

STRANGERS OF THE CITY

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

I think of my paintings as an extension of street photography. The photograph has had a long-standing tradition of being at war with the painting world; however, I found that it is used in my work beyond the traditional means of reference, and is solely responsible for the imagery of transient people in the urban landscape on which my paintings are based. The process manifests in two parts: first, the execution of photography, and second, the painting, where I look for patterns, repetition, and order among people in groups, isolated figures, and compositions that may have a narrative. The results are at times unexpected, uncanny, mysterious, strange, and even fearful. Many of the works are inspired by the photography of Garry Winogrand, Walker Evans, and David Bradford.

The photograph is also used to deeply explore the psychological and sociological issues of people in urban spaces, borrowing from the research of Edward T. Hall, whose studies consist of proxemic and kinesic explorations, which assigns relative animal and human distances in public spaces. This body of work is meant to reintroduce the city and its inhabitants to the viewer, to look at the stranger, and to look at ourselves.

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arts is a wonder to behold. Furthermore, your generosity in time has been unmatched, and your guidance has been crucial to the lineage and evolution of my painting. Thank you for all that you have done in support of my art education. I am extremely delighted to call you my colleague and friend.

DEDICATION

For Dennis Drummond, to whom I give sole credit and gratitude in the
pursuance of my Masters of Fine Art degree for his endless
encouragement and support despite my ever doubtful mind.

And to my parents for ceasing to have any expectations for my career
except that it bring happiness.

EPIGRAPH

*I wanted to affirm unequivocally that
eighty-two people had come along and,
without knowing it, placed themselves
in front of a fixed and impersonal apparatus
for a given time and that all these individuals,
inscribed in the view-finder, were photographed
without the slightest human intervention at the
moment the shutter clicked.*

~Walker Evans

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DESCRIPTION

Evolution

It was not until much later—after the most of the paintings for this thesis were finished—that I realized the content of the pictures I had created had not strayed as far from my undergraduate thesis as I had originally thought; indeed there was a connection. The former collection of paintings concentrated on single figures in private interior spaces, mostly women in tranquil, self-reflecting solitude. Suddenly, after three years of enigmatic painting, the antithesis of that undergraduate body of work emerged: a series of paintings that present figures in outdoor spaces. Where the former discussed privacy and the individual undisturbed, this current work discusses the public person within society. The evolution from isolated figures to social figures happened rather subconsciously. One was never intended as an answer to the other, although now it seems they answer each other indisputably.

In 2007, while visiting Chicago and having coffee downtown somewhere near Michigan Avenue, I decided it might be interesting to photograph people as they walked by my window. I did not photograph with the intent to use them as references for paintings, but simply as an experiment to see how I might capture these people, and what they might portray as moving figures. I left the coffee shop with photographs of seventy-two people, (and one dog) many of whom were cut off, blurred, and nondescript. In that set of photos were people of all ages, races, and sexes; I felt as though I had encapsulated seventy-three different lives in a matter of fifteen minutes—each with their own gait, style, and demeanor.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 are of the first two people I photographed that day as well as the first two I reviewed on screen afterward. These pictures are not wonderful photography,



Fig. 1. Mike Miller, Chicago 1, 2007

though what I caught could not have excited me more. At first glance, I noticed I was not as inconspicuous as I had thought, having been surprised by a hooded man looking back at me. I found excitement in photographing the stranger, different from photographing someone I knew. The friend is always the same person in the photograph, as he or she is known to be. This man was most likely not who he relayed himself to be in the picture or what the picture made him out to be. His identity, I realized, had been stripped away and redefined in the photograph, by my own projections. It no longer mattered who he was in

real life; he

only existed then, as he seemed on screen and paper. The photograph teemed with narrative. He looked dark and brooding, and perhaps not completely harmless—someone who did not smile in his pictures or did not smile much at all.

The next photo showed a woman in red, window shopping with a man, though his face had mysteriously been cut off by a protruding wall from the building. There seemed a sadness on her face; perhaps she did not like what she



Fig. 2. Mike Miller, Chicago 2, 2007

saw in the window, or perhaps it made her think of someone else. Nevertheless, this collection of photos interested me in ways I did not understand, though I would eventually recognize.

