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Chaotic Journey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Artist Statement

My art seeks answers to personal conflicts while telling a story of a chaotic journey. As my life traversed the trials and tribulations of moving from a high school student to a wife and mother, my art was a direct reflection of the events. Art allows me to reflect on everyday moments while discovering ways to make sense of situations and life. I do this by creating textural, vibrantly colored, and gestural surfaces that emulate the powerful waters of the sea.

I want to reveal an emotionally driven and process-oriented experience to the viewer. While creating, I do not maintain full control of the media and let the process become part of the work. As I aggressively layer thick paint, glass, and mixed media, I spontaneously apply spirals and swirls of vibrant color that undulate and rotate like waves of an ocean. The spirals and swirls are a recurring motif in my work. These forms are ancient symbols of evolution, growth, and change and reflect my examination of my life. The colors and marks represent the turbulent and constant chaos of life. When viewing my work, you are looking directly into my inner soul. My life and my art are entwined together.

Chaotic Journey

Introduction

I have always loved producing art and teaching others to create their own masterpieces. I remember as a child pretending to be an artist and a teacher. I created art in school and on my own. Not only was this my true calling but it was my destiny. I continued to create art in school and on my own. Upon graduation from high school, and a small stint in community college, I transferred to Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) School of the Arts. At VCU I earned my Bachelor of Fine Arts in art education. I obtained my dream job and began teaching preschool to eighth-grade art at a small private Catholic school in Richmond, Virginia. Now a tenured teacher, I have built the art program from the ground up and developed the art curriculum for the entire Dioceses of Richmond. I am blessed to have had the chance to inspire others by teaching them to appreciate art, be creative thinkers, and help them reach their greatest potential artistically.

In contrast to my dream job, two dramatic life changing events have influenced my art. These happened simultaneously and gave me conflicting emotions. The first was becoming a mother which was an incredibly high moment in my life. In direct contrast, the other event required me to cope with a loved one's alcoholism. The opposing feelings of these two situations affected me deeply. My thoughts and feelings became distorted; my life and my art became confused and out of control. I drew chaotic marks and lines, and layered media aggressively. Turmoil and excitement were consuming my life. Fear and anxiety made me feel like I was drowning in a turbulent

sea. This is when I chose the motif of ocean waves as metaphors for my positive and negative experiences. I explored and contrasted the calmness and strength as well as the turbulence and destructive power of waves. By using my creativity to explore my emotions, I found strength in facing fears and allowed myself joy in motherhood. Through my work, I discovered the ebb and flow of life.

As I tried to balance my life and career, I decided to take a few classes in the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art (MIS-IAR) Program at VCU to reconnect with my inner artist and explore my emotions and my art. Soon, I applied to and was accepted in the degree program. Choosing to relay my experiences through the concentrations of painting and craft and materials studies helped me to have a more positive focus in my life.

Aesthetics

My art work is about emotional and creative exploration, discovery, and resolution. The imagery in my paintings revolves around seascapes and swirling water. My glass sculptures are focused on faces that are presented in a watery environment. I use these images as metaphors for the contrasting range of my emotional experiences and interactions. Whether my memories are good or bad, I express my thoughts and feelings gesturally and physically by using my whole body in the process. This helps me convey a sense of emotional energy in my paintings and sculptures.

Working through my challenges, water metaphors and symbols are present in all my artistic endeavors. I think part of my interest in water is being born under the

constellation of Pisces (two fish). I also am naturally drawn to water and feel at peace when I am near it. So, I use traditional symbolic meanings associated with water in my work. For instance, the spiral is often associated in art to represent evolution, cleaning, or destruction. The spiral also represents changes in life as it evolves. I use these symbolic meanings as I explore my life and conflicting thoughts.

In my paintings, I spontaneously and aggressively layer pigments and gestured marks, sometimes building up the surface. My palette is vibrant and filled with a combination of naturalistic blues, tans, and whites with splashes of non-naturalistic complements of blue and orange. These colors help me express emotional states while I make my art and resolve life's challenges.

In my kiln fired glass sculptures, I also use vibrant color and surface texture. The imagery and symbolism here revolves around faces in spiraling and swirling environments. The faces represent the memory of people within my life. These pieces are planned, yet due to the nature of the process, the end result is unpredicted.

As I work through my challenges, I seek to find resolution through my art making processes. By working in various media, I am able to expand my palette and express my thoughts.

