

# Beyond the Bee

Art Historical Influences on  
My Graduate Work

By  
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Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Beyond the Bee*, 2008, Oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches.

My artwork is about questioning the perception of the reality of the physical human experience. In my paintings I explore narrative imagery in order to investigate the nature of human relationships: relationships with other people, relationships with our environment, and, most importantly, the relationship with ourselves. Through these relationships I attempt to grasp the meaning of my experiences. Every experience consists of an outer, physical reality and also an inner, emotional reality. I am curious about what we accept as reality and how we try to divide and separate the inner and outer reality in an attempt to understand our experiences. In my paintings I question these divisions. I am questioning whether one reality is capable of being “more real” than the other. These are not new questions nor are they new investigations. I grew up watching



Figure 1. Martin John Garhart, *Dancing in the Circle*, 1992, oil on panel, 54 x 67 inches. Private collection



Figure 2. Richard Evans *Omnibus Portrait: V.H.F.*, 1970's-1980's, oil on canvas, 10' x 6' 9 inches. Private collection.

my father grapple with the same inquiries in his artwork (figure 1). Likewise his mentor in college, Richard Evans (figure 2), as well as my mentor in college, Ricki Klages (figure 3) were both also inspired by this quest. A preliminary glance at art history reveals a rise and fall of movements based on this innate human desire to understand our existence within the context of a greater whole. Often this search leads to an exploration of perception and what is meant by “reality.” Many times a spiritual pursuit accompanies the work as well as ideas about the subconscious and dreams. Regardless of the ways in

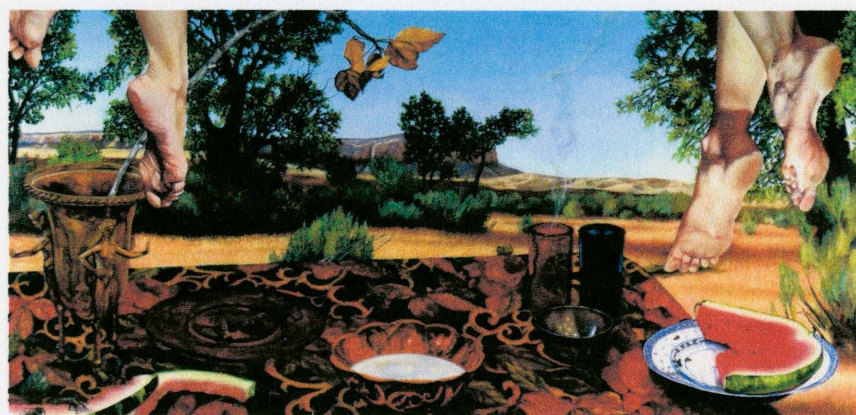


Figure 3. Ricki Klages, *Alchemical Picnic*, 2000, oil on panel, 24 x 48 inches. Private collection.

which the work manifests itself, artists since the beginning of time have been contemplating these same questions. For me, being an artist was not a choice but a

matter of deep-seeded primal instinct that surfaced as I traversed my course work in pursuit of my Master of Fine Arts degree.

The questions surrounding human existence have been raised, through artistic expression, since the dawn of mankind. From the beginning, the earliest people were forming the foundations of existential inquiries by organizing and separating their universe, asking how human is god, and recording their experience through visual representation. As humans we are blessed and cursed with the need to comprehend our lives not just on a physical level but on an abstract one as well. Evidence of this is available deep into prehistory. The Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux, France offer



Figure 4. *Head of Red Deer & Rectangle*. Cave painting, Magdalenian, c. 15,000 B.C.E., Lascaux, France

insights into the lives of the earliest humans. The wealth of preserved cave paintings housed at Lascaux offer profound information about many aspects of Paleolithic life. From these we have been able to deduce that even the earliest artists desired to visually

depict and organize in their search for comprehension. The most convincing evidence that early humankind was challenging the perception of the natural world is in the combination of both representational and abstract imagery.<sup>1</sup>

The image of a zoologically correct red deer and a rectangle (figure 4) demonstrates that the Paleolithic painter was aware of both realism and abstraction. The deer in the image is an accurate symbol of the outer, physical world, while the rectangle represents an inner world, or a reality based on conceptions of the human mind. The rectangle and the square are the oldest symbols of analytical and metaphysical thought.<sup>2</sup> Even the earliest artists were combining representation and abstraction in a narrative to understand their experience (figure 5).



Figure 5. *Abstract Pattern/Grid with Legs of Unidentified Animal*. Cave painting, Magdalenian, c. 15,000 B.C.E., Lascaux, France.

The image of the square has been a source of fascination and intrigue since it was invented. I, too, have fallen irrevocably in love with it. In my exploratory body of

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<sup>1</sup> Alvin Martin, *American Realism, Twentieth-Century Drawings and Watercolor*. New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art & Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1986. 17-19.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, *American Realism*, 18.

graduate study artwork, it is the one element that remains constant. It is also the one element whose termination is nowhere in sight. I have not exhausted its potential in the slightest. While other aspects of my work morph and evolve, the square is the foundation on which all my ideas are built. I have used other formats in the past, using all manner of rectangles and even a body of work done in circles. Yet, once I unearthed the stoic perfection of the square it has remained the basis for all my work. I cannot explain this. My only idea is that it springs from the collective unconscious as the acceptable place to begin a voyage from the physical world into the metaphysical. I am not alone at this starting point. Not only was the square used in early Medieval and Classical religious structures, early civilizations, also, began their mystical sojourns with a square. The oldest surviving temple structure to be based on the square is the *Stepped Pyramid of King Zoser* in Saqqara Egypt (figure 6). Only a few hundred years later, the Sumerians

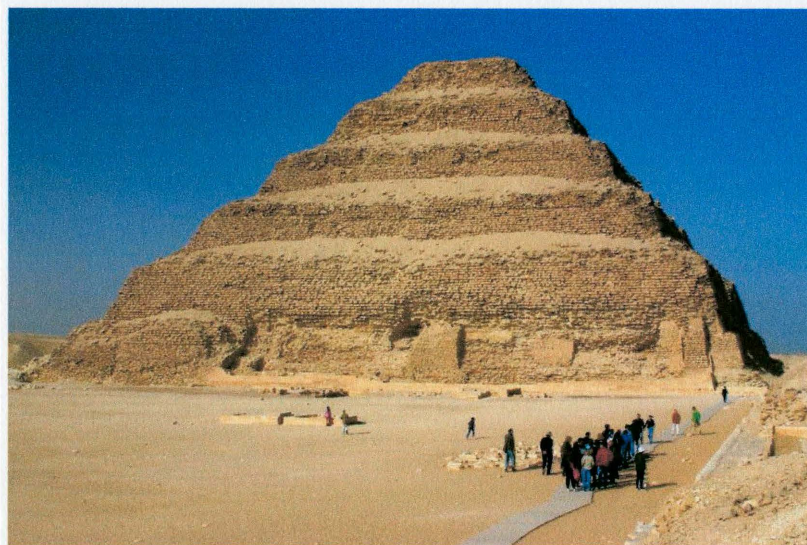


Figure 6. Imhotep, *Stepped Pyramid of King Zoser*. Dynasty III, C. 2675-2625 B.C.E, Saqqara, Egypt.

built a lasting temple structure, known as the ziggurat, also based on the square (figure 7).

Not only does the square-based temple exist in the Old World, but additionally, the

concept crossed the Bering Strait and resurfaced in Mesoamerica where the sacred structures resembled both the pyramid and the ziggurat (figure 8). The Pre-Columbian



Figure 7. Reconstruction drawing of Ziggurat at Ur, Sumerian, c. 2100 B.C.E., Ur, Sumeria.

ideologies that were unearthed along with the discovery of temples and artifacts from Mesoamerica have had a great deal of formal and conceptual influence on my graduate work.