As a painting thesis based on street photography, it was difficult to find meaning behind my drive to paint the photographs I was taking. The interest to create the paintings I realized went far beyond the notion of figurative and urban imagery. These were not cityscapes with people but people-scapes with cities. As I looked closer, it became clearer that the reasons for my interest were existent only within the reality of the photograph. In my enthusiasm of the photographed stranger—that which relayed people's inwardness in an outward world, the spaces in which they moved, and their changed identities once photographed—I found the camera indispensable.

I then began to ask myself questions concerning the role that photography was serving in my work, both conceptually and formally. Some of these questions were addressed and answered in the writings of literary theorist Susan Sontag. Reading her compiled collection of essays, *On Photography*, it soon became apparent how fundamentally the photograph assisted the paintings, beyond traditional reference and moving into the role of catalyst. I could not then regard the photography as only a tool, and instead chose to honor the photography that excited me and allowed my work a place to germinate.

What was happening in the reality of the photograph did not interest me; however, the reality that something did happen, a slice of life cut out by the camera, was intriguing. My fascination was not about how the photograph observed the real world, but how it was *perceived* afterward—a dual reality, or sur-reality as Sontag suggests: “Surrealism lies at the heart of the photographic enterprise: in the very creation of a duplicate world, of a reality in

the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision” (52). Within the photographic picture, the perceived drama changed from an empirical realm to an investigation of a new reality. Furthermore, this new reality from my photographs and my paintings suggested I did not exist. By having taken the pictures I—in a sense—claimed my invisibility, suggesting the scenes in my paintings happened through my own dissociation; I was hidden from view.

My original goal was to produce nine paintings of people in Chicago passing over the same location at different times of the day. By the third painting I found this to be technically difficult, and



Fig. 3. Mike Miller, *Proximities*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"



Fig. 4. Mike Miller, *Pennies*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

the will to continue painting the same setting quickly faded. Perhaps I could have gone about it a different way utilizing the original concept; nevertheless, I realized that what I wanted to say could also be said of people in different locations.

Execution

For her anonymity, the woman in *Passer* (Figure 5) stood out first among those in the other photographs. Her firm arrest in the middle of the sidewalk forced me to look at her and wonder, at what exactly was she looking? Because she is completely concealed, except for the lower legs and tip of her nose, we can only assume she is a woman, and are unaware of

age and race, much like we are unaware of these attributes as we stare at the backs of heads walking down the street, or sit in a movie theater. She is almost universal with such little identity. Fixed on something unseen, she stands distracted, unsure, reflecting the choices to keep going or to stay put. She stands firmly planted on the pavement, which prompted me to strengthen the contrast of her figure against the ground to keep her in front on the picture plane. She felt heavy and important, almost immovable. Another exciting element for me is the runner ahead of her,



Fig. 5. Mike Miller, *Passer*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

bordering the edge of the picture frame. The juxtaposition of a running figure with one that is still, the inactive versus the active, reaffirms her circumstance. She is the one of importance; she is staying.

In many ways, *Passer* was an experiment in dealing with new issues like the blur of photography, and the complexities of city details. I contemplated mimicking the blur of the runner, and I decided that doing so befit the content of the painting. This painting also bore the lack of my maturity as a painter, fitting images to standard-sized canvases rather than designing the orientation to best suit the painting. This resulted in uncontrolled compositions, like the expanse of sidewalk at the bottom, and thus cracks were added in the lower right

corner. This change solved the issue, but also broke up an otherwise oddly smooth sidewalk. Though I find the negative space below her to add a sense of alienation, cropping slightly more of the pavement could have better served the picture. With the cracks, a tiny cigarette was placed just above the fracture. This was more of a technical decision of balance, and it has little to do with the content; however, it could belong to her or the runner. Newspaper boxes were simplified along the edge of the far sidewalk, and the sky was invented with the addition of a small patch of blue in an otherwise bleak and dreary winter. Formally, *Passer* is as descriptive in color, value, and structure as its photograph with limited alterations—something I worked to avoid in later paintings.