Influences

Greatly influenced by many artists, I have been particularly drawn to abstract and expressionist painters, and contemporary glass artists. These artists, Jill Moser (1956-), Lee Krasner (1908-1984), and Mats Jonasson (1945-), have inspired me with

their processes, palettes, and themes.

The work of contemporary abstract painter, Jill Moser, is made up of energetic mark making. Her compositions address the visual weight of positive and negative space. In *Bird in Hand* (2014), she used seemingly quick gestural marks to create a sense of movement and visual excitement. Like Moser, I employ gestural marks to express my emotions. By activating the negative and positive space with my gestured marks, I place strokes of color while varying the translucency of the paint. Moser's marks are minimal yet expressive. I have adopted this approach to expression in my mark making.

Another artist whose work intrigues me is Abstract Expressionist painter, Lee Krasner. In her work, she used broad and sweeping strokes that command attention. For example, in *Gaea* (1966) she layered colors and marks that created circular forms throughout the composition. These elements create a rhythmic pattern. In my paintings, I also layer color and reference the rhythmic patterns of water. Like Krasner, my marks and swirls of colors are loose and spontaneous. I intuitively develop a visual statement. These marks and colors reveal my emotional and spiritual journey.

When it comes to my glass work, I am inspired by Mats Jonasson. His engraved glass and lead crystal works feature elements of nature and human faces. In *Masquerade in Blue* (2012), Jonasson presents a blue glass piece of an abstracted head. The face expresses a quiet emotion which implies a narrative. Like Jonasson, I use faces to tell a story.

These artists have helped me develop my body of work. They showed me how

to express my inner artist and challenged me to explore the surface with paint and glass.

Exploration in Paint

As I explore with paint, I create surface texture through aggressive mark making. My process is therapeutic for me. My goal is to let my process and the material relay my thoughts and emotions.

In the acrylic painting, *Roaring Water* (Appendix, 1), I filled the canvas with layers of texture and swirling brush strokes. I aggressively attacked the surface with thick paint and layered marks, taking out all of my frustrations on it. My goal was to create a surface that reflected a chaotic energy. This painting is a reflection of a time in my life that was consumed by anger and resentment. With each stroke, swirl, and layered mark of paint, the remnants of emotional conflicts seemed to remain on the surface. The more I layered the marks and pigment, the more I felt a release from emotional baggage.

My mixed media painting, *Submerged* (Appendix, 2), is an abstract image of double spiral forms representing turbulent and dangerous ocean waters. This piece was created after feeling totally overwhelmed with motherhood and my unmanageable life. I felt overwhelmed and felt like I was being pulled under water.

As my inner turbulence began to settle, my paintings became more about mark making and the fluidity of paint, the thickness and texture decreased on the surface. *Excited Energy* (Appendix, 3) reflected these changes. In this piece, I shifted from

aggressive and angry to peaceful and happy. The title speaks for itself because I felt like being on the top of a roller-coaster ready to plunge down the hill. This painting allowed me to lighten up, free myself of negativity, and to focus on the positive. That moment changed me and my painting. My work was still cathartic but not necessarily negative.

I continued to explore my approach to positive expressions. I developed simpler forms, expanded my palette, and created more fluid marks. In *Renew* (Appendix, 4), the layers of blue, yellow, and gray strokes change from thin, transparent colors to overlapping bold marks. Through the transparent gray swirls, I wanted to express my release of negativity.

In *Journey* (Appendix, 5), I spontaneously applied gestured marks of blue, green, orange, and yellow. I intuitively painted and minimally layered the pigments. This approach was similar to the abstract and expressionist approaches of Lee Krasner and Jill Moser.

When painting, I am dedicated in mind, body, and soul. Working through my life's journey, I take every emotion and physical movement out on the surface with the paint. I began my painting by addressing negative aspects of my life, but learned to express more joyful moments as I worked through life challenges. I have discovered serenity, hope, and courage within my life and my art.

Craft Studies

My kiln fired glass pieces conceptually overlap with my paintings. Each sculpture

is meant to capture a moment in time and convey an emotion. My glass pieces tell a story about my interaction with people in my life, and the challenges of overcoming the family dynamics, personalities, and conflicts that occur.

In *Chaotic Interaction* (Appendix, 6), I present several faces that represent family and marriage. The faces are of varying sizes and are grouped throughout the piece. Multiple faces at the top of the composition represent families and the two faces at the bottom represent spouses. Between these groups, I placed a single face that represents me with torn obligations and conflicts between the demands from family members and in-laws. The swatches of color throughout this piece represent the good, bad, and challenging moments of breaking away from one family and joining another to create my own.

