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RECONSTRUCTING PARADIGMS OF EXPRESSION

by

CHRISTOPHER MURPHY

(Under the Direction of Patricia Walker)

ABSTRACT

The objective of my thesis research is to collect, assimilate, and reconstruct the paradigms of expression in order to formulate my own unique form of art. This thesis provides a detailed exploration of artwork done for my MFA Exhibition with emphasis on artistic intent, use of metaphor, and the conveyance of knowledge through painting. These components are discussed in comparison to the major movements of expressionism and signature artists of the 20th century such as Vassily Kandinsky, Robert Motherwell, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. The philosophers, R. G. Collingwood, Suzanne Langer, and Nelson Goodman are cited to support ideas discussed in this paper.

In addition, the aesthetic theories of Expressionism and Cognitivism are also discussed as an underlying correlation between the images in my thesis exhibition.

INDEX WORDS: Art Department MFA Thesis, Fine Art, Non-Objective Painting, Abstraction, Expressionism, Cognitivism, German Expressionism, Abstract Expressionist, Neo-Expressionism, Modernism, Postmodernism, Collage, Acrylic Paint, Abstract Painting, Mixed Media, Mark-Making, Text in Images

RECONSTRUCTING PARADIGMS OF EXPRESSION

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The structure of my thesis is divided into five chapters. After the introduction, Chapter 2 will demonstrate the understanding and “explanation” of my motivations and intent as an artist and the relationship of my work to the viewer. Chapter 3 focuses on the use of metaphor within my artwork and Chapter 4 discusses the ways in which my art steps beyond Expressionism and into Cognitive theory and the contemporary realm of art. This will be followed by a conclusion.

The aesthetic theories of Expressionism and Cognitivism are the main threads that connect me to my artwork and to the world around me. A contemporary variant of Expressionism, called Cognitivism, asserts that works of art add to knowledge as well as express feelings in unique and valuable ways.¹ These philosophies are supported by many artists, including myself, as well as by aestheticians and art critics because the theory embraces so many methods of creative expression. Contemporary author and aesthetician Gordon Graham said:

“artists are people inspired by emotional experiences, who use their skill with words, paint, music, marble, movement and so on to embody their emotions in a work of art, with a view to stimulating the same emotion in an audience.”²

Expressionism in art is generally thought of as having begun in the middle of the 19th century and is often associated with modern art.³ Many artists are affiliated with Expressionism, including the German Expressionists in the early 20th century, such as Vassily Kandinsky, the founder of the Abstract Expressionists movement, Robert Motherwell, and later the Neoexpressionist, Jean-Michel Basquiat. Each of these artists

had a major impact on the development of my work and this thesis will refer to them extensively.

Expressionism in aesthetics took a more cognitive turn in the 20th century with the writings of R.G. Collingwood, Suzanne Langer, Nelson Goodman, and Arthur Danto. The ideas of these theorists and aestheticians have helped me to clarify and direct the content of my artwork. This paper will discuss in detail my intent, as a purveyor of knowledge to construct a new vernacular through painting, one that pertains to our contemporary culture, while building on the foundation of previous forms of expression.

In the last century western culture made great strides in technology starting with the Industrial Revolution and continuing to the present digital age. While western society has progressed in so many ways, expressive artists and philosophers over the years have argued that this progress has also brought the threat of nuclear war, famine, environmental degradation, and dehumanization to the point of humans being perceived as mere machines. I look to the past to contemplate the present in order to mark my place within the human condition. My work remains firmly fixed in contemporary aesthetics and all that transpires in our society and the world at large, however banal, has the potential to become input for my own creative process.

My artwork's primary focus is the human condition. More specifically, it is humanity's shared experiences in the search for the meaning of existence. Through painting, a series of visual metaphors has developed in my work that represents conversations, questions, memories, and experiences. These appear in the random objects and the expressive marks found throughout my work. The strength of my images resides in their ability to resist immediate interpretation, which prevents the viewers from

making an instant assumption of the work's intent. This tactic encourages the viewer to explore the work on a deeper level and become actively engaged in the experience of the artwork.

