

Піди туди - не знати куди,
принеси того - не знати чого

Go there - I know not where, bring back what – I know not

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

I undertake the process of individuation with art making. I paint contemplative images that tell stories of personal discoveries and of the transformation of the self by examining psychological relationships between characters in my work, their environments, objects and their inner selves.

My thesis body of work is divided into two groups: large-scale narrative paintings with complex multi-figurative compositions, and small-scale landscapes. These two categories explore similar ideas but each is different in both method and approach. The landscape paintings possess investigative quality and focus on the formal aspects of the work. They utilize structured and controlled linear brushstrokes, such as hatching and cross-contour, to describe forms of the landscapes. My larger paintings embrace the spontaneity of the impasto palette knife technique, relying on the emotional effects created by the traces of dynamic physical gesture, to describe the energy and movement of the figures.

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DEDICATION

To my family

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INTRODUCTION

The writing of my thesis followed the painting process itself. I used this paper to deconstruct and understand my painting practices and the motivations that guide the conception of my art works. In retrospect, my thesis paintings were created for the purpose of learning, which I acknowledge to be both a tool that provides artistic evolution, and a goal of its own. My thesis work produced in the past two years branches out into multiple directions, resulting in eclectic subject matter, a visual repertoire, and diverse technical methodologies. My paintings are not driven by a single idea or theme, and are not required to be read in one particular way, rather they are meant to be contemplative in nature and open to thematic interpretation. This body of work can be compartmentalized loosely into two groups: large-scale narrative paintings with complex multi-figurative compositions, and small-scale landscapes. These two categories explore similar ideas but each is different in both method and approach. The landscapes series utilize a mixed technique of egg tempera and oil glazing, learned from my mentor, F. Scott Hess. They possess an investigative quality and focus on the formal aspects of the work. They utilize structured and controlled linear brushstrokes, such as hatching and cross-contour, to describe forms of the landscapes. My larger paintings embrace the spontaneity of the impasto palette knife technique, relying on the emotional effects created by the traces of dynamic physical gesture, to describe the energy and movement of the figures – a tool that reinforces narrative.

DESCRIPTION

"When one follows the path of individuation, when one lives one's own life, one must take mistakes into the bargain; life would not be complete without them. There is no guarantee - not for a single moment - that we will not fall into error or stumble into deadly peril. We may think there is a safe road. But that would be the road of death. Then nothing happens any longer - at any rate, not the right things. Anyone who takes the safe road is as good as dead" – Jung

"Go there – I know not where, bring back what – I know not" is an "impossible task" given to the protagonist of the popular Slavic folk tale of the same title. The hero embarks on an adventure eager to solve the problem posed and, overcoming obstacles on his way, achieves a goal, gaining important knowledge and the main prize at the end of his journey. He, along with many other prototypes in similar stories of the world's mythologies, not only accomplishes the goal, but goes through a rite of passage – a transformation of self (Campbell).

There is nothing new about the concept of individuation. It is a condition universally shared by every person. The expressions of its structure and stages are found in all forms, in every culture, of every age: mythology, philosophy, literature, and the visual arts. Individuation, a term defined by Carl Gustav Jung, is a process of becoming aware of one's true self through a series of personal struggles that come from an integration of the conscious with the personal and collective unconscious. The goal of this process is to acquaint ourselves with and harmonize these important yet conflicting parts of our psyche into one whole (Jung 235).

I undertake this journey of individuation – a need that is simultaneously personal, artistic and political – with art making. I regard painting as a process that allows me to tap into the well of

the collective unconscious. Primarily, it fosters not the rational, but the emotional interpretation of the world, allowing me to understand myself in relationship to the complexity of experiences I encounter.

When I think of myself as a painter, I identify with the Ukrainian definition of the word –“живописець” (*zhynopysecj*)– the representative of life. For me art is never separate from my everyday life; it is a consequence of accumulating and reacting to the ideas and events I encounter. I derive my inspiration from personal, social and spiritual experiences, dreams and desires. My body of work essentially embodies the process of individuation, telling stories of personal discoveries and of the transformation of the self by examining psychological relationships between characters, their environments, objects and their inner selves. These paintings depict everyday scenes, people, and places that don't have anything particularly extraordinary about them; yet in its heart, my work acknowledges the presence of the unknown of this world – the unconscious – which, I believe, can be felt if the viewer is also a careful listener.

Evolution of themes in large paintings:

My main body of work (the large-scale paintings) went through a notable evolution in both ideas and process, clearly showing the wide variety of both technical experimentation and thematic exploration. In the first few paintings that I completed at LCAD, I attempted to investigate a tension between the private inner world of a person and the experiences of that person on the larger scale of their social and cultural world. This initial framework allowed me to explore contemporary economic, social, and gender issues in Ukraine that I care greatly about. I had

been following the early days of the feminist organization FEMEN, a group known for publicly baring their breasts to challenge and protest relevant social issues. One of these issues is the mail-order bride phenomenon, which has reached a massive scale in Eastern Europe over the last two decades. As a Ukrainian female who lives in a foreign country, this topic was relevant and “close to home.” The paintings inspired by the research I conducted focus on two aspects of the mail-order bride phenomenon: the commercial transaction side and the personal psychological implications that such arrangements have on women.



Fig. 1. *The Fight of the Mail-Order Brides*, Oil Canvas 5x3' 2011

In the painting *The Fight Of The Mail-Order Brides*, (figure 1) I examine the absurdity of the mail order bride industries. Visually I wanted my paintings to coincide with websites where women advertise themselves and

compete with each other to become the so-called “chosen” one. This painting is theatrical. It depicts the bride – the mischievous and seductive woman – fighting her rival. Using her sexuality and looks, each bride essentially markets herself and is transformed into a commodity. Nevertheless, her eroticism is obscured by this overwhelming drive to sell herself. As a result, the facade of sexuality fades and she becomes comical.

