of

repetition. And repetition incorporates a symbolic stability and assuredness due to its consistency. It invokes a sense of power – for the ability of its creator to control the use of shape and line. I use pattern to create order into such a disparate variety of elements present in each painting. Pattern is also symbolizes entirety in the image.

Intention of the Artist

A work of art can clarify the feelings that we experience. If we don't share our feelings, then we won't know what others experience. According to Jung, knowledge can come through an outward manifestation: “ In ways that are still completely beyond our comprehension, our unconscious is similarly attuned to our surroundings – to our group, to society in general, and, beyond these to the space-time continuum and the whole” (cited in Sharp, 220).

CHAPTER 2

IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

Enduring the endless search for the truth in art and its interpretation, I turn toward the inner-self to find fulfillment and an understanding of personal involvement. This paper is a search for the tone of that inner voice, for a self-expression of pure experiences. In order to understand the drive behind the creation of works of art that portray the pathways of fate and illuminate the gateways to a betterment of the self, this paper is a compilation of ideas on the individual, creation, and reality that surrounds me as I am part of the ever-encompassing environment.

By reading certain philosophers whose theories are relevant for this paper, I can place the personal in art at existence. Threading the unconscious and the intentional, which flows through gestures in color and line, I can find the words to interpret the visual content. Existentialist thought, for example, emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. It deals with the notion of leading a meaningful way of life when at present it is of no importance. The valuation of right and wrong is in a state of chaos. As a way of orienting life, emphasis should be placed on individuality. These are all constituents of the existentialist movement in philosophy, but only the ones necessary in this paper have been selected for explication.

Historically, existentialism represents a revolt against traditional philosophy. It denies that truth can ever be synonymous with reason, a central theme in the thought of Plato, Kant, and Hegel. Against the view that existence does not add anything to our conceptual knowledge, existentialism conducts a general examination of existence, its facility, its emotions, asserting that existence must be the primary category through which such concepts as essence must be viewed (Nauman, 46).

The Search for Meaning

Philosophers since Plato have tried to reason that when one comes close to moral perfection, they start resembling other such individuals, but the 19th Century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, the first existentialist, insisted that it would benefit the individual more, if each found one's unique vocation. According to him, it is crucial to recognize one's experience of fear towards general apprehension, or *dread*. He interpreted it as a Heavenly calling for each individual to commit to a valid way of life for the self. Heidegger terms this dread as *anxiety*, which leads to the individual's confrontation with the impossibility of finding a real justification for the choices one must make in life.

According to Sartre, people are unable to acquire a rational basis for their lives all the time, thus human life is seen as a "futile passion", although despite that, none of the pessimistic views about our world are an excuse for a person to abandon the commitment towards a projected goal. The views are there to

emphasize the responsibility of each individual's space and personal freedom (Sartre, 37).

Human Nature

Human existence, according to the existentialists, is placed before human nature or the concrete and temporal. Heidegger interprets our being as a compilation of feelings, anxiety being the primary one directed plainly towards the whole world. Out of all the fear, anxiety, tranquility, and joy that we carry as a mode of existence, fear let's say, is always directed towards a definite thing, while anxiety is undefined. Thus, trying to understand anxiety would be a pathway for discovering the existence of the self. But in life we try to transform the feeling of anxiety into a definite condition with which we can deal, one that is directed towards something. The anxiety is curtailed into curiosity and inquisitiveness. It is explained as human nature to busy oneself with distractions and diversions from the self. It is virtually impossible for the human being to discover an authentic mode of existence since we all exist in the world along with others and busy ourselves with care for various things. Analysis is already a way towards the essential characteristics of human existence (Barrett).

Anxiety derives from care for our own existence and thus the concern for the being in this world, which is supposedly separating us from all the other beings in the universe. If it is in a human's nature to care, the being's definition is always

defined by one's possibilities, projected towards a future. Our existence goes beyond the past, projects itself towards a future and realizes the present (Barrett).

The Individual in Society

In *What is Existentialism?* William Barrett asserts that each generation tends to believe themselves to be more ridden with doubt than the previous and more problematic in its existence, but he says that there are good grounds based on the witnessing of historical facts, for people of today to be uncertain of ourselves, more than ones in the past (73). And despite all the questioning, humanity is still without a clear view of the self. The fall of Communism has shown that the actions of people can remake the whole structure of human society. Thus the deepest social norms can turn into something transitory. Human existence is always conditioned by social and economic organization (Barrett).

The Industrial Revolution seems to have filled life with congestion and standardization, reducing personalities and strangling individuality. Humanity has not yet shown itself capable, says Barrett, of being able to control, in a rational way, the technological order overpowering one's existence. Technology is the visible product of science, a newcomer busying the intellectual activity of the modern person and back-staging religion with the power of reason. Since the Enlightenment it has been thus. The intellectual breakthrough and the

technological change with its fast pace according to Barrett, transforms the sense of history for people. They will live in a present of constant technological change and lose touch with nature. As it disappears, the presence of Being will as well, creating an objectification of the sense of self (Barrett).

The German theologian, Paul Tillich, in *The Courage to Be*, writes that the existentialists were afraid of the loss of their individual selves. They were driven in a reaction against the realization of the process of transforming people into things, parts of a reality where science controls. The person was transformed into a field where impressions prevailed according to different degrees of intensity in that empty space, which the self had become (Tillich, 135-8). According to Victor Frankl, a concomitant of industrialization is the term *existential vacuum*. Frankl explains this term as the psychological condition in which a person doubts that life has any meaning. An existential vacuum is characterized by loss of interest and lack of initiative. It happens when neither instinct nor social tradition point a person to what they ought to do. One eventually will not know what to do, or what one wants to do, resulting in an existential vacuum (cited in Nauman, 53). Frankl says that social pressure makes people want to conform, thus the individual neglects the meaning of one's own personal life, feeling an inner void.