In the chapters that follow there will be a deeper exploration of the aesthetic theories of Expressionism and Cognitivism and their connection to my artwork. The techniques discussed are supported by the work of three important artists of the 20th century, Kandinsky, Motherwell, and Basquiat. Their work influenced the development of the visual metaphors used to demonstrate my artwork's goal of reflecting our common experiences in the search for the meaning of existence.



Figure 1: Christopher Murphy, *Information Age*, 2007

CHAPTER 2

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AND INTENT

My thesis works connect to the theory of Expressionism through their intent to show my internal world of ideas, philosophies, and feelings. As an artist, it is essential for me to step beyond the transference of incoherent feeling and transform my artwork into a conduit of compassion and knowledge. My works do not simply express eruptions of raw emotion they also communicate complex viewpoints and experiences. Terry Barrett, Professor of Art Education and author of the book, *Why is that Art*, says of expressionism in art:

“It is not only sensations, feelings, moods and emotions that may be expressed, but also attitudes, evaluations, atmospheric qualities, expectations, disappointment, frustration, relief, tensions and relaxings.”⁴

These ideas suggest that works of art can contribute to knowledge, as well as feelings, in distinctly important ways. What follows, in this chapter, is an exploration of my artistic intent, a description of how my works connect to the theory of Expressionism, and the role the viewer plays in the interpretation of my imagery.

An integral part of my creative process and intent involves responding to what I describe as humanity’s obsession with codifying our universe. Collectively we are in awe of the expansive universe, as well as fearful of it. The inability to completely control our corner of the universe causes considerable paranoia. This paranoia manifests itself in all facets of human activity. While my work offers no specific explanations or solutions to this dilemma, there is comfort for me in creating art that offers some insight into these mysteries. Three of the paintings in my thesis exhibition, *Severed Union*, *Endless Journey*, and *Dark Matter*, serve as examples of works that deal with this theme.

Severed Union (Fig. 2) is a non-objective work in the tradition of early 20th century abstractionists like the German Expressionist, Vassily Kandinsky. The symbolic use of color and form as a means to represent emotions and ideas is significant in this work. *Severed Union*'s composition signifies a division between the natural and the artificial world. The separation of these two worlds reveals itself in the synthetic pink slash across the more organic forms behind it. While I have stated my intent with *Severed Union* it would not likely be obvious to the viewer. It certainly is not my goal to make the viewer passive by having them rely on my explanation of the work for a judgment or interpretation.



Figure 2: Christopher Murphy, *Severed Union*, 2005

These paintings referred to in this thesis acknowledge cosmological forces at work and attempt to reflect the aspects of the “sublime” through abstraction. There are elements in much of my work that question the meaning of all practical, scientific, and religious achievements. This is accomplished by depicting celestial or primal forms without any point of reference which allude to my idea of a universe without meaning, without a plan.

Barrett says that Expressionist theory “draws upon experiences of artists who have strong feelings and different ways of looking at the world who attempt to express them by means of their chosen medium.”⁵ The German Expressionists, one of the first groups of the 20th century to be identified with the term “expressionism”, used a wide variety of styles and subject matter to express subjective emotions and their innermost feelings. Vassily Kandinsky (Fig. 3), among other members of the German Expressionist subgroup named the *Blaue Reiter*, called this “inner necessity.”⁶ This term was used to describe a devotion to inner beauty, fervor of spirit, and deep spiritual desire.⁷ Kandinsky created many of his more abstract compositions on religious subject matter in order to provide him with forms and colors that he believed were already imbued with spiritual energy. Kandinsky said: “The harmony of color and form must be based solely upon the principle of the proper contact with the human soul.”⁸ His process of simplifying the meaning within these themes was reduced to its essence and as a result became more powerful than when conveyed in a more objective manner.⁹