In *The Mail- Order Bride Tries To Fit In* (fig. 2), I attempted to reveal another aspect of the issue –

the absurd and tragic situation that a woman puts herself into. The Bride is-squished inside the box, transformed into a commodity along with other consumer items.



Fig. 2. *Mail-Order Bride Tries To Fit In*, Oil on Canvas 3x4' 2012

I became interested in exploring this phenomenon because I could identify with it easily, and saw it as another form of Joseph Campbell's "hero's adventure." It is a story about women who, sacrificing parts of their selves, embark on a journey in order to find their "boon" in the form of stability, a sense of financial and personal security. Moreover, I see this series in broader terms: it is a story about our human condition. We all strive for something that provides us with a sense of self, security and place.

As my work in the MFA program progressed, I started placing less emphasis on the social issues I was investigating (at least they became less explicit). Even though important and worth exploring, all these implied issues of female sexuality and consumerism were impairing my ability to engage with my paintings emotionally. I believe my problem lay in the position I was taking of a removed and a passive observer. The paintings from the *Mail-Order Bride* series seem to come across exhausted, as if they lack a soul. I came to the conclusion that for me simply researching and inquiring into a topic is a contrived and narrow way to create that doesn't benefit artistic growth. In other words, in front of me there was a mountain I needed to climb,

and for the hike to be successful, I had to strip away some unnecessary baggage and become more honest in how I approached my paintings.

My artistic frustrations are represented in the piece *Awareness* (fig. 3). The painting depicts an exhausted woman stretching across the living-room floor, and obsessively cleaning it. She



Fig. 3. *Awareness*, Oil on Canvas 6x3,' 2012

appears to be scrubbing the floor in the same spot, over and over, making it clear and reflective. She has no awareness of her surroundings or even herself. All her

material belongings are pushed to the left side of the picture plane. Behind her is an empty wall. Both her strenuous contorted position and directional movement are reinforcing the compositional tension and imbalance. She is lit by the diffused light coming from an off-canvas window, upper right that make the mood and atmosphere of the painting dreamy and contemplative. She is preoccupied with this physically exhausting act, yet mentally is disengaged from her environment. She is attempting to find something within herself. In the painting she is confronted with her own gaze and thus becomes self-aware.

I perceive *Awareness* as a symbolic shift that allowed me to make a transition from one point to another. In this painting and the ones that followed, I gave myself permission to introduce

personal themes. This was the point when my work started to branch out. The content I constructed was shaped by various personal experiences and memories that had some significance to me. I focused on my own relationships to the place I grew up in, and my family, making them the center of my art. My paintings, suppressing visual theatricality and action, abandoned a specific narrative. I started exploring more abstract ideas and feelings. Including the sense of transition, displacement, and anxiety. Each painting was trying to solve the "impossible task," and was aimed at finding the unknown. It meant that I had to listen carefully to my intuition and let it lead me wherever it would.



Fig. 4. *Мигдаль*, Oil in Linen 36x54" 2013

“In the individuation process it is always a matter of something obsolete that must be left behind to die in order that the new may be born” (Jacobi 99).

The nature of discovery implies sacrifice. To find something new, one must give something else up.

My painting *Мигдаль* (fig. 4) represents separation from the old for sake of the new. The figure in the foreground is situated in the confined interior environment, yet occupies a distant mental space. She is looking beyond the room, distracted by something that is happening outside the picture plane. Her gaze is searching, inquiring into the

unknown. The architectural surroundings, along with the palette of the painting, define the

inner state of the character. The relationships between the dining room and the figure is that of separation; they are divided by the empty hallway. The divide is reinforced not just by the geometry of the composition but also by the temperature of the color palette, and the light source that comes from two directions – one from the left, another from the right. The figure is saturated with vibrant purple and pink that provides a contrast between her and the room. In my opinion, this color arrangement gives a sense of underlying urgency to the story. The almond on the floor creates a connection between the figure and the room, simultaneously representing loss and gain. I chose to give a title to this piece in Ukrainian. The word “мигдаль” translates to English as almond, but if broken apart it can create a double meaning: “Миг”- can mean “a moment,” and “даль” – “distance.”



Fig. 5. *Розмова*, Oil on Linen 31x51" 2012

My painting *Розмова* (fig. 5) – the word means both “a conversation” and “a disagreement” – evokes a similar concealed tension between the two figures. One of them stares beyond the canvas into the unknown, expecting, waiting for something, completely unaware of someone else's presence behind her. She is filled with a feeling of tension and anticipation, either because she foresees something in front of her, or because part of her is sensing that she is looking in the wrong direction. Perhaps whatever she is looking for is left behind. The atmospheric light reinforces the overall mysterious aura, contributing to the ambiguity of the narrative of the painting.

The painting *Коло* (fig. 6) presents two female figures – a mother and daughter– in the domestic setting. Each woman's leg is placed on the circular pattern inscribed into the carpet of the dining room floor. The older one, who is confidently sitting at the table, invites her daughter to step inside the circle, encouraging her with an offering of food. The younger woman is looking



Fig. 6. *Коло*, Oil on Linen 36x54" 2013

for something within the circle, inquiring into its meaning. Her leg mimics its circular shape, suggesting that she is about to become a part of it, and thus connects with her mother. The carpet represents the rite of passage –the participation in the order that each human enters in. The circle inscribed in its pattern is reminiscent of a mandala. Jung refers to the mandala as an “archetype of wholeness (236).” Its representations can be found in different cultures and religious practices. In

Tibetan Buddhism “it has a significance of a ritual instrument (yantra), whose purpose is to assist meditation and concentration” (Jung 235). In my painting it is a placeholder – a symbolic union that brings together the opposites within a psyche. It is a place where conscious and unconscious come together.

