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## ABSTRACT

The subjects of my work are portraits of myself and people that I know, and still lifes composed of objects that have relevance to the individuals in the portraits. My purpose is simple yet challenging: to promote, through careful observation, an honest and reverent description of my subjects. Because I am a representational artist, all of my paintings are concerned with surface details that represent the uniqueness of a particular entity, creating an optical similarity in form and color with the subject. In addition, an attempt is made to convey my feelings and thoughts about each subject, a sense of reverence for the beauty and elegance that characterizes what I see. In part, my paintings are a response to the many distractions from patient, thoughtful concentration that unfortunately permeate contemporary culture. I am hopeful that my work contains sufficient meditative qualities to inspire meaningful contemplation by the viewer.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## EPIGRAPH

*Good artists, even those who work very quickly,  
turn to every detail, every passage, as though it could if necessary  
be given an infinite amount of time.*

Robert Grudin

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
DESCRIPTION	3
RESEARCH	7
METHODOLOGY	14
CONCLUSION	18
BIBLIOGRAPHY	20
APPENDIX	22

## INTRODUCTION

The overall theme of my MFA work is close observation. Every scene that I look at has the possibility of becoming a painting. Common to all of these scenes are the admiration of life, its mystery, and beauty, and the recognition of the inevitability of time. The evidence of time is made visible on the surfaces of objects by a variety of effects, such as wrinkles in the skin of a person, or the worn nature of clothing, or the soiled folds of an old rag. Therefore, when observed closely, all objects reveal a history and proof of life. I paint what I know as honestly as I can, and so familiar subjects that are part of my life have become the focus of my attention: portraits of people that I know and still lifes related to these people.

The question of how close observation will reveal both objective and subjective qualities of my subjects plays a major role in this project. By objective qualities, I mean the reality of form created in the mind through one's perception of light; this is essentially how our visual sensitivity realizes the image being observed. By subjective qualities, I mean the emotive nature of the human presence represented in a portrait, or the expressive possibilities of familiar objects presented in a still life. The goal of realizing objective and subjective qualities is common to all painters working within representational or figurative modes. I attempt to achieve this goal through the execution of carefully planned paintings using both direct observation from life and the sustained study of details from photographic references. How the actual marks are made on the painting surface is unknown to me; the search to find the correct marks will necessarily be incomplete, the results being only a measure of the intensity of my observation and the accumulation of my attempts.

My interest in painting portraits arises from their obvious human content. Portraiture allows for the exploration of psychological issues related to human purpose. In painting a portrait, I hope to reveal some aspects of how the person in the painting views his or her purpose and, in so doing, encourage the viewer to ask questions about his or her own existence. In looking for purpose in life, we inevitably encounter differing interests that create some internal conflicts, such as following a path of hard work and security versus a less restrictive,

playful existence. We all have different sides to our beings; personal goals and interests can be in conflict with each other. However, these goals and interests do not always need to be in conflict: they can be self-expanding, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of life. Consequently, in my portrait work I hope to reveal some of the different psychological characteristics and life experience of the person that I am painting. These characteristics can be revealed through a variety of means, such as the physiognomy of the person, the environment that surrounds the individual, or the objects that relate to his or her interests and abilities.

I use myself as the subject for a portrait not only for the practical reasons of being able to work at any time and over extended periods, but also for personal reasons of self-expression, affording me the opportunity to make statements about my character and purpose through the painted image. There is a rich historical precedent for this subject: many notable painters have recorded their own image over a lifetime of work, such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Vincent van Gogh, Max Beckmann, and Lucian Freud. What is evident in the self-portraits of these artists, and what I hope to pursue in my own work, is their ability to convey, in addition to a likeness, integrity and honesty in observing and representing their image.

For still lifes I have used articles of clothing, shoes, and rags. I think of these still lifes as being similar to portraits. Thus, the image of a hanging shirt can be interpreted as a vision of the person to whom it belongs; a pair of worn ballet shoes suspended from a nail on a wall represents the time, effort, and dedication of its owner to the dance form; a rag on the floor presents many folds of soiled, colorful history. In painting these articles, my objective is more than just representation. My goal, as I work and rework the paint, is that eventually the subject will present itself as an entity possessing characteristics both shared with and separate from its owner. How this happens and whether or not a particular painting attains these goals are both difficult to know, but the intention that motivates the still life as representative of an object and its relationship with human life remains constant.

The specific work for my thesis focuses on four people: three individuals that are close friends of mine, and myself. I have attempted to create portraits of each of these individuals and

various related still lifes that are meant to be statements about who they are and how I see each of them as unique individuals. There is an intention in each of the figures to portray a feeling of isolation, not only as a descriptive quality, but also as an element that encourages some degree of focus from the viewer. I am hopeful that one effect realized by this work will be to instill quiet moments of reflective contemplation on the part of the viewer.

## DESCRIPTION

*The Shirt* (Figure 1) is a life-size painting of a white shirt hanging on a wall next to a doorway. Through the doorway is a portrait of me standing in a dark area, staring directly out at the viewer. Part of my face and hands are sliced off by the frame of the doorway on one side and the edge of the painting surface on the other. The shirt is hanging from a nail so that it has more interesting folds than it would if it were suspended by a hanger. By painting the shirt its actual size and with as much care as possible, I hope to create enough interest for the viewer to want to look closer. The folds in the shirt produce highlights and shadows that create an attractive topography for the eye to explore. I am trying to attract attention--thoughtful attention--with simplicity. The image of me off to the side of the shirt but somewhat in the background has obvious references to the act of observation. By positioning my hands on nearly the same level as the sleeves of the shirt, a relationship is established between my image and the shirt. The shirt, acting as a representative for me alongside the image of me in the background, makes this painting into a double self portrait. There is an implied split in my nature conveyed through the two images in two different rooms, one advancing forward in light and the other receding in darkness and in partial form, desiring to remain somewhat removed from public view. In addition to an objective interpretation of the shirt and the figure brought forth by careful observation and rendering, the viewer hopefully receives some subjective psychological issues implied by the separation of the shirt and self.

*The Paint Rag* (Figure 2) is an old T-shirt of mine that was used to clean my paint brushes. After a period of months, the shirt, or rag, became encrusted with earth-colored paints, creating a stiff fabric that emphasized its natural folds when dropped onto the floor. This

composition allowed some comment about the process of painting, since this rag contained the residue of months of painting. This still life is as much about interesting forms as it is about the process of painting. The orange was added to create some tension in the composition, a variation from the relatively coherent color and pattern established by the rag. It is also a self-reference because oranges played an important role in my youth having grown up in a home surrounded by orange trees. The orange is placed above the neckline of the T-shirt where my head would be if I were wearing the shirt. Although I have attempted to carefully render an objective image of a rag and an orange, the painting also contains a subjective message through its symbolic representation of a head and torso.

*Standing Self-Portrait* (Figure 3) represents an important advance in my work because of its size. This is the first large-scale, full-length figure that I have painted. Therefore, it presented many technical challenges which I will describe below, in the methodology section. What I attempted to do with this painting was give an honest view of myself in my own environment. There is a sense of isolation, as I have framed my figure in a doorway between two rooms, with another doorway behind me that recedes into darkness. However, there is also a confrontation with the viewer, as I have assumed a frontal pose, staring directly outward from the canvas. The directness of this gaze produces a reciprocal connection between the viewer and the painting. The theme of careful observation is promoted by the image of me staring outward. The reception of this idea is, in turn, reciprocated by the viewer's feeling of being observed.