Jung believes that the individual's survival depends upon the group around, and the belief in the person's self-individuality. A person needs an evidence of inner, transcendent experience to avoid being swallowed by the masses. According to Jung, the individual should believe in an extra mundane principle strong enough

to sustain a spiritual and moral autonomy, to prevent one from the overpowering influence from external factors. He discusses *individuation*, the process by which individual beings are differentiated from the general collective psychology. This involves an awareness of the strengths and limitations of a person's unique psychological reality and a deeper understanding of humanity as a whole. It is not meant to lead to isolation, because the individual's existence is after all presupposing a collective relationship. But individuation, continues Jung, also isolates one from collectivity, leaving the individual to bear guilt, which one tries to redeem by offering values, equivalent to a substitute for one's absence in the collective sphere (Sharp).

The artists are the sensitive reeds that first vibrate to the new currents which flow into the historical epoch and give it precisely the feeling and exultation that it is new. The Renaissance artists themselves need not have been expressly aware of this new attitude towards existence, which they possessed only as an ingredient in their way of seeing the world; it became conscious and explicit in the philosophers (Barrett).

As Sartre evaluates it, the image is formed through the consciousness of its creator. That creator doesn't create the actual image but a description of it as it appears in the imagination (cited in Cumming, 77).

In *Search for the Real in the Visual Arts*, the painter Hans Hoffmann explains that an idea is only communicable when its surreal forces (beyond physical reality) are converted into material terms, the physical carrier being commonly painting or sculpture, used as a medium of expression. The artist's technical problem is how to transform the material with which he or she works

back into the sphere of the spirit. According to Hoffmann, an artist is busy with the search for the essential nature of reality.

And so artistic creation is the metamorphosis of the external physical aspects of a thing into a self-sustaining spiritual reality...Metaphysically a thing never expresses anything. It is the relation between things that gives meaning to them and that formulates a thought. A thought functions only as a fragmentary part in the formulation of an idea (Hoffmann, quoted in Ross, 77).

The following Chapter 3 of this paper will address artistic influences upon the artist as such a creator. It will describe inspirational stylistic occurrences as well as individual thoughts upon the creation of an image.

CHAPTER 3

STYLISTIC INFLUENCES

A stylistic influence upon me was Die Brücke (the Bridge). It was a group of German expressionist artists, founded in Dresden in 1905, whose name symbolized their bridge of common interests and their link to the future. They rejected academic tradition, realism, and impressionism, but most importantly, their art was drawn from strong feelings and use of the imagination. I am interested in the key artist of this group, Ernst L. Kirchner, whose expressive paint strokes and harsh colors depicted distorted shapes. Kirchner has managed to project his emotion and fantasy, depicting his interaction with the world.

One other expressionist, who used his art to project his anguish, was Oskar Kokoschka. He terms the projection of the self into the artwork as the fourth dimension – the other three being the result of mere eyesight. Besides being expressive, Kokoschka's works also deal with a special concept distinguished by prismatic color and planes over the surface (Dube, 184-86). This artist aimed to convey spirituality by invoking a transparency or delicacy in the representation of his subjects.

The approach is a one-sided, spiritualized one – all the more specialized in that the painter almost invariably sought the spiritual quality he was after in one thing alone, the human face, reinforced by attitude and gesture in a half-length that included the hands (Schmalenbach , 7).

One more movement, Abstract Expressionism, impacted by WWII, the victory over the reigning power and the Great Depression, was happening in the United States. It held characteristics of being both expressive and abstract. This movement was an aesthetic form where the artistic works exemplified the theory of an individual's isolation from collectivity, an aspect of influence from the philosophy of the psychologist Carl Jung.

With their mature works, the Abstract Expressionists created highly charged images which force the viewer to recall and experience a wide range of powerful emotions and feelings, in effect giving the public an opportunity to experience the same confrontation with the subconscious that attended the artists during creation (Ross, 18).

Artists such as Ad Reinhardt, Jackson Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko were working toward a collective aesthetic, and especially so, because by 1940 almost all the Abstract Expressionists had settled down in New York. The Abstract Expressionist works derived from qualities of Cubist drawing, Fauve color, and the attitudes of Surrealism (Ross). They built on the influence of Surrealism, whose basis was a philosophical belief in the subconscious of the individual and its relation to the collective subconscious. These artists all developed forceful personal styles of art that would invoke and confront the viewer without descriptions or depictions of subject matter. As a means of expression, Abstract Expressionists chose to go beyond the representational image and worked with color, line, and texture instead to convey their individual goals.

Artistic Influences

A leading figure in the Abstract Expressionist movement, and one of the most influential teachers of modern art in the United States, was German-born American painter Hans Hoffmann. He paints tightly organized compositions with the ease of gesture with interplay between colors, shapes, and textures.

From 1904 to 1914 he lived in Paris, France where he absorbs many of the theories of modern art that would find expression in his paintings and teachings. Hoffmann's work becomes increasingly abstract by the mid 1940s and begins to show the influence of European surrealists, particularly their use of *automatism* – a technique in which the artist paints or draws with as little conscious control as possible – and their acceptance of the role of accident in art led him to techniques of pouring and spattering paint onto the canvas. Hoffmann often has several techniques in one work, combining poured paint with conventional brushwork.

Hoffmann's painting is the product of both visual and psychological oppositions. Because warm colors (red, orange, yellow) appear to project toward the viewer and cool colors (blue, green, purple) tend to recede, Hoffmann juxtaposes warm and cool colors, as well as different shapes, textures, and gestural marks, to create a visual tension, or a 'push and pull'. In Hoffmann's *Search for the Real in the Visual Arts*, 1948, he explains that:

Space must be vital and active – a force impelled pictorial space, presented as a spiritual and unified entity, with a life of its own. This entity must have a life of the spirit without which no art is possible – the life of a creative mind in its sensitive relation to the outer world.

