

EARTHQUAKES

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ABSTRACT

Through my study of landscape and portraiture I have found that there are many ways of interpreting and composing a representation of the world. This body of work represents earthquakes and disasters with the knowledge that I have gained from my studies of nature. I want to create exciting images of life, something that will capture a viewer's senses. I have found that what is very exciting about painting is not the subject matter, but the way the artist utilizes the tools that they have to tell a story. There are millions of techniques and ways to apply paint to elicit a reaction from someone. Since these paintings are about disasters, this is a subject that naturally makes people feel afraid, scared, or uneasy. Regarding people's reactions, I feel that I need to paint these disasters as though they are full of life and vitality. I hope that the imagery and representation of the imagery creates a pleasing story in itself, something that ignites a sense of adventure and existence.

Of all the sciences and stories that I have studied while doing research for these paintings, I have found that my best resources are nature and observation. My instructors, family, and peers have aided me, but most of my studies have been best spent researching drawing, art history, and painting. Some of the stories that inspire me are from the Bible, for example, the book of Revelation. Through the readings of the Bible I feel that I can reach themes that abound in mortality, life and death, and our existence. Exploring the natural environment can lead to finding great examples of beauty, but this also provides great avenues of expression that I hope to capture in my paintings.

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DESCRIPTION

The ideas that I have gathered about art are usually best portrayed by the paintings and drawings that I create. I mostly work in oil paint on canvas, charcoal on paper, or watercolor on paper. I have also created landscape sculpture models out of Styrofoam, mat board, glue, and acrylic paints. The body of work that I plan to show in May of 2016 is primarily composed of oil paintings of disasters. I like creating paintings of disasters, and I feel as though I am working with some very powerful subject matter, however, all my work represents a little more than what can be readily perceived. I portray mostly images of earthquakes and their aftermath. I think the themes and concepts that are in the paintings work with the subject matter but are less about the earthquake and more about life and the contrasts that we see in nature. I draw a lot of my inspirations from observation and observational drawing and painting. Studying from live models as well as landscapes and still life has led me to gain a great understanding of life drawing and painting. I pay attention to things like technique, the application of paint, brushstrokes, and other skills so that I can utilize these tools to be creative with the manner in which I interpret reality.

The work that I was doing when I began the Master's program was mainly centered around landscapes and life in general. By being imaginative with my work, I have been able to find ways to push the boundaries of reality with subject matter, and also with technique and style of painting. I create compositions while keeping in mind that I want to emphasize certain areas and make an interesting overall design. For example, if the pole in the painting titled *Earthquake* didn't feel as close, if the buildings didn't feel as large, or distant, then the composition would be missing something. I want my compositions to be lively and dynamic, so I compose with as much of the end result in mind as possible.

Scenarios in my paintings include simple narratives that are vaguely implied. For instance, in the painting titled, *Earthquake 3*, depicted is a video arcade during the aftermath of an earthquake. This sparks interest because there are so many possibilities for narrative, from the arcade games in the foreground, to the cars outside. In *Earthquake*, an otherwise peaceful intersection with the hustle and bustle of a city is shaken and split apart by a terrible earthquake. I try to leave the paintings vague enough to be open to interpretation. I think opposites inhabit many of the best paintings I've seen. In an earthquake there is a certain amount of inherent chaos, and the interesting part is finding something to counter this activity. The usual opposing end of this dichotomy is beauty. The other ideas that I find to counter the chaotic environment are things such as, humor, peace, and stillness.

A goal of mine is to create a scene that feels as though it is real, as if it really happened, and I experienced it. Can I make people believe that these things happened? What is real? What is a subjective experience? These are questions that I think about in order to attempt to understand what people respond to. This is because I want the viewer to be part of the experience so that they can relate to the feelings, mood, composition, harmony, and other pictorial devices. I like to think of the subject matter as secondary and dependent on the interpretation of the composition; in this sense, I could be creating a painting of anything. I think there is a certain balance that is put to the test when I make a disaster, more destruction almost always requires more beautiful interpretation to balance the painting. Of course, like many things that we come across, beauty can be thought of as subjective because, aside from subject matter, beautiful painting can come in many different forms. I think beauty is merely what pleases, I focus on technical things that can make a painting beautiful; such as, color harmonies, clarity in composition, nice design, and other schemes and considerations. What I

think pairs the techniques that I use with the subject matter is contrast, and all the ironies that can be found there. I think it ironic that amazing, man-made designs may appear more beautiful once in pieces; the contrast that can make the designs stand out more.

In one painting I have the earth falling apart as it reacts to land mass's friction to show the wonder of the earthquake. Another is the city intersection in Long Beach, California, where the land is moving about as vehicles are taken along and being flipped; this taking into account the amazing carnage that can ensue in these catastrophic events. Once more I created a scene from within an arcade that has been affected by an earthquake. The disaster paintings are generated from actual photos that I have taken, or found. Reference was created of the things which I was unable to find in real-life. For instance, I couldn't locate a shadow on the surface of an ascending plane, so I made the plane out of styrofoam, and used the sun to cast a shadow. I wanted to simulate how earth would look dissembled, so I made it the same way, with the help of my mentor, John Brosio. This model was made out of styrofoam, hobbywood, and H.O. scale cars that you would normally see on model train sets, with the addition of real dirt and acrylic paints. This aided in saving time, and provided new inspirations that I found with positioning these objects. Having something to literally observe, I feel, is an important part of understanding the space.

My focus has become an inclusion of all the concepts and ideas that I have adopted in my education. While it would be more difficult to do away with all the things that I have learned, I am learning that consciously using these lessons effectively helps in creating the tangible environment. I would like it if my work portrays, but is not limited to, the specific instruction that I have been given in the past seven or eight years I have been involved with Laguna College, a student of oil painting and related arts. These lessons are more specifically

the implementation of drawing, perspective, figurative and landscape painting, and all the other senses that I have gained in the courses that I have studied. There are many lessons on form and content that I work hard at bringing to fruition in my work, as well as the fundamentals that lie within the forms, such as gesture and anatomy that lie at the foundation of my drawings. Although these things might be thought of as traditional academic skills, I think that they hold an important message within themselves. I would like these paintings to be lively and I want to create an atmosphere that viewers can feel as though they are playing a part in the experience. I think that incorporating common ideals of painting craft, technique, and skills that I have learned through figurative painting is essential to the creation of these environments. These ideals seem to me as containing humor, beauty, wonder, and many more aspects of life. A good example of the formal lessons that I have learned being included in these paintings is through interplaying rich, saturated colors and contrasting them with subtle variations in their counterparts to create a sense of voluminous shapes, space and form. These elements are the things that I think most people agree would constitute our visual experiences, making things feel real. These paintings should compose just enough to create a good story or a significant experience that can contain many parts of daily life. Constructing destruction is a concept that came to mind as I was creating these paintings and their models. I find that to be a fascinating topic because it sounds impossible.

I implement all of the same tools in the process of creating paintings of disasters, normal landscape, still life, and portrait paintings, and I paint them the same way. I look for complements found in nature, and I try to utilize them to portray a small narrative of contemporary life, and to represent our magnificent landscapes. Of course I add and omit things in both paintings. I desire for people to see the disaster paintings and the normal life

paintings as the same. I want these to appear alike because I think this kind of a painting has a statement about nature's potential and capacity. I think nature shows us everything we want to see in great story. The differences that I have found between my plein air, landscape, still life and portrait paintings is obviously subject matter. The earthquakes have a heightened experience, and I think this comes from the imaginative aspects that I incorporate in the work. I know most of the limits in the possibilities of what the earth can do with an earthquake, so when I push these, I think I create a more interesting composition. The balance comes in finding what I can do to make these paintings more real, despite the creative choices I have made.

The goal of creating these natural disasters would be to regenerate an instance that can contain an exciting story, with the viewer being part of the experience. There are technical devices that I use in composition that create interest. On occasion, I juxtapose organic against inorganic shapes when I want to create contrast. More tools that I use in design are things like stillness and movement, activity and rest, and other compositional strategies. They connect to the themes that are apparent in my paintings. I take consideration in presenting contrasting themes of life and death, order and chaos, confusion and tranquility, adventurous themes, tension and relief, humor amidst ruin, and other themes of these kinds. For instance, in *Earthquake*, I created a painting of a Long Beach City street in which I took into consideration the vertical shapes created by the surrounding buildings; this was done to offset the damage that the earthquake will naturally portray anywhere in the painting. On another level, life and death are seen in instances in which the glorious palm trees are set next to the shattering landscape and buildings. These works shouldn't alarm anyone any more than a fictional story, script, or Hollywood film; yet, I hope they are able to contain enough

life to capture people's attention and imaginations. These paintings are meant to be seen as one could envision an adventurous film or story. Although, I think that it is important to note that this theme can have the capacity to hold a certain amount of intensity because it is fictive and not real.

