JORDYN BRENNAN

2021 Spring Mid-Program Review | Expected Graduation: Spring 2022 | Mentor: Kelli Nelson

STATEMENT OF INTENT

This project is a series of oil paintings that highlights the need to show compassion and care to the people who occupy public space. I use women in their everyday work attire as a vehicle to discuss the importance of the mental health of individuals in a community. Similarly to when you are walking down the street, when looking at these paintings you see only the occupations, the outer shell of an individual. What you don't see is who they truly are at their core, what they go through everyday before they walk outside their door, the burdens they face, and the other lives they must provide and care for. These ideas are often taken for granted.

The pandemic has shed a light on how fragile life is and has shown the need for empathy, compassion and care for those around us. According to the American Psychological Association, studies indicate Americans' stress levels are rising, showing spikes in depression, addiction and suicide. As someone who has experienced the loss of a loved one to suicide, I feel an extreme amount of guilt for words that were left unsaid.

My work throughout last semester made me realize the pain I experience has subconsciously transferred into my artistic practice. Through a great deal of experimentation and self reflection I have come to the conclusion that because of my experience with loss, I have an overwhelming need to spread empathy, compassion and show appreciation to others. To address this need, I asked my social media following to share a woman in their life who inspires them.

Using the figure as a tool for communication, I crop the body to isolate the figure and create emphasis on the form. This also allows the individual's identity to be anonymous and to focus the viewer's attention not on the obviously visible, but to recognize what is invisible in both these paintings and people. Using photos as reference, I create implied texture to mimic the appearance of clothing using high contrast to add to the heightened sense of realism in my oil paintings.

Oil painting is a traditional medium and one I believe requires a large amount of craft and care. I am inspired by the sculpture, *Pieta* by Michelangelo for the level of detail in the figure; exposing wrinkles and folds, creating life-like flesh.[1] In addition, I am drawn to the work of Jan van Eyck for the way he tackled fabric with such fine detail and high contrast.[2] I see painting as an extremely thoughtful and giving process. Working representationally gives me time to appreciate all the details of the figure which relates to my belief in empathy, compassion and care for others.

Historically, portraits in Western art have been commissioned by the rich, royal and privileged to show signs of power, wealth, religious aspirations and lasting legacies.[3] I want to change the idea of what a portrait can be and who it can be about. I use women in their everyday work attire to represent people in the public space that one could pass by on a daily basis.

However, I am aware I couldn't possibly represent everyone and the infinite combinations of characteristics that make a person. As a result, this project is both challenging and exciting for me. It is challenging because painting other people is a huge responsibility and undertaking. Representing the figure brings up complex ideas of identity which I had not considered previously. While it is a daunting task, I am confident that topics of care, compassion and empathy are crucial to our world. It excites me to continue to challenge myself to find unique ways of representing this message going forward.

---

[1] Michelangelo, *Pieta,* Marble, 1498-1500.
[2] Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*, Oil on wood, 1434–1436.
[3] Nairne, Sandy, and Sarah Howgate. *The Portrait Now*. London, England: National Portrait Gallery, 2006.