The work of art is firmly established as an independent object; this makes it a picture.

Outside of it is the outer world.

Inside of it, the world of an artist (Hoffmann, 81, quoted in Ross).

The intention of the artist to achieve a representation of emotion in a communicable form is as though an apprehended action towards the important role of a correlated larger structure. (Blocker, 247) “That is, we approach works of art as a purposeful interrelation of parts, but this is not the same as, even if it is indirectly related to, our knowing or even considering the thoughts and desires of the artist who created the work” (Blocker, p259).

A student of Hans Hoffmann, the artist Lee Krasner, struggles for years to find new styles as fresh means of expression. Her work spun in image cycles rather than in series. It engages rather than overwhelms, where the viewer experiences an interactive struggle and is required to sustain substantial energy in encountering the direct vigorousness of her art. (Rose, p14)

In her work, Krasner would go through stages where her works were comprised of bars and small compartments that would become constricting to her so she would aggressively tear them apart to create large-scale imagery exposing her sensibility and finesse. “The works of 1956-57 appear full to overflowing, in

both an expressive and a formal sense. They are crowded, densely packed with bursting and bulging forms” (Rose, p107).

Her inspiration from calligraphy is evident in the use of her line. She creates automatic drawings with vaguely figurative overtones that are combined with watercolor or gouache to unifying the overall composition. (130-32) There is a sense in her paintings, which she bases on drawings, of concealed apocalyptic imagery. She disciplines the splatters and bursts though, with rich texture and ornamental color. Her gouaches often contain spilling, flooding and a notion of liquidity where the paint and color are within the surface. (142)

The paintings also deal with pictorial irony in a contemporary manner. Value contrast functions to suggest illusionistic depth; however, because the drawings are constantly interrupted – at times with a kind of violent trusting intrusion – by intercalations from other drawings, contradictory passages of shading nullify the suggestion of illusion. The result is that the conscious *mind* rather than simply the eye is awakened to the cognizance of flatness as a conception not irreconcilably antagonistic to illusion (Rose, 153).

Having been a student in Hoffmann’s school in the late 1930s taught Krasner that the concept of a painting is a surface upon which discrete, planar, and non-specific visual occurrences take place (Wilkin). It was her conviction, that representation was an approximation of reality. In the first half of the 1950s she produces large collage paintings with clear edges encompassing clean expanses of color that, as if, transpose the natural world with energetic,

constructive imagery. Her paintings of the mid and late 50s aspire to contrast between literal flatness and the allusion of it (Wilkin).

The painter brings hot contrasting color into her works in the 60s to evolve into a sense of dynamism through the use of loosely bound shapes and striking color as exemplified with the hot pinks in her *Gaea* painting of 1966. Krasner also revisits her use of collage and tears her early works from the Hoffmann school to reassemble them afterwards into a compilation of planes that simultaneously suggest space and pattern. Krasner's swirling compositions relate to Helen Frankenthaler's allusive abstractions of the early 1950s. The female artist Frankenthaler is noted for her original method of applying paint to the canvas. She painted with spilling thinned down and watery colors onto the surface of her works.

This staining had a dual result: the colors, having lost their glossy coating, floated into and away from the surface creating a nebulous but controllable space; at the same time, the spectator's awareness of the natural texture of the canvas deprived him of an extended sense of illusion (Grossen, 9).

There is a seeming influence from the work of painter Jackson Pollock and his process of dripping paint on the canvas – from which Frankenthaler has departed onto her soak-stain technique. Pollock differed from Frankenthaler though, because he dealt with the pouring and spilling of viscous paint such as enamel and thick oils, creating a web of gestural workings existing in their own reality, complete within itself as a vibrant space.

The critic Clement Greenberg comments on the unconventional method that Pollock began in 1947:

His strongest 'all-over' paintings tend sometimes to be concentric in their patterning; often the concentricity is that of several interlocking or overlapping concentric patterns (as in the marvelous *Cathedral* of 1947). In other cases the patterning consists in a rhythm of loopings that may or may not be counterpointed by a 'system' of fainter straight lines. At the same time there is an oscillating movement between different planes in shallow depth and the literal surface plane...

Pollock was far less interested than Mondrian in making theoretical points. He made them in his art, but without particularly bothering about them. He took to working with liquid paint and a 'drip'-stick, and finally a basting syringe, simply – and yet not so simply – because he wanted to get away from the habits or mannerisms of fingers, wrist, elbow, and even shoulder that are brought into play by the use of a brush, knife, or any other implement that touches the picture surface (Greenberg, 160-161).

Robert Motherwell is another artist who similarly to Pollock was deriving his work from the spontaneous flow of imagery out of the unconscious as a means of expression (Ashton, 30). A printmaker, collagist, and painter, Motherwell was an Abstract Expressionist whose moral views and intellectual philosophy relate him to the postwar French existentialist philosophers.

It was the Existentialists who underscored the single, dominating conviction continually evident in their works, and in that of Motherwell, that modern man retains only the act of choosing as his moral and ethical statement. ...So far had society been transformed, departing from hitherto unquestioned ethical and religious convictions, that choice had been relegated to the individual alone (introduction pages by Buck).

Jack D. Flam describes Motherwell's work as calligraphy that transforms

into elaborate and complex shapes, morphed and angular compositions, and “...a range of feeling that moves from the lyrical to the violent to the austere serene” (Flam, 9). The artist’s imagery extends over a wide range but is also unified through the consistent gesture and color. His choice of color is compared to the invention of a personal musical scale. His use of color is symbolic due to his apprehension that color can be given external associations without imposing narrative. Motherwell supports the notion that the definition of a visual structure could be based purely on internal meaning. For him, the meaning of the image is closely connected to the gesture in its creating. He never worried about the meaning in the creation of an abstract image because a painting is only a relational structure, and thus he could synthesize Surrealism, Picasso, and Mondrian all together in his works (Flam, 19).