The painting *Transitions* (Figure 4) shows a dancer, seen through a doorway that opens into a studio space. The wall partitions the dancer inside the room from the ballet shoes hanging on the wall outside the room. The dancer is gazing in the direction of the shoes, but is separated from them. These well-worn shoes represent the simultaneous beauty and difficulty of ballet, its expressive elegance coupled with weariness brought on by the dedication, hard work, and physical commitment necessary to excel as a dancer. The figure in the doorway is a mature woman who is facing a conflict between the desire to dance and the physical limitations of her age. She is looking to the side, toward the shoes, but cannot see them because of the wall. Her

gaze not only implies a longing to dance, but it also serves as the embodiment of the act of observation. The direction of her eyes leads us, the viewers, to the shoes hanging on the wall. The careful rendering of these shoes attracts the attention of the viewer and supports the idea of patient, thoughtful observation.

The process of creating the painting *Ballet Shoes* (Figure 5) by closely observing them on my studio floor over a period of months was an effort to bring their history and purpose to the attention of the viewer. This painting repeats some of the themes found in *Transitions* but without reference to a figure. As with all of my still lifes, *Ballet Shoes* is an accumulation of many attempts to paint from direct, close observation.

*Coffee Break* (Figure 6) is a portrait of a friend of mine doing what he typically does: taking a nap at Starbucks while drinking a cup of coffee. The figure is sleeping through an activity that we normally do to stay awake. He is oblivious to us observing him. It is ironic that this man goes to a public venue where people drink coffee, which is associated with an awakened state of social activity and conversation, only to fall asleep, separating himself from reality by submerging himself in a dream world. This work is not meant to be a criticism of anyone or anything. Instead, because of the image's irony, it is meant to present an honest representation of an individual while asking some questions about human behavior. There are elements of time implied by the sleeping body: we are able to look over this individual from a high vantage point without concern for change or hurry. Once again, the idea of observation is at play here. A second image, Figure 7, is a preparatory study for a proposed large painting, similar to Figure 6, except that it is expanded to incorporate the reclining figure into an environment.

Figure 8 shows a small (20 x 16 inches) study in oil for a larger painting of my friend and colleague Dr. Stein, who is a physics professor at Golden West College. Some of the themes found in *Standing Self-Portrait* (Figure 3) are repeated in this work. The lone figure of Dr. Stein creates a sense of isolation in the dark environment of his laboratory. There is also his direct gaze outward, confronting the viewer; again one is reminded of careful observation (upon

which the science of physics is based) and being observed. There is the reference to his teaching with the chalkboard behind him, but this is secondary to the individual character represented, his observer status, and his aloneness. Figures 9 and 10 are companion pieces to Figure 8, in that they show Dr. Stein's hands (Figure 9) and his head (Figure 10) in greater detail, although in different contexts.

## RESEARCH

When I began to explore representing the human form, it was the anatomical drawings of Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) that were among the first examples that I looked at for instruction and inspiration. I soon learned that throughout his life da Vinci maintained an interest in observing nature with a sense of scientific precision, displaying a great attention to accuracy and detail of the subject matter while maintaining an expressive power, whether in his drawings or paintings. Da Vinci's anatomical drawings are examples of how close observation and recording of facts can create images of lasting human interest. When giving advice on how to create a successful painting, da Vinci recommended careful planning through preliminary drawings from life: “[S]o that no part of the work remains that is not so counseled by reason and by the effects in nature” (MacCurdy 882). Always relying on accurate observation from nature, Leonardo da Vinci explored all aspects of representing the human form, dissecting corpses to reveal the underlying anatomy of bone structure, musculature, organs, and proportions of the body, as well as drawing the effects of aging displayed on the exterior surface of the skin with its folds and wrinkles. His use of parallel hatching (parallel lines used to indicate shading), particularly in his silverpoints, produced subtle and powerful effects that make his drawings far more than just clinical exercises. This importance of shading in da Vinci's drawing carried over into his painting, as his following remark suggests: “Shadows and lights are the most certain means by which the shape of any body comes to be known” (O’Grody 14).

The twentieth century German-American painter Max Beckmann (1884 – 1950) was also concerned with close observation as evidenced by his statement, “If you wish to get hold

of the invisible, you must penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible” (Beckett 6). This means to me that I should look at the subject of my painting with great care and scrutiny. By doing this, I hope to capture more than just what is on the surface of the object. Beckmann said, “It is important and, really, probably the most important thing of all, to remember that a work of art must speak the truth” (Beckett 92). There is a truth to be found that is beyond just what we see. When painting a portrait or still life, part of my responsibility is to attempt to realize the physical and mental reality of the subject. Whether the subject is a person or still life, it has both objective and subjective qualities that are always present but never completely attainable in a painting. By looking carefully at the details of things, one finds evidence of the specific and the general, what is unique to that entity and what is shared by its environment. My desire is to make each painting a movement in the journey toward these elusive and ever present qualities of being.

Another artist whose work relates to my own is Alberto Giacometti (1901 – 1966), primarily known for his sculpture; however, his drawings and paintings remained an important part of his work throughout his life, and his commitment to careful observation of his subject remained steadfast. In particular, from about 1945, the subjects for his two dimensional works were similar to my own: portraits of relatives and close friends, and still lifes, usually consisting of apples, flowers, or the interior of his studio. His method was to set up his easel at a measured distance from the subject and paint directly from observation. His portrait paintings appear simple in concept, usually an isolated figure, torso, or head that is facing the viewer from the center of the canvas. Of great interest to me was his use of a complex network of gestural lines, a natural extension of drawing, to establish space and the solidity of the figure in relation to its surroundings. Giacometti spent much of his life attempting to resolve the problem of how to integrate the figure, an isolated figure, with its environment--a problem that has been a significant challenge to me in my own work. In addition to the figure-ground problem, Giacometti addressed the issue of how to portray the specificity of a certain individual, representing his or her uniqueness while simultaneously indicating what is human and shared

by us all. I want my portraits and self-portraits to be representative of the unique individual being observed and also to contain some qualities of being human that are identifiable to everyone. Alberto Giacometti struggled with concepts of being and representation during his entire artistic career, and was an untiring proponent of the use of direct observation in attempting to resolve these issues.

Any serious figurative painter today would probably agree that the British artist Lucian Freud (b. 1922) is of the most famous and revered painters of the human body still active. His work is dominated by portraiture. His method is to work directly from the model, using intense observation over a great many sittings. Freud's uncanny ability to portray human flesh in paint comes from hard work, continually painting layer over layer until the life of the subject comes out onto the canvas. Everything that he paints in addition to the figure, such as furniture, floors, carpets, walls, etc., are rendered with great accuracy and by direct observation of the subject over an extended period of time. Freud has said,

I think a great portrait has to do with the way it is approached. If you look at Chardin's animals, they're absolute portraits. It's to do with the feeling of individuality and the intensity of the regard and the focus on the specific. (Freud 7)

Lucian Freud's work is about observation, and whether the subject is animate or inanimate, the point of the work seems to be about life. One thing that I share with Freud is the lack of desire to make any sort of political statement; my painting is about the object that I see and how I feel about it. As Freud has said, "Nothing ever stands in for anything.... Nobody is representing anything" (Smee 34). His paintings are about using the material of paint to reproduce, as honestly as he can, what he sees before him.