These paintings can be metaphors for other real events, whether they are terrible, beautiful, factual, imaginary, or fun. The tragedy that we find in earthquakes worldwide is astounding and terrifying. Through searching many reference and resource materials I have found more than enough photos of demolished buildings and houses where people lost loved ones, jobs and homes. I think some of the best stories that I have seen in film, read about in books, and that I have seen in paintings have been about perseverance through troubling circumstances. Michael Harnish was discussing with me the other day about how some of the best art and films have included a full range of emotions, and produce a range of emotions in the viewer. In other words, I think the success lies in the balance of these powers. However, I try to limit reference that might appear as sad or very frightening depictions of nature, unless the composition requires it, as it might take over the whole painting. Earthquakes as well as landscapes are subjects that I think a lot of people have personal experiences with, especially in California. So a part of my work has been finding images in which people identify with the environment. If someone has a great personal experience that relates to a painting, I think that is an especially good thing. The objective of my work is to create an environment that sustains a viewer's interest and beholds some kind of an adventure or entertainment. I have found a lot of stories in the Bible book of Revelation that relate to end of days scenarios. I think that these stories are very inspirational and strengthen my faith and beliefs. I admire Rembrandt van Rijn's skills in depicting stories from the Bible. The stories in my paintings

aren't as specific, but I take inspiration from great visual storytelling. For instance, the mail truck in the painting titled, *Night Quake*, was somewhat of an inspiration from the book of Revelation and the letters John of Patmos wrote. To add more about what I think people can take from disaster paintings, I think earthquakes are among the experiences that have united people. Humans have no real control of earthquakes, and people must come together in order to endure such events. In the events in and surrounding the 9-11 World Trade Center tragedy, there are ways to defend against terrorism, but more defense is yet to be made against earthquakes, no one is ever completely safe from natural disasters. Since nature has no control there is only science and God to explain any and all events. I try not to delve into these themes too seriously. Ultimately, I find these paintings to be a part of my personal history and something that I think others find entertaining, yet attached to real, very significant events from around the world.

RESEARCH

When I create a disaster painting, I find as much reference material to paint from as I can. I often draw from my own experiences, including personal encounters with nature. Since I have lived in California all my life, I have experienced earthquakes. I was five when the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake struck California. I can remember my friends running down the street as I set my bike down. I did not know what was happening. I went to find that my house was a mess. I learned about what had happened from my mother and the television. The majority of what I have learned about earthquakes is from media and online. There are many resources that have taught me how the earth is constructed, designed and formed with tectonic plates. Tectonic plates are the large, thin, rigid plates that move relative to one another on the outer surface of the Earth. Plate movement is thought to be made by a ridge in

the ocean where land is being formed by rising magma. The magma is cooled, and pushed up and out. The result is a plate that pushes other plates. The plate is pushed underneath other plates at subduction zones. So, tectonic plates are moving, slowly. Seafloor spreading happens when molten rock is forced up from inside the earth at ridges. The resulting plates that are created and pushed are then subducted under surrounding plates, or they come up against other ones, creating friction. Earthquakes are caused by the friction between these plates at a meeting place, sometimes called subduction zones, which is a fault. A fault is also a fracture along which the blocks of crust on either side have moved relative to one another, parallel to the fracture. Faults generally move at a certain rate each year. Rotation of the world, and the tidal forces of the sun and moon also interact with plate movement. The edges of faults are stuck together and the energy that would normally cause plates to slide past one another is stored up. When the force of the moving plate finally overcomes the friction of the jagged edges of the fault and it unsticks, all that energy is released. The energy is released from that point, like dropping a rock in a pond. Faults are important in my painting because they are like an anatomical part. Fault lines are to an earthquake painting like an anatomical landmark is to a figure drawing. I think that it is important for people to know a little about the land that they walk on, if only because it creates an awareness of our environment. I am portraying the earth as fragile and vulnerable, so I think it's also significant that people know some facts about earthquakes.

There are different kinds of faults, this makes each earthquake different. The inter-workings of waves and subduction zones are important when I want to know the extent of what nature can do. For instance, the many geological factors of a fault line help me predict the possible resulting visual effect with a high degree of accuracy. Take, for instance, a fault

that is 10 miles away and rated at a 9.9 magnitude caused by waves that can be described as “surface” and “rayleigh” waves. In this scenario I imagine that, the earth would open and swallow cars, buildings would collapse, gas mains would explode, and glass window shards would be falling from the skyscrapers. Knowing facts also helps me incorporate earthquake photos for use in my paintings, for example the photos in Figure 1. and 2. I have understood that there are things that the earth cannot do in earthquakes. Some scientists have said that there can't be great openings in the ground unless there are sink holes or great landslides. Although, after seeing so many photos, I am convinced no one really knows what mother nature can do. In film and television, many of the disastrous events that might take place have been exaggerated with movie magic to create more exciting images. When I create an earthquake composition, I use photos of real events. I am usually very inspired by films, and I try to emulate some effects that I see. I have learned a lot from the pictures and videos of earthquakes and their aftermath that I have found online. Figure 1. is a photo of part of the earthquake that occurred in Anchorage Alaska in 1964, it lasted four minutes and thirty seconds and had a magnitude of 9.2. The small group of photos that I have found of this event have been influential when I try to imagine what happens to the ground when it comes apart. The anatomy of an earthquake is useful for creating images of earthquakes, and understanding how these phenomena work. As most people know, in order to create art while referencing the human body, it greatly aides the artist to know about what is going on beneath the human forms, and how it works. So, studying human anatomy's functions and forms is extremely helpful when describing the surface planes of the body. When I approach creating an earthquake scene, I look for the “anatomical” parts that I have read about. The information I gather about fault lines and earth movement could be useful to those wanting to

create pictures of mountains and landscapes as well as earthquakes. When we hear about an earthquake, we usually hear the word magnitude. Magnitude is a number that characterizes the relative size of an earthquake, and how powerful the earthquake was. Magnitude is based on measurement of the maximum motion recorded by a seismograph. A seismograph, or seismometer, is an instrument used to detect and record earthquakes. Earthquakes are recorded and mapped, they indicate the location of a fault, and the electrical voltage, or 'magnitude.' Most people are familiar with these kinds of measurements, these measurements are usually the things that we tell our friends when we hear about an earthquake's size (USGS, 2016).

There are events that we hear about on the news that are similar to earthquakes, these are: aftershocks, landslides, liquefaction, floods, tsunamis, and sink holes. It is scary how there is no limit to nature's fury. Earthquakes are nature's proof of human and nature's fragility. Something that helps people cope with our fragility is faith in a higher power. A big part of my development as a painter and artist is my Christian faith. Attending church on the



Figure 1. Unknown Photographer, *Anchorage, Alaska, 1964.*

weekends, and listening to Bible programs have inspired a lot of choices that I make. Bible verse, the people, and the stories that I read about consistently bring life to the ideas that I have. In the Bible, Revelation 11:13 says, “At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of Heaven” (International Bible Society, 1040). This tells of the strengthening of faith that can happen with the survivors of such events, a great instance of God providing hopefulness to those in need. The story of John of Patmos and Revelation are intriguing to me. Revelation is a book that describes the



Figure 2. Unknown Photographer, *Untitled Loma Prieta earthquake photo*, 1989.

revelation that Jesus Christ gave to John. John was told to write letters to seven churches of Asia to warn them, and encourage them to correct their ways. Revelation and many passages in the Bible usually inspires beautiful imagery and design in my sketchbooks and paintings. I listen to Bible programs on the radio more than I read. I listen to many Christian talk show preacher and pastor’s on the radio, a few are: Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Rick Warren, Rene

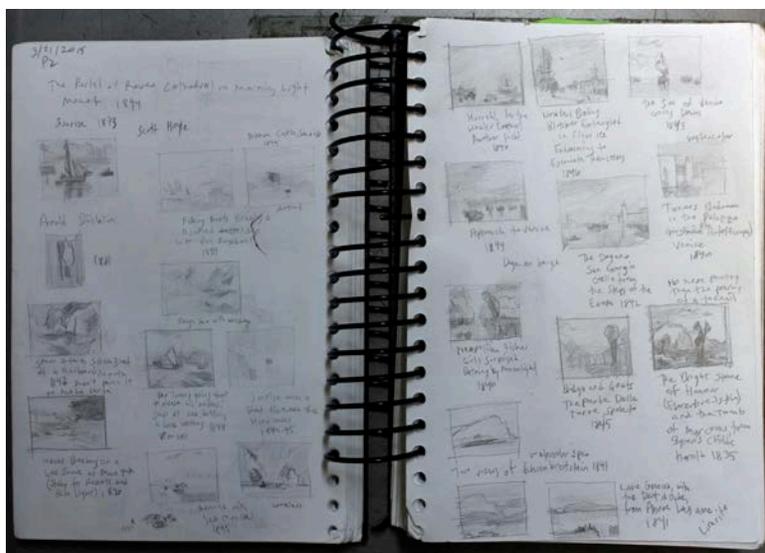


Figure 3. Trevor Christiansen, *Image from pages of my sketchbook*, 2015, Pencil, 6.5 in. x 10 in., J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA.

Schlaepfer, as well as people that take me through the Bible, like J. Vernon McGhee. I find the Bible to be an unlimited resource for life, health, and energy in every part of the painting process, as well as normal living.