I discovered the mandala to be similar to the symbol of a crossroad, which I introduced in a few of my paintings. Old Slavs believed that the world was divided into four parts. Accordingly, they perceived everything in their everyday life in relation to the structure of crossroads, which

became one of the most common symbols in the superstitious beliefs of everyday life for generations to follow, finding its way into folklore and popular culture. Even today crossroads are considered sacred places and are often feared for their supernatural qualities. They are believed to be places where doors to different realms open and meet in the middle, where all time lines come into the present. I found this symbol to be analogous to the painting process itself, which opens up doors into a subconscious mind.



Fig. 7. *Роздоріжжя*, Oil on Canvas 3x5' 2012

In my painting, *Роздоріжжя* (fig. 7), instead of painting a literal crossroad, like the one found in my painting *Street View* (fig. 8), I focused on the directional gaze that formed it. Three of the

characters in the painting are looking in different directions: the frontal figure is gazing to her left, a figure in the middle ground is looking to her right, and the only character that is making eye contact with the viewer is the sheep. This arrangement poses a question as to whether the viewer is just an observer or an important participant who completes the crossroad. Gaze is a relationship the depicted characters and the viewer enter together. This painting embraces ambiguity and invites the viewer to become an interpreter who completes the narrative of the painting. The word “роздоріжжя”(crossroads) itself means both a place where roads come to one point, but also go apart. The women in the painting are situated in close proximity, yet each is headed in their own direction. The only thing that will remain in their place is the bucket with

an inscribed text, that reads “тыт нуто” (“this place is empty”).

Landscapes:

My landscape series emerged as an offspring from my main body of work. Stylistically, they are quite different from my narrative work; however, I feel that my landscapes are important representations of the self-analysis that is present in the rest of my paintings. The impulse to create them arose after visiting Ukraine – my first trip home in a couple of years. I felt a need to translate the “soul” of the place I grew up in, which is suffused with a vivid sense of history. I find that the place itself has become heavy with accumulated events from the past century: WWI, the communist revolutions, WWII, numerous famines, etc. Everything in Ukraine has been marked and scarred by its history. It carries the weight of collective memories that one can discern not only through listening to the accounts of witnesses and reading history books, but also in the immediate environment. My sense of identity was formed and shaped in relation to this subtle intangible feeling – a perception of belonging and participation in this historic order that extends beyond one's life span. Living thousands of miles away for an extended period of time dims that feeling of belonging. The “soul” of a place becomes either forgotten, or at least not as vivid any more, making it difficult to remember. To me, the impulse to paint this series was driven not just by nostalgia, but also by my personal need to keep reconnecting with home through the painting process. Painting them is in a way an exorcism of the subconscious. The landscape series depicts places in Ukraine that I have significant memories of, places that I often dream about. The paintings depict a morphed recollected memory – an echo of a place created by the blend of memories that had been altered by dreams. When working on these paintings I

referred to the works of Zdzislaw Beksinski (fig. 17) and Jeremy Geddes (fig.14), whose paintings express an ethereal dream-like quality that I am after. Similarly to Geddes's paintings, my work depicts human figures with obscured identities floating in the air. Even though the floating figures are embedded in representational space, and some do interact with the ground plane, they don't appear to belong in the environment they occupy. They are disconnected from it, isolated in their own realm.



Fig. 8. *По Полю Не Ходити*, Egg tempera/ Oil on Linen 10x12" 2013

In the painting *По Полю Не Ходити* (fig. 13) I use muted colors to isolate the figure from the saturated palette of the landscape. The figure is posed in the fetal position, making it unclear whether it is a female or a male. Moreover, this person is turned away from the viewer, which

obliterates his or her features even further. The ambiguity is meant to reinforce the surreal quality and to give the painting a sense of timelessness. Even though the figure is a prominent character, it is not central to the painting, and, in fact, is not noticeable at first glance. The landscape takes on a leading role.

I chose to paint these landscapes on small size canvases to reinforce the precious, fragile quality of a memory. They function as tiny openings – windows – into a different realm.

RESEARCH

The research I was conducting for my thesis shaped both the conceptual side of my work and helped me to construct the concrete methods with which I compose my paintings. My research

is derived from various sources, ranging from the literary and historic to the visual and artistic ones. One part is generated from anthropology, neuroscience, psychology, and art historical theoretical texts that focus on narrative paintings, and the other from visual sources that come from everywhere and are impossible to list: films, animation, video games, and of course, fine art. Some content is acquired from personal experience, and inspired by people that I have encountered.

Though not all sources found their way into my paintings, they, nevertheless, were crucial to the changes in my artistic consciousness. For instance, in *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancient Regime*, Norman Bryson analyzes French paintings, placing them in historical perspective, and identifying the “conflicting factors,” like social history and psychology that were important in the creation of the works of art. He examines different narrative styles, their evolution, and how visual techniques were employed to communicate the message of the paintings. This book has been invaluable in my understanding of historical paintings, but it also has helped me in developing my own methodology in constructing a narrative painting, especially in my desire to balance content with formal elements.