Figure 3: Vassily Kandinsky, *Composition VI*, 1915

Art Critic Suzi Gablick states in her essay, *Has Modernism Failed?*, that at the highpoint of Modernism (1910 -1930) “art had cut itself loose from its social moorings and withdrew to save its creative essence.”¹⁰ Gablick explains that the rise of individualism and the idea of “art for art’s sake” was a reaction to the artists “spiritual discomfort in capitalist and totalitarian societies” which ultimately led to the “dehumanization” of art.¹¹ Kandinsky said, “the phrase ‘art for art’s sake’ is really the best ideal a materialist age can attain, for it is an unconscious protest against materialism, and the demand that everything should have a use and practical value.”¹² Gablick explains further:

“In opposition to materialist values, and because of the spiritual breakdown which followed the collapse of religion in modern society, the early modernists turned inward, away from the world to concentrate on the self and its inner life. If valid meaning could no longer be found in the social world they would seek it instead within themselves.”¹³

There is no denying the influence of the Modernists on my own work and the lure of their ideals. Yet, withdrawing from society in order to preserve creative essence is counter to my own need to be immersed in society in order to convey my thoughts and feelings about the human condition. Kandinsky predicted these kinds of long running issues in his work. Even the most idealistic artists understand that abstraction is rarely totally free of the world.¹⁴

There is a parallel between the early modernists and contemporary artists in the sense that there is spiritual unrest in today's society as it was back at the beginning of the 20th century. Questioning our perceptions of reality and the purpose we serve, if any, in our universe has become a common thread throughout my work. It stands to reason then that queries of a spiritual nature are posed in my work through the use of recognizable images and text that are reconstructed into new forms to be reevaluated and visually interpreted by the individual viewer.

The British historian, early 20th century philosopher of history and aesthetician, R. G. Collingwood, has theories that factor in this concept. For Collingwood, the artwork comes to life and takes on meaning in the imagination of the viewer. He agrees that art expresses emotion, but it is emotion processed by the artist via his imagination. In contrast to other versions of Expressionism, imagination plays an important role in Collingwood's theory. The completed work must be reconstructed in the mind of its viewer for it to function as a work of art. The viewer, in turn, collaborates with the artist in re-imagining the artist's emotive and imaginative expression. Therefore, according to Collingwood, art operates as collaboration between the artist and the viewer.¹⁵

My thesis work, *Endless Journey*, (Fig. 4) reflects a more personal approach to communicating the themes I just discussed. Included in this work is an amalgamation of layers of paint, printed imagery, letters, and scattered bits of refuse. These new additions allowed me to make references to life and the common experiences we share. Including familiar patterns, words or images the viewer is better able to decode the intent of the work instead of passively accepting the more formal aesthetics used in my earlier works. Ultimately, my goal is to take my painting outside the ivory tower of the modernist ideals in order to reconnect art and life. The artist, Robert Rauschenberg, also made art that alluded to this concept. He stated: “Painting relates to both art and life. Neither is made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)”¹⁶

Endless Journey was the first painting I executed that included elements from my everyday existence. Allowing viewers to identify with the painting on their own terms opens up all sorts of possibilities for how far these paintings can evolve based on the idea that there may be an infinite number of interpretations. Collingwood does not believe that the artist’s personal history should be taken into account when attempting to find the intent of a work of art.¹⁷ Collingwood writes:

“The artist’s business is to express emotions; and the only emotions he can express are those which he feels, namely his own ... If he attaches any importance to the judgment of his audience, it can only be because he thinks that the emotions he has tried to express are ... shared by his audience ... In other words he undertakes his artistic labor not as a personal effort on his own private behalf, but as a public labor on behalf of the community to which he belongs.”¹⁸



Figure 4: Christopher Murphy, *Endless Journey*, 2006

According to Collingwood, my art shares the ability to do more than express emotion; it can transform emotion into knowledge and potentially provide an understanding of our collective human experience through the process of making art and putting my feelings into physical form.¹⁹