I gain inspiration from people on the radio as much as artists and painters that live near to me. I tend to gather a lot of information from artist biographies or other writings. When I find out what others are saying about their own work, and the kinds of materials and techniques that they use, it helps guide my work. I attend a lot of shows, openings at galleries, and museum exhibits, where I see extremely skilled artists from all over the world. On April 20th, 2015, I had a chance to view the J.M.W. Turner show titled, *J.M.W. Turner: Painting Set Free*, at the Getty Museum. Turner's paintings of storms have influenced my earthquake paintings quite a lot. I learned about his life and techniques through audio. I also read about, and sketched some of his compositions, as seen in Figure 3. Turner influenced some of my decision-making when I saw his paintings of the sea, and his paintings of storms. I am inspired by his compositions and techniques he uses when painting adventurous environments, such as the painting titled, *Sunrise with Sea Monsters*. In that painting we see

that the monster might just be fish, but Turner pushes reality to stretch our imaginations. The Norton Simon Museum has some wonderful paintings by Degas that I return to visit from time to time. The Edgar Degas sculptures and paintings at the Norton Simon Museum are all amazing examples of excellent figurative works. I remember seeing his works for the first time and wanting to create drawings and paintings like him. He comes to mind when I make



Figure 4. Edgar Degas, *Dancers in the Rotunda at the Paris Opera*, 1875-1878, reworked 1894, Oil on canvas, 34.875 in. x37.75 in., Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA.

compositional choices, when I crop the figure, and when I place shapes and colors. Also, in Figure 5, there is a Rembrandt painting titled, *Self-Portrait* that I enjoy for the flesh tones as well as his skillful drawing and painting abilities. Rembrandt's work may embody the best parts of visual storytelling. I find his compositions very memorable, and the narrative is easy to understand. His portraits contain great narrative because he composes the figures with great gesture and expression that suggests that the figure is doing something, and engaged in a lively action.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art is also an extraordinary location to acquire useful information and knowledge for artists. I was very inspired by Thomas Eakins' artwork in 2010 at a show called, *Manly Pursuits: The Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins*. I remember enjoying his drawing abilities. Also, I visited the *Hudson River School Exhibition, Nature and the American Vision*, in 2015, and it was a very beautiful display of several paintings of naturalistic landscapes. I had not seen Frederic Church's works in person prior to that time. Since that show I think of him when I go to place finishing details on a painting. His work draws attention through careful observation of nature. As I continue to attend galleries and museums in Los Angeles and surrounding areas, I have come to find that the information available in the artist's statements and catalogues are very telling of the ideas



Figure 5. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait*, 1606-1669, Oil on panel, 24.875 in. x 19.875 in. framed: 32.5 in. x 27.5 in., Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA.

that artists have, and what their intention and motivations are. Taking a couple moments to read statements adds to the work that I have seen and helps me understand them. D.J. Hall writes in a recent artist statement that she paints in hyper detail because it “convinces viewers to believe in the reality of an invented realm” (Hall). Biographies, pamphlets, and any other writings contain notable information, whether they tell of techniques, the past of the artist, or what is going on in the works. Artists tell about their lives and art, and I can relate it to my experience. Another important source that I have found is books in the library or bookstore, whether they are big catalogues or general books written biographically or autobiographically. I find the images to be inspirational, and the information about them to



Figure 6. Frederic Edwin Church, *Cayambe*, 1858, Oil on canvas, 30 in. x 48.13 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

just as important. Whether I find artists that are similar or different than me, anyone and everyone helps me push my creativity. For example, Richard Diebenkorn is a fantastic artist that I found influential when I was trying to bring a variety of techniques to my work. It’s funny how, not surprisingly, I agree with some of his sensibilities, even though our work may appear different. Diebenkorn said that, “Abstract literally means to draw from or separate. In

this sense every artist is abstract... a realistic or non objective approach makes no difference. The result is what counts” (Diebenkorn). Diebenkorn is an example of a successful artist that is able to think of all artists as more similar than different. Another example is Edward Hopper who provides great inspiration in his compositions and scenes of domestic life. Hopper wrote the following statement in 1939: “So much of every art is an expression of the subconscious that it seems to me most of all the important qualities are put there unconsciously, and little importance by the conscious intellect” (Hopper, 41). After reading this, I feel encouraged when doing the instinctual things that come from spontaneous inspiration. This might occur in my paintings as impasto paint in unexpected places, or solutions that I find when searching for unique ways to define forms. I think what Hopper describes is that there is an expression created when decisions are made and something happens that could not be controlled, however, there is a unique order that aides the artist’s intent. Max Liebermann talks about form and viewing a painting based upon the creative articulation of the paint. He states in his writing that,

A bunch of asparagus, a bouquet of roses, can yield a masterpiece, a beautiful girl or an unattractive one, an Apollo or a misshapen dwarf, anything can be made into a masterpiece as long as there is a significant amount of imagination at work...a bunch of asparagus holds our interest solely by virtue of the way it is artistically handled.
(Harison, 31)

These thoughts are extremely helpful when I think of the handling of paint on the canvas being something that calls attention to the viewer. Subject matter is nearly secondary to the vision that I have in mind of the subjects. In my opinion, this quote says painting is one of the best ways of re-presenting anything in general. Liebermann may have found the main

reasons why an artist is drawn to a subject. I think we can see proof of this when looking at the art world as a whole. One of the easiest ways to do this is social media. Instagram, Facebook, and other media are very supportive of the arts, and a great place to find current works and paintings. I have learned of many artists on Instagram, and continue to do so. Artists post process pictures as well as the art that they look at, and it is such a fascinating look at art I may have never seen otherwise. Galleries post images of the art that they have, and that is very helpful when I'm looking for inspiration. Some artists write about their work, there are a couple of shows that I have attended because I saw posts on Instagram or Facebook. Social media connects many generations, providing education and inspiration.

Museums and gallery shows are consistently inspiring explorative changes in my work. *Earthquake 3* portrays a scene from within an arcade, in this case the interior is reminiscent of the gallery spaces that I walk through. I have used reference from a couple of galleries that I have found, in search of similar floors, walls, and parts of buildings. Looking at paintings in a gallery space helps me decide how my own paintings will be displayed. Casey Baugh had some paintings at the Los Angeles Art Show 2016, I found these paintings worthwhile to see in person. The texture and details only come close in reproductions and on computers. Of course, this goes for most, if not all the paintings that one can see at the LA Art Show. I attend potlucks at renowned artist John Swihart's house where I have had the opportunity to watch slideshows from great artists, and also chat with many others that are in attendance. Laguna College has a similar event where the College invites invites guest artist speakers. I enjoy listening to interviews, and artist talks because I get to hear an artist talk about their work. After listening, I then see their art with information that I might not be able to find from just viewing their work, or reading about it. I find these kinds of events

invaluable to my education because of the variety of ideas that I may pick up from other artists. I seek feedback at the college from the professors that I encounter and from the discussions and critiques that go on at the studios. I learn a lot just by doing something that someone suggests. I have a substantial amount of resources and opportunities to find information to help my paintings. For instance, John Seed provided some great suggestions and ideas about how to think about my work when he visited my studio. He described how there is humor in my painting titled *On End*, and that is why it might be working so well with the earthquake. After that, I went to my work looking for more circumstances like that. There are innumerable lessons that I have learned from the instructors I have encountered at Laguna College, as well as my Community College experience. My education has been strengthened by my family, they have been supportive financially, and I could not do any of my work without them. I ask my family for advice on my paintings almost as much as I ask my peers and instructors.

Studying in workshops, working with artists, and working from life has greatly enhanced my painting and drawing abilities. Studio visits with artists are great. I spend as much time as I can visiting the studio of John Brosio. In the past I have worked with Joseph Todorovitch and Casey Baugh to unlock my understanding of portraiture, life painting, and trained observation. What I gain from these artists is mostly new perspectives and methods. An exemplary portrait artist and keen observer of life, John Singer Sargent, said,

Cultivate an ever continuous power of observation. Wherever you are, be always ready to make slight notes of postures, groups and incidents. Store up in the mind without ceasing a continuous stream of observations from which to make selections later. Above all things get abroad, see the sunlight, and everything that is to be seen,

the power of selection will follow. (qtd. in Gurney blog)

Since Sargent is a major inspiration to my paintings, I appreciate his advice on working with observation. I have been looking at Sargent's paintings for his techniques, composition, color, drawing, among many of the other beautiful things he can do with painting. The murals that he created are very impressive to me. I find it intriguing that he uses his skills to attempt to create an iconography that represents religious figures from all over the world. What he did is very beautiful and remarkable. The murals have influenced my work by creating a vision of the interesting juxtaposition of different styles, and what they can do to a picture. The stylized figure arrangement within the same context as the naturalistically painted figures is a great feat, and an example of what an artist can do with his or her manner of painting. Sargent created a powerful message about religion in his murals. He makes me interested in the many different kinds of ways that we can define our perception of the world. Sargent places religious icons in the context of naturalistically painted figures. I think he shows how the Bible perceives other religions, yet does this through the iconography of those religions. I think that he does this in a way that shows how all people can be represented by how we are observed. I think of this like I think of expressive notions that artists have about nature. For instance, placing pure colors in a painting that not all artists may observe in nature, might make my painting mean something to someone. Wayne Thiebaud explains in an interview that great artists can build exciting, unrecognizable forms within the context of recognizable forms (UCTV). In one of Sargent's murals, the figures that are articulated by the iconography of foreign religions seem real, because they are placed in the context of realistically painted figures. In my paintings, I define most forms to function in their pictorial space. This helps me create paintings that are expressive of specific subjects, and it helps

emphasize areas for interest. I find a lot of influential artists are making paintings that incorporate abstract shapes without any definition of form. My mentor, John Brosio has used this concept as a design device, as well as Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Joseph Todorovitch and many others. I think that these kinds of ideas are aligned with the essentials of impressionism.

George Inness, the great landscape painter, said, “We are all subjects of impressions, and some of us seek to convey the impressions to others. In the art of communicating impressions lies the power of generalizing without losing the logical connection of parts to the whole which satisfies the mind” (*Inness*, 2009). I think what Inness is saying is that we seek definitions beyond visual interpretation to satisfy our mind. These definitions are an important link to the use of creative perceptions of reality. Definitions help our understanding of things, paintings best portray what we need beyond definitions, and describe what things mean to us. Inness is a great example of someone who pushed the limitations of the realistic realm in painting in order to unlock the secrets of representing reality, and how we receive it. What I hope to accomplish in my paintings is the realistic impression of an earthquake, landscape, or whatever I happen to be painting. Although I wish to articulate my vision in the painting, I also wish that I share this vision with others. In other words, I hope people understand and enjoy what it is that I am representing. I want the earthquakes to have contrasting elements of beauty, humor, peace, and stillness to create intriguing visual ideas and storytelling.