I am interested in the aspect of duality in Motherwell’s works. It is played in the line, color contrasts, and the gestural rhythm of shapes. Duality is also expressed in his way of collaging pieces from his surrounding into the painted canvas. The artist believes that the process of painting can be in such a manner initiated by an idea or impulse generated by the surrounding world.

Even before he had discovered what he wanted his art to look like, he seems to have had a firm idea of what he wanted it to do. He wanted to create an art that would deal with the universal rather than the specific, yet be charged with feeling; that would be true to its medium, be quintessentially what it was physically, yet also evoke powerful reverberations beyond its mere physical appearance (Flam, 19).

The abstractionist Robert Rauschenberg is another intriguing artist whose art seems to caringly juxtapose personal mementos with found objects and even published illustrations. He fills his surfaces with objects that explore a way that is an in-between situation of abstraction and representation. With his works, Rauschenberg challenges the viewer to look beyond one's immediate surroundings, implicating political and sociological aspects of diverse cultures that he traveled to in his works (Kotz).

Relation to Present Times

It is influential for me to see how young British artists explore issues of identity, desire, and epistemology. There is an apparent interest in how representation operates in culture of consumerism. There is awareness towards the issue of identity and its problematic nature. The artwork is struggling through its uncertain status. The young British artists are working to respond to the situation with different emphases aiming at the same provocations. And that is what is being transmitted from the artworks of Fiona Rae.

Fiona Rae has developed a 'hybrid abstraction' to present her enthusiasm for a variety of marks, dribbles, drips, and smudges within the potential of the painting medium. She transitions into a painting format of elongated horizontals that evoke potentially endless expanses. Her paintings become more and more

consistent compositionally over the years. An example here is *Untitled: white, orange and black*, of 1995, where painted circles are rolling across the surface as it interferes with its white areas of puddle shapes creating an illusionary atmosphere. She then evolves from the denser feel of early work of hers towards sparer and emptier compositions, which is a shift from the popular return of all-over, color-saturated abstraction in the late nineties.

The most recent work of Rae's updates the maxim by critic Clement Greenberg that it is a sign of anxiety when there is an extreme value contrast in the illusionary space of a painting – where Greenberg earlier criticizes the work of Kline for being retrograde and at the same time emphasizing the 'even glow' of Barnett Newman's work. Fiona Rae's "black" paintings present a parody of depth with the high contrasting black background and brightly colored brushings along with ominous geometric shapes (Siegel).

Just a few years ago, strange new kinds of primitivism and expressionism were irrationally embraced. Coinciding with technological accidents, hostage crisis in Iran, and more - cultism, extremism, and terrorism were on the rise while rationality was on the decline. There was a new nostalgia for a past that never was. The art movements that arose simultaneously in the eighties made it look like the future would be built on the taboos of the modernist past. The artists abandoned the modernist ideals of originality and progress in order to recycle the past – they were inspired to express a raw physicality in apparently not so respectable images, as if recycling visual trash. They stopped looking for ideas and went after

sensationalism. “Overblown metaphor, sensuous color, material pleasure and the romance of the making of art have replaced formal and narrative logic. Grandiose technique often accompanies crude and banal imagery” (Hunter, 219).

David Salle is a good example of the new reality that I am creating in my paintings. Underneath the layers, much goes on in my works than meets the eye. There are messages that hide behind the seemingly inconsequential imagery refusing to claim significance, often thus appearing formless, disoriented, or mute. His principle was to present imagery in a manner that subversively distances one in order to simulate and stimulate the power of emotions. The surface marks of impulse and spontaneity are an illusion of an eerie environment of visual language that spits out incomplete narrative clues. Seemingly selected from high and low art, the imagery consists of fragments that mirror cultural repression and provocation of doubt in stereotypes. The viewer will visually access established conventions acting against themselves in the hope of an exposure as to how our culture makes people desire things and how these desires will form as being actual needs to us.

Salle’s painting is like a contemporary image bank that includes representation and reality. It is a compilation of materials where one can see the influence of Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg, along with fifties patterned fabric that is collaged on the canvas, as well as the painterly, gestural marks of Abstract Expressionism.

His innovation was to use the formal repertoire of recent abstract painting, notably stained color fields and diptychs as a kind of container-image, an image of itself, within which his borrowed, “hot” figurative images were presented like butterflies chloroformed and pinned in space. He complicated things further by the technical means of overlaying sharp contour drawings on fuzzy tonal ones, thus piggybacking images and activating contradictory types of pictorial space simultaneously (Pradel, 142).

In an interview for *Art in America*, Salle reviews his own work as being pictorial associations that build on the past of art making and yet bring about a new sensation to the visual senses. Instead of describing or depicting an experience, the work is an experience itself. It becomes a metaphor as well as a specific physical reality - both of which are inseparable. The information held in the painting can be interpreted through instinct and shared culture that artist and viewer have in common. Salle says that: “When meaning in art is defined by external theoretical constructs, it becomes increasingly difficult for the viewer to have a personal response to anything” (Tuten, 78-83). David Salle has thus broken up the consistency of elements in his works to where they function as an eclectic collection of various layered influences, directly relating to the interest of the artist and yet at the same time these elements are of universal associations that others can relate to.

There is art that reflects the singular self, and there is art that reveals a non-singular, fragmented self. Obviously, I am an example of the latter. The word on the street is that reductivist art is better for you, and that a fragmented art is contaminating. Just for myself, I might prefer to be a

singular, reductivist artist, but I don't have it in me, so I approach it the other way around (Tuten, 78-83).