With the aid of the historical research I was conducting, and my mentor's direction, I began to view my paintings in the context of a cultural and historical framework. Research into my own cultural heritage took on a leading role. My inquiry into the Ukrainian national and cultural tradition is a deeply personal endeavor, since it has had the greatest role in shaping my development as an individual, and of course influencing me as an artist. I started to derive inspiration from Slavic ethnographic sources and the artists who are inspired by those sources as

well: Ukrainian and Russian literature, everyday superstition, folk tales (especially *биліни* “byliny”), and of course, mythology. Slavic myths and tales – immortalized in books, various films, and animation – have always had a special place in my heart. From an early age they shaped my perception. It is through the metaphors and symbols in those stories that I learned to see the world. They acknowledge the mysteries and the unknowns of this world. My work embraces the influence of folklore, attempting to translate the eerie, almost surreal quality of Slavic stories. It is the search for the intangible unknown, abundant in folk tales, that I try to make visible in my work. Sometimes the characters in my paintings find it in the picture plane, but most of the time this “unknown” is elusive – it escapes the canvas, and thus the viewer. In this regard I can identify with the early works of Kandinsky, where his fascination with Russian and German folklore is evident. He did not illustrate representations of particular stories; rather he alluded to them with atmosphere, trying to recreate the impression of those tales (Kurchanova).



Fig. 9. *Street View*, Oil on Canvas 36x46” 2012

The symbols in my work are usually implied and are not always used in a literal sense, like in the painting *Street View* (fig. 8). The female figure floats in the middle of the busy street– at the crossroads of an urban city. This figure is an allegorical Mavka, a female spirit trapped between two realms: our world and the afterlife. She is in a state

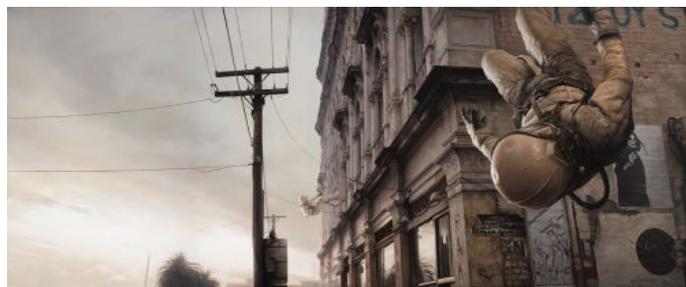
of transition, unable to find her place, and doesn't seem to belong with the rest. Nevertheless,

she is not a central subject in this painting. The main actors are pedestrians, who, preoccupied with their inner selves, seem to be disconnected from their surroundings. They each go about their business without questioning or even acknowledging the presence of the floating figure.



Both of my paintings, *Street View* (fig. 8) and *Encounter* (fig. 9), possess a restless mood. They embody the uncertainty I feel is present in contemporary society. Every generation is faced with an “unknown” of their own. Today the changes that come with technology and globalization challenge our sense of self, causing a constant state of searching for who we are as individuals and as people. Jeremy Geddes (fig14) conveys this feeling

Fig. 10. *Encounter*, Oil on Linen 26x30” 2013 with the subject matter he paints. An archetype that often emerges in his work is an astronaut who floats above the empty streets of a city or is embedded in an abstract space. The isolated figure with concealed face appears to be disconnected from the environment he/she occupies. I find that this uncertainty is more intensified in my home country. In the post-communist Ukraine, an individual does not just experience the general sentiments of anxiety and apathy that arise from the disquieting promise



of the future, but exists in the state of personal disconnect with oneself. This is not a result of temporary sickness but is a chronic symptom of history. The

Fig. 11. *Heat Death*, Jeremy Geddes, 2009

repressive politics of the Soviet Union were the major imprint on people's consciousness, suppressing both individual and national consciousness of minorities. The established method of Socialist Realism that covered every level of society merged personal identity and the State into one, the core of which was the Chief himself. It removed an individual from the center, alienating people from their psyche (Groys 3-13). In the hallucinatory short story *My Self (Romantica)*, Ukrainian writer, Mykola Khvulovuy, focused on the psychological conflict that such arrangements have on an individual. The protagonist of the story, the chekist, is presented with a tormenting choice: to follow his rational mind and sign the death roll for execution of innocent people, on which he finds his mother, or follow his heart and save her, which would require him to disobey his ideological convictions (Khvylovuy). His mother in the story represents his unconscious. If he saves her, he becomes whole inside. If he denies and kills her, he becomes forever detached from the important part of his psyche. According to Jung, when people are withdrawn from their inner selves, they become sick (225).



Fig 12. *Teenager*, Artem Volokitin, 2009

The political and social changes of the last two decades in Ukraine are slowly awakening people from this long sickness. When a society is on the verge of transformation, the process of individuation needs to happen. My painting *Коло* embodies this necessity symbolically. The child—the conscious mind, reconnects with her mother—the unconscious. A similar sensibility is expressed in Artem Volokitin's diptych, *Teenager* (fig. 12). The artwork portrays a young girl and a boy standing in a living-room setting. Their awkward half nude figures don't yet resemble formed

adults. They are entering the age of physical transformation – a rite of passage. Not yet fully aware of their change, they expose themselves to the camera, attempting to find themselves through the eyes of the viewer.