There are countless other artists that have been influential to my development as a painter, draughtsman, and artist. Joaquin Sorolla comes to mind when I want to have a lot of paint handled very loosely, yet in a sophisticated manner. I appreciate his abilities with color



Figure 7. George Inness, *Lake Nemi*, 1857, Oil on canvas, 44.88 in. x 29.92 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.

and sense of form and light. I viewed a number of Sorolla's paintings in Paris in 2010, and I had the opportunity to look closely at the textures he created. I look at artwork from great artists like Ruprecht Von Kauffman when I need inspiration on composition ideas. It is very encouraging to see an artist who is successful with freedom in composition. Anything and everything is at his disposal to create a great picture. F. Scott Hess and Peter Zokosky have helped me to create interesting narrative with great subject matter. Working with Scott Hess on narrative has furthered my understanding of art history, and how I can bring it to my work. Working with Peter Zokosky has been integral to my successful results with fun and interesting subject matter. Of course there are countless ways all of my instructors have influenced my work. I try to draw influence from any and every part of my life. I do my best to create the best circumstances for creativity, and I feel that by surrounding myself with art, books, and positive artists, I can do more work that is similar to the great masters of the past, and I create discourse with the artists of the present.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptually my paintings come into being through drawings that I create in my sketchbook. Drawings are usually inspired by nature, events, art shows that I attend, museums, music, film, or my general environment. My methods and procedures are fairly simple, they go from idea to drawing to painting. The steps in between these things contain different elaborations on reference gathering, creating, and all other areas of design. So, there



Figure 8. Trevor Christiansen, *Drawing for Earthquake*, 2014, Pencil, 6.5 in. x 10 in.



Figure 9. Trevor Christiansen, *Photo I took of Long Beach, CA*, 2014.

is the initial inspiration, then the drawing at a small size. I draw from my imagination or from photographs like the drawing in Figure 8. I figure out some of the major shapes and values in a photo like Figure 9., and I try to simplify as much as possible. After I make decisions about the placement of things, then I make a larger drawing. I usually make a drawing with general



Figure 10. Trevor Christiansen, *2nd Drawing for Earthquake*, 2014, Pencil, 10 in. x 15 in.

values from photo and imagination. After a basic design and drawing is planned out, I need more references for things like smoke, dust, debris, or giant chunks of land. At this stage in the process, I create models out of styrofoam, dirt, and paint, as seen in Figure 11. These models include small items at scale: toy cars, trees, curbs, lines on the road, and various other



Figure 11. Trevor Christiansen, *Model for Earthquake*, 2014, Styrofoam, acrylic paint and mixed media, 30 in. x 30 in. x 15 in.

things that are in our urban environments. I put cars on wires so that they appear as though they are flying through the air. I place any other props that I have, and when the model is ready I take photos of the model in daylight, at the same time of the day that I took the life-sized reference photos. I place the model facing the same direction as the actual scene, in order to find good placement of shadow and light shapes. In addition to this model, I create color studies that match the drawing to get an idea of how everything looks in color. Color studies are smaller than the final version, but help me see the overall harmonies and color relationships that will be seen in the final painting. In the study in Figure 12., I was trying to figure out what kinds of techniques I could use to portray movement. Sometimes I'm just trying to figure things out in a study, for instance, if I'm not sure what the best color of an object will be, I change it in the study to see how it looks before it's big. Once I've



Figure 12. Trevor Christiansen, *Color Study for Earthquake*, 2015
Oil on canvas panel, 8 in. x 10 in.



Figure 13. Trevor Christiansen, *Color Study for Earthquake 4*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 11 in. x 14 in.

done the drawing, color study, and models, I then proceed to find the canvas and support.

The materials play a significant part in the work, because the surface may change how these paintings are experienced. I normally want varying textures of impasto paint contrasting with thin paint on the paintings. Things like the weave of the canvas can become important elements in the painting. I usually try to find a medium or fine weave canvas. A linen with white gesso or oil primer is ideal to paint on, and to achieve great results. Lucius Hudson is a canvas support manufacturer where I purchase custom made supports, they also supply canvas and primer. They have aluminum canvas supports that have large sturdy braces on the back of the canvas, and they do some preparatory work like putting everything together. I like including more people in the process of creating a painting, especially when they have such awesome products. I also purchase pre-made canvases from companies: Dick Blick, Art Supply Warehouse, Laguna Art Supply, Aaron Brothers, Michaels, San Clemente Art Supply, Trekell Brushes, and Rosemary Brushes. As long as the surface is ready to paint on,

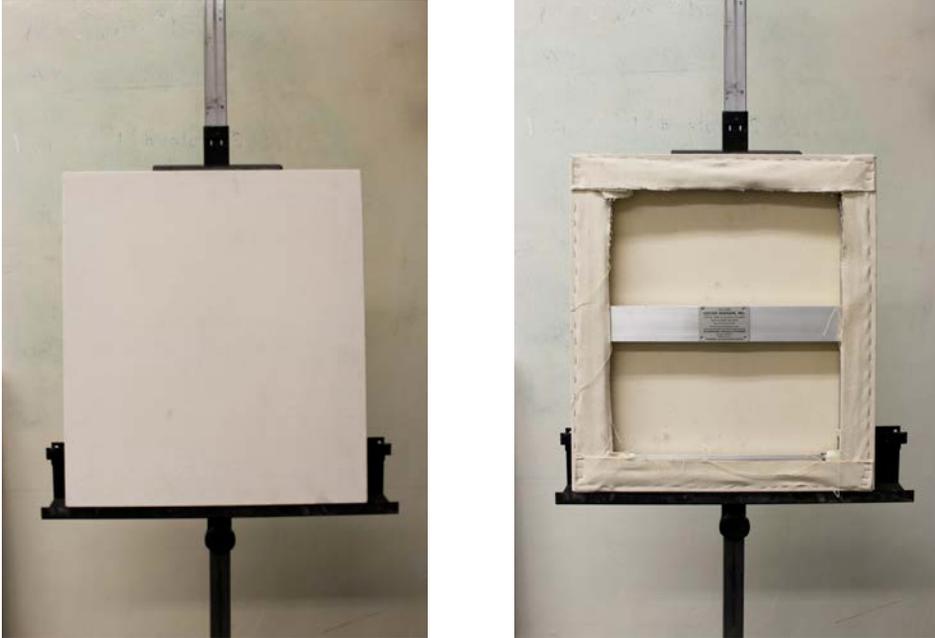


Figure 14. Trevor Christiansen, *Photo of Lucius Hudson Canvas front and back view*, Aluminum, wood, cotton duck canvas, and gesso, 2016.

I move right into working on it. I sketch in and transfer a drawing onto the canvas in charcoal; for this I use a grid and perspective drawing. The drawing in Figure 15. was enlarged using a grid on the drawing in Figure 10. I sometimes also place a grid on the photo reference to be sure of some precise measurements. This drawing is mainly made for contour notes, and placement of shadow shapes. I was taught to use grids and projectors in High School, and I remember thinking of these as tremendous shortcuts. Grids are easy tools that enlarge a photograph, or drawing, onto the project's final dimensions, scaling to the desired size. The grid, much like perspective drawing, is a significant part of art history. Once the drawing is made to the proper scale I then take a moment to see if it looks right at that size. Sometimes scaling something up to a larger size might change the impact or overall impression the painting has. If no changes need to be made, I have a solid drawing to paint on. Once I have figured out as much as I can about the drawing, I proceed with painting. Usually beginning with a tone of a transparent red oxide neutralized with ultramarine blue, or, something like an alizarin permanent neutralized with pthalo green or mixed with



Figure 15. Trevor Christiansen, *Beginning of Earthquake*, 2015, Charcoal and oil on canvas, 58 in. x 75 in.

ultramarine blue. I paint, area to area, addressing the whole painting, with the concern of getting the essentials down. I simplify shapes and forms to accurately depict space and where objects lie in it. I look for values, temperature, and hue when I mix paint, it is how I was taught. Gesture drawing, drawing, and perspective are on my mind as I develop form. The focal areas are on my mind as I address the relationships between all of the elements within the painting. Generally I like working from middle tones into darker and lighter areas. I'm working on techniques such as thin versus thick paint to create interest with the textures in the painting. Again, there are many techniques and design ideas that I continue to use and explore in an attempt to expand on my ideas, and make my paintings new and interesting.

With portraits and 'unaltered' landscapes I don't differentiate my methods. I like to have my interpretation of life remain consistent, and I let the composition dictate if I want to

create changes. For the majority of my paintings, one might have the same impression from a disaster as from a sunset or afternoon landscape because the palette, colors and relationships are similar. Often, I begin portraits and landscapes from life, and I finish them from photography. I move subjects and lighting around in paintings to create interest. There are many rules and strategies for creating compositions that I have found useful for study. Andrew Loomis books are a favorite resource of mine. He created a series of books on figure painting and painting for illustrators and artists that I reference from time to time.

I found abstract composition studies to be fun fundamental keys for beginning a composition. Finding simplifications of forms and various ways that people draw things like the human figure is helpful when drawing from life and composing paintings. Loomis is also helpful when I seek information on portraiture. Proportions, rhythms, gesture, shape, and anatomy are some of the key parts of figure painting and drawing that many artists depict differently. Variables that can be arranged by design and artist intent are strengthened by facts in anatomy and the limitations of the human body. I utilize resources such as Eliot Goldfinger's *Artistic Anatomy for Artists* to find how the skeleton and muscles fit together and create the forms that I see.