During the first semester of my graduate program I elected to take Pre-Columbian art history with Dr. Catherine DiCesare. I was interested in learning more about my new husband and the art from his homeland of Mexico. My study and research of Pre-Columbian art from Mesoamerica led to a revelation in the way I understood the purpose of art. In many cultures and art movements, the *process* of creating art is the *end* and not

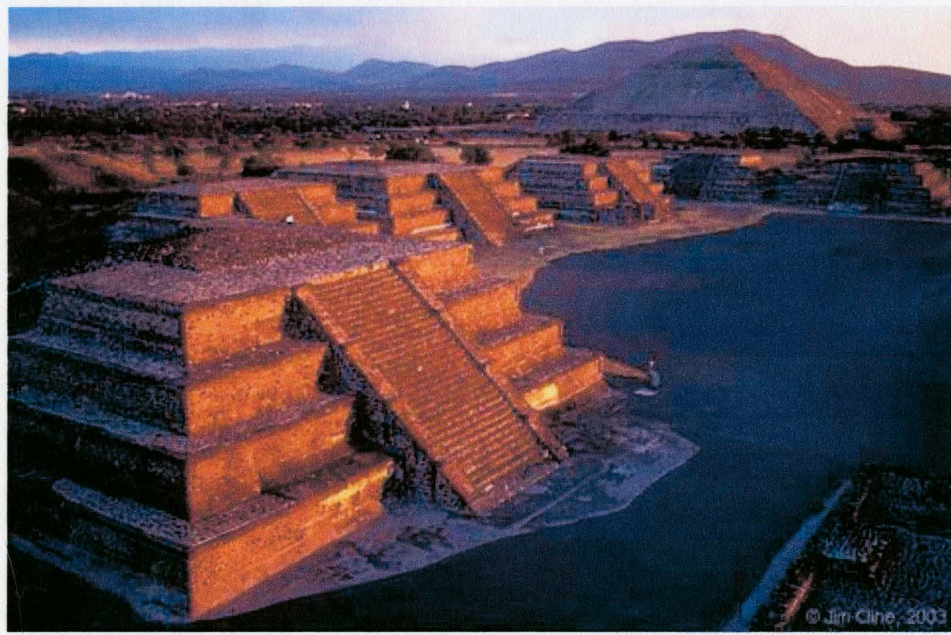


Figure 8. *Temple of the Sun & Avenue of the Dead*, c. 150-900 A.D., Teotihuacán, Mexico.

simply the means. The act of making a creative product was an offering and served to recognize and honor a greater power; a force that was outside of mere visual perception but well within mental cognition. This is extremely evident in the art and artifacts from Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

The earliest examples of works designed for a higher power come from Olmec craftsmanship at the site of La Venta near present day Vera Cruz, Mexico. In one instance a huge mosaic “mask” constructed of blocks of serpentine was systematically buried under cubic tons of colored clay and slabs of imported rock (figure 9).<sup>3</sup> In another example fifteen jade and serpentine figurines were carefully organized in a pit several feet deep (figure 10). The figures were all standing upright, on their feet, in a group. There are fourteen figures of precious stone facing one figure of plain granite. It was then systematically buried to preserve the structure.<sup>4</sup> In these examples, there is no

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica: From Olmec to Aztec*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 31.



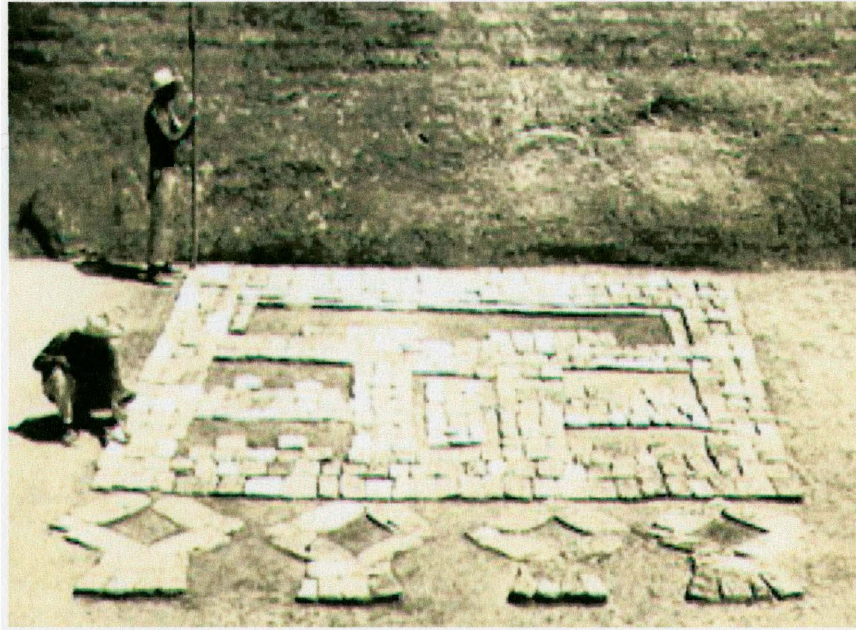


Figure 9. Olmec, mask of carved serpentine blocks, c. 600-300 B.C.E, La Venta, Vera Cruz, Mexico.

archaeological evidence of the works ever being disinterred after the initial burial. In these two pieces there is an obvious amount of time involved with creating very specific conceptual imagery and then it was purposefully hidden from any human view. The objects, as well as the work involved with their creation were completed for a non-human audience. The act of creating these offerings was immensely important, but beyond that



Figure 10. Olmec, *Offering 4*, c. 600- 300 B.C.E., La Venta, Vera Cruz, Mexico.

they were not meant for any kind of human experience, inner or outer. They were, instead, part of a spiritual experience that was then given over to a more important, other-worldly entity.

Along these lines, the greatest influences on my work are the monolithic stones carved by the Aztecs.<sup>5</sup> One of the most impressive of these monoliths is a work that represents the goddess *Coatlicue*. What is so remarkable about this statue, aside from the

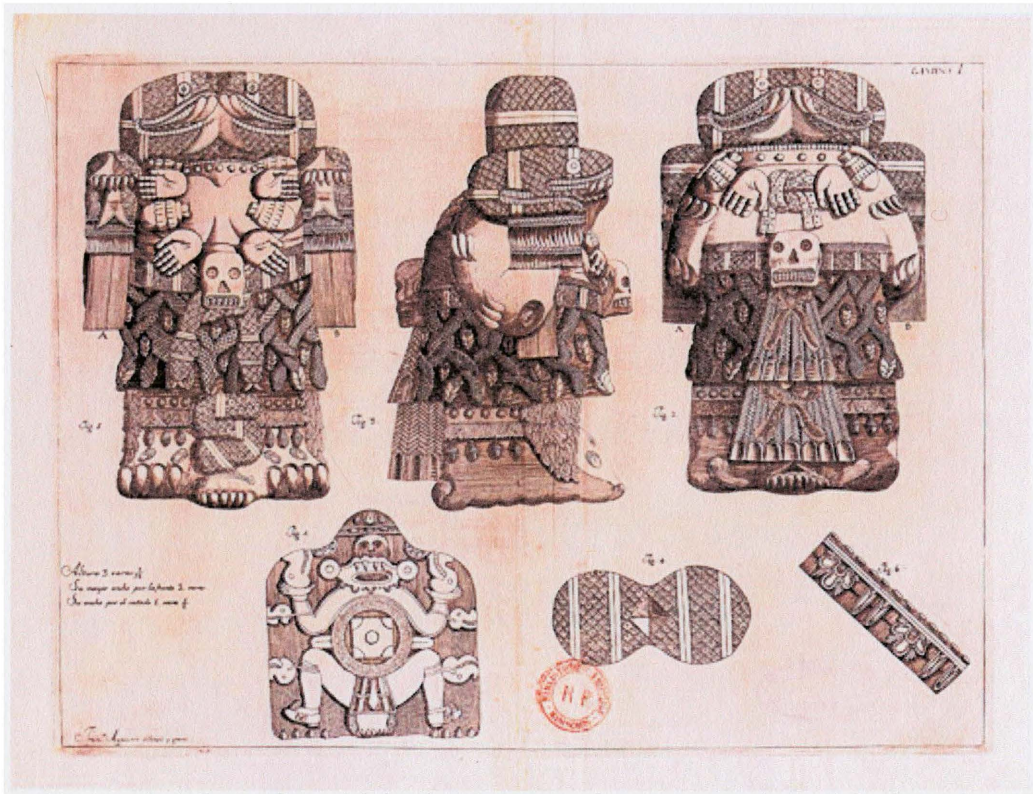


Figure 11. Antonio de Leon y Gama, ink drawing, *Descripcion historica y cronologica de las dos piedras*, 1792.

symbolic and downright fearsome imagery, is that even the base on which she stands, the bottom of the statue, is carved as intricately as the remaining, visible portions (figure 11).

The carving of integral information on the bottom of mega-ton stones led the first archaeologists to assume these statues were meant to be suspended. Instead, the message

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<sup>5</sup> The term *Aztec* was coined by archaeologists to refer to the many different tribes living in the high plains of central Mexico from 1250-1519. It roughly translates to “people of Aztlan”.

was intended for a superior audience: the earth, the underworld, and a force vastly more important than human life to early Mesoamericans. Researching the way these prehistoric people interacted with their art and their world, I finally understood why it was impossible for me explain my *need* to paint. I discovered that regardless of how personal my paintings seemed to be, they were really not about me at all. My paintings are about the act of painting, they are about meditating, about thinking, about finding the place where body, mind, and spirit are inextricably linked. Arriving at this conclusion via the aforementioned examples inspired me to make art on an entirely different level.