In the piece *Parenthood* (Appendix, 7), I created a box mold with an abstracted dimensional surface of shaped glass. These surface features symbolically present a father with his child and a mother with her child, representing the bond between parents and their children. I wanted to reveal the emotional feelings of the parents as well as the demanding yet rewarding roles as a parent.

In *Mother and Child* (Appendix, 8), the pairs are intertwined in a Celtic knot configuration. They are bonded together in love and strength. Through my chaotic journey, becoming a mother was the amazing highlight in my life. My son has been my biggest strength, inspiration, and reason to find hope and determination every day to push through the chaotic waters. Even as a baby, he seemed to have this innate compassion and strength when moments of life seemed unbearable. It is this bond

with my son that I refer to in this piece.

Working through my conflicting emotions, I find peace in works such as *Serenity* (Appendix, 9). In this glass piece, there are two large faces placed symmetrically, a small face is placed centrally beneath the large faces. One face represents a father and the other a mother, the smaller face is a child. I attached the casted block of glass with the faces to a sheet of glass and framed it. This sheet is turquoise and brown glass that reminded me of the calm sea. The faces represent the happy family that I have built with my husband and our son. It captures an idealized peaceful and perfect picture of family. It shows our strong, bonded connection and everlasting love that nothing can break.

Through my paintings, I have expressed my negative and positive feelings and emotions. With my glass pieces, I have worked out my emotional conflicts between individuals and found resolution through my creative processes. This exploration has ignited my creative fire as an artist and has helped me to find inner strength. Now, as I continue to create art, I confidently address the ebb and flow of life.

Conclusion

Now, I am the art teacher and the artist I have always wanted to be. Twenty years ago, I never would have dreamt that I would become a graduate of the MIS-IAR Program at Virginia Commonwealth University, and a working artist. Learning so much about myself and about my art process through this program has given me the opportunity to develop my work and ideas. This program has offered a variety of

experiences and art processes that I have brought into the classroom.

I have taught my students new processes and techniques while giving them similar challenges that my professors gave me. I've shared my work and ideas with my students and helped them practice critiquing. My experiences have enabled me to relate better to my students, appreciate them more, and show them what a cathartic process creating art can be.

During this program, I dealt with some of the best as well as toughest moments of my life. It was this program that allowed me to examine my life and experiences as subject matter. It was my classmates and professors that encouraged me to create my art and be confident with my creations. It gave me hope and enabled me to confront calmness and chaos. Now, I am a stronger, happier, and healthier person. I continue to use my art as therapy to work through life's conflicts.

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Appendix

List of Images

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- Figure 2. *Submerged*, acrylic on canvas, 24" X 36", 2015.
- Figure 3. *Excited Energy*, acrylic on board, 34" X 30", 2015.
- Figure 4. *Renew*, acrylic on paper, 30" X 20½", 2015.
- Figure 5. *Journey*, acrylic on paper, 32" X 25" 2015.
- Figure 6. *Chaotic Interaction*, kiln fired glass box mold, 9" X 3¾" X 1", 2015.
- Figure 7. *Parenthood*, kiln fired glass box mold, mounted on painted wooden box frame 6" X 6" X 2" 2015.
- Figure 8. *Mother & Child*, kiln fired glass , mounted on painted wood box frame 6" X 6" X 2 1/2 , 2015.
- Figure 9. *Serenity*, kiln fired glass 3" X 5" X 1½", mounted on sheet glass in wooden frame 12-5/8" X 12-5/8" X 1" 2015.



Figure 1. *Roaring Water*, acrylic on canvas, 24" X 36", 2015.



Figure 2. *Submerged*, acrylic on canvas, 24" X 36," 2015.