An artist decides what to do in a painting by transcending out of oneself to envision future that actually goes somewhere. Self and tradition, culture and cannons evoke a place that allows reception of imagery. Salle's resulting imagery show us that abstraction is trite and representation of figurative elements is futile. In his *Wild Locusts Ride*, 1985, one of the diptychs shows a sunbather with a Santa Claus floating on top and the other side depicting a poster image of militant marchers, Salle has portrayed the relaxed consumer with a superimposed representation of the buying frenzy next to the angry, striking workers, who are the emblem of dissatisfied producers, ironically summing up the cultural structure of society. He narrates the artificial world of crass commercial reproductions (pattern design) filtering through the individual aesthetic temperaments and combined with the nostalgia of the 80s for the 50s. His works disrupt the erotic illusion of a daydream reality, pushing into the domain of memory and desire.

David Salle's work claims to be personal but borrows imagery from others. He brings out issues of the fashion-conscious society that has been fed marketing strategies to the extent that it is excluding the art world from its circle of consciousness. He follows a strategy of sabotage and infiltration, using prevalent established conventions to deconstruct common aesthetic myths. His paintings seem to be representations of the impossibility of passion in a culture that has institutionalized self-expression.

Post-modern Painting and the Art World

Interviewed in Artforum, to the question why he reproduces found imagery, David Salle says:

I think that the deadening in art comes from making literal-minded connections between things; ...Literal mindedness doesn't get you anywhere interesting. I want to make bigger leaps. Painting, whatever the imagistic source, is about specificity. My pictures are the specific orchestration of all those other things... It's that alchemy of imagistic syntax - two things in the right sequence make a third thing, or rather, allow the mind to make a new thing (Rosenblum, David Salle talks to Rosenblum, 74-5, 264-5).

Specific things provoke an artist into action and for Salle it is apparent that form needs to be liberated from being locked up within an image. Salle's reasons for the use of his imagery is seen, or justified, as formulating symbols that use language not as reflecting reality but connecting meanings in the world. The implication that is created through the use of symbolism is that reality is not divorced from language. Knowledge of reality is buried under, or embodied in, language, and it is thoroughly mediated by human existence, as the critic Roland Barthes says.

So it is only appropriate to mention David Salle's use of unnerving contrast in his works in relation to the still evident question about the credibility of knowledge and order if their actualization is mediated by interpretation. For

imagery, the artist is picking up fragments of 'a broken discourse' - using the pre-existing imagery from a world that he observes is already filled with too many of them and he doesn't wish to add new ones. His paintings create an eerie, made-up environment that is partly physical and partly mental, with incomplete fragments from the widest range of visual languages. Salle pushes towards what seems to be a lack of commitment of any single visual truth, but a deeper understanding of the language and clues given by him will lead to a pattern or organization of the incomplete and narrative clues. Salle himself says that he has the inability to see things singularly - one thing automatically calls up another, and then that rhyme calls up another to make a chord.

A good example is his *the Disappearance of the Booming Voice*, 1984, with the combination of material or fabric and the wooden construction above the painted sexual image, Salle has communicated the "shuffling" of fact and fiction by using a subtle symbolic language to speak within the confines of the visual:

What you do in life is to constantly find equivalents for feelings. We are constantly finding and using expressions, jokes, puns, images, innuendoes, insults, gestures, music, tone, timbre, touch, rhythm, inflection, frames within frames, halls of mirrors, sweet and rough things, etc. All of it. This is just what I apply to the work. It's not programmatic at all. ...the way to know what to do in a painting was the same as to know what to say to someone on the telephone. It's the thing that actors work with, "What does my character want?" (Tuten, 81).

The language of David Salle has derivative imagery that comes out of universal symbols - the interest (and therefore the question posed) for constructing

the segments is personal, unique, and intimate for the artist although the works themselves omit the process of application, separating and focusing on the process of creation, in order to become truth based on conditioned, premeditated thought but not limiting its expressiveness to the viewer at the same time.

The artist Julian Schnabel has works that engage conventional forms of authoritative ideology like religion, art history, medicine, etc, and their effect on the viewer actually denies the definite and certain interpretative meaning. As in Salle's works, there is the veiled communication attempt that can be easily overseen as desperate but never clear, thus forcing the viewer to "confront the process of meaning-making itself".

Subject and object have dissolved in the space depicted by artists. We can visually represent the world, but we don't position ourselves within it. The present discontinuity between things creates a new placement for humanity in this hyperspace where object and subject have a new meaning that is different. A detachment from the old ways towards a new ideological orientation is occurring. It is not new because the language is still a language. Visual communication has not ceased to function so that there would be a need for a new language. It is the visual rhythm that has changed (Jameson, 53-65).

An artist who exemplifies the shift from what has been established and familiar to present issues in contemporary culture is Shahzia Sikander. Her artworks display a juxtaposition of deeply rooted cultural traditions and notion of critical questioning of the self in contemporary society. She incorporates symbols,

textures, and decorative painting to manipulate an indeterminable accumulation of fragmented imagery. The work becomes a visual language that serves a connection between the fractal segments, setting up the portrayal of the fragmented self and psychological journeys of the artist (Self). “Traveling between national, cultural, social, and personal boundaries, Sikander and artists like her who have left their country of origin to live in another – she came from Pakistan to America – articulate the shifting identities they negotiate” (Self).

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF EXHIBITED WORKS

There is a certain synthesis about the combination of painterly and gestural brushstrokes combined with flat, line images, which are intermingled with yet the many layers of poured color – itself devoid of an artist’s gesture.

An entirety fails to be captured; stability slips like a thorn-up pattern to give way to anxiety that seeps in and out of each layer of the image. A relation to past and present is drawn visually through the use of symbols. These are thus symbolic images that have the devaluation of established norms and a reorganizing cultural identity imposed upon them. There is the affirmation of an idiosyncratic symbolism afloat the illusion of a perceived expression on the flat surface.