It wasn't until after my first semester in graduate school that I was finally aware of a direction I wanted to go with my work. For one thing, I wanted to learn how to paint. Learning to paint meant solving compositional and framing problems through the application of paint and not resorting to mixed media or found objects (figure 12). I was finally free to abandon the obsession with mixed media that had landed me in graduate

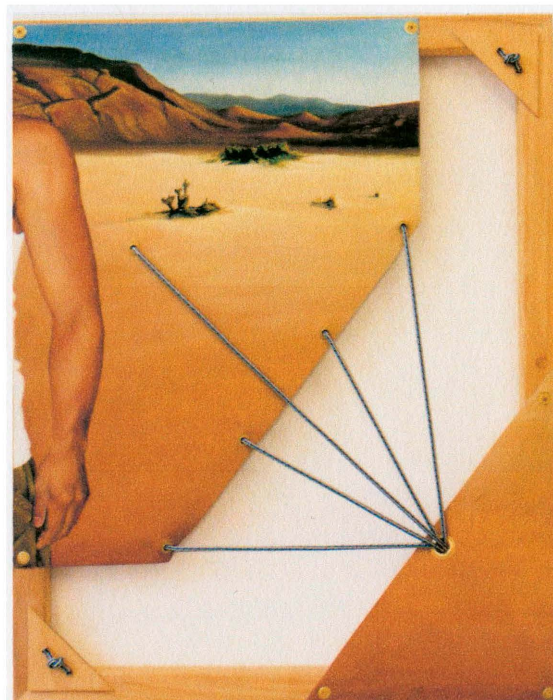


Figure 12. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Departure*, mixed media, 24 x 30 inches, 2006.

school. Up until that point I had been committed to the frame of a painted image and had used textiles and found objects to surround my painted canvas (figures 12 & 13). Despite not using a textile or found object framing device, I continued to be concerned about the frame and its function.



Figure 13. Cassidy Hale Garhart, *Ritual*, mixed media, 22 inches diameter, 2001.

The frame has always been integral in my work. My frames contribute additional information and symbolism and are a part of the overall narrative. Two-dimensional images need frames, the same way people need clothes. A frame encompassing an image is a threshold between the viewer's physical experience of the piece and their inner reaction to the narrative within the frame. This time, however, I wanted to *paint* the frames. I sketched, planned and built a series of square panels that began at 3 feet and steadily diminished in half-foot intervals (figure 14). All four sides of these panels were four inches deep and therefore large enough to paint on. This three -dimensional square

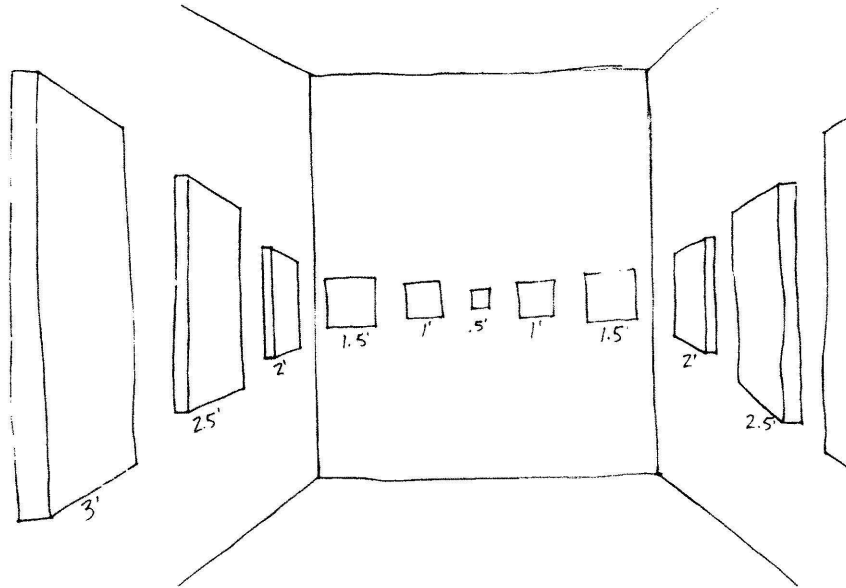


Figure 14. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, conceptual sketch for “pyramid” panels, 9x 12 inches, 2006.

was to be the base on which I began my practice of painting. The resulting body of work will include eleven (only nine are complete) pieces that are painted on five sides. Each

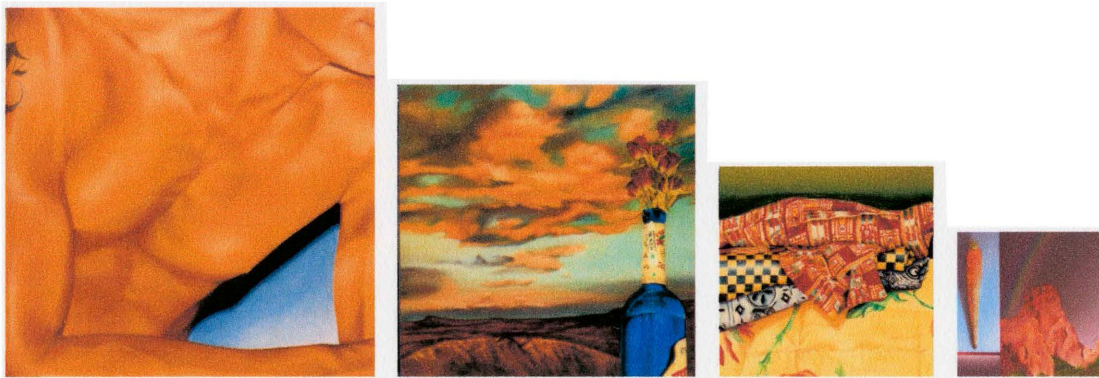


Figure 15. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, early stages of “pyramid painting” consisting of, from left to right, *His Strength, Her Weakness*, 30 x 30 x 4, 2006, *Closing Night*, 24 x 24 x 4, 2006, *We Are What We Pretend to Be*, 18 x 18 x 4, 2006, and *Nourishment*, 12 x 12 x 4, 2007.

painting consists of a “big picture” on the foremost surface and is supported by four-inch wide images that serve as a type of frame. The top painting cannot be seen by the average viewer and the bottom painting is only visible by bending over and looking for it. Even the side paintings are not available for immediate viewing (figure 16).

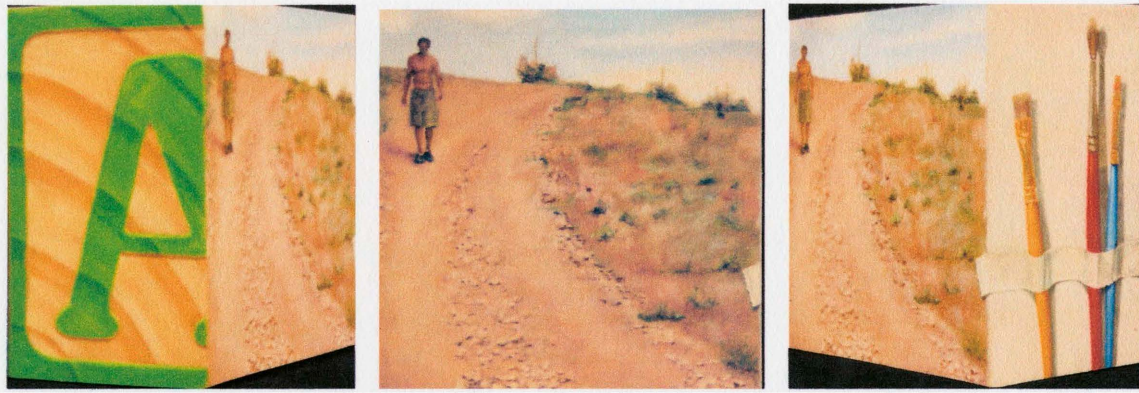


Figure 16. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *A Place to Start* (three views), oil on canvas, 6 x 6 x 4 inches, 2006.

Conceptually, I felt that there was a large topic that would manifest itself in a different form from day to day. There was a “big picture,” so to speak, that would be milling around in my thoughts that shifted on a daily basis. One day I might be thinking about a relationship with a loved one or a friend as in *His Strength, Her Weakness* in figure 15. On another day I might be thinking about a test I needed to take or a critique for school. A different day I might be thinking about a vacation I was going to take or an adventure that I had had as in *Closing Night* in figure 15. Occasionally the dominating thoughts were not adventures, but necessary chores, like doing laundry and getting groceries, as in *Nourishment* in figure 15. All of these prevailing thoughts were supported, or framed by, the other necessary thoughts throughout the day. The less obvious, though equally important thoughts occupied the smaller, framing panels. Together, the “big picture” and the framing pictures formed the narrative.

For example, *A Place to Start* (figure 16) is the smallest of the pieces built in this series and was meant to be the capstone to my pyramid. It addresses the desire to learn to paint. As I focused on learning to paint, I realized that the act of painting was a unique experience in and of itself that was equally as important as the finished piece. The pyramid became even more symbolic: the pinnacle of the pyramid, as a metaphor for the

finished painting was no longer the end. Instead, what had previously been the means, the *practice* of painting, or the ascent of the pyramid, had become the objective.

Throughout history the pyramid has served as an outer, physical experience that represents an inner, spiritual experience. It was my hope at the commencement of this project that the number of pieces would fill a space in which the audience would be able to view the works much like they would traverse an actual pyramid (see figure 15). Thus the largest of the images would be on either end and the size of the subsequent images would decrescendo to the smallest painting in the middle. I also hoped that the narrative imagery and it's arrangement within the paintings might also reflect a pyramid, with more mundane subject matter occupying the lower levels (larger paintings, such as *His Strength, Her Weakness*, figure 15) and gradually mounting to more ethereal and enlightened impressions (smaller paintings), such as the personal revelation depicted in *A Place to Start* (figure 16). My "pyramid" piece, in its conceptual entirety is not yet



Figure 17. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Closing Night*, 2006, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 x 4 inches.

complete, and may or may not ever be, but it has prompted me to pursue a kind of personal mythology within my work and to further explore the metaphysical meanings contained in the ziggurat and pyramid form.