Another artist that fits into the theme of intense observation is Avigdor Arikha (b. 1929), who works in Paris and Jerusalem. In 1965 he abandoned a successful career as an abstract painter to turn to realism. His paintings are typically completed in one sitting, quite unlike my process, but they are developed with intense observation. His subjects are objects that surround him, such as clothing, portraits of friends, and himself. Everyday items and common scenes are

explored with an intensity of observation by Arikha that convinces us of their importance. Items of clothing, food, utensils, and so forth are represented with a personal intimacy that conveys a feeling of gratitude for life, something that I would like to strive for in my own work.

Because of his emphasis on precise observation from life, the British artist Euan Uglow (1932 – 2000), has also influenced my work. His teacher, mentor, and friend, William Coldstream (1908 – 1987) was known for his philosophy of painting from carefully measured sections of the visual image using a systematic assemblage of marks on the canvas:

By systematically gauging vertical and horizontal distances on the person or object, seen against a brush held at arm's length, and marking his canvas accordingly, Coldstream sought to let his subject emerge as if by itself, without having been merely willed.

(Prendeville 137)

It is interesting to note that Alberto Giacometti met with Coldstream in June of 1955 on the occasion of Giacometti's first London exhibition. Both of these artists shared a sense of careful observation; their works can be described as an accumulation of many sessions of recording their visual sensitivity to the subject at hand. This idea influenced Uglow, who at times was known for his insistence on painting directly from the figure, requiring strict standards for the model's positioning and holding the pose. Uglow came into contact with Coldstream during his training at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in south London. Discussions with Coldstream and others at the school about attitudes toward realism were stimulating:

The retinal image tells us only a small part of what we accept as the reality of these objects. They seem to have weight, and a solidity that is only understood by an intellectual interpretation of tone and color changes on their facets; they have a space between them only apprehended because the shape of the shadow falling from one on to the other is seen not only as a tonal patch but as a shape defining the space, something one has learned and remembered. But all this is understood by direct contact with the objects themselves and of the space in which they are situated. This is the material of our paintings. (Lampert xiii)

These remarks coincide with my own attitude: that painting involves the presence of the actual object and the mind. One thinks about the object and interprets it in terms of paint. The painting is as much about the contemplation of the object through careful observation as it is about its visual representation.

The Spanish artist Antonio Lopez Garcia (b. 1936) is another proponent of intense observation. He has said “the realist has an ethical commitment to, or an intense relationship with, nature, and, alongside this, fidelity to a working method that is in line with the principles of painting, drawing, or sculpture” (Brutvan 100). Lopez Garcia will go to great lengths to paint directly from the actual model, whether it is a fruit tree, a landscape, or an interior setting, sometimes taking years to complete a work. His dedication to painting from life is an inspiration for my own approach to painting.

In 2008 I was able to see an exhibition of Lopez Garcia’s work at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. His plein-air paintings of views of Madrid exemplify his insistence on working from life, using direct and patient observation over lengthy periods of time to complete a work. Looking closely at the surfaces of these paintings I could see a variety of pencil marks that indicated a process not unlike the precision one might find in an architectural rendering of the subject; however the paint application and subtle color and value choices produced a work full of life and atmosphere. These cityscapes contained tremendous precision and detail in the foreground, with windows and walls of buildings meticulously rendered and the gradual changes in values of light reflecting from the top to the bottom of the walls painted with equal care. As the buildings recede toward the horizon, Lopez Garcia changes his values and paints hazier elements, producing atmospheric perspective. All of this comes together into an image of such believability that I felt as though I was standing where the artist stood viewing the actual city below. These are not photorealist works at all; the paint application produces a warm feeling of life, not a coldly objective imitation of space. I have a great admiration and appreciation for this artist’s dedication to the truth of his subject.

Finally, Ann Gale (b. 1966), a professor at the University of Washington School of Art in Seattle, is an artist who uses the same subject matter that I am pursuing: self-portraits and portraits of friends who sit for her. Because of her insistence on working directly from life, any one of her paintings can take several weeks or months to complete. Her process is to use a multitude of vertical and horizontal brush marks consisting of mostly subdued colors that create forms appearing to be simultaneously breaking apart and coming together. Edges of figures, when examined in detail, seem to come apart into the surrounding space and yet, when viewed as a whole, form solid masses within space. Gale combines intense observation and an expressive brush stroke to create stunning images of heads and figures in quite ordinary poses. There is no story being told; all she depicts is a confrontation of human existence through an isolated seated figure in a barren room. I find her paintings to be very inspiring. She has developed her own unique style of realism that combines the excitement of abstract expression's painterly brush strokes with classicism's effort to mimic the visual image. We are in a way "forced" to look closely at her works because of her complex style of fitting together strokes of color to create an image. This effect of creating a visual field that both challenges our senses and engages our interest gives her paintings a unique quality that I would like to emulate in my own work.

All of these artists share an intense desire for truth and honesty in their work. Each has a unique style of painting, but what is consistent to all of them is their process of careful, dedicated observation. My own methodology contains some of these same principles, and therefore my results may also possess some degree of truth and honesty.

## METHODOLOGY

My college training in mathematics and subsequent teaching in this field has influenced the methods and procedures that I use in my painting, the most obvious of these being the tendency toward precision. Part of my process is careful observation, motivated by a desire for an optical accuracy when reproducing an object on the painting surface. This is a change from when I began the MFA program. At that time I was interested in a painterly approach displayed

by expressive brushwork. However, as I gained more experience, the tendency to want to record what I see with greater accuracy has grown to the point where most of my painting is done with small brushes and brushstrokes, allowing for more refinement in rendering details.

My process began with the desire to work directly from life, although using photographs has steadily become more prevalent because of its practical necessity when working with the figure. When possible, working from life is preferable because of its obvious advantages. First, I like the physical closeness of the subject; its proximity and physical presence helps to give me the feeling while I am painting that I am on the actual surface of the object. This is similar to the effect of blind contour exercises in drawing where one looks at the object and attempts to draw the contours without looking at the paper. In this process, the mind transfers the feeling of being on the object's surface to a corresponding mark on the paper. Second, by working directly from life I have more visual information, such as light and surface texture and the ability to look at parts of the whole image from different angles and different distances. It is true that photography helps to obtain some detail by freezing the image; however, the feeling of space around the object remains for me difficult to obtain with photographs only. Also, I do not want my work to necessarily represent a frozen instant; I would rather it indicate a moment in the inevitable passage of time.

My endeavor to do portraits began by working with myself as the subject. In this way I was able to work at any hour and maintain very close observations over extended periods of time. In addition, there was no pressure to make the perfect likeness; I was free to experiment with different colors and brushes, which led to becoming a better painter. Also, there was the aspect of self-discovery inherent in painting self-portraits. As I struggle to form a style of painting that is both objective and subjective, both representational and individually distinctive, I ask questions about who I am and what, if anything, these portraits mean. The self-portrait is more than what I see; it is also what I think. I want the viewer to look at my image and see someone who is isolated, perhaps alone, but also an observant individual open to examination and inquiry.