One method of conveying knowledge is by using titles as a strategy to engage the viewer with the painting. The title of the thesis painting, *Dark Matter*, communicates on several levels in conjunction with the work. It refers to both the actual physical properties of the painting as well as the content. *Dark Matter* (Fig. 5) can refer to the enigmatic substance that makes up our universe or an event of a serious and malevolent nature. In this case, the intent of such a title is less to communicate a specific message or line of thought, than it is to ask a question, the purpose of which is to get the viewer to

ponder the image even though it may seem impossible to penetrate. In some ways the act of asking a question that causes one to deliberate recalls stories from Eastern philosophies. Zen Buddhist Masters are said to ask questions, called Koans, of their students that are seemingly impossible to answer; for example, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”²⁰



Figure 5: Christopher Murphy, *Dark Matter*, 2007

The artistic intentions described in this chapter provide a framework to understand the techniques I have employed to project the intangible qualities of emotions and thoughts. My desire to communicate more than just raw emotion coincides with the Expressionist theory of R.C. Collingwood. Art can transform mere passion into total awareness and, according to Collingwood, expression and imagination are the key to

conveying the depth of awareness necessary for my artwork to function as intended.²¹

My paintings demand that the audience be engaged and interpret; the viewer of my artwork must actively participate. Viewing expressionist works of art is a mental process where both artist and viewer can achieve a better understanding of themselves through the experience of art.

CHAPTER 3

METAPHORS FOR MEANING

My paintings use a number of techniques that help to convey meaning through the use of metaphors. My art communicates thoughts and feelings through an intricate language of rich and complex symbols. These symbols have familiar origins but their meaning must be reevaluated once placed in the context of art. Through these kinds of inverted metaphors I express my experience of the world. This chapter will build an analysis of the use of metaphor in art; demonstrate the ways metaphors operate within my work, and the meaning that has evolved out of the process of creating these thesis works.

The use of metaphor in art figures prominently in Expressionistic theories. In fact, expression in art is, in itself, a form of metaphorical exemplification. All expressionistic works demonstrate some form of emotion or idea; i.e. using visual art to describe our need to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. This concept is infinitely more interesting when described via metaphor than through more logically expressed statements. The 20th century American philosopher and aesthetician, Nelson Goodman, describes metaphors in art as:

“apt, effective, illuminating, subtle, intriguing, to the extent that the artist or writer grasps fresh and significant relationships and devises means for making them manifest.”²²

For Goodman, works of art belong to symbol systems, and each of the arts uses different systems. Any one symbol can make many references simultaneously and everything counts toward meaningful expression in a work of art. Emotions evoked by works become sources for a better understanding of our world.²³

When I am immersed in my everyday activities away from the studio my mind fixates on any number of mundane things. Once at my studio, those kind of idle thoughts are suppressed and my mind focuses on the painting process. Or so I thought. Despite my attempt to repress my subconscious thoughts from seeping into the work, my daily experiences, feelings, and random thoughts wash throughout the work and float about like flotsam and jetsam. It became very apparent to me that allowing my internal awareness to become part of the work was extremely important for the paintings to convey meaning. This revelation led me to the work of the Abstract Expressionist painters and their use of free association and psychoanalysis as methods to express genuine human emotion in abstract form.



Figure 6: Christopher Murphy, *Absolution*, 2007

Absolution and *Faithful Ruin*, like many of my other thesis paintings can be seen as a formal opposition between the intensely felt emotional elements (expressed through my use of contrast, loose calligraphic marks, and swatches of bold color – both painted and collaged) and the diagrammatic arrangement of vertical and horizontal shapes that define both shallow and deep space. The opposition created between formal and emotional elements plays an integral role in the themes of my artwork.

This kind of duality relates to Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory. The Austrian medical doctor, Sigmund Freud, generally states that artists express what is buried within their subconscious mind and that works of art provide us with knowledge of artists as making subjects and of viewers as viewing subjects.²⁴ In viewing a work of art one could search for what Freud called “striking omissions”.²⁵ Freud describes these as “disturbing repetitions, palpable contradictions, signs of things the communication of which was never intended.”²⁶ Freud’s Psychoanalysis is of particular interest to me because I have need to tap into my inner-self and allow repressed unconscious desires to be revealed through my work.