My study of Pre-Columbian art also revealed cultural ideologies that were rooted in a strong tradition of symbols. This led me to recognize, appreciate, and cultivate the symbolism in my own work (figure 17). My paintings became a more complex narrative based on iconography and symbols (figure 18). The symbols used in Mesoamerican art served two purposes. They were either employed as a written language used for communication, or they were actual invocations of the spirits they portrayed. For example, the statue of *Coatlicue* was not considered an idol, instead, it was the *manifestation* of the spirit of the goddess. This kind of symbolism is different than the



Figure 18. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Bound* (three views), 2006, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 x 4 inches.

kind of symbolism advocated by the Symbolists at the turn of the twentieth-century. The Symbolists did, however, like the Mesoamericans, consider the act of creating the end and not the means. The phrase “art for arts sake” was born out of Symbolist work and thought.



The Symbolist artists emerged in reaction to Realism and were contemporary with Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psychoanalysis, at the onset of the twentieth century. Freud's research into the experiences of the unconscious and psychiatry led to his publication *Interpretation of Dreams* which is likely to have influenced the work of the Symbolists who were working around the same time. The Symbolists strongly believed there was more to just the facts of realism and sought to transform them into symbols of an inner experience.<sup>6</sup> The Symbolists did not use imagery just as they *saw* it, but instead tried to capture what was seen *through* it. The superficial appearance of things could be analyzed to encompass a much greater meaning. This notion led the Symbolists to view artists more as prophets, or mystics, whose act of painting, or creating, was the end, not the means.<sup>7</sup>

A unifying characteristic of the Symbolists was their broad range of painting styles. One of the early Symbolist painters was Gustave Moreau. In his paintings, Moreau was interested in expressing the immense magnitude of splendor and glory that the imagination embellishes on a daydream. His work relies on representational imagery that has been influenced by the rich color, sensuous shape and intricate line that only an ingenious painter could supply.<sup>8</sup> Moreau's imagery depicts enigmas of myth, dream, and fantasy in grandiose stage settings that, despite the visual energy of the formal elements, are completely frozen in a specific, unnatural moment (figure 19). On the other hand, Paul Gauguin was also a Symbolist painter and his imagery, being more impressionistic and fluid directly opposed the sharp edges and superfluous detail seen in Moreau's work.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard G. Tansey & Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages, Vol. 2*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996. 1003-1004.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1005.

Gauguin bridged the gap between Realism and Symbolism. He was the instigator of one group of Symbolists that referred to themselves as *Nabis*, the Hebrew word for *prophet*.<sup>9</sup> Gauguin's work was based largely on physical reality. He primarily adjusted color and composition to influence the symbolism (figure 20) while the later Symbolists preferred to depict an entirely inner reality.<sup>10</sup>

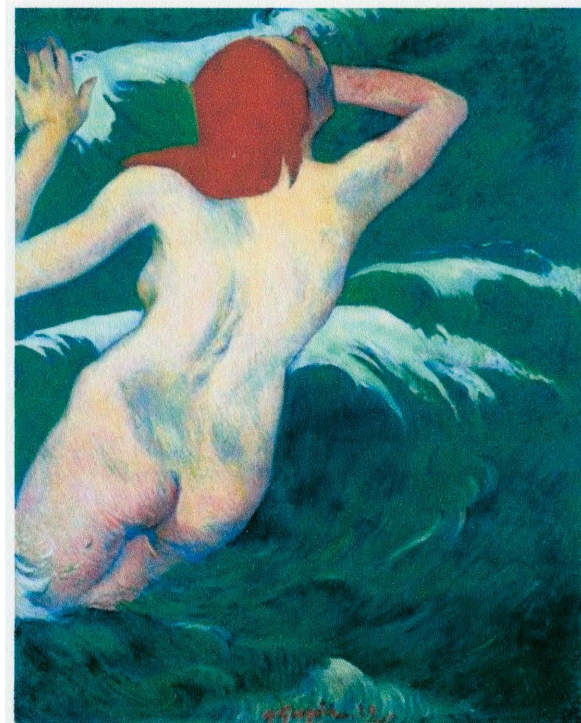
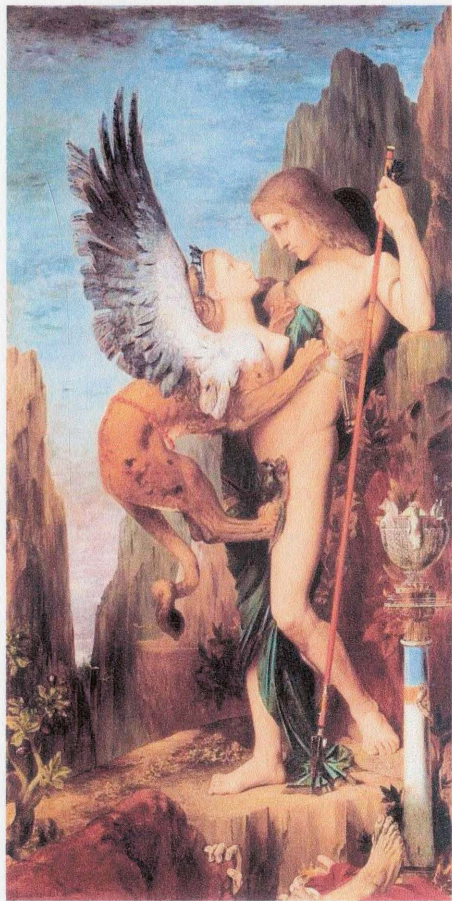


Figure 19. Gustave Moreau, *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, 1864, oil on canvas, 81 x 41 inches. MoMA, New York.

Figure 20. Paul Gauguin, *In the Waves*, 1889, oil on fabric, 37 x 28 1/2 inches. Cleveland Museum of Art.

One Symbolist artist who demonstrated the ability to bring his intense inner connection into focus was Odilon Redon (figure 21). Redon was renowned for the strong

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<sup>9</sup> Tansey & Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*, 1003-1004.

<sup>10</sup> Alastair Mackintosh, *Symbolism and Art Nouveau*. Woodbury: Barron's, 1978. 24.

private and personal vision exhibited in his work.<sup>11</sup> Redon's work is visually more reminiscent of Gauguin, in terms of the impressionistic use of color and the compositional use of space, however, his subject matter more closely reflects Moreau. Both Redon and Moreau breathed life and personality into fantastical characters and situations. But unlike Moreau, Redon's renderings are charged with emotions purged from a private, inner source like the sadness of Polyphemus in *The Cyclops* (figure 21).

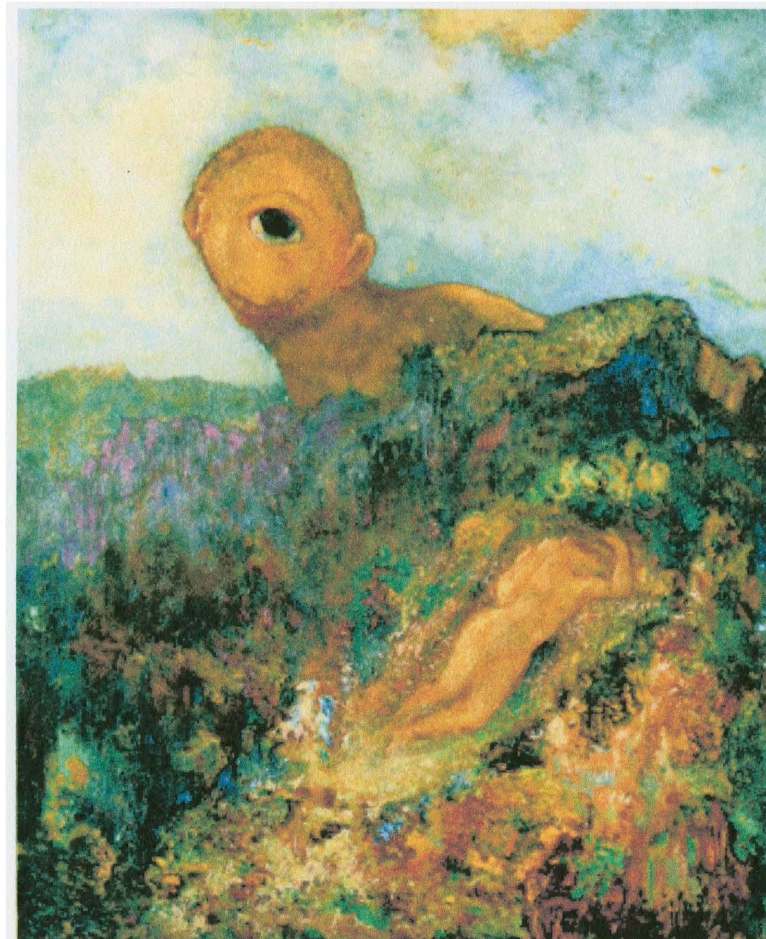


Figure 21. Odilon Redon, *The Cyclops*, 1914, oil on canvas, 64 x 51 cm, Museum Kroller-Mueller, Netherlands.