I want my paintings to be informed by the best resources. I try to keep up to date on the current new publications, so that I can be aware of the styles and trends in design. In most cases, each of my paintings have unique stylistic considerations. For instance, my painting titled *Night Quake* has a different feeling and mood than the painting titled *Earthquake*. *Night Quake* is somewhat calmer, and I think this composition requires considerations such as low contrast, low key values, and desaturated colors. Meyer Shapiro says in his 1953 publication called *Style*, about style in painting, "in general the description of a style refers to

three aspects of art: form elements or motives, form relationships, and qualities (including an all over quality which we may call the ‘expression’)” (Schapiro, 54). What I think Schapiro means by this statement is that style can be technically figured out and grouped or categorized based upon relationships. I think Schapiro thinks of style like language, the accent a person might have, or cultural mannerisms. All these things that Schapiro lists are parts of the impression that a person might receive from a painting or piece of art. I find great success in the recognition of expressive visual ideas. My desired intentions and impressions, are received by viewers through my interpretations of reality, and are something I consider to be called “style.” Maybe style is technique, mediums, design, or any other ideas that change reality. The motivation behind my work is a desire to share my vision of my experiences, and the result may be categorized into a style.

I think I borrow painting styles from many different kinds of painting. If a painting is going as I have planned, I usually will develop areas with direct painting. If areas need further work, I will paint into them, or place glazes. The glazes that I make are usually followed by painting over them with impasto paint, or scumbled paint. Scumbling is a technique that Michael Harnish and John Brosio showed me how to perfect. How I think scumbling is done is just like how it sounds, the paint on the brush is lightly run across the surface until the desired amount of paint has been applied unevenly to the painting surface. I find satisfying results when I have glazes seeping into the surface of the canvas, or into the valleys of the textured paint surface. Peter Zokosky showed me a great technique with lead white. To do this technique, first, I apply lead white to an area, in one case it was the neon lights on the sign in the painting titled, *End of Pine*. I glazed a mixture of Hystoclear and thickened linseed oil mixed with a color onto the dry lead white. This creates a very

luminous finish, and I found it to be much brighter than white mixed with a color. Of the techniques that I use, I find as long as I am able to keep the fundamentals of form and good shape design, I am able to find the results that I like, and that I think others like as well.

When I am painting, there are times when I need to address any problems that I am having. Sometimes when I develop one area, it helps me develop other areas as well. In the painting titled, *Earthquake 4*, I had a lot of advice from Jonathan Burke along with the advice of my mentors, instructors, and colleagues. In that painting, one of the things that was suggested was that objects be placed in certain areas within the painting. I find that outside sources, other artists, and family are extremely helpful in troubleshooting. In other instances, I take the painting outside to look at it from a distance, or I look at the painting through a gel that makes it all one color, or monochrome. Also, flipping a painting, or looking at it in a mirror helps. Whatever I can do to see the painting ‘with new eyes’ is among my means of finding what the painting needs. Whenever I can’t figure out if something isn’t working, I try many different things, sometimes it just takes a little bit of time and thought, other times, I create studies, models, or drawings of the area in question. I consider almost any and all options with an open mind to changes.

When changes need to be made, I have to be somewhat careful to maneuver around the areas that are working. While I can probably paint any area better than I had painted it previously, I find it lucrative if I stick to what is needed. So, when I want to add an object, I get right to it if the paint doesn’t get too difficult to work into. This would mean that I am drawing with paint, which makes precision not as easy. I like working into wet paint because dry paint is difficult to match. If I wait until the area is dry and I add something, success comes in accurate mixtures, placing oil on the painting to see the colors correctly, and

planning how I want to draw what I am painting. I like drawing in vine charcoal because it is easy to remove, and I can paint right into it. Just like any other area on the painting, new additions are to be addressed throughout the whole process, and the finish of a painting is somewhat dependent on each part functioning as it should.

Finishing a painting and finding the desired resolve means me making sure each part addresses the entire painting or drawing. Making a painting feel finished and resolved is a matter of planning for certain goals. The difficulty is finding what will look best on a painting. For myself, having control over the technicalities is a big preference. I like knowing that I am making changes in perspective, anatomy, and colors, and any other things that we see in real life. Sometimes I find that some areas feel more finished, and life-like, when I have painted over them once or twice. Other areas, I repaint a few times, and take longer to complete. If I paint a painting and it disturbs someone, then I gather advice on what I can do to make it better, and it's usually something easy to fix. I spend a good amount of time making sure that I am working to the best of my abilities to create a painting that is the highest quality that I can create. Occasionally I get my painting to a particular stage, and I place what John Brosio calls a separation layer, it is mainly galkyd light, cold wax medium, and some solvent. This creates a glossy finish, and slick surface. This is kind of like a re-workable varnish, and can be applied at the very end to act as a varnish as well. Once I think that I have done as much as I can, I discontinue work until there is a show, it is sold, or until I find something else that I think that I can do to it to make it better. As we can see in art history, there are indefinite amounts of ways that one can finish a painting. John Brosio encourages me to find what makes each of my newest paintings my favorite one of my

paintings. In my paintings, I wish to include as much of anything new that I have learned, and hopefully I can learn new tricks from the process of creating each new painting.

CONCLUSION

I embarked on creating the first disaster painting with an interest on extending the possibilities of landscape painting. To restate a concept that I have found, I like to represent intriguing imagery to complement something that some may find frightening, to achieve results that people enjoy. In some ways I'm only using fundamentals of contrast to compose subject matter. I'm merely exploring interesting imagery that pushes the boundaries of reality. When I took the initial photographs for reference of landscapes and cityscapes in Long Beach, CA, I was out and about looking for simple landscape subjects that looked interesting. I drove and walked around town, stopped to take photos, and shot during appealing times during the day. I was also working on paintings that were as simple as a tree in a park, and a parking lot at night. I liked to think of these paintings as having some sort of sense of being a part of a narrative, story, or adventure. Since then I have increased my inspirations by taking trips to Los Angeles and around Southern California, taking several photos of the amazing cityscapes and the life that flows through the cities. I am also interested in pushing the boundaries of the skills that I have gained. I think that Claude Monet, one of the creators of impressionist painting, was striving for change when he helped make such advancements in impressionist painting. I say I want my work to be realistic and impressionistic because I am looking for something that can make both styles intriguing and interesting. From my investigations in art history, I have found there is a certain freedom that comes with expanding or improving one's art. The man who wrote about Claude Monet in the French satirical newspaper *Le Charivari*, and one of the people who helped create the

term impressionism, Lois Leroy, wrote, "Impression I was certain of it. I was just telling myself that, since I was impressed, there had to be some impression in it — and what freedom, what ease of workmanship! A preliminary drawing for a wallpaper pattern is more finished than this seascape" (*Merling*). Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, once said, "In a world that's changing really quickly, the only strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks" (*Tobak*). I think that a part of carrying on tradition of any art form is adopting the sense that art is continually changing. I imagine most art that we read about and see in history books was probably created while taking a chance, pushing boundaries, or innovating.

Some of the biggest advancements in art and technology I have seen have been disaster films that incorporate all the wonders of movie magic. These films show me what artists are able to do to suspend disbelief, or make something appear real. Many artists of the past have created paintings of natural wonders and disasters. The allure of the great impressionistic landscape painters of the past were on my mind more than the last John Cusack disaster film. The motivation underneath the very first painting was a lot of me exploring new territory and creating what I wanted to see. I didn't know if anyone would like or enjoy these paintings. I saw how John Brosio was able to create paintings that people like with disaster imagery, and I thought I could do something similar with earthquakes. The paintings that followed the first painting included much more planning, and I was able to include more elements that took my ideas further, and included advice from everyone. Those are the things that I think lead to the successes that I have had.

What lies ahead is continuing work on my studies and drawings, and making these into paintings. What I have learned is that I gain so much information from landscape,

portrait, and still life drawing and painting, and I am able to transfer all of this knowledge to the earthquake paintings. I would like to continue my studies on this project, while emphasizing landscape painting, which I think will increase the quality of my disaster paintings. To further increase the quality of my work I plan on pursuing residency opportunities to receive further guidance. I'm an exhibitor at the 2016 Festival of the Arts, and I think it will be a great inspiration to my work. Also, my travels to Venice, Italy, and Paris, France were very influential to my artwork, and as I gain time, I will try to travel more. I want to teach, I think teaching art will aide my work. I think a complete understanding of my art will come with teaching. Something else that will continue my education of art practices will be comissions. In the coming year, I hope to be working on commissions. What I have learned from this in the past is that I recieve a great deal of knowledge working with people. The experience of talking with people and interacting generates ideas, giving me a better idea of what people are looking for, and I use all of this information in future paintings. In future compositions I want my paintings to have more to do with the Christian church and my beliefs. Having a strong connection to the bible and religious context gives a message of hope and faith that I think people of any religion, or of no religion can identify. Whether it is stories from the bible or experiences in and around the church, I think that what I communicate can have a stronger connection to my experience with Christianity. Another level of this would be my inspirations from science. The USGS has been an important website that I visit for information on any and all earth facts. They have information about what is going on in the world around us. Through establishing better connections to church and science, I hope that my art takes part in a discourse that is physical and spiritual. I like to think that I compose with honest and genuine goals that promote life. Through honesty of my

intentions I think that I reach a more universal level of communication. Some of the best artists that I have seen have been able to be a part of contemporary art scenes, yet still have an underlying relationship with personal beliefs and positive experiences. I think that these things add to the content of paintings, and create a rich sense of purpose and meaning.

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APPENDIX



Plate 1. Trevor Christiansen, *Earthquake (Ocean and Pine)*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 58 in. x 75in.



Plate 2. Trevor Christiansen, *Earthquake 2 (Church)*, Oil on canvas, 16 in. x 20 in.



Plate 3. Trevor Christiansen, *Earthquake 3 (Arcade)*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 58 in. x 75 in.



Plate 4. Trevor Christiansen, *Earthquake 4 (Grand Avenue)*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 36 in. x 48 in.



Plate 5. Trevor Christiansen, *Study for Earthquake 4 (Grand Avenue)*, 2016, Oil on canvas panel, 8 in. x 10 in.



Plate 6. Trevor Christiansen, *On End 2 (big version)*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 48 in. x 62 in.