Fig. 13.
Nuda
Veritas,
Gustav
Klimt, 1898

Parallels can be drawn between *Teenager* and Gustav Klimt's drawing *Nuda Veritas* (fig. 13) – a woman holding a mirror, the reflection of which is empty. Klimt's drawing summed up the atmosphere of 19th century Europe—“the quest for modern man's true face,” who is not yet aware of his own self, or his place in the world (Schorske 217). Today’s changes are to some extent similar to the world of the 19th and early 20th centuries, when rapid modernization and radical political changes resulted in the search for a new identity in many European countries. Artists, for instance, rebelling against the constraints of academic art, started searching for new forms of expression, driven by a desire to convey the spirit of their era. The works of German and Austrian artists of that time channeled the

neurosis of their inner selves, which were a result of that cultural upheaval. Gustav Klimt and Alfred Kubin's images were sensitive to the anxious atmosphere of a society that was faced with the unknown of the future, as if anticipating the major catastrophes of the 20th century. Symbolist art shows things that are not within the horizon of reason, but stems from “preverbal, symbolic order” (Gibson 28) They are private, imaginative images that arise from the depth of the psyche and embrace the surreal quality of dreams, fantasies and premonitions (Gibson 139). Symbolists in Slavic countries of the 19th and 20th century, turned to the mythology and folklore of their land to depict the same lingering feeling of their era. The influence of folklore has always

been profound on Eastern European artists, but became much more prominent at that time. Artists in the Russian Empire, like Ilya Repin, Ivan Bilibin, Mikhail Vrubel, also show interest in their cultural heritage, merging fantastic and symbolic images from folktales and mythology with the realism of everyday life. The fantastical imagery of fairy tales is not always explicit in Slavic art, but they have a definite presence there. These artists looked into mythology and folklore to uncover some truth about themselves. After all, myths and legends— the stories that survive the test of time —on a fundamental level reveal the truth about the nature of existence, unraveling the complexities of human experience (Lovleva). The exploration of mythology and folklore is an inquiry into the psyche of one's ancestors. It provides us with a chance to not only understand their soul, but to define our present selves in relationship to the past. The film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, by Sergei Parajanov, is based on the classic book by Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky. It links past with present. The plot of the film, focusing on the beliefs and folk customs of the Carpathian people, is a drama about domestic life in the 19th century. It is an archetypal story that revolves around the universal themes of births, relationships, and death. The plot is typical, but the visual storytelling invokes a sensual world that walks on the fringes between reality and dreams. This film, like many of Parajanov's works, is renowned for its symbolic imagery derived from—Christianity and the pagan rituals of Slavs, which charge the observed reality with unseen significance. His film, like the works of my favorite artists, contains an element of subtle mystery that cannot always be perceived by the rational mind but is rather felt (Ebert).

Paintings by contemporary fantastic realist artist Zdzislaw Beksinski (fig. 17) never cease to move me. His work engages all of one's senses. This talent of balancing awe, mystery and distress

contributes to the strong emotional weight, and the reason it is impossible to remain neutral or unresponsive to his work. When working on my landscapes I often referred to his images, not because of the subject matter per se, but because of his ability to capture the “soul” of the place he grew up.



Fig. 14. *Title unknown*, Zdzislaw Beksiński, date unknown

The traumatic memories of the horrors of WWII that he witnessed as a child were manifested in his art: overwhelming monumental figures, erected on desolate landscapes, are painted with meticulous obsessive detail. Despite the compositional movement, created by various human and inanimate structures, the imagery is static and mummified. Misty atmospheres, subtle light sources, and a limited color palette contribute to the overall macabre mood and timelessness of his imagery. Post-apocalyptic landscapes, coupled with forms resembling human beings, are rendered realistically, yet they preserve a distorted and stylized quality similar to illustrations of Eastern European folktales. His work has a rare attribute of beauty, which can be understood as an ability to reconcile visual aesthetic qualities with unsettling subject matter. Even though the imagery of his art at first glance can be seen as disturbing and dark, it is not meant to horrify or shock for its own sake. It is honest, because it speaks the truth about our human condition on a fundamental level. It provokes contemplation on our own mortality, yet is timeless because of its ability to engrave that moment of contemplation. I find there are a lot of similarities between the artists that captivate me. I can identify with the main ideas of their work. They search for truth and

contemplate the meaning of human existence in all its forms – from personal and domestic to social and historic. Their work is distinguished by a constant quest to expose and pin down a main idea of the age they are living in. I, too, search for that meaning in my paintings. Even though my influences have had a profound impact on me, ultimately they are not a decisive factor in how I approach painting. They never take supremacy over studio practice itself: “Everything that the artist does is but play... When I play like that, I tremble in every nerve, my whole body resounds with music and a god is within my heart. I don't give a damn whether it's hard or easy... whether or not it has any practical purpose. Now and then I come across someone who is grateful for my things and who gets something out of them...” – V. Kandinsky (Kurchanova 75).

METHODOLOGY

Studio as a state of mind:

“The artist works like a scientist. His work exists not only for their own sake but also to demonstrate certain problem solutions” – Gombrich

Similarly to many fine artists, I find studio practice an important element in contributing to the production and evolution of my work. There is an “analogy between experimental science and experimental art”(42). It is a “laboratory” where experiments happen. Studio practice opens my mind to view my paintings as an investigation that allows me to think, experiment, and learn. “The studio as instrument is an invention that has had a long life – from Pieter Janssens's studio as light-box to the studio as a state of mind” (44). It is especially evident in “Cezanne's pictorial innovations... [who transitioned] from attending to an imitative landscape to attending to real

particles of things”(43). Cezanne wrote: “The landscape reflects on itself, is humanized, thinks itself in me. I objectify it, project it, fix it on my canvas” (Alpers 44). I adopt this approach in my own studio practice: instead of imitating the observed world, I analyze, internalize and filter it. When faced with a blank canvas, I do not always know where the process will take me. Painting is a search. It is aimed at finding a perfect potion, something that I haven't seen before; therefore, the ingredients I use are never the same. Even though every painting tries to tackle its own problem and has its own ultimate mission, there are still a few things I keep in mind when constructing an image. One of them is visual movement.