The eclectic nature of the works produced by the Symbolist painters allows me to find parallels between the movement and my own work. My aesthetic may be different from Moreau, Gauguin, and Redon, but the search is similar. I have, on occasion,

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<sup>11</sup> Mackintosh, *Symbolism and Art Nouveau*. 30.

included mythical creatures in my paintings such as with the jackalope in *July* (figure 22). And, I too sense a deep private and personal source that feeds into my paintings

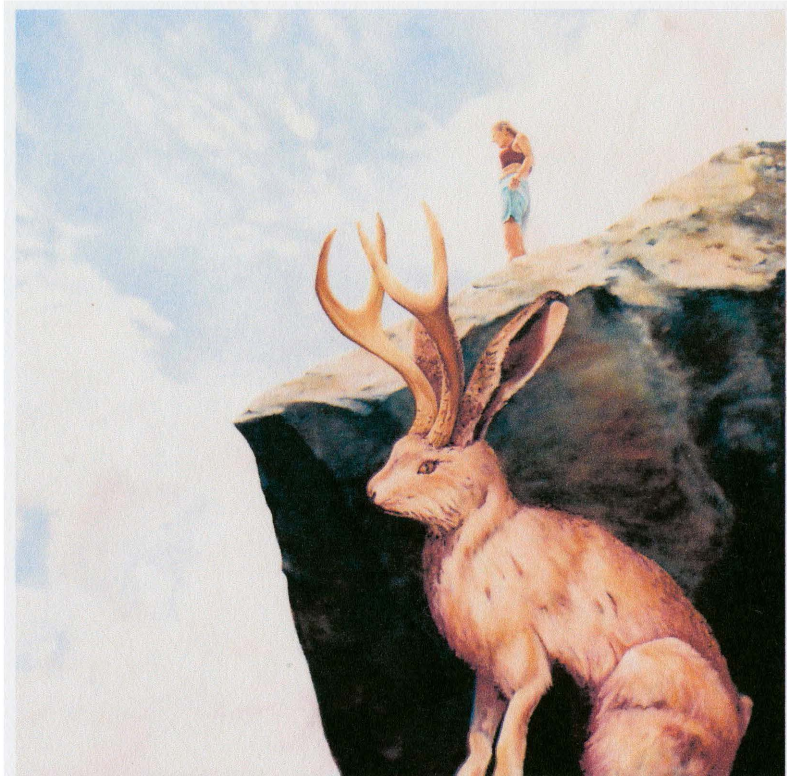


Figure 22. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *July*, 2007, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 x 4 inches.

as I attempt to imbue worldly symbols with inner truth. For instance, the idea in *We Are What We Pretend to Be* was born from my experience of playing and pretending as a child (figure 23). For children, it is easy to look beyond the boundaries of a thing's physical being and to instead find a significant inner importance. In this image I combined a realistic interpretation of a stack of fabric with a pair of cartoon birds and the contours of a hare emerging from the top pattern of cloth. This arbitrary collection of symbols directly addresses the notion of what constitutes reality and what does not. A child might look at a simple stack of cloth and see instead a wealth of different costumes, or material to create a number of other inventions. The pile of fabric functions as a symbol for this ability to fantasize. The cartoon birds on the right panel emphasize the

child- like imagination and the strange depiction of the hare adds to the ambivalence and shifting of reality.



Figure 23. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *We Are What We Pretend To Be* (two views), 2006, oil on canvas, 18 x 18 x 4 inches.

The concepts of the Symbolists resonate forcefully in this piece in particular, but are also present, perhaps less apparently, in all of my work. I share their desire to elucidate an inner world and use my work not just as the means, but an end. Often it is my work that speaks back to me and assists me in grasping the tenuous nature of reality and my liminal position within it. The symbols I use, like the Symbolists, are a bridge between outer and inner reality. The way the images are constructed and the random nature of the contrasting symbols makes my work not only relevant to the Symbolists but also share qualities with the Surrealists.

The Surrealists, like the Symbolists, sought to bring a hidden, inner reality into focus. The work of the Surrealists is characterized by bizarre visual juxtapositions

designed to bring the inner “reality” into alignment with outer reality in a manner reminiscent of the way they commingle in dreams or the subconscious.<sup>12</sup> My work, also, offers bizarre, visual juxtapositions through the superimposition of seemingly unrelated imagery. This unrelated imagery like the spectrum, carrot, landscape, and the number eight in my piece *Nourishment* (figure 24) becomes a metaphor comprised of symbols describing the indistinguishable barriers between outer and inner realities.

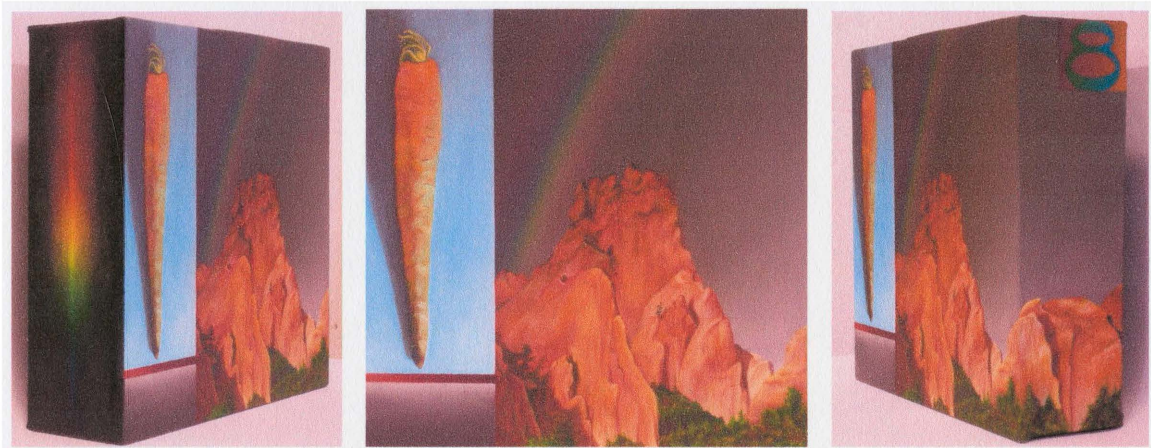


Figure 24. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Nourishment*, 2007, oil on canvas, 12 x 12 x 4 inches.

The Surrealists suggested that our understanding of reality is simply the outward projection of conceptions born in the mind. In his image *The False Mirror* (figure 25) Belgian painter, Rene Magritte, directly suggests that our understanding of reality is simply a perception of the human mind.<sup>13</sup> He even notes, “visible things always hide other visible things”.<sup>14</sup> Magritte’s dislocation of image and its content and then his calculated reconstruction and overlap of these visible things generates a new meaning within them and suggests the presence of other *invisible*, though equally real, things.

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<sup>12</sup> Tansey & Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*, 1073-1075.

<sup>13</sup> Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions*, 334.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 25. Rene Magritte, *The False Mirror*, 1928, oil on canvas, 21 x 32 inches. MoMa, New York.

Giorgio De Chirico, of Greco-Italian descent, is another Surrealist who used common imagery in uncommon combinations to portray a new meaning. De Chirico was highly aware of the connections between the reality of the mundane world and the inner world of the psyche. The relationship is evident in his eerie, otherworldly handling of architectural spaces, stark shadows, and objects from a strangely displaced reality that commingle within his paintings.<sup>15</sup> De Chirico is often associated with the *pittura metafisica* movement, or *Metaphysical Painting*, and in his piece *The Nostalgia of the Infinite* (figure 21) De Chirico makes metaphysical overtures through the use of his own version of a pyramid. De Chirico's *The Nostalgia of the Infinite*, coupled with his view of aesthetics and the metaphysical demonstrates the persevering power of the pyramid in humanity's desire to reconcile existential questions as they pertain to the perception of reality. De Chirico articulates the approach to his metaphysical aesthetic by saying,

In the construction of cities, in the architectural forms of houses, in squares and gardens and public walks, in gateways and railway stations . . . are contained the initial

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<sup>15</sup> Tansey & Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*, 1074.

foundations of a great metaphysical esthetic....We who know the signs of the metaphysical alphabet are aware of the joy and solitude enclosed by a portico, the corners of a street, or even in a room, on the surface of a table, or between the sides of a box. The limits of these signs constitute for us a sort of moral and esthetic code of representation, and more than this, with clairvoyance we construct in painting a new metaphysical psychology of objects.<sup>16</sup>

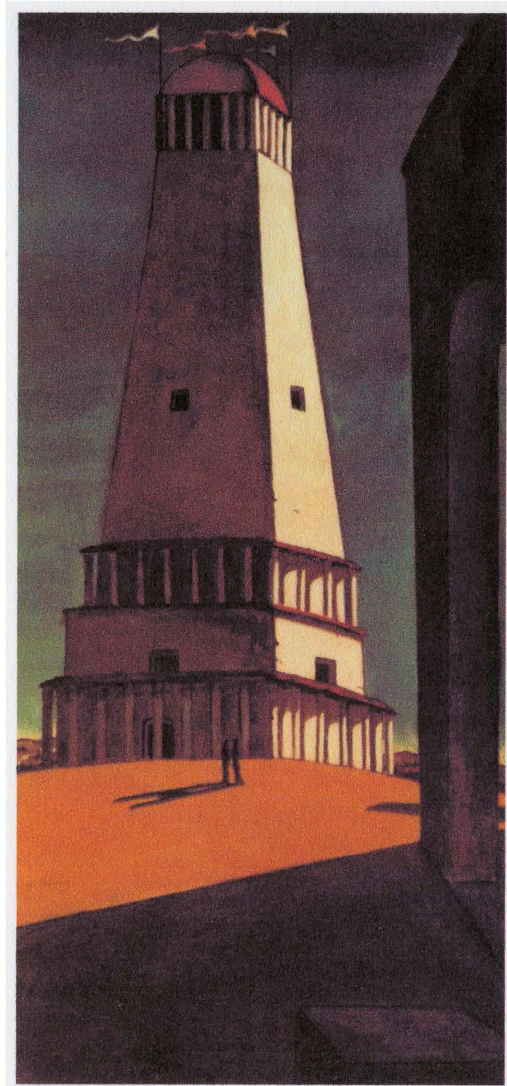


Figure 21. Giorgio De Chirico, *The Nostalgia of the Infinite*, 1911, oil on canvas, 53 x 25 inches. Private collection.