After *Passer* came two more Chicago paintings of the same scene with different people. While I decided after the third painting I would not continue the six others as originally planned, I did learn two things in this endeavor: my painting process and the paintings bored me. After viewing them side by side, it was clear that they were painted in such a way that was limited to their photographic loyalties, and that nothing about them said “painting.” Thus, for the third Chicago picture I used only the palette knife after viewing figurative works by Nicolai Fechin. Fechin’s paintings are painterly, almost abstract at times. In these works it was in the search and discovery of the figure where I found the joy of looking at painting, not the photographic replica of painting. I brought this new assertion for painting to the next project.

The reference for *The Crossing* (Figure 6), was found incidentally through cropping. Excess cityscape in the photo showed the entire left side of the street, which I reframed to focus on the woman and the path behind her. The image portrays a woman at the end of the sidewalk in Los Angeles waiting for the light to turn, so that she can cross with several

people approaching from behind. Because much of the painting's imagery is made up of concrete and cement, I made the decision to paint using the palette knife for most of the piece, exploring different textures and visual weights. I focused on layers of paint and harder, less precise edges. Different from the Chicago paintings that were more mirrors of their photo counterparts, I wanted this painting to read as a *painting*, divorced from the photograph while still maintaining the genetics of its related photo.



Fig. 6. Mike Miller, *The Crossing*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 40" x 30"

revealed by her frontward position, brightly colored garment, and white slippers. Her only story here is that she apprehensively holds her bag, seemingly guarded. She stands at a point in her journey in which others may catch up to her, meet her, and cross over with her to the other side, or the light will turn and she will continue as she was, alone. Street crossings are profound in some ways because they symbolize a change from one side to the other, where the two sides are never the same. These street corners provide a holding place for

In all of its rigidity, *The Crossing* somewhat represents the structure of an entire city with its receding space and its predominance of concrete which encapsulates its inhabitants. Like the woman in *Passer*, she too is stopped amid moving people, yet dissimilarly, her identity is

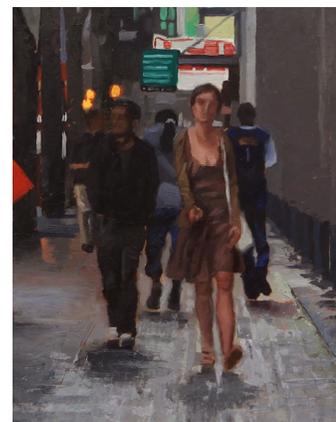


Fig. 7. Mike Miller, *The Crossing*, detail

pedestrians, a safe haven from the automobiles that collect people as they wait with others to cross over; if everyone follows the rules, they all get out alive. Others pass one another on the way, distracted most of the time with little inquisition.



Fig. 8. Mike Miller, *Corners*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 48" x 28"

Corners (Figure 8), a Los Angeles scene, is about anti-distraction and apathy for strangers existing in the urban environment amid a flurry of stimuli. The camera, however, presents the photograph of a city devoid of distraction with no traffic, almost no signage, and minimal people, recording a kind of ghost town. It caught the people in a state of singularity with specific distances between each where they never fully came together before the shutter clicked. Perhaps they knew one another, perhaps they didn't. The stimuli exist in their own thoughts as if aimlessly wandering and wondering, and we notice their attention, specifically the woman in the foreground whose gesture can be seen as someone thoughtful and worried. She bears the emotion of the scene because of her close position and size, and beyond the

confines of the photograph, her dominance is heightened due to the more painterly treatment she is given in contrast to the others.

The camera can be an equalizer, whose treatment is the same for all of its subjects. However, I can describe my subjects subjectively, ordaining the lead star while diminishing others. While photography can fall short as evidence for what the painter considers splendor, painting can amplify, restate, and idealize. Looking at the photograph and subsequent painting in Figures 8 and 9, one can clearly see a difference. Evident are the shifts in color and tonality, where emphasis is placed, and where it is retracted.