Movement:

The nature of two-dimensional art is its inevitable stillness. It is a property of my medium that I try to fight by introducing various types of visual movement into my work, ranging from the physical motion of the figures to the expressive usage of paint application.



Fig. 15. *Studio*, Oil on Canvas 16x20” 2012



Fig. 16. *Hunter*, Oil on Canvas 18x24” 2012

In the paintings *Studio* (fig. 11) and *Hunter* (fig. 12) I employ several strategies in achieving this. First, the figures in both are moving in succession from one side of the picture plane to the other, establishing the

directional movement of the entire composition. Secondly, both of these paintings, along with *The Street View* (fig. 8), rely heavily on the discombobulation of forms, which breaks the

continuity of lines and planes. It achieves the effect of a figure moving through time and space. Additionally, I employ scintillation – textural marks of sporadic shapes and sizes, which reinforce the movement of the paint surface itself. Movement in my work is also constructed as rhythm that balances compositional complexity and simplicity (Hess).

A study in neuroscience shows that movement helps to bring life to a painting, enhancing our emotional engagement with an image: it is through empathy – our basic level of response – that a viewer is connected with the work of art: “...beholders might find themselves automatically simulating the emotional expression, the movement, or even the implied movement within the representation. This empathetic response constitutes “the feeling of bodily engagement with the gestures, movements and intentions of others; the identification of the emotions of observed others; and a feeling of empathy for bodily sensations... Even the artist’s gestures in producing the art work induce the empathetic engagement of the observer, by activating simulation of the motor program that corresponds to the gesture implied by the trace” (Freedberg).

Evolution of methodology:

The evolution in my methodology coincides with the evolution of content and formal elements in my paintings. My “*Ritual*” series – work that I developed before coming to LCAD – utilizes extreme closeups, displaying cropped figures that take up an entire picture plane. This angle creates physical proximity with the viewer, allowing an intimate and private view of the subject matter of the painting. Cropping serves the purpose of reinforcing the content of the work, but I felt that only focusing on cropping and close-up as a stylistic device drained my painting of

meaning. That series consequently lost freshness and originality because the compositions felt a bit suffocating. In my thesis work I gave myself two main objectives: 1) to break away from my photo references, which would potentially free me from trying to make an image look like an exact copy of a photograph; 2) to introduce representational pictorial space into my paintings. Using figures has always been a necessity for the content, as they are the main actors in telling the story, but to believe those stories, those figures needed a place to occupy. Including secondary information – pictorial space – was a pivotal point in creating a universe that acted as a threshold for those characters to live in. This decision added visual variety, enhancing the realism of images, and “arouses[ing] our willingness to believe” in them (Bryson 12). The environments I started constructing in my paintings were imaginary, and not drawn from single photographic source. I purposefully wanted to create the setting that lives in my subconscious mind rather than places that actually exist somewhere. Even my landscape paintings are fabricated to a degree – composed of various source materials from photos I gathered on my trip to Ukraine. The only concrete photo references I employ are people. Because of the complex structure of human anatomy, it is more difficult to conceive a human form lit with the desired light source. Unfortunately, I haven't developed that skill yet. As a figurative artist, human figures are my primary focus. One of the goals of my work is to depict the essence of the psychological states of the characters presented in my work. Their expressions contribute to the content of the paintings by creating specific emotions and moods.

One of my favorite artists, Ilya Repin, is able to do so effortlessly. He was a true master of capturing the individuality and psychological depth of every character in his paintings. This ability helped to capture the existing personal and social tensions of his time. He creates

archetypes from different social groups whose facial features would depict their mental states, and also speak in some way about their inner constitution.

In the master program I was compelled to find new ways of approaching the execution of my work. Being process oriented, I began experimenting with new techniques, tools, and materials in order to find the stylistic look and method that would suit my natural inclinations, and potentially better communicate the content of my paintings. It wasn't enough for me to create representational imagery that relied on mimicking what I saw; I wanted to deconstruct the process of observing reality through all my senses. Moreover, I attempted to break away from the hyperrealistic rendering that I was confounded in, and explore a looser, more gestural, avenue of painting. Being inspired by some formalist artists, like Alex Kanevsky and Kent Williams, whose work possesses an effortless quality, I, too, searched for the method that would allow my work to breathe. I look up to fine artists' paintings that do not aim at technical perfection, but rather use the painting medium to its fullest advantage, exploring its properties not for its own sake, but to depict how things feel – their expression rather than how they look.

Some of my latest work has undergone this shift in technical approach: I limited my palette, and acquired a variety of odd tools besides brushes, allowing for a more gestural mark, and switched from a rough canvas to a finer linen. In the painting "Розмова" I balanced additive and reductive methods in applying the paint. The first layer was accomplished with a grisaille underpainting of burnt sienna wash mixed with raw umber. In the second layer I utilized a black and white palette: in some areas I diluted the paint with medium (galkyd, to make it dry faster) to allow burnt sienna undertone to show through. In other areas I used a palette knife to build up the

paint, only to scrape it back and/or blend it in with rubber tools. The color scheme of the painting at this point was monochromatic, and the usage of color only came in as a last minute tweaking method that was meant to move a viewer's eye around the image, accentuating the compositional movement.

Overall, I started trusting my intuition in guiding me through the process of painting. I vary my technique from one painting to another depending on the goals I set for myself, but whatever I paint, my work is naturalistic in representation and painterly in approach.