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<sup>16</sup> Tansey & Kleiner, 1074.



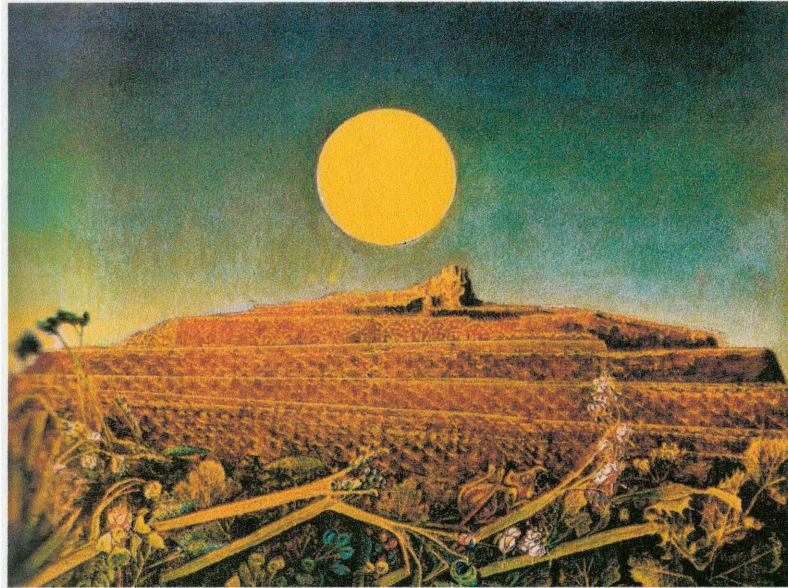


Figure 22. Max Ernst, *The Entire City*, 1935-36, oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm. Zurich, Kunsthhaus Zurich.

De Chirico was not the only Surrealist to speak through the pyramid. The pyramid, or ziggurat, shows up again in the painting *The Entire City* by the German artist Max Ernst (figure 22). Ernst also explored the Surrealist's scrambling of conventional contexts and sought to realize the realm of dream and fantasy by visually provoking reactions that resembled the subconscious experience.<sup>17</sup> Including the term *dream* in the explanation deems it necessary to clarify the intent of the Surrealists. Ernst elucidates that the Surrealists

are painters of an always changing dream reality, this does not mean that they paint what they have dreamed. . . but rather, that they move freely, bravely and naturally on what is physically and psychologically certainly a real ('surreal') - even if not yet adequately defined - border area between the inner and outer worlds.<sup>18</sup>

It is not surprising, then that the pyramid returned to my work in *Counterpoint* (figure 23 and 24) in a much more deliberate manifestation than in my previously discussed, earlier

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<sup>17</sup> Tansey & Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*, 1075.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Ruhrberg, ed. Ingo F. Walther, *Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Koln: Taschen, 2005. 139.

work. Prior to writing this paper, I had never seen this image by Max Ernst. The similarities of the symbolism (figure 23) in the individual compositions is startling and gives credence to Carl Jung's theories surrounding the collective unconscious.<sup>19</sup> Both images contain some type of flora that consists of grassy vegetation and flowers. They both address nearly identical geological outcroppings. They also both include a pyramid or ziggurat structure and they both consider a strong light source. Ernst's light source is overt and looms blatantly in the sky, while my light is inferred by the intense shadows cast on the cliffs and on the illuminated tiers of the ziggurat. One major difference is that Ernst used a morphing and blending of images, whereas I have used sharp division and separation. Another difference is that I have included elements of *trompe l'oeil*. *Trompe l'oeil* reiterates the physical world and at the same time questions the validity of it.



Figure 23. Left: Max Ernst, *The Entire City*, 1935-36, oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm. Zurich, Kunsthau Zurich.  
Right: Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Counterpoint*, 2007, oil on panel, 36 x 36 inches.

*Counterpoint* (figures 23 and 24) indicates a breaking point from all of the other paintings previously mentioned, due to a shift in format. During the process of working on all five sides of the three-dimensional surface paintings I developed an awareness of

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<sup>19</sup> Carl Jung, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *The Portable Jung*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976. 59-69.

different approaches to paint application. I became increasingly obsessed with *trompe l'oeil* illusions. *Trompe l'oeil* has been used to question the perception of reality since 400 years B.C.E. (figure 25) when Parrhasios and Zeuxis entered into their legendary painting competition.<sup>20</sup> *Trompe l'oeil* is a way of painting that greatly appealed to my quest for the meaning of reality. Working on a panel that was itself an object detracted from the elements of *trompe l'oeil* that intrigued me. As I spent time piecing together paintings with varying degrees of illusion, including *trompe l'oeil*, it became clear that not only was I using subject matter as symbols, but the extent of the illusion was also a symbol.



Figure 24. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Counterpoint*, 2007, oil on panel, 36 x 36 inches.

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<sup>20</sup> Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions*, 19. It is recorded by Pliny the Elder that “Parrhasios and Zeuxis entered into a competition, Zeuxis exhibiting a picture of some grapes, so true to nature that the birds flew up to the wall of the stage. Parrhasios then displayed a picture of a linen curtain, realistic to such a degree that Zeuxhis, elated by the verdict of the birds, cried out that now at last his rival must draw the curtain and show his picture. On discovering his mistake he surrendered the prize to Parrhasios, admitting candidly that he had deceived the birds, while Parrhasios had deluded himself, a painter.”



Figure 25. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Mostly Alone*, 2007, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 x 4 inches

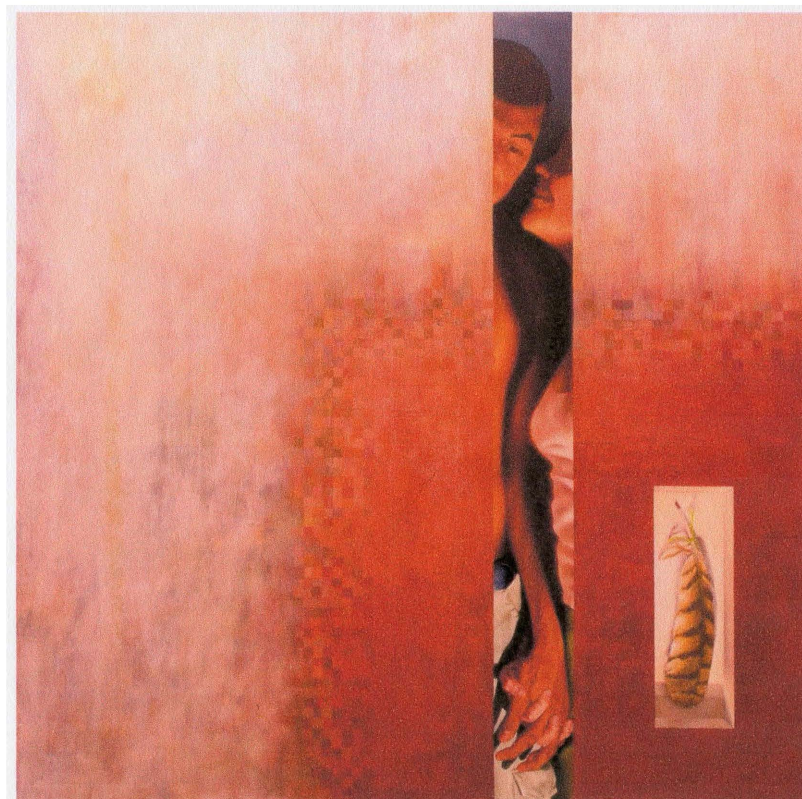


Figure 26. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Whisper*, 2007, oil on panel, 40 x 40 inches.