My procedure for painting a self-portrait of the head begins with the placement of a mirror within three or four feet of my face, sometimes closer, to allow for careful observation. Most of these self-portraits are done while standing which gives me the freedom to move away from the painting to check its progress. I start with a charcoal drawing on the painting surface to map-in the major landmarks of the face and establish proportions. After using a spray fixative on the drawing, I begin painting with a large brush to block in the planes. This first application of paint, as in most of my work, is usually done with a transparent red or brown oxide and a little ultramarine blue mixed with Gamsol to keep it thin. This initial layer defines the major planes as well as the light and dark areas. After the initial layer is complete, I begin to apply color. My palette is organized and, rather than premixing colors, I mix them as the painting develops. When the painting becomes more detailed, smaller brushes are used and the paint is applied with shorter strokes, sometimes by just laying the paint down by pressing the brush onto the surface. The painting evolves in a cumulative fashion: as one part is developed this requires further development to another part which in turn influences another part, and so on. It is almost an endless process of pushing the painting more and more, accumulating layers of attempts until I cannot see what to do next and I stop. The entire process takes at least six to eight weeks to complete. Two head self-portraits are shown in Figures 11 and 12.

While painting *Standing Self-Portrait* (Figure 3) numerous challenges were encountered due to its large size, accommodating the full figure. A preliminary drawing was executed first to determine whether the composition would work. This was done using charcoal on paper (Figure 13). Although this is a self-portrait, working with a full-length figure required reference photographs in addition to looking in a mirror. After most of the compositional questions, such as placement of the figure and value relationships were answered in the drawing, a small color study was done in oil (Figure 14). This study was helpful in verifying that the composition and color would work in the final large painting. After completion of these two preliminary studies, I was ready to begin the final painting. Before any application of paint onto the large canvas, I began with a charcoal drawing to establish the figure and doorway. This was

difficult, because at this scale a slight error in proportion or placement becomes very pronounced. Once the drawing was established, a slow approach using transparent washes was used to help keep control of value relationships. A steady buildup of layers of semi-transparent color allowed me to constantly check that color and value created the appropriate atmosphere and focus in the composition. It was important to let each layer dry for one day before moving ahead with more paint, otherwise undesirable mixtures of color would occur (creating dull grey areas). Each layer of painting on this canvas was the product of carefully observing the results of the previous layer.

The desire to paint directly from life also led naturally to work with still lifes. In this genre I had some experience working with fabric and clothing before entering the MFA program. I think this began as a substitute for the figure: coats and shirts hanging on a wall were used as stand-ins for the human figure. I would hang the article of clothing from a nail to create folds and use a strong artificial light source to produce shadows emphasizing these folds. I have continued with this subject, using shoes and rags as well as other objects related to everyday life. An example of this type of still life is given in Figure 2.

The most difficult part of doing a still life is setting up the actual subject. Although I want the subject to be related to a person in one of my portraits, it should also have meaning to the general viewer. For example, clothing is a favorite choice because it can have multiple layers of meaning. We all use clothing; it provides protection and comfort and is immediately recognizable. However, clothing by itself can also represent the person who wears it and can pose questions or provide answers about that person. For example, in the still life *Ballet Shoes* (Figure 5), a pair of ballet shoes represents my friend who is a dancer, and the worn appearance of the shoes indicates the struggle and hard work involved with that life.

Once the set-up for a still life is accomplished the painting progresses much as described above for the self-portrait, except that I am more confident about handling the paint. I believe this is related to the fact that the subject does not change from day to day: the lighting, color, shapes, and textures are constant. This type of painting is very amenable to intense

observation. My process of painting remains the same from portrait to still life: it is a product that evolves out of the continual development of parts and relationships between those parts, the results being an accumulation over many painting sessions of direct observation.

## CONCLUSION

My paintings are exercises in careful observation involving study and thought. My intention is for the viewer to be visually engaged with the painting and experience some level of reflective consideration. I have not attempted to tell stories or make political statements. Instead, I hope that these works attract the attention of the viewer and create an awareness of the act of observation so that the contemplation of a human face or a familiar object may occur for more than just a moment. Consider, for example, the following poem called “Rag Meditations” written in response to viewing one of my still life paintings of a dish rag (Figure 15):

There are no pretensions here.  
A thing is what it is.  
And that’s all there is –  
until I look further,  
deeper than everything  
surface offers,  
and hints of the indescribable  
coruscate among folding colors.

We live in those things we do not,  
can not,  
construct –  
things that simply are,  
have no meaning,  
and so are most meaning full:  
the quotidian feel of color, shape, smell,  
damp paths that curve through specific leaves,  
clean bed sheets smoothed flat.

I live in these folds  
by compassion alone.  
Nothing matters except  
living in these folds of color,  
without illusion.



Figure 15

What I retain is here,  
now:  
beauty, transient, solid –  
folds of color that hang on a nail –  
simplicity  
costing not less than everything.

Stainless steel cutlery,  
porcelain sink,  
tile in white squares,  
glasses transparent as water,  
scissors, knives, cups, bowls,  
the reality of each moment,  
breath by breath,  
touched by folds of color  
hanging on a nail.

(Merrill 1)

These are meditative and deeply felt words in reaction to the painting. There are “no pretensions” in this painting, no story to tell, just my interest in representing the folds of the rag, its colors and shadows with the hope that viewers will see, in addition to its physical reality, “hints of the indescribable.” The hanging setup for this still life serves as a metaphor for the suspension of time to which the poet alludes by relating the rag to “the reality of each moment” touched by its surface. My theme of using close observation to reveal objective and subjective qualities of the subject matter, attempting to create moments of quiet study and contemplation and seeing beauty in the most simple, everyday objects was evidently achieved in this viewer’s mind.