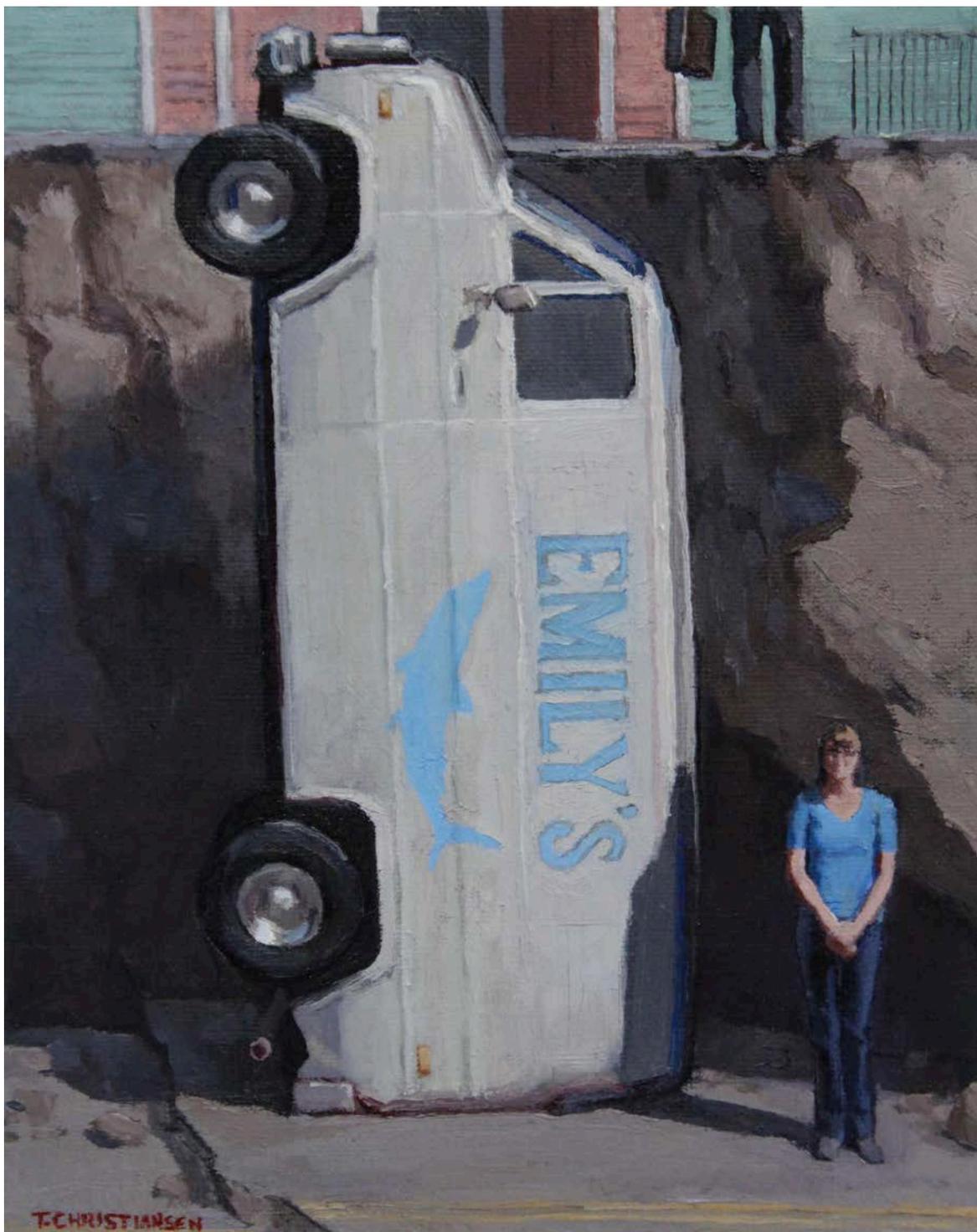


Plate 7. Trevor Christiansen, *On End (small version)*, 2016, Oil on canvas panel, 8 in. x 10 in.



Plate 8. Trevor Christiansen, *End of Pine*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 36 in. x 48 in.



Plate 9. Trevor Christiansen, *Shakes*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 48 in. x 48 in.



Plate 10. Trevor Christiansen, *Night Quake*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 30 in. x 40 in.



Plate 11. Trevor Christiansen, *Heisler Park at Night*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 11 in. x 14 in.

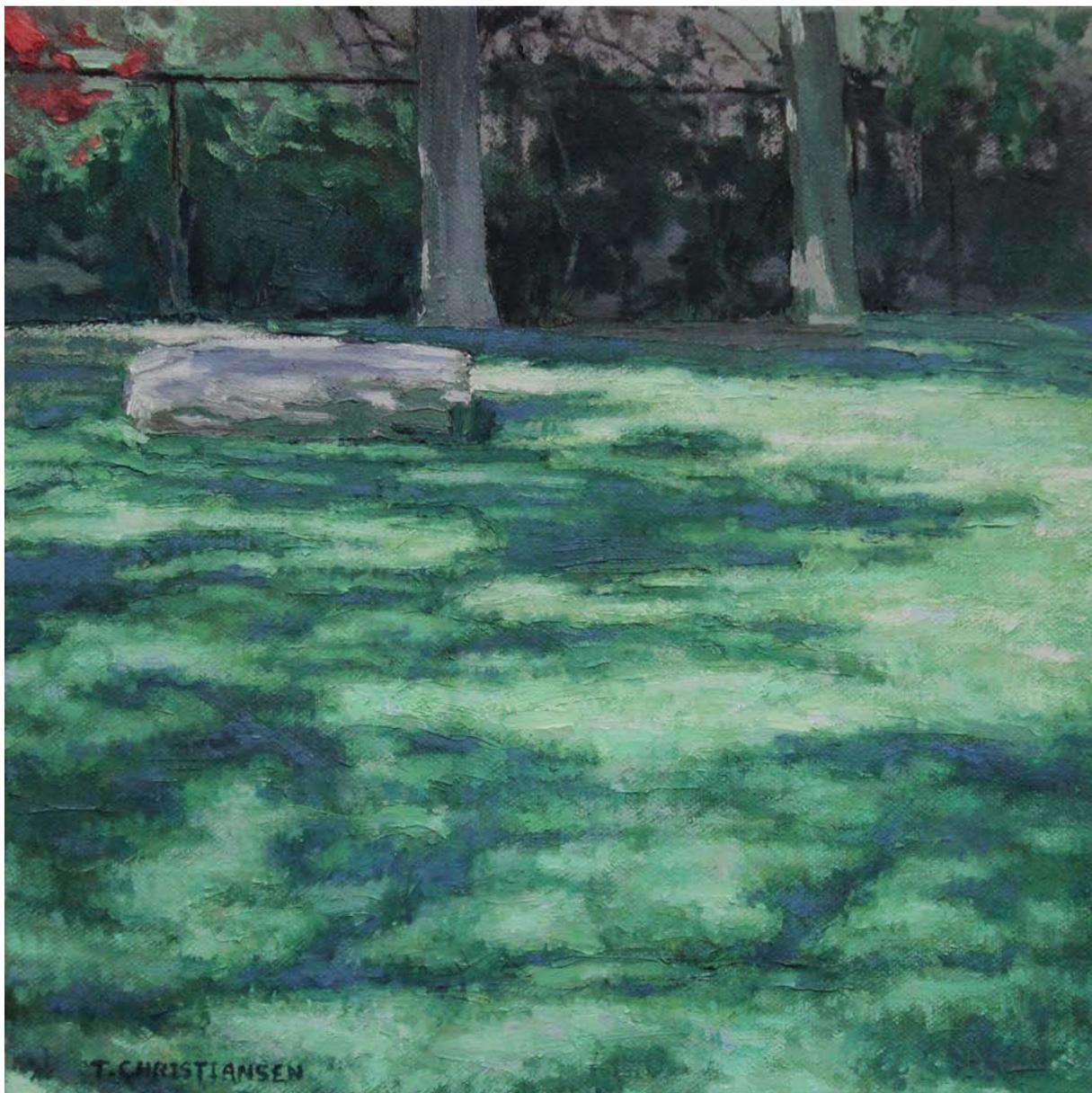


Plate 12. Trevor Christiansen, *Sun*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 12 in. x 12 in.