Fig. 9. Mike Miller, comparison for *Corners*, 2010

This comparison is not to show the exactness but rather the inexactness between the surreal photograph and the finished painting. Sontag points to their differences as she states:

The painter constructs, the photographer discloses. That is, the identification of the subject of a photograph always dominates our perception of it—as it does not, necessarily in a painting. The subject of Weston’s “Cabbage Leaf,” taken in 1931, looks like a fall of gathered cloth; a title is needed to identify it. Thus, the image makes its point in two ways. The form is pleasing, and it is (surprise!) the form of a cabbage leaf. If it were gathered cloth, it wouldn’t be so beautiful. We already know that beauty, from the fine arts. Hence the formal qualities of style—the central issue in painting—are, at most, of secondary importance, while what a photograph is *of* is always of primary importance. (92-93)

So, the formal qualities of style in painting, as Sontag illustrates, exceed photographic style—except in the case of the lenses used—by its manufactured and unconscious effort. My responses to the unconscious camera, whose mechanical eye records where I perceive, brings the people and their city in *Corners* to a different place of reality, an affected reality.

Informed by this, especially in this painting, was the use of color as I shifted from a tonal palette to a more chromatic, harmonious one. *Corners* was a push toward something greater than the photograph, and less absolute, with focus on restructured color, light, and spatial and figurative hierarchy.

Space, which is intrinsic to cities, and that which excites me about cities—their endless corridors in every direction, and verticality amidst a horizontal world—has been previously absent from my work until *Discovery* (Figure 10). Before, I mimicked the flatness of the photograph. Photography inherently collapses space, and folds everything on top of

itself, negating the very quality it tries to capture. It was up to me, I realized, to give that which it took—space—back to the images I was trying to make. This did not become apparent until I saw the work of Jean-Léon Gérôme for the first time in a retrospective at the Getty Museum. For me, space in painting had never called attention to itself as it did in the retrospective, particularly in Gérôme's outdoor figure scenes.

Discovery was an attempt at addressing formal concerns of space and color as well as the psychology of the people in the work. Because my work focuses on people in urban spaces where space exists both narrowly and expansively, I began to ask questions about the personal spaces that surrounded the people within the city. What effect, if any, did their personal space have on their experiences both before I photographed them, and

afterward in the pictures?

Discovery covers new territory in the viewer's closeness to the figure, the figure's direct gaze, and personality. The girl in green, as the painting was originally called, is the painting's main subject, and is more descriptive of her than any other person I had painted previously. Her style of clothing, hair, accessories, stance, and expression are all certain and definable—editorial, as one artist called it. Her choice about her own personal space was



Fig. 10. Mike Miller, *Discovery*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 40" x 25 3/8"

evident here as she leaned against the end column opposite the man, each maintaining their own distances. Seen here for the first time, is the subject's acknowledgment of me. Before, I remained invisible, but here I infiltrated the scene and made my presence known, contributing to the stimuli of the city as another passerby who looks and is looked at. My attempt at candidness failed, but in return I received engagement. If I had not been seen, it would have been the person next to me, or whomever walked before or after. Suddenly, I became the experiment as well as the subject.

The photograph for the painting was cropped much more tightly, eliminating the rest of the sidewalk, which was quite wide, and contained people walking and conversing, people doing things. However, it was the non-doing of the people to the right, as they waited, stared, and sipped, which grabbed my attention. The painting suggests "the sidewalk experience" where one makes decisions about where to look, and at whom, so in this case, the sideliners, who knew more about what was going on than those in the middle of it. They knew about my presence as those engaged in conversation did not.

As my crop narrowed the focus to these five people, increasing their description, the description of the city also narrowed, stripping away information to just a series of concrete columns. This alluded to the sideliners' whereabouts as "anywhere," indoors or outdoors, and proved the city as background mattered less than the people within it. Regarding space in *Discovery*, the people arranged themselves like dominos going backward. I lessened the contrast for each one creating a path from clarity to vagueness, so the viewer would first look at the girl in front, then the men behind her, and finally the two individuals behind them, as if passing by. *Discovery* is about the discovery and investigation of one another, from stranger to stranger.