Conception of a painting:

The conception of a single painting is not a linear process for me, and it varies from painting to painting. Sometimes seeing powerful and inspiring imagery is enough to awaken a desire to translate it into a painting, but more often it is an idea or a story that finds its way onto a canvas. Usually, the initial concept that gets me fired up is illusive, and simply not fully composed in my mind. The painting process itself helps me to further nurture and construct it. As I paint, it becomes clearer and clearer what it is about, or why I need to visualize it to begin with.

To begin a painting, I draw several thumbnails to decide on a best-suited composition. I gather reference images that are relevant as a solution for problems I might run into, which are mostly compositional and tonal. My paintings evolve or change completely during the process of painting from the beginning to the finished stage, and only carry the slightest trace of the original sketch and idea. I try not to impose conscious limitations on my work, and to listen to the needs of a painting that, gaining a life of its own, starts to dictate its own course. Even though I plan out compositions thoroughly at the beginning, I never stay married to the original

Photoshop sketch, even if I am far along in the painting process, but change it if it needs improvement. For example, my painting *Awareness* (described earlier) started with a clearly conceived image in my mind – a woman pushing her belongings from one corner of the room to another. As I finished working out the composition, I translated the original image somewhat accurately. The painting utilized a balance between simplicity and complexity both in term of composition and paint application: a horizontal abstract form – a brightly lit wall, painted with subtle smoother brush work – occupied most of the painting, giving the viewer's eye room to rest from the active detailed bottom part of the painting, textured with a thick palette knife impasto. Nevertheless, I felt that this image was drained of energy and it lacked something crucial. My dissatisfaction with the image was shared by my mentor. The abstract shapes of the composition were weak and didn't reinforce the psychological weight of the gesture of the female figure. The abstract elements of the composition needed changes. The breaking point came after studying the painting, "Annunciation," by Leonardo da Vinci. His painting can be read as male/ female forces represented by horizontal (active) and vertical (passive) abstract forms. I decided to appropriate those abstract elements in my work. Consequently, I broke up the wall, adding a vertical form on the left – an opening into a different space. In my painting the female became transformed into the active dominant horizontal force, contradicting her submissive pose, but creating a pivotal moment in the narrative – she sees herself in the reflection created by her cleaning ritual and becomes aware.

The geometry of a composition based on horizontal and vertical arrangement of abstract forms can be found in a number of my paintings. "Розмова", for instance, delivers its content through similar abstract arrangement of forms: the strong horizontal movement of the figures is

reinforced by directional gaze and the gesture of the hand, which is stopped by a vertical opening in the wall on the left side of the canvas.

If the composition of the painting is planned out thoroughly, and I know how that painting will look, I often lose interest before completing the image. Through extensive planning the painting loses the element of surprise, and I feel like the time spent working on it was fruitless. What excites me at the beginning stages of the painting process is the potential of what the image could become. When a concept changes from its original idea to a finished product, evolving into its own being, it is the most satisfying experience for me.



Fig. 17. *Encounter 1*, Oil on Linen 26x30" 2013

The *Encounter* (fig. 10) went through this type of evolution. The scene in the first version of this painting was set in the park. Two girls are engaged in a conversation, while a third one, distracted from her activity, is looking directly at us. The position of the viewer in this painting is that of a participant, who intrudes into the person's private space. This intrusion puts the figure at her most vulnerable state, where the awareness of herself comes from being looked at.

When I completed this piece, I felt compelled to paint another version, after observing that the immediacy of the narrative was lost. The figures appear to be out of reach, comfortably hidden by the tree in the foreground, making the viewer

a distant observer.

By cutting out a portion of pictorial space in the following version (*Encounter* fig. 9), our attention is placed directly on the figure, making the scene more intimate. In the first stage of this painting she resembles the main figure in the previous version, but her discomfort and fear are much more intense and convincing. Nevertheless, I didn't want to beat the viewer on the head with a hammer by overstating her haunted look. I decided to quiet her down by removing her knees from the composition, which were placed there to signify self-protection. Of course, one change to a composition provokes a domino effect. Since the knees weren't there anymore the shape of a tree branch had to change. As a result, tiny tweaks like these altered the entire concept. In the final stage of this painting she is not threatened by the viewer's gaze anymore. Moreover, she and the viewer switched roles. She becomes an intruder herself, looking at the viewer with a forthcoming gaze. This arrangement potentially constructs a foundation where the viewer becomes aware of his/her own self. Lacan in his works "refers to the uncanny sense that the object of our eye's look or glance is somehow looking back at us of its own will. This uncanny feeling of being gazed at by the object of our look affects us in the same way as castration anxiety (reminding us of the lack at the heart of symbolic order)..."(Felluga).

CONCLUSION

"Go there – I know not where, bring back what – I know not" is a metaphor for my artistic journey. It is an "impossible task" I wanted to solve in my master's program. I didn't know where I was going or what I was looking for. The answer, unfortunately, wasn't "inside a needle, which is in an egg, which is in a duck, which is in a hare, which is in an iron chest, which is buried

under a green oak tree, which is on an island in the middle of an ocean.” I checked there many times (Koschei).

I believe that feeling lost and frustrated is not such a bad thing after all. The experiences in the last two years of wandering and taking various turns with my work have solidified this conviction. They freed me from the constraints I built that required me to follow one artistic path, allowing me to broaden my horizon. I let myself experiment with different techniques, and explored a variety of themes to find and define my artistic direction. I came to the conclusion that painting is a life long journey of explorations, which cannot be completed in two years, but I believe that for me the pieces of the puzzle are finally coming together. The answer to my art journey started emerging as a myriad of basic questions. Do I paint because I can't not do it and I need to indulge myself in the process of painting itself, or do I paint because I have something important to say? Can I give an honest answer to that? I feel guilty saying yes to the first one, and dishonest saying yes to the second one. I don't know if I can ever answer these questions objectively, but I feel it is important to keep asking. Every painting I make is meant to answer these questions, and each differently.