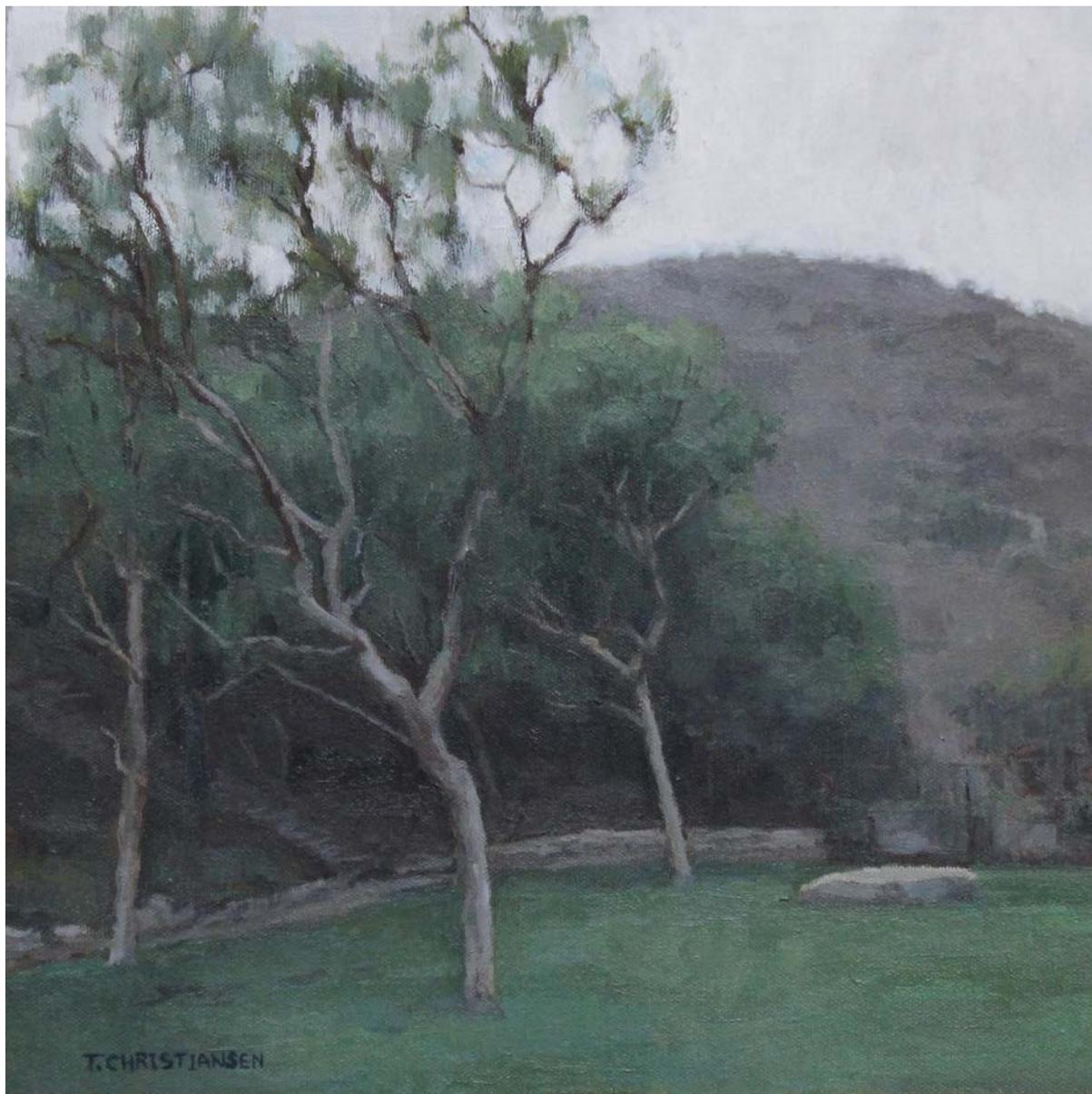


Plate 13. Trevor Christiansen, *Nina's Park*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 12 in. x 12 in.



Plate 14. Trevor Christiansen, *Lady with Cars*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 11 in. x 14 in.

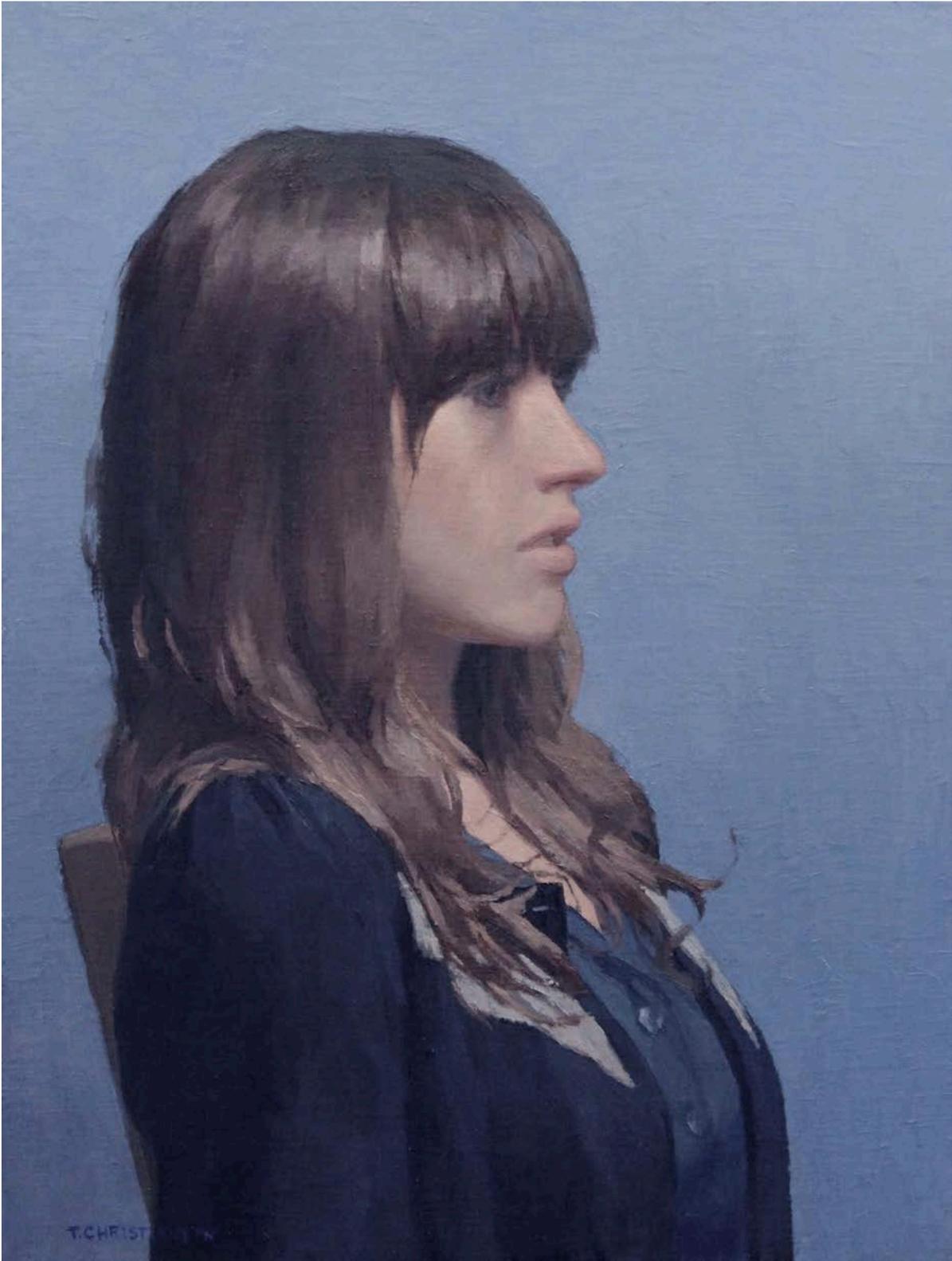


Plate 15. Trevor Christiansen, *Heather Patton*, 2016, Oil on canvas panel, 16 in. x 21.25 in.



Plate 16. Trevor Christiansen, *Las Brisas*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 12 in. x 16 in.

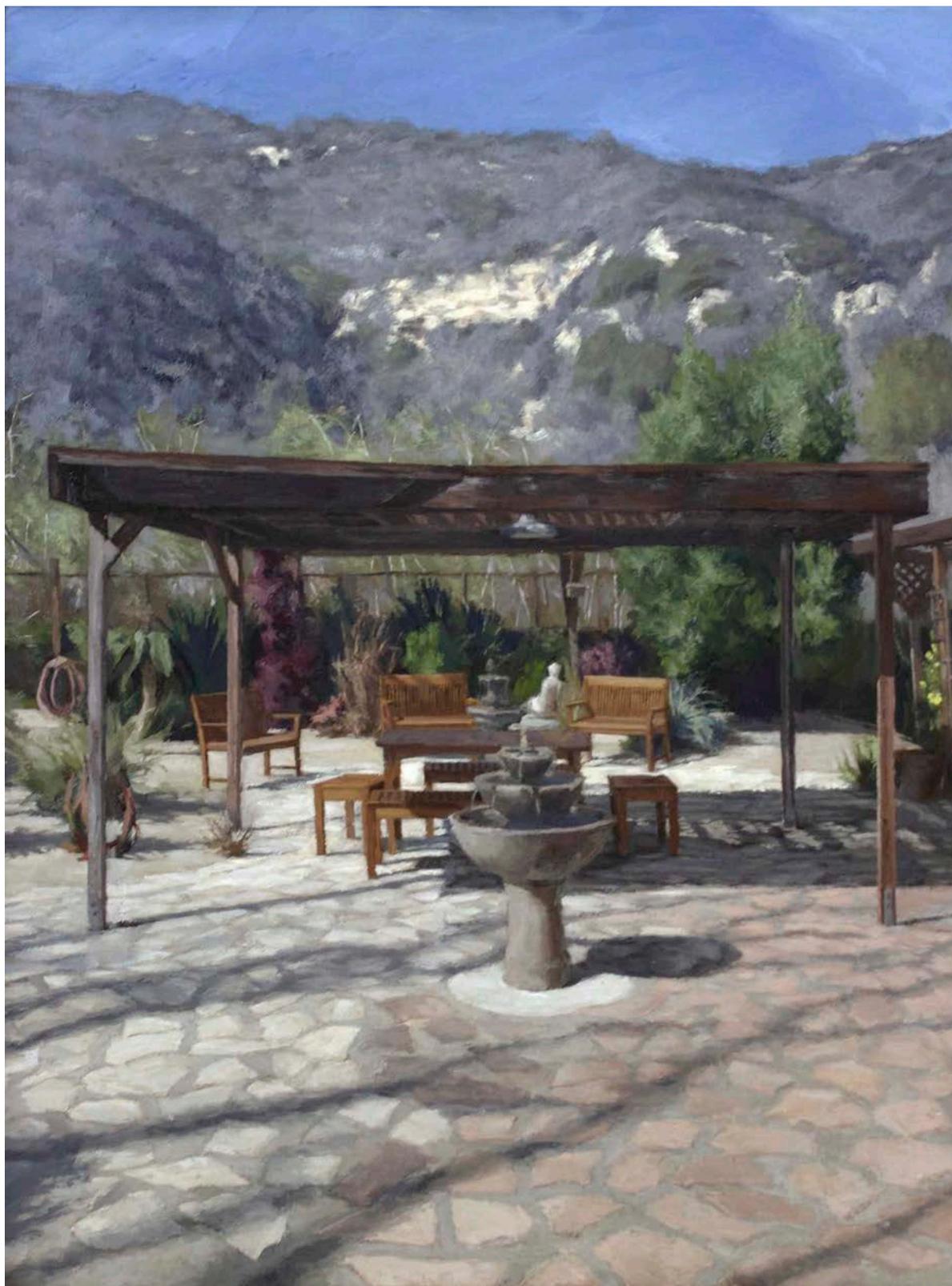


Plate 17. Trevor Christiansen, *Gazebo*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 18 in. x 24 in.