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## APPENDIX

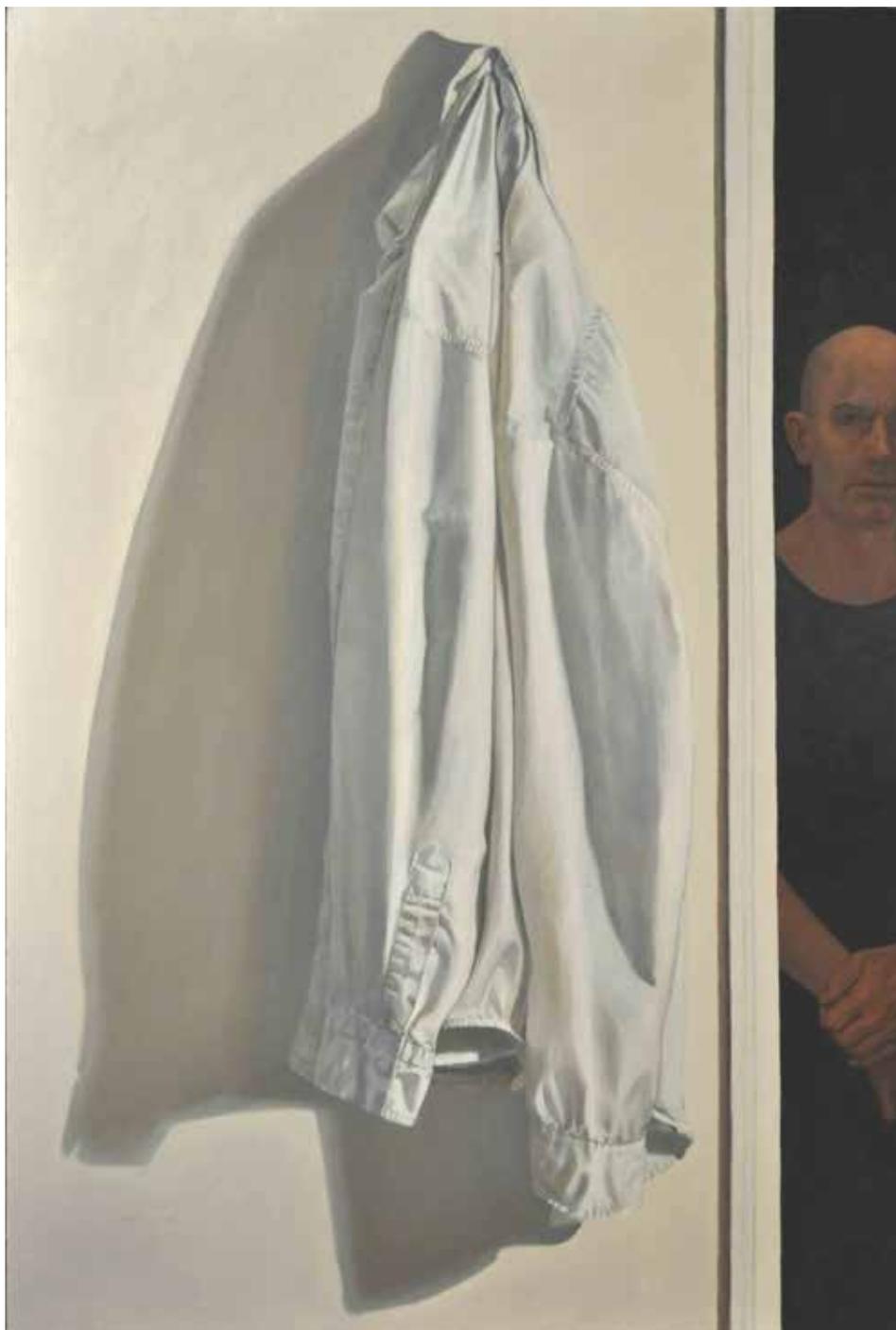


Figure 1. *The Shirt*, 2008, Oil on board, 36x24 inches.



Figure 2. *The Paint Rag*, 2010, Oil on board, 20x24 inches.

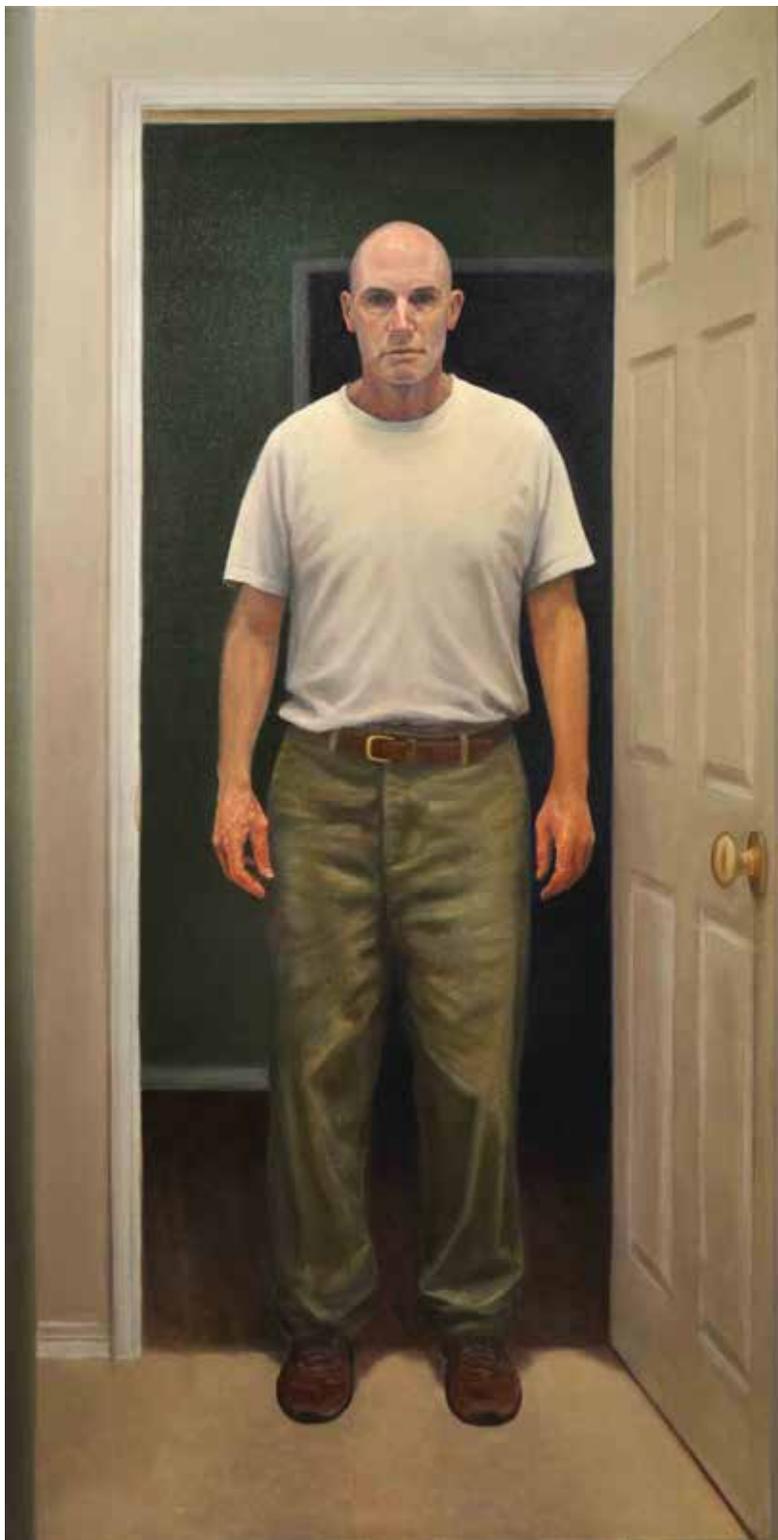


Figure 3. *Standing Self-Portrait*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 72 x 36 inches.



Figure 4. *Transitions*, 2009, Oil on board, 30 x 24 inches.



Figure 5. *Ballet Shoes*, 2009, Oil on board, 24 x 15 inches.