I spend hour after hour isolated in my studio tête-à-tête with my paintings, completely, and maybe selfishly, absorbed in the process. Will they serve some important purpose on a larger scale, providing me with a deeper understanding of the world? Maybe, maybe not... However, this innate impulsive craving that motivates me to paint gives me an opportunity to communicate with others through visual experience. And I believe that painting is a language that connects people on a level that words do not.

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APPENDIX A



Fig 1. *The Fight of the Mail-Order Brides*, Oil Canvas 5x3'



Fig. 2. *Mail-Order Bride Tries To Fit In*, Oil on Canvas 3x4' 2012



Fig. 3. *Awareness*, Oil on Canvas 6x3' 2012



Fig. 4. *Мигдаль*, Oil in Linen 36x54" 2013



Fig. 5. *Розмова*, Oil on Linen 31x51" 2012



Fig. 6. *Kono*, Oil on Linen 36x54" 2013 (in progress)



Fig. 7. *Роздоріжжя*, Oil on Canvas 3x5' 2012



Fig. 9. *Street View*, Oil on Canvas 36x46" 2012



Fig. 10. *Encounter*, Oil on Linen 26x30" 2013



Fig. 17. *Encounter 1*, Oil on Linen 26x30" 2013



Fig. 15. *Studio*, Oil on Canvas 16x20" 2012

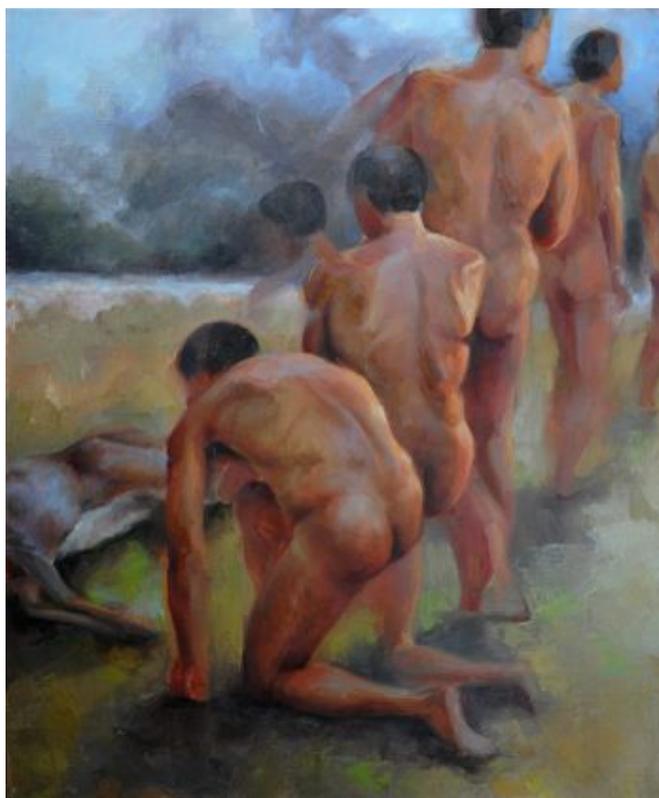


Fig. 16. *Hunter*, Oil on Canvas 18x24" 2012

Landscape Series



Fig. 8. *По полю Не Ходити*, Egg tempera/ Oil on Linen 10x12" 2013



Дорога Дорóга, Egg tempera/ Oil on Linen 9,5x12" 2012



Поміж Мною й Дивиною, Egg tempera/ Oil on Linen 5x11" 2012



Пошук, Egg tempera/ Oil on Linen 10x12" 2013



Вітер, Oil on Linen 10x12" 2012



Провід, Oil on Linen 6x8" 2012

APPENDIX B

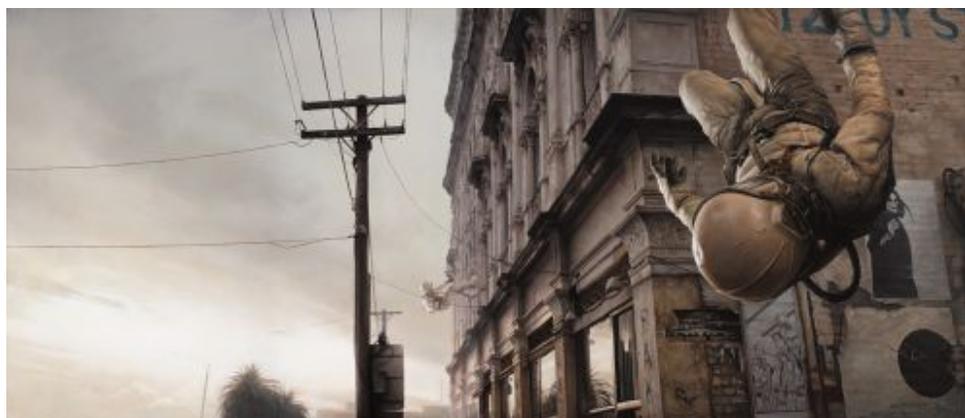


Fig. 11. *Heat Death*, Jeremy Geddes, 2009



Fig 12. *Teenager*, Artem Volokitin, 2009



Fig. 13. *Nuda Veritas*, Gustav Klimt, 1898



Fig. 14. *Title unknown*, Zdzislaw Beksinski, date unknown

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