The philosophical chronicler of Abstract Expressionism and accomplished artist, Robert Motherwell, wrote in 1949: “Every artist’s problem is to invent himself.”²⁷ For Motherwell, free association seemed to be a viable means of generating a form that would directly embody the Abstract Expressionists’ existential struggle for self-definition. This, in turn, provided the ideal tools for artists, like myself, who wanted to retain the vitality of each moment of discovery as it unfolded.²⁸

The human condition was a prevalent theme in Motherwell’s oeuvre: life and death, violence, and revolution. Through the act of painting, Motherwell transformed

abandonment, desperation and helplessness into a poetic vision on a tragic and universal scale. His series of works titled (Fig. 7) *Elegy for the Spanish Republic* exemplify his austere monochromatic palette and the regimentation of his compositions against the spontaneous gestures and use of loose brushwork and drips. My interest in works like *Elegy for the Spanish Republic* lies in their complex layering of metaphorical meaning that is specific in its associations on several levels despite its abstract vocabulary.

Motherwell said the theme of all the Elegies: “is the insistence that a terrible death happened that should not be forgotten.”²⁹ These works were inspired by a poem by Spanish poet and dramatist, Garcia Lorca, whose execution at the hands of fascists during the Spanish Civil War became a symbol of injustice.³⁰ This became a symbol Motherwell found useful throughout his career.



Figure 7: Robert Motherwell, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* #34, 1950

The American philosopher of art, Suzanne Langer, describes in her book, *Feeling and Form*, that the artist is able to express things, through symbolism, without implying the existence of the objective of which the artist is referring.³¹ The Aesthetician, Thomas Alexander, explains her philosophy further:

“Art for Langer gives us an alternative form of meaning. Langer argues that artworks are somewhat freer than words constrained by definitions, and we see the artist’s use of elements – sounds, marks, gestures – and understand them directly and immediately. . .art uses nondiscursive language, that is, symbolism that cannot be directly or easily translated into literal, logical statements. Works of art, however, are ways to organize our world meaningfully liberating rationality from finite and practical concerns through metaphoric thinking.”³²



Figure 8: Christopher Murphy, *Faithful Ruin*, 2006

The thesis painting, *Faithful Ruin*, exemplifies Langer's point of view by symbolizing skepticism of faith in certain truths and how we sometimes tenaciously cling to ideas or concepts without reason, for fear of change. That idea remains a dutiful and faithful companion but outlives its usefulness, like an ancient fortress that can no longer function as a safe haven for its builders due to technology in warfare that has surpassed its design. Having faith in a concept that cannot serve the needs of the faithful is ludicrous; nonetheless it remains a fundamental part of human nature.

“Disassociation” is part of my work, but so is “association” and collective organization. In the *Collective Mindset Suite* layers of found papers and printed material are collaged in a random fashion. These are used to enhance the intrinsic values of the composition and designed to make a connection to the viewer that conveys an understanding of the connection between each of us. When isolated, each painting in the suite has a unique persona, but placed in context with one another they find a unity. Their relationship to one another conveys a complex relationship of uniquely different forms that find purpose in their existence through their relation to one another. As a suite, they form a more complex organization both aesthetically and conceptually. The *Collective Mindset Suite* exemplifies my approach to painting. It is non-objective, yet not in the strictest formal sense. My work is not concerned purely with form and content. Titles and built-in text often refer to objects or events in the actual world. These references are consciously used as a bridge connecting the work to the viewer more easily. They reflect how the mind learns to understand the unknown through linking it to known metaphors.



Figure 9: Christopher Murphy, *Collective Mindset Suite*, 2006

The use of metaphor and symbolism in art greatly extends our perception of the visual imagery and opens up a whole new range of intriguing and thought provoking possibilities to expression in art. The philosophies of Nelson Goodman help me to understand that expression is not restricted to feelings and Suzanne Langer redefines expression by stating that art is like a language with words that are not constrained by definitions. These theories define and liberate my work and allow me to openly explore and discover the self. I share an existential journey through the work of Robert Motherwell and the Abstract Expressionists. The study of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis can help one understand takes expressionism on a new level. Freud's work is associated with a more recent philosophy called Cognitivism, which is linked to Expressionism in many ways. In the following chapter there will be further discussion of Cognitive theory and the translation of knowledge into art.