My intent for the function of layering in an image is to connote that a layer will hide or correspondingly reveal what is there. The entirety of the image is never available prompting that there is more to understand than the instant glance of perception would avail. This concern with the layering and perceived depth in the paintings, the build up of the texture on the surface is in association with the baggage of issues and concerns that torment me as an artist. That inner torment sometimes surfaces as anger, as is depicted in *Anger* (not shown).

Anger is a very powerful feeling that a lot of the time causes people to be unaware of what they are doing, and thus the term “black out”. It is an extreme

emotion that is spontaneous and suggesting a motion; in this case it is exhibited in a diagonal composition moving towards the top left corner of the canvas. The painting is non-objective with an attempt to convey the unrestricted flow out of the subconscious, yet concretizing it with a definite feeling. The approach that is influenced by Abstract Expressionism pays tribute to the freedom of not objectifying anger with anything but its own vibration. Black color is pushed along the surface as that energetic vibration, using it not as color but as a grid work of lines that constitute a certain engaging force when they go in and out of each other's space.



Displaced (My shoes don't fit)

36" x 40"

Acrylic, silkscreen, and pastel on canvas

Space in the visual plane has been distorted in *Displaced (My Shoes Don't Fit)*. Based on a dream where I experienced the discomfort of my shoes being too small, the feet have been placed at the very outer edge of the canvas, thus destroying the sensual comfort of a balance in the painting. The merging of drawing, gesture, and pouring of paint in this work as well as the others, is intended to invoke mixed feelings of a complicated self and a dreamy displacement. As much as *Displaced* questions the sense of awareness while one is in discomfort, *A Sense of Place* actually accentuates the stability and assuredness while being unaware.

A sense of place is being depicted within the self; that is as a distant hill over an unreal landscape. The hand 'stirs' the illusion. The symbol of the hand can be defined as: "Power (temporal and spiritual), action, strength, domination, protection – a general symbolism that reflects the hand's executive role in human life and the belief that it can transmit spiritual as well as physical energy" (Tressider, 98).



A Sense of Place

36" x 40"

Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas



What About the Wings?

40"x 48"

Mixed media on canvas

There is interplay of abstraction with the symbolic in *What about the Wings?* as well. The ground is gone as would the notion of stability and the space that is portrayed is of an elusive depth and flatness at the same time. The personification of the self (the dog in the painting) is sent falling down into endlessness. The promised wings have not been granted and the ladder is not reachable. Here the use of the ladder image is to signify the progress or spiritual advancement that is yet unattainable. The wings are derived from the Christian religious iconography where they had to be spiritually earned and a parallel meaning for the present is that they represent intelligence and aspiration.

The wings are also symbolically used in *Archangel* where they are part of the depiction of the self as archangel Michael, signifying good judgment. The archangel is prevailing over the depicted head at the bottom of the image, which is of dual significance. It can be either the ruling manifestation of a person's thought or, as derived from iconography, it is depicted as the power to influence events.

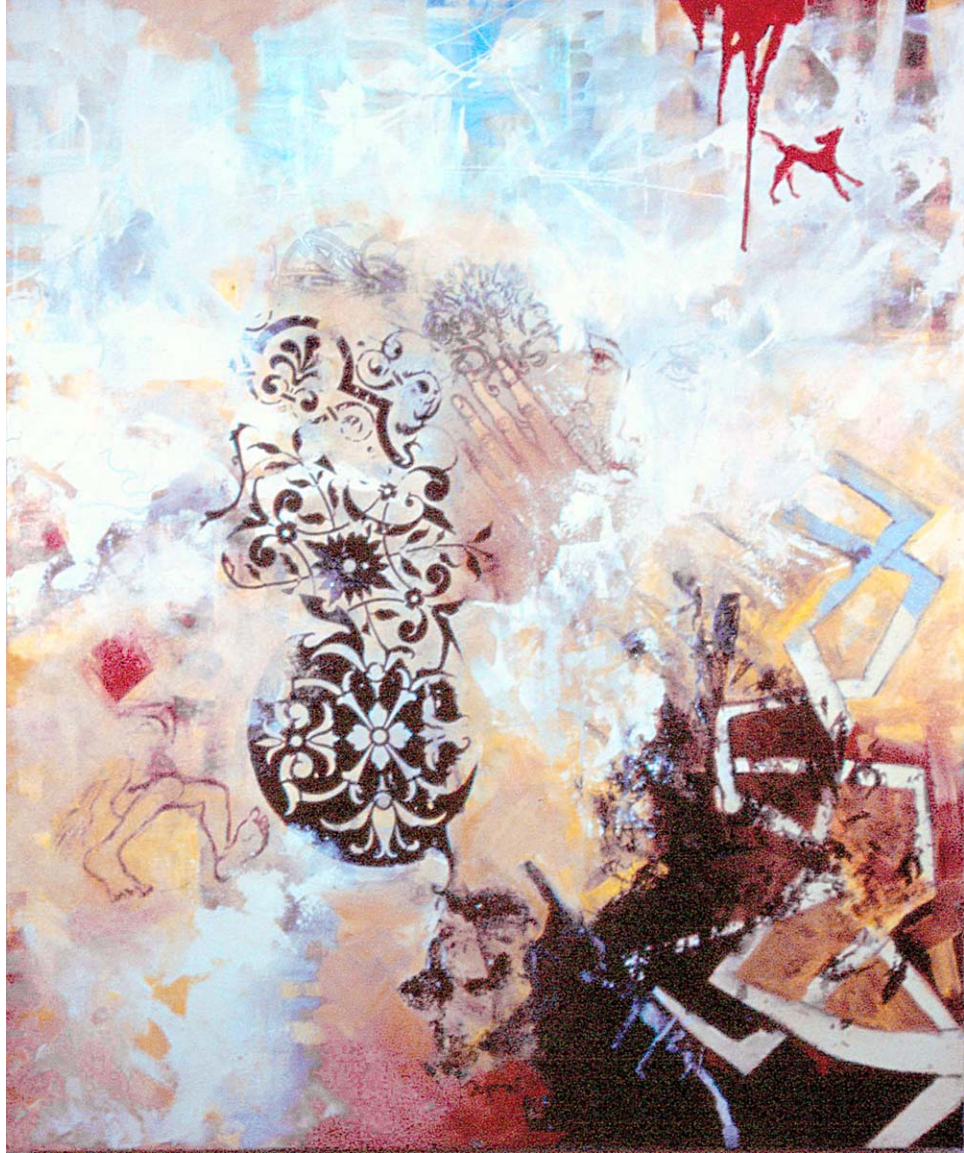
Whispers is based on events that caused an apprehension of destructive anxiety. It is the girl who whispers beautiful words, which turn to garbage and cause the death of 'me'. But in retrospect the story is unreal and the little dog runs away scared from its own tail.