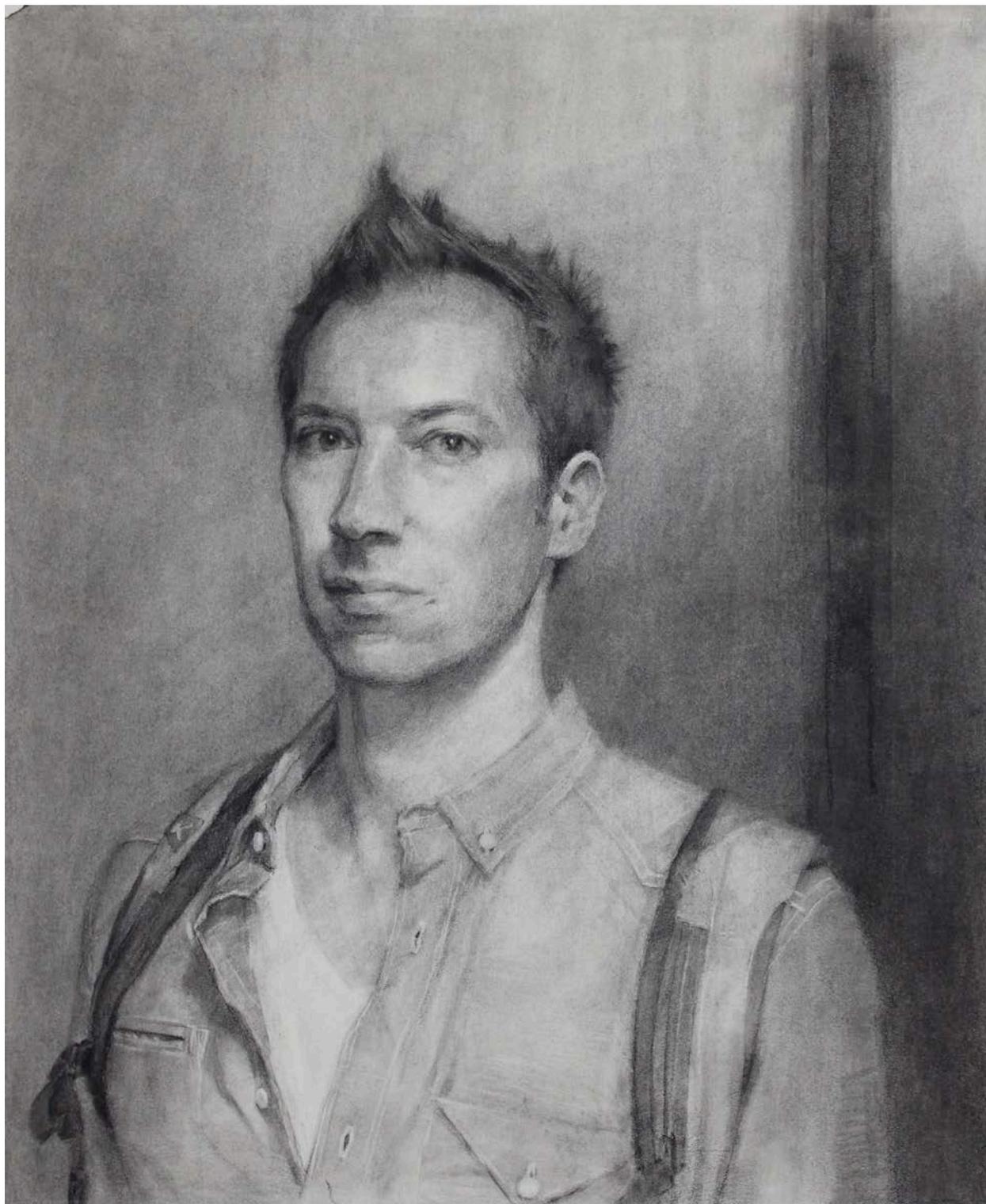


Plate 18. Trevor Christiansen, *Kenny Harris*, 2016, Charcoal on paper, 14 in. x 17 in.

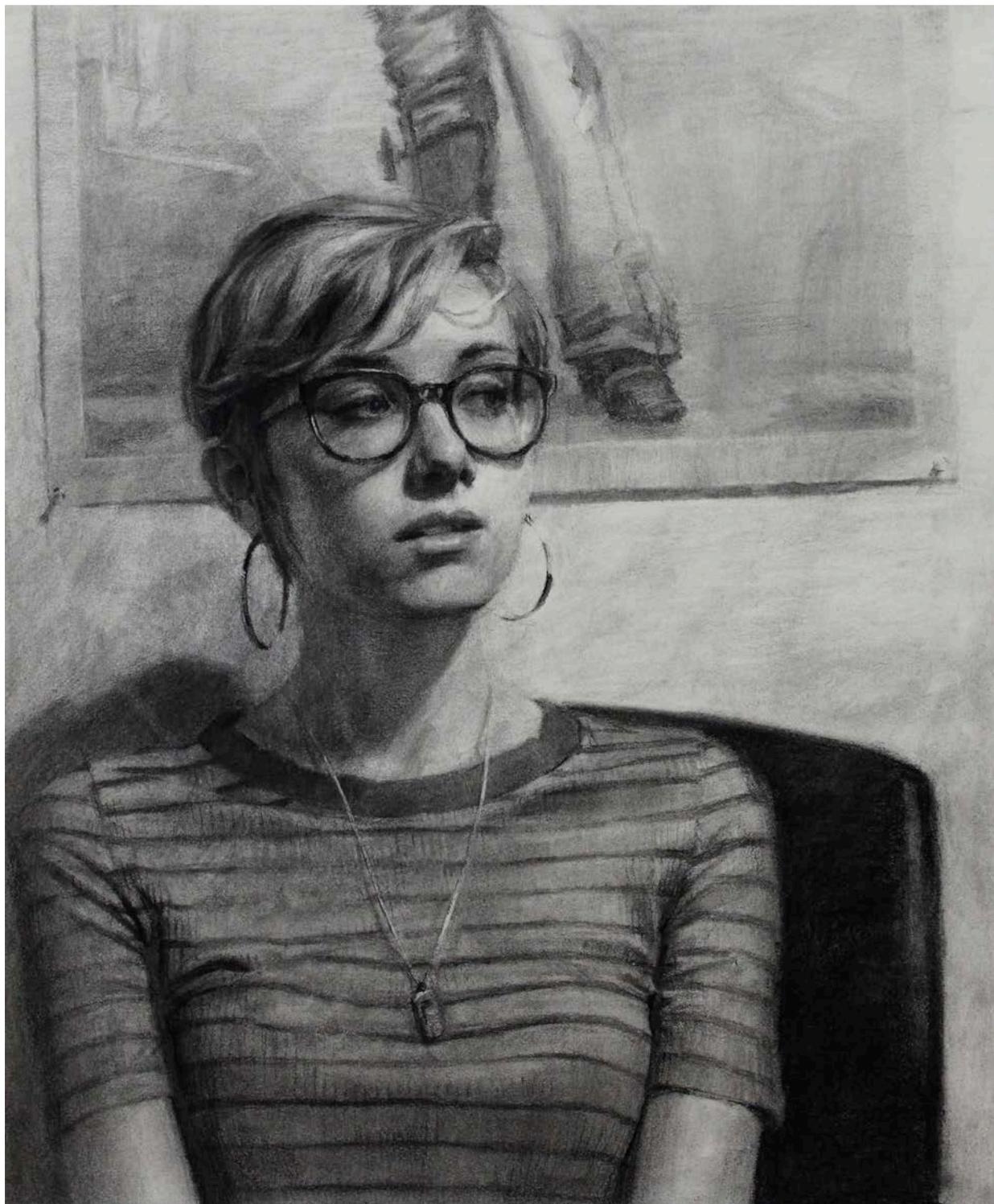


Plate 19. Trevor Christiansen, *Amber Ansdell*, 2016, Charcoal on paper, 14 in x 17 in.



Plate 20. Trevor Christiansen, *Scientists*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 11 in. x 14 in.



Plate 21. Trevor Christiansen, *Cement Boat*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 18 in. x 24 in.



Plate 22. Trevor Christiansen, *Rose*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 16 in. x 20 in.



Plate 23. Trevor Christiansen, *Night*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 18 in. x 24 in.



Plate 24. Trevor Christiansen, *Livingston Park*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 18 in. x 24 in.



Plate 25. Trevor Christiansen, *Heisler Park Gazebo*, 2016, Oil on canvas panel, 11 in. x 14 in.



Plate 26. Trevor Christiansen, *Drawing of Ruth*, 2015, Charcoal on toned paper, 20 in. x 24 in.



Plate 27. Trevor Christiansen, *Montage Path*, 2016, Oil on canvas panel, 8 in. x 10 in.



Plate 28. Trevor Christiansen, *Montage*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 16 in. x 20 in.

ARTIST'S NOTE

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