CHAPTER 4

THREADS OF KNOWLEDGE

In recent years, Expressionism has been associated with Cognitive theories of art in the sense that works of art add to knowledge, as well as express feelings, in distinctive and valuable ways. Contemporary philosopher, Berys Gault, advocates the value of Cognitivism and what he calls “aesthetic cognitivism.” Aesthetic Cognitivism is the union of two ideas: first, we can learn from art and secondly, art’s aesthetic value comes from its ability to teach us.³³ These attributes are one of many values of art which will be discussed, in this chapter, in context with my own art and other contemporary artists.

The painting, *Daytime Drama*, transcends the modern ideal and sits comfortably within sensibilities of contemporary art by presenting itself in the same manner as a misrepresentation or a deconstructive tool designed to undermine the certainty of appearances. *Daytime Drama* shows a forceful energy emerging, unable to be contained. This dynamic characterizes what I identify as a contemporary approach in my work; the sense of disjunction, the duality of parts that may or may not be able to be unified into a whole. This duality reflects a discontinuity between old and new in contemporary terms. My work strives to transcend the supposed meaninglessness of the individual view by adopting the contribution of personal vision. The integrity of the painting is violated through the introduction of elements of my everyday world in order to reflect what I recognize as an inner collision of art and life.



Figure 10: Christopher Murphy, *Daytime Drama*, 2007

A third movement which has influenced my work is Neo-Expressionism, which is characterized by intense subjectivity of feeling and an aggressive raw use of materials. The similarities between my work and the Neo-Expressionist paintings are that both are typically large and rapidly executed. Sometimes found objects are embedded in the surfaces. Differences are found where my work tends to be more introspective with broad overarching themes and Neo-expressionist subjects are often violent with doom-laden figurative themes.

Neo-Expressionist painter, Jean-Michel Basquiat, is an artist whose ideas and techniques have influenced my own approaches to art. Franklin Sirmans writes,

"What identifies Jean-Michel Basquiat as a major artist is courage and full powers of self-transformation. That courage, meaning not being afraid to fail, transforms paralyzing self-conscious 'predicaments of culture' into confident 'ecstasies of cultures recombined.'"³⁴

Like me, Basquiat appropriated signs and symbols from a wide variety of cultural sources, from the traditional art of Africa to quotations from Leonardo da Vinci or *Gray's Anatomy*. He then placed these in an urban context by using the vernacular generally associated with the spray painted graffiti commonly seen in subways, alleys and overpasses of inner city. His association with Cognitivism is his expression of social awareness in a subconscious fashion. Basquiat imparted knowledge of what it was like to experience his own perspective on life. His work calls out for understanding and demands that we, as viewers, actively engage and experience the ideas, emotions, and mind-set of the artist.³⁵

Jean-Michel Basquiat stated simply "I start a picture and I finish it. I don't think about art while I work. I try to think about life"³⁶ His energetic and free brush strokes, express a kind of carelessness or anarchy and bear an overarching random quality that speaks, for me, to the contrast of "unity versus chaos" that I find myself continually confronting when I paint. Finding ways to illustrate the chaos of existence and still exercise control of the media and image sets up very dynamic and contrasting relationships in my imagery. My work, like Basquiat's, lends itself more aptly to Cognitivism than to Expression. Our work arouses emotions in viewers; it also expands their knowledge by giving them new and unique ways to look at the world and the human

condition. Basquiat and I both express an interest in connecting art and life and communicating our experiences within it.