Archangel

36" x 40"

Mixed media on canvas



Whispers

40''x 48''

Mixed media on canvas

I have used the symbol of the dog as a sign of the self, being present throughout the paintings. In history the dog symbol has been associated as both a guide and a guardian. Dogs were considered to have carried the soul of the dead to the heavens in ancient myths and Persian practice. There is a Muslim belief about the dog as being useful only as guards but otherwise simply unclean and greedy.

In Christianity the dog also fits the symbolism of the Good Shepherd, and was an emblem of the clergy. Dogs are benign symbols in Celtic iconography, the companions of many goddesses associated with healing, and of hunters and warriors. They are guardian symbols in Japan (Tressider, 65).

I considered the apprehension of the viewer in *Confection* (not shown), where the head and ladder are used again to create a composition of displacement. The humor here is in my naming of the image, as the word confection has no significance in the English language, but a similar sound in Bulgarian means mass-production of a product.

The series of *Obsession* paintings deal with issues of the creation of a sense of place again, but they sort out the notion of self in its surroundings – whether it is the self in the world or the individual in an unfamiliar setting.



Obsession III (Emptiness)

38" x 46"

Acrylic, charcoal, and silkscreen on canvas



Obsession I

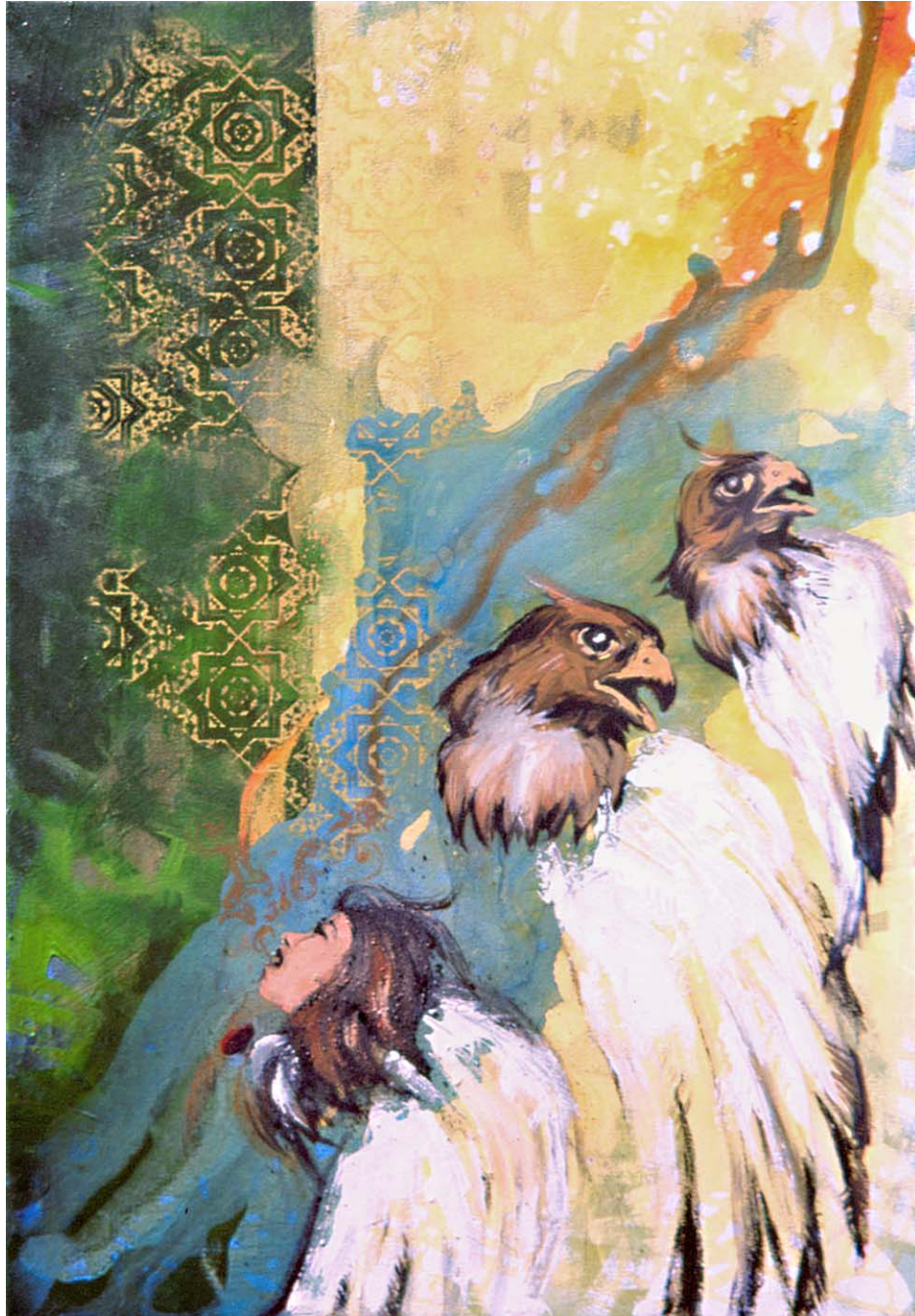
38" x 46"

Acrylic, collage, charcoal, and silkscreen on canvas

The paintings *Chrysalis*, *Amy* (not shown), and *Ten Years Later* are explorations of individual origins and symbolic depictions exposing a visual language that comes out of the instinctual, depicting emotions towards a specific provocation – the return to Iran ten years later, the complicated and somehow tormented Amy, and the life that a foreigner lives in a place.