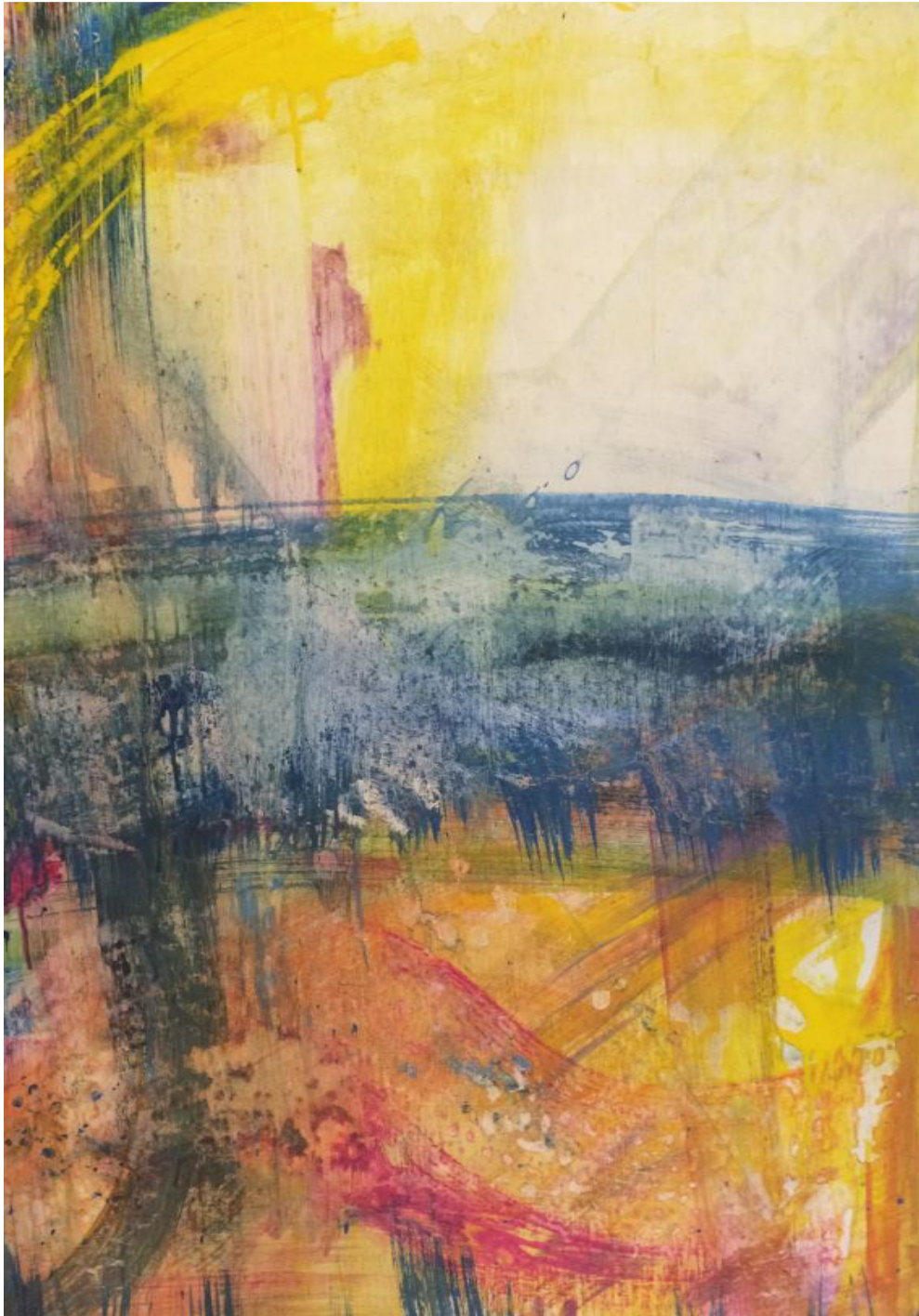


Figure 3. *Excited Energy*, acrylic on board, 34" X 30", 2015.



Figure 4. *Renew*, acrylic on paper, 30" X 20½", 2015.



Figure 5. *Journey*, acrylic on paper, 32" X 25", 2015.



Figure 6. *Chaotic Interaction*, kiln fired glass box mold, 9" X 3¾" X "1", 2015.



Figure 7. *Parenthood*, kiln fired glass mold, mounted on wooden box frame, 6" X 6" X 2", 2015.



Figure 8. *Mother & Child*, kiln fired glass mounted on painted wooden box frame,
6" X 6" X 2½", 2015.



Figure 9. *Serenity*, kiln fired glass 3" X 5" X 1½", mounted on sheet glass in wooden frame 12 5/8" X 12 5/8" X 1", 2015.

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- 2015 **National Honor Society Member**
- 2008-Present **National Catholic Educational Association**
- 2000-Present **National Art Education Association**
- 2000-Present **Virginia Art Education Association**

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- 2016** **Central Region Virginia Art Education Association
Art Educator as Artist**, A show of the Central Region Virginia Art Education Association, Exhibition: Art Space, Richmond VA.
- 2017** ***Chaotic Journey***, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Interdisciplinary Art Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. Exhibition: Real Life Photography Studio, Chesterfield, VA.