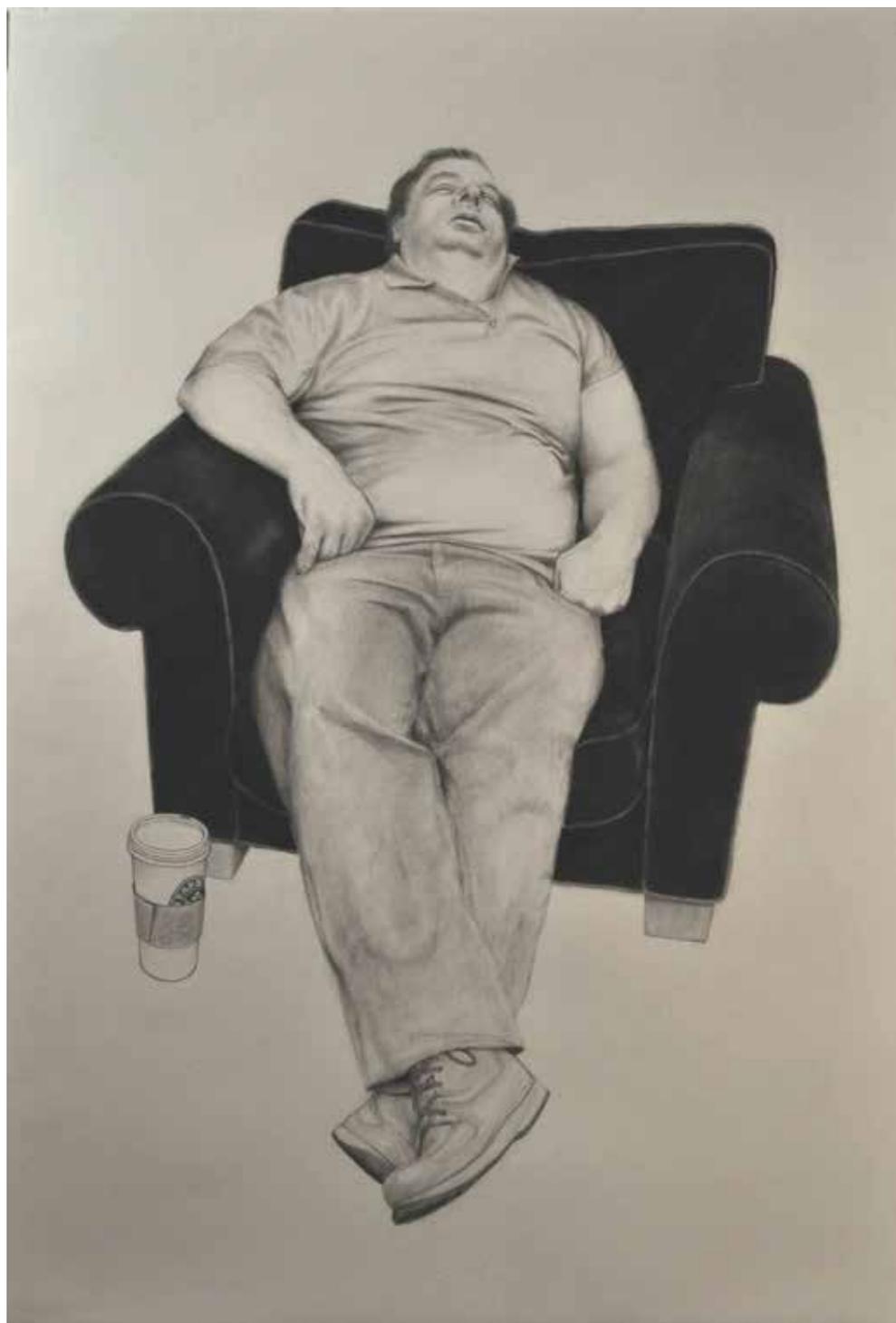


Figure 6. *Coffee Break*, 2010, Charcoal on paper, 44 x 30 inches.



Figure 7. *Starbuck's*, 2010, Charcoal and gesso on paper, 60 x 33 inches.

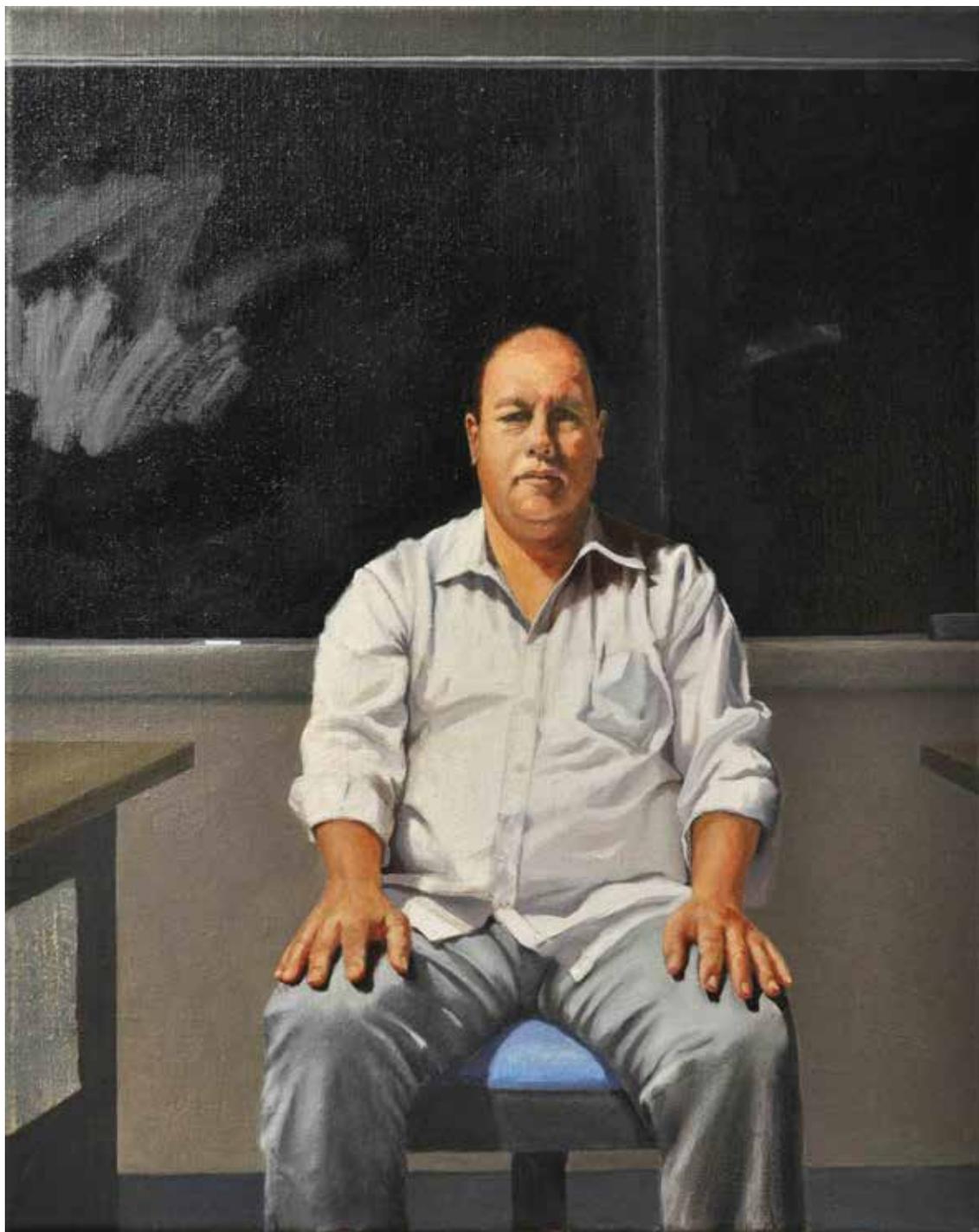


Figure 8. *Dr. Stein*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches.



Figure 9. *Konrad's Hands*, 2009, Oil on board, 18 x 9 inches.



Figure 10. *Konrad*, 2010, Oil on Dura-Lar, 24 x 20 inches.