Chrysalis is concerned with comparisons and the imitation. In the work, I have made direct use of collage to depict the eagle and myself, creating a transformation of one image into the other, exploring the question of difference between my status as a person...or alien.

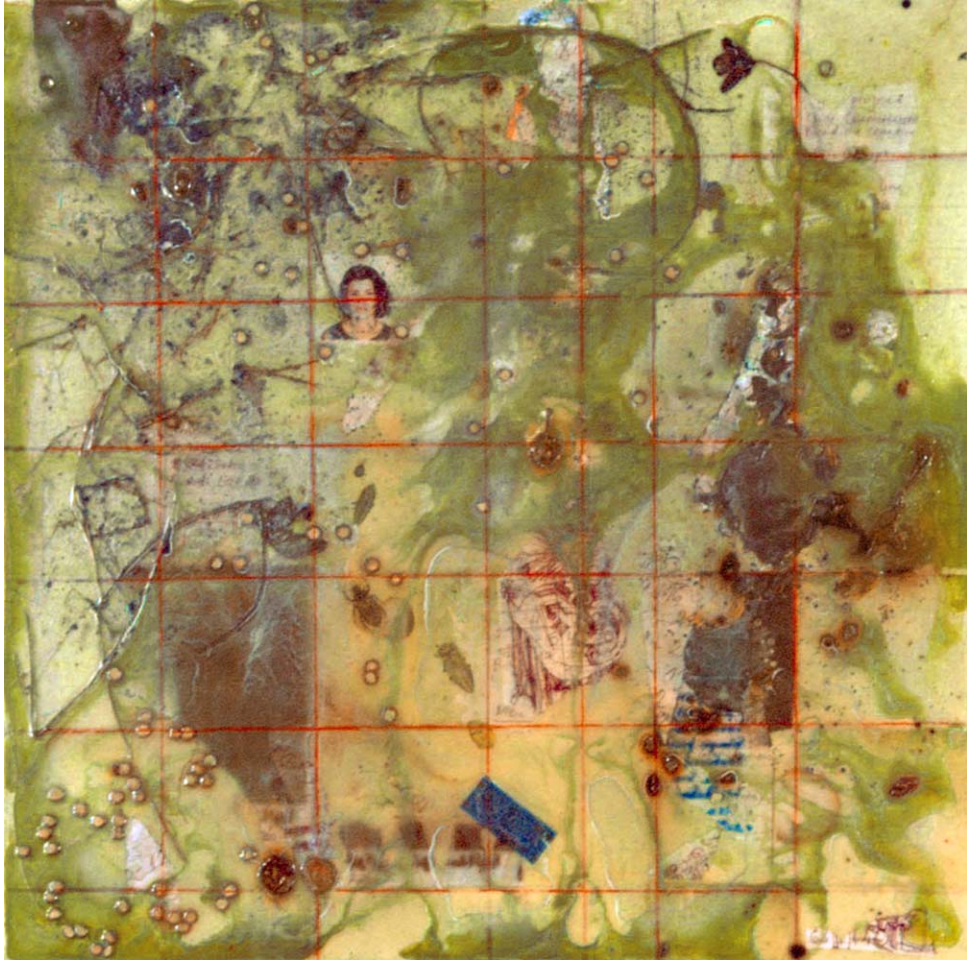
I chose to place elements of my daily activities from my visit to Tehran in *Ten Years Later* and then I drew a grid over the tactile feel of the layered surface. The grid represents the days that I marked off in the calendar when my visit would end. It was a very emotional trip for me, which I represented with flow of washes over bits and pieces of memories and times dear to me. I received a chance to go and compare developments from my life and those of others within a ten-year difference. It is, again, the revisited life I lived as a foreigner.



Chrysalis

24" x 36"

Mixed media on canvas



Ten years later

18" x 18"

Mixed media on canvas



Self-Portrait

18" x 18"

Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas

The self-portrait paintings are yet another exploration of the self and questioning perception upon the familiar. David Salle says that a painter is the intermediary between the culture and psyche (Rosenblum, David Salle talks to Rosenblum), in such a way these two paintings can be taken as a representation of the psyche and the resulting expression that is generated upon it by the surrounding world.



Self-Portrait (Tribute to Max Beckmann)

18" x 18"

Acrylic on canvas

Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the individual's feelings of inner anxiety as well as the desire to express oneself. Through experience and interaction, I am influenced by the surrounding world. An individual establishes a self in many ways, including gestures, which are part of expression. This expression can be in the visual plane – as works of art with the richness of their color and the exploration of ideas placing a work of art in reality. The artwork seeks to resolve issues or bring up ideas with its presence, as is my aim as an artist. Thus there is constant continuity between things in life, and I look for meaning in the apprehended sense of place created in response to natural instinct and intuition.

John Dewey terms continuity between things in the following:

In order to understand the meaning of artistic products, we have to forget them for a time, to turn aside from them and have recourse to the ordinary forces and conditions of experience that we do not usually regard as esthetic. It is quite possible to enjoy flowers in their colored form without knowing anything about plants theoretically. But if one sets out to understand the flowering of plants, he is committed to finding something about the interactions of soil, water, air and sunlight that condition the growth of plants (Hofstadter and Kuhns, 579).

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