The combination of realism and abstraction and their implementation as symbols was first explored in my piece *Mostly Alone* (figure 25) and was further developed in *Whisper* (figure 26). The seemingly contradictory nature of *trompe l'oeil* and abstract painting methods is challenged in these two images. There is a certain correlation between the two techniques wherein each provides a similar point of participation for the viewer. Artists working with both non-objective abstraction and *trompe l'oeil* ask the audience to believe in the reality of the images as they are seen in space and time and *not* as a metaphor. In my work, the inclusion of both on a single surface underlines the proximity of the inner and outer realities and accentuates the difficulty, despite our concerted efforts, with which they can actually be divided. I have yet to cultivate my proficiency with abstraction, and I intend to do so, however, I have been more inclined to first improve on my abilities as a *trompe l'oeil* painter.

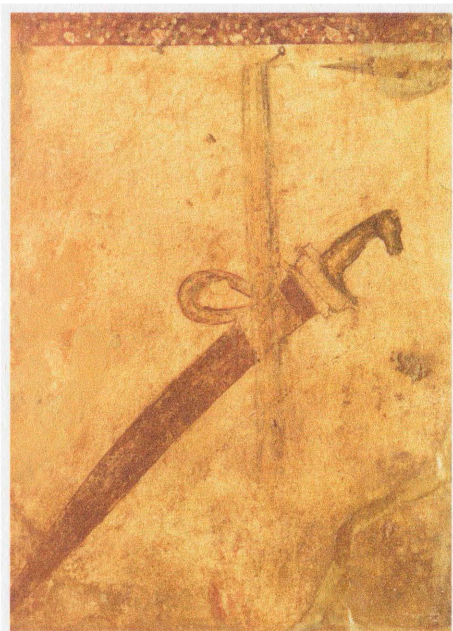


Figure 27. Left: Unknown artist (Greek working in Italy?), *Hanging Sword*, fresco, 40 x 31 inches, circa 400 BCE. National Museum of Archaeology, Naples.

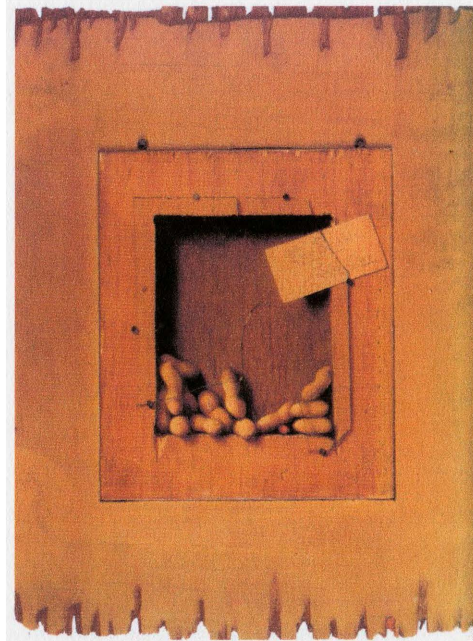


Figure 28. Right: S.S. David, *Free Sample, Take One*, 1890, oil on canvas, 13 x 9 inches. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

*Trompe l'oeil* painting techniques intrigue me because they are not so much about illusion as they are about deception (figure 28). An image painted in *trompe l'oeil* is not merely a representation of something recognizable, it is asking the viewer to believe that it is the thing.<sup>21</sup> The power of *trompe l'oeil* lies in its ability to imitate on such a perfect level that it actually undermines the principle of imitation itself.<sup>22</sup> In this way *trompe l'oeil* challenges the viewer's trust in their ability to determine what is real from what is not. It is an art form that poses the question that is at the root of my investigation; what is real? In my work, elements of *trompe l'oeil* are juxtaposed with other degrees of illusion in order to emphasize the dilemma of discerning a "true reality." Thus, *trompe l'oeil* serves two purposes in my paintings; one, for the viewer to consider that our reality is really a manifestation of our perception, and, two, that it is a symbol of our tenuous understanding of what is truly real. This is both similar and different to the ways artists have employed *trompe l'oeil* throughout history.

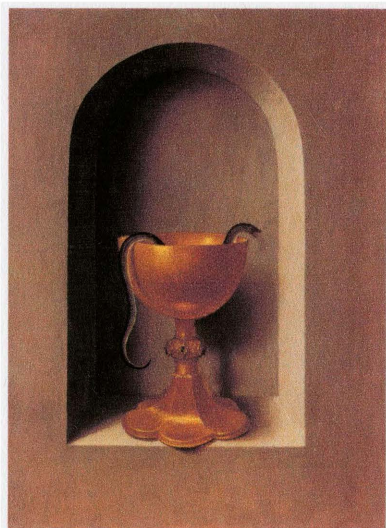


Figure 29. Hans Memling, *Chalice of Saint John the Evangelist*, 1470, oil on panel, 12 x 9 inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Figure 30. Simon Bening, *Imhof Prayer book*, 1511, color and gold on parchment, 4 x 3 x 2 inches. Private collection.

<sup>21</sup> Ebert-Schiferer, *Deceptions and Illusions*, 358.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Historically, *trompe l'oeil* has used niches and cupboards in order to trick the viewer into touching the surface only to find out that they have been fooled (figure 29).<sup>23</sup> The fly, and other insects, such as the bee, have a permanent place in the *trompe l'oeil* repertoire and also tempt the viewer to respond physically, by brushing them aside (figure 30).<sup>24</sup> This physical reaction to the perception, or misperception, of reality is a powerful demonstration of just how tenuous “reality” really is. I use *trompe l'oeil* precisely because it emphasizes how easily we are fooled by things that *appear* to be real.



Figure 31. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Lost Charm, Found*, 2008, oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches.

An idea is something that can seem extremely real, even tangible, but is instead locked in the ether of the imagination. *Lost Charm, Found* (figure 31) is about the death of an idea: an idea that is then resurrected in a new form. This piece is literally about a

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<sup>23</sup> Ebert-Schiferer, *Deception and Illusion*, 237.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

personal tragedy, and yet, when the audience sees this piece it evokes a smile, innocent curiosity and the need to physically connect with the tiny *trompe l'oeil* ornament. The viewer moves visually from the physical world where she/he stands into the virtual telescope of the interior of a pyramid and the symbolic, muddy, green of disillusion gives way to the pure yellow light of truth at the apex of the image. *Lost Charm, Found*, with its abstract, albeit three-dimensional, space that contains an identifiable symbol from the natural world expresses the concept and composition I anticipate exploring in my future paintings. I am inspired to pursue this amalgamation of imagery in part because of the work produce by the American Abstract Illusionist painters.



Figure 32. James Havard, *Sand Crow*, 1977, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches. Private collection.

Figure 33. Paul Sarkisian, *#9 with O'keefe*, 1981, oil, silkscreen & glitter on canvas, 46 x 48 inches. Private collection.

In the 1970s a group of painters went beyond my mere juxtaposition of abstraction and realism and proved to the world that even pure abstraction had the potential to be deceptive.<sup>25</sup> The Abstract Illusionists took *trompe l'oeil* to a new level by

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<sup>25</sup> The information about the Abstract Illusionists is taken from my paper *Abstract Illusionism: Taking the Reality Out of Illusion* written for ART 695 and is included in my thesis binder.



removing all elements of realism and replacing it with abstraction. James Havard is attributed with starting the trend by airbrushing shadows underneath squiggles of paint to make them stand off the page (figure 32). Paul Sarkisian used a similar airbrushed shadow to make trompe l'oeil sheets of cut and torn paper seemingly float on top of one another parallel to the picture plane (figure 33). Ronald Davis, on the other hand, created abstract spaces that completely denied the picture plane (figure 34 and 35). His pieces are two-dimensional, cut-out paintings, however they create such an effective illusion of space that the viewer is skeptical that they are hung on the wall. Davis was interested in creating illusionistic spaces that were completely abstract and offered no room for any representational element despite the audience's conviction that they occupied three-dimensional space.

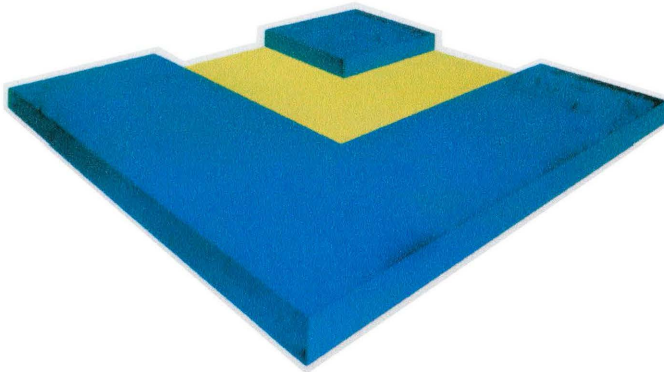
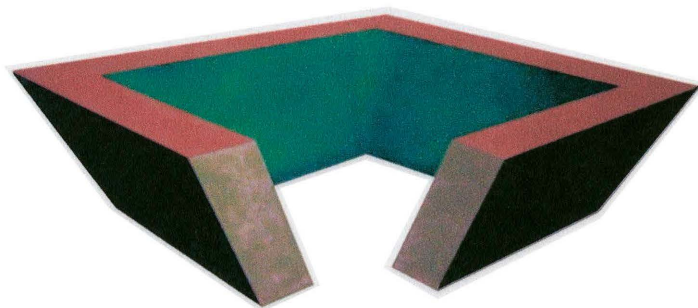


Figure 34. Ronald Davis, *Sixth Ninths Blue*, 1966, pigment, resin & fiberglass, 72 x 131 inches. Private collection.  
Figure 35. Ronald Davis, *Green Black*, 1967, pigment, resin, fiberglass & wood, 54 x 135 inches. Private collection.