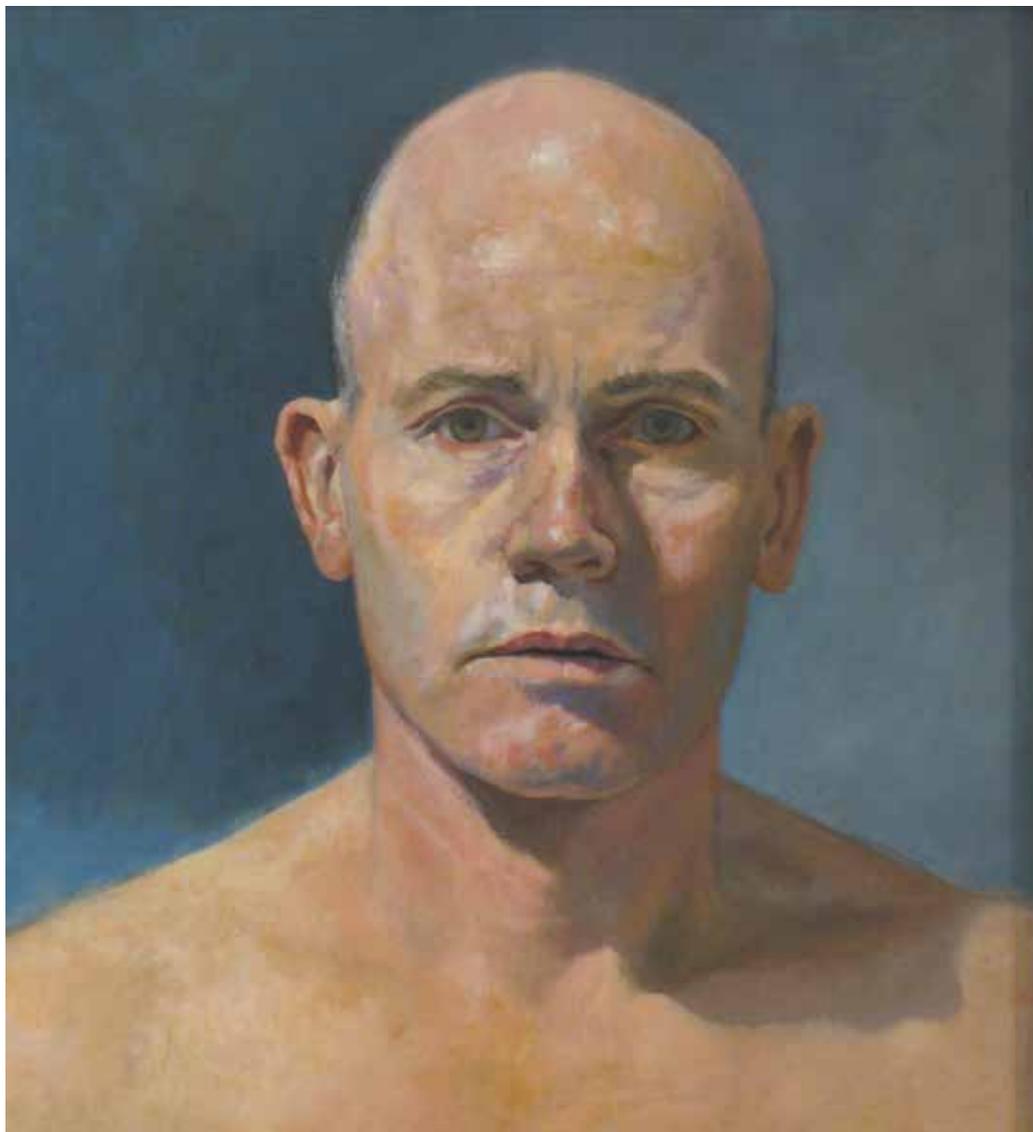


Figure 11. *Self*, 2008, Oil on board, 20 x 16 inches.

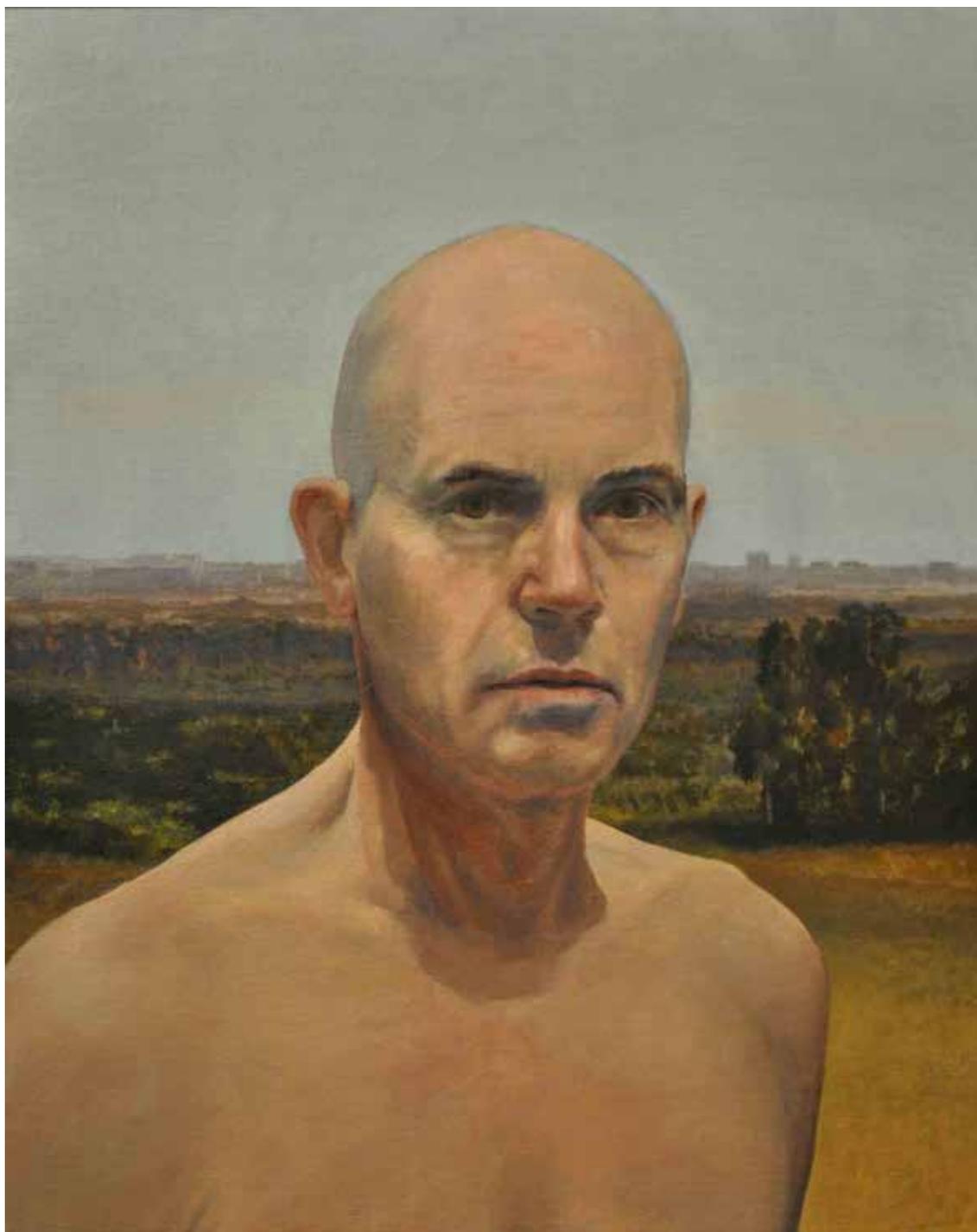


Figure 12. *Self-Portrait In Irvine*, 2010, Oil on board, 20 x 16 inches.