Figure 11: Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Catharsis*, 1982

Basquiat's use of graffiti, ideograms, lists of names, and hand-drawn words to fill his paintings demonstrate not just the span of his knowledge but new ways of directing attention to fragmented parts of the canvas. Basquiat said: "I cross out words so you will see them more: the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them." Basquiat often used obliterated, cancelled, and erased marks are routinely to draw the viewer into his work.³⁷

Berys Gault argues that there are a variety of types of knowledge that art can give to its viewers. He lists these as; propositional knowledge, know-how or skills, knowledge of what it is like to experience something, conceptual knowledge, and

knowledge of values.³⁸ Gault states that we commonly use cognitive criteria in judging art: “we celebrate some works for their profundity, their insights into the human condition, for how they make us see the world anew; we criticize other works for their shallowness and their escapist pandering to people’s illusions.”³⁹

My thesis work, *Sorry I Missed You* is intended to stimulate the thoughts and feelings of the viewer by communicating knowledge through experience and the connections made through human correspondence. The colors both convey excitement and contentment through use of the harmonious relationships. The allusion is not ominous in appearance; rather, it depicts a reference to random correspondence with a friend or relative where both feel mutual respect. The emotion that ultimately remains in the image is curiously distant and seemingly unaffected. This lack of impact from the correspondence in the final image was surprising because in this painting the relationship between words and images is important. The title directly relates to the content of the work in order to include the viewer making them feel as if they were part of the conversation, albeit a conversation whose original intent had long been forgotten. The title, *Sorry I Missed You*, can purposely be interpreted in multiple ways. Working here, also, is the ambiguity that comes from starting the work without a specific intent, then finding the title as the work develops. *Sorry I Missed You* speaks to the imperceptible process of self discovery as inner emotions are depicted.



Figure 12: Christopher Murphy, *Sorry I Missed You*, 2006

When Expressionist theory and Cognitive theory are combined they provide a comfortable place for expressive contemporary art to rest. The theories discussed here can encompass many forms of art and hold artworks to be uniquely valuable. As we saw with Basquiat's work they open up experiences we would otherwise miss, they present ways of knowing the world to which other forms of expression do not allow access. My paintings have absorbed and learned from the experiences of the artists before me. At this point, I will move into the future with new knowledge that I intend to impart to the world through my unique form of artistic expression.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Painting for me is a process of discovery. The gestures, marks, and scribbles found throughout these MFA Exhibition works remind me that the practice of creating art transcends the materials. By revealing the process used to create these paintings it is my hope the viewer can follow the same path and share a similar experience. The theories of Expressionism and Cognitivism guide the principles through which my art is made. I propose that radical innovations of art embody the preverbal stages of new concepts that will eventually change civilization. In responding to a work of art viewers attempt to decipher the work. It is vital, for me, that they become engaged and actively participate in understanding my work. Yet, the interpretations viewers decipher will not necessarily be the single-minded intention of the one who creates the art. Even an artist's style is the result of both the artist and those who point out new concepts that the original artist could not have intended.

It is my intent to reveal elements that affect our society others may not distinguish or discern. What I paint can be viewed as a diminutive portion of space or a vast expanse beyond our comprehension. When art is viewed, it occupies a finite space between our physical world and the metaphysical one. Creating art allows me to explore these layers of existence through by using color and mark making to convey my perceptions of time and space. My wish is to avoid allegorical references to outside objects that only have meaning for a specific culture. Instead I want the viewer to speculate and traverse a new world that is free of cultural dictations and religious dogma.

The philosopher and art critic, Arthur Danto, claims that art is dead and that we are liberated by its demise.⁴⁰ I thrive in an era of pluralism and find the freedom to express what I need in order to exert my own individualism. In the 21st century we are striving to throw off the shackles of categorization, evading labels and expressing our individualism in an ever expanding market. I believe I reside in a place and in a time where we may have finally achieved the goals of radical artists like Kandinsky, Motherwell, or Basquiat. Validation from outside sources seems no longer necessary. The revolution is over and all we need to do now is celebrate what we have achieved.

ENDNOTES

¹ Barrett, Terry. (2008) *Aesthetics and Criticism of Contemporary Art*. Oxford University Press. New York. p.58.

² Gordon Graham, "Expressivism: Croce and Collingwood," in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 119.

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