Indifference (Figure 11), revisits the street corner and returns to apathy for the stranger except in the case of one's concern about distance to that person. Many of my



Fig. 11. Mike Miller, *Indifference*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

The painting shows a man and woman on the street corner in downtown Seattle who have stood far enough apart that they fall within the social space of four to seven feet (Hall 121). Because they were the first to arrive at the corner, they could choose how far apart they would stand from one another. Across the street is the opposite situation, where, as time went on, people began to fill up the empty space, giving those arriving later fewer choices about their distances from one another. No one on the other side

paintings portray social situations and, along with visual atmospheric space, social space as well. Of the other paintings, *Indifference* most clearly illustrates the idea of personal distance and how we manage to maintain it in public. One's relative distance to others is something most people think about, whether it pertains to the choosing of subway seats or the space between people in a line. The painting shows a man and woman on the street corner in

seems to acknowledge the other person as they each keep to themselves, hands in their pockets, gazing outwardly.

The two figures in front also seem to ignore one another, looking off down opposite ends of the street. I could easily politicize the painting as they are essentially perceived stereotypes of their class: one looks to be a tall, thin, Caucasian woman, (though we can never know for sure) and the other a tall, dark-skinned, presumably African American man. Yet, in their polarity they are unified by their dark clothing, and they stand at approximately the same height. Their disinterest in one another is obvious, and so the given title *Indifference*.

One of the biggest challenges for myself in painting is choosing the amount of description for the painting. The painting's large size and deep view of the city made available the opportunity to convey large amounts of information. In painting, as I push beyond the photograph, the challenge of description becomes an ever present question: how much is too much, and how little is too little? Conventionally, *Indifference* relates more to *The Crossing*, where I became less concerned about refining the details of the city, reducing its structures to large abstracted shapes, freed from painting the windows of each building and each person in the crowd. In the beginning stages, I worked in layers from the ground up as opposed to the direct painting method I often used before, completing a section, and completing another.

Again, due to the large canvas, I used two and four inch brushes and a palette knife for almost everything but the figures. The chromatic intensities were exaggerated to breathe life into the otherwise gray Seattle atmosphere. The photograph for *Indifference* presented challenges, as it contained a large scope of the city, as well as full figures, which made

finding ways to create space and hierarchy among the people difficult. The pillars of the painting were undoubtedly the two figures in front, and were painted darker while everything behind was painted in a higher key, to relay the distance of the street's width. Indifference is about the relationship between two people on a street corner who have nowhere else to go.

New Couture (Figure 12) and *Among Storms* (Figure 13), are two paintings I did after returning from Venice, Italy in the summer of 2010. Perhaps a change came from my thesis research or my time in Venice; however, these two works mark a turn in composition from the rest of the works that came before, and a refocusing of the figure with less emphasis on the city. *New Couture* is one of the smallest paintings in the series. The painting shows several shoppers passing by a window of headless mannequins dressed in black. What is exciting for me is the abundance of concealed identities, either through cropping, or a turned head—even the mannequins have no faces.

The juxtaposition of the thin, chic, powder-white mannequins in black on display behind the street people of more ordinary sensibilities is ironic. Much like their appearance, they are physically out of reach behind glass, towering above everyone that



Fig. 12. Mike Miller, *New Couture*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

passes. Most of the people walked by the window without noticing the black figures, except

for the woman in the straw hat who seems to have taken an interest in the fashion display. Venice streets were constantly filled with people walking in both directions, so it was important to me that the painting feel as though people were walking in and out of the picture frame. Framing the composition with *people*, is much like standing in the middle of a crowd. I often stood on busy street crossings surrounded by people. The only way to see ahead was to see through them; thus, the idea of *in betweenness* became an important theme from that point on.