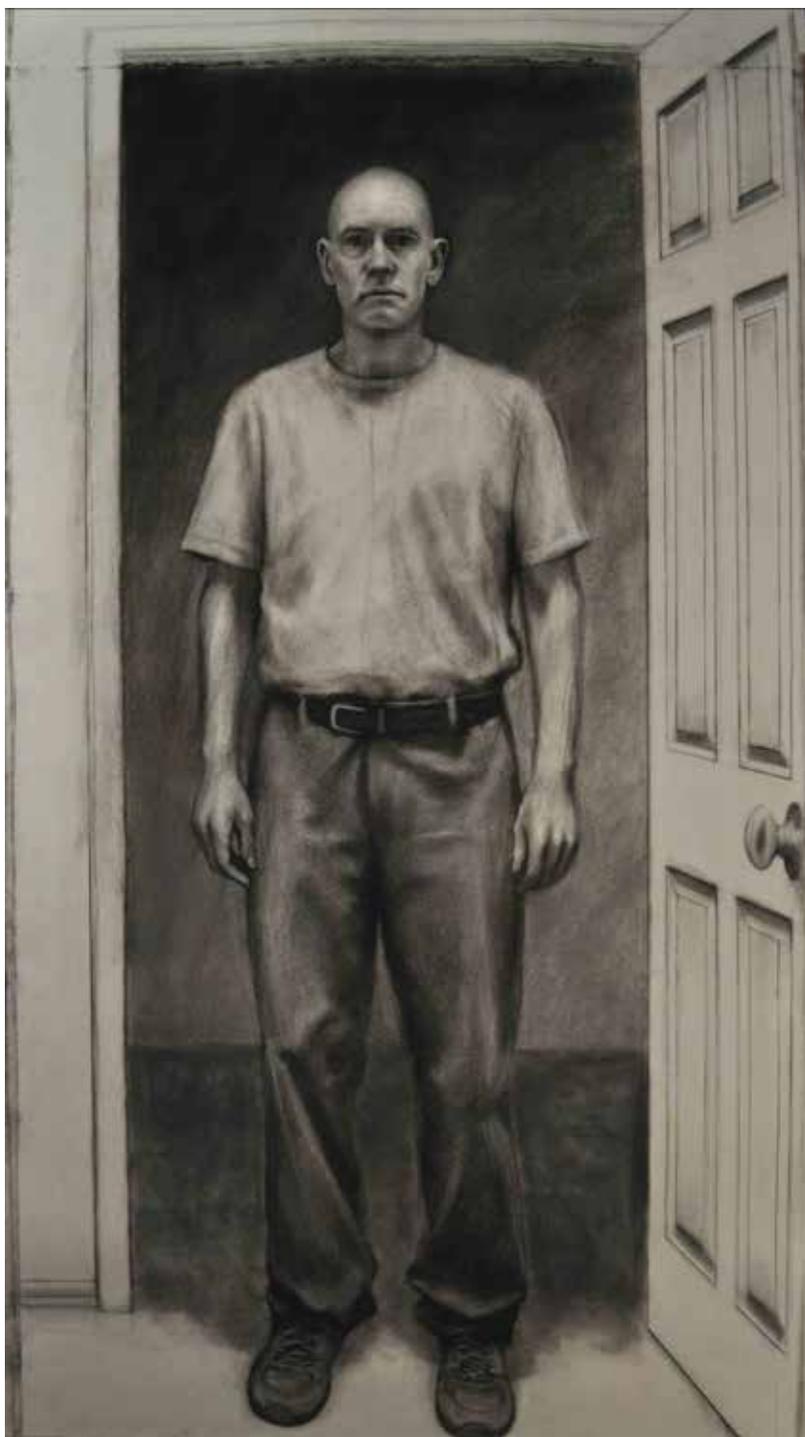


Figure 13. *Standing Self-Portrait*, 2010, Charcoal, 51 x 26 inches.

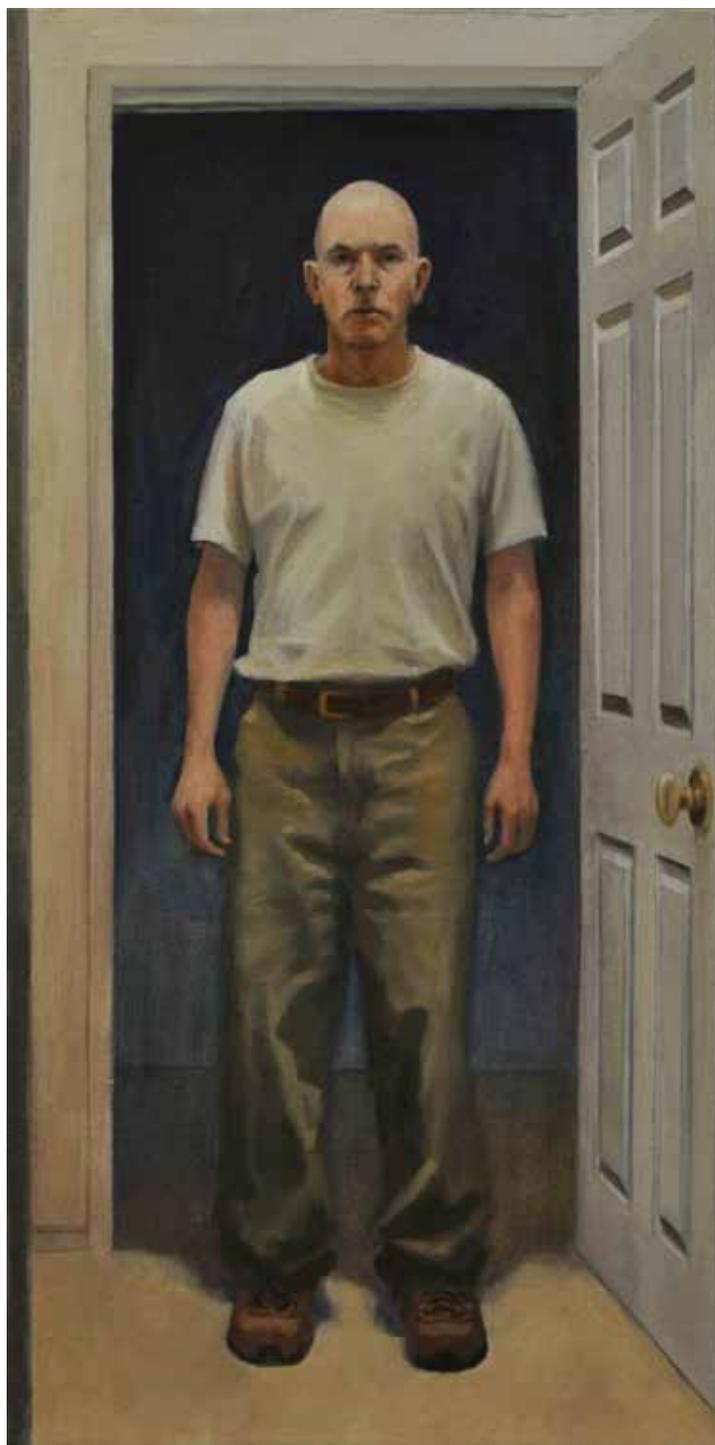


Figure 14. *Standing Self-Portrait*, 2010, Oil, 20 x 16 inches.