It is my aspiration to be able to create illusionistic spaces as beautifully and as believably as Ronald Davis. My spaces, however, will contain elements of representation because I am interested in the interaction between realities. I want to understand how the inner reality and spiritual reality are not separate, but connected to the outer, physical reality. In one of my most recent paintings, *Between Maintenance and Creation* (figure36) I have attempted to capture a Davis-esque space and infused a figure within it.

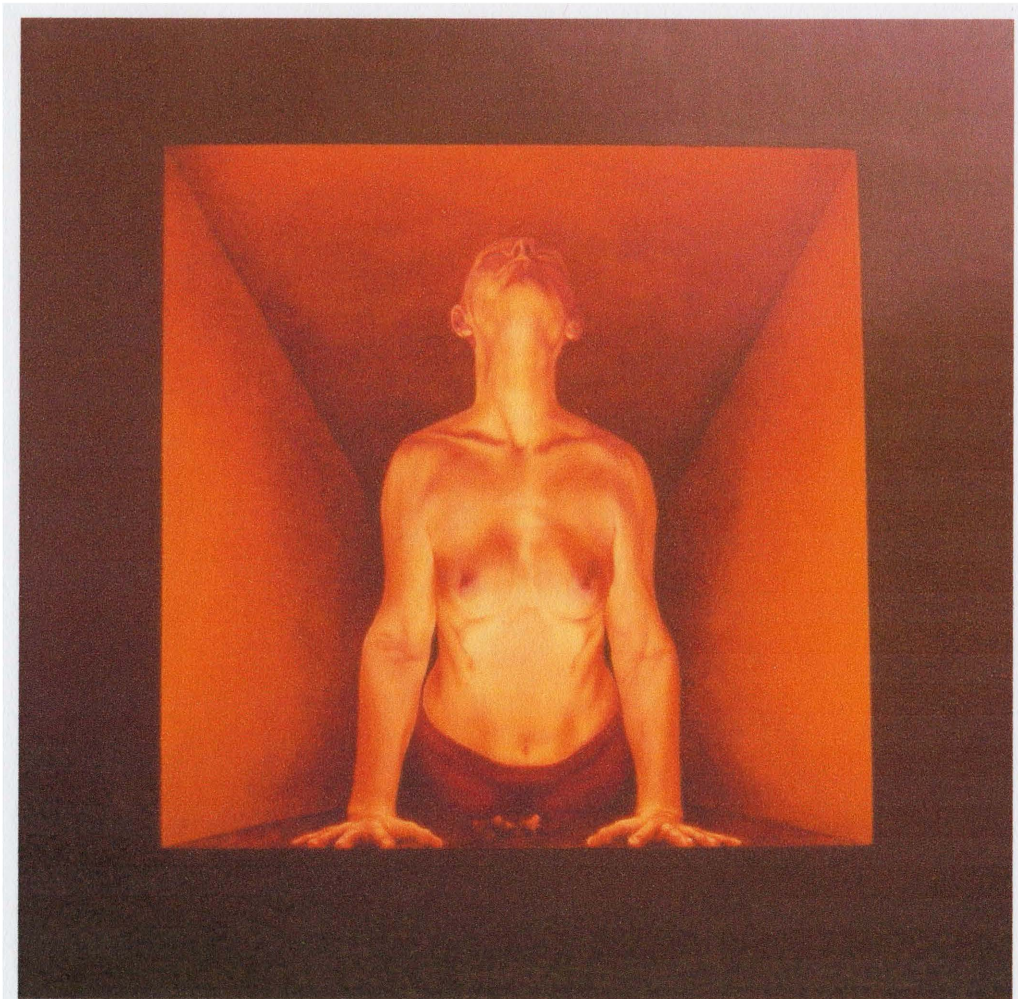


Figure 36. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Between Maintenance and Creation*, 2008, oil on panel, 42 x 42 inches.

The square element simply represents the analytical and the metaphysical and could be construed as the top tier of a pyramid structure. The contrasting, organic aspect, depicting a palpable physical body that is at the same time very human and not quite

human, is then emerging out of, or breaking free from the confines of the square. At this point this image is the closest I have come to creating a visual narrative that reconciles my experience with the merging of inner and outer realities.

Similarly, my small piece *Beyond the Bee* also questions the physical body and its relationship to a hidden reality. The life-size dead bee, painted in *trompe l'oeil* conveys a lengthy legacy of insects painted in the same manner, only this time the illusion does not provoke a physical response because the host is dead. This painting, in the same vein as *Lost Charm, Found*, is an illusion about the death of illusion. Bolstering the point, the purple square nearly devours what is left of the minute, yellow, bee body.

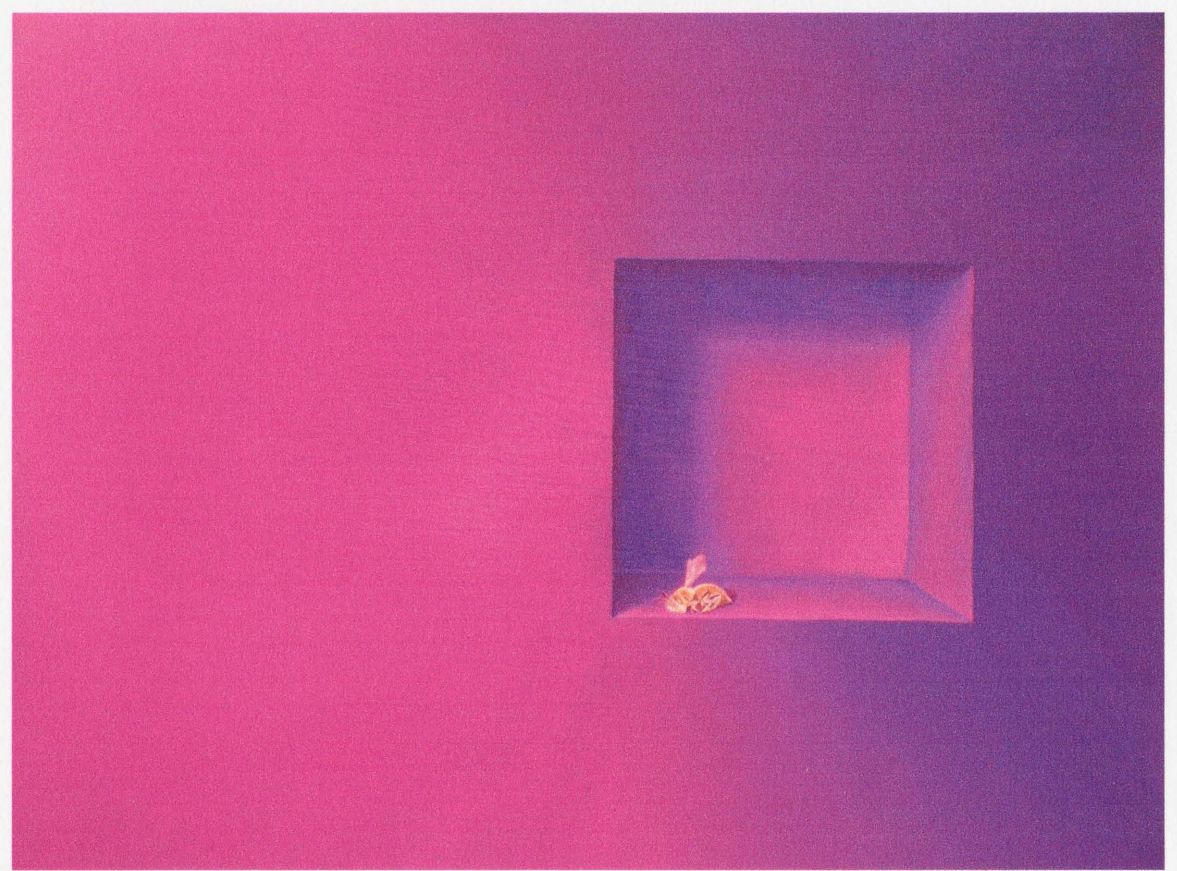


Figure 37. Cassidy Garhart Velazquez, *Beyond the Bee* (detail 7 x 10 inches), 2008, oil on panel, 12 x 12 inches.

These last three pieces, *Lost Charm*, *Found*, *Between Maintenance and Creation*, and *Beyond the Bee* signify the direction in which my thought process and paintings are headed. Although the imagery may morph and the specific idea may shift, ultimately, my endeavor to understand the meaning of my experience based on both visible and invisible realities remains unchanged. This quest is a timeless, artistic undertaking and thus my need to pursue this inquiry is engrained in me on an instinctual level. When I ask existential questions I seek their answers in visual thought, not only like my father and immediate predecessors, but also like my ancient ancestors. I, like the Paleolithic artists who drew the first representations of their physical world and scrawled the semblance of a square next to them, attempt a visual narration about the fragile braiding of inner and outer realities that create our physical and metaphysical experiences.

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