Fig. 13. Mike Miller, *Among Storms*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 48" x 27"

The reference for *Among Storms* (Figure 13) came from my outing during a heavy thunderstorm that sat over Venice, dropping torrential rains. Caught in the evening storm, I

found shelter under an overhang with others. I do not remember taking the photo that became the painting, though I do remember photographing the storm and various people with their umbrellas. I had always wanted to do a night painting, and a storm was the perfect scenario. *Among Storms* was a significant departure from my previous works, as it contains almost no city background, and two-thirds of the surface is occupied by two umbrellas encroached from the sides, framing the two girls in the center.

The girls are standing side by side, while one's back is turned and the other is facing front. I am always compelled by photographing someone from behind. From behind, there is

an anonymity that draws curiosity for the individual, one that seems to exist with a quietness, and perhaps one which rests in its expressionless form. The missing persona from the girl with wet hair is replaced by the girl whose face we *can* see, who wears the face of an uncertain child. It is a dark painting, low in key where the figures are lit by street lamps, while a glowing vaporetto station floats on the water in the background. The smallest hint of water can be seen through the space between the girl's hand and thigh.

The umbrellas respond like a gate, which open to reveal what is behind. For the umbrellas' structure, the palette knife was a convenient tool to lay in the paint and naturally build the paint at the seams, replicating the effect of the wire frame underneath. This allowed for the synthetic feeling of nylon, while I reserved the brushes for the center figures. Varied types of painting applications have become more common for me as I decide which areas of the painting should reveal brush strokes or texture, and which areas should hide them—magnifying the emotional versus mechanical.

Muni (Figure 14), a painting of a boy in San Francisco as he waits for the bus, continues the idea of looking through people to discover other people. Waiting as the boy does is an act which reminds us that we are not completely independent, and are controlled by our surroundings, just as the same happens while one waits for the green light, for the elevator, for the cab. The city which we designed and built ultimately controls the very people who run it. In the city, order and patience go hand in hand in a jungle of cement and steel where people can die if they do not adhere to the rules. In this case the boy is alert and waits for something to come along and take him away as he travels from one place to another.

Muni originally occupied a much larger area of the sidewalk until I cropped in closer to the boy. I had contemplated on panning out of the photograph further to include several more people from behind, but I feared the boy's face—the



Fig. 14. Mike Miller, *Muni*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 34" x 26"

catalyst for the painting—would be lost in the sea of bodies. Similar to *New Couture*, the contrast of hidden identities of the backs of moving pedestrians, mixed with the boy's apprehensive and still stature, restates the idea of perception. The boy in the midst of the chaotic city, alone, is perceived to be watching something that the viewer can't see. The only clue is evidenced by the boy's reaction. The mood of the painting is set entirely by his expression and how the viewer understands it. One knows he is the main character because his is the only face. One knows the turned woman in *New Couture* is the main character because she bears the hat which replaces her face, like a blue jelly bean in the midst of a thousand red ones, noticed for its element of surprise. It is special because it is the *only* one.

Waiting (Figure 15), another San Francisco painting, closer examines the relationships of four people as they wait for the bus. Similar to *New Couture*, the painting is framed with people as a woman leans in from the left, and a man exits to the right suggesting the pedestrians' transient nature. The cropping advocates straddling the line between existing

just outside or within social circles. This cutoff effect also forces the viewers to make up what they cannot see, piquing curiosity which, in a sense, this painting is about. The woman in red seems to be listening to the conversation of the man and woman in the middle, or she is checking her hair in the reflective glass that frames the bus schedule, or she is *reading* the bus schedule. Any one of these narratives could be true, leaving just as much room for interpretation as there is for misinterpretation, not unlike everyday life. The scene was caught just so that any conclusion can be drawn, however the true reality of the scene may be impossible to uncover. Nevertheless, her gaze signals to the viewer where to look and investigate with her, and of what to take notice.



Fig. 15. Mike Miller, *Waiting*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 30" x 46"

Similar to *Discovery*, *Waiting* carries a strong psychological affect in facial and bodily gestures, further illustrating the invasion of personal space within public space. The woman in black is perceived to be annoyed by the man facing her, as she looks to the man in the hat. The duality of the situation is that something or nothing could be wrong; the scene is

ultimately ambiguous. Two more people hidden behind the glass offer another layer of mystery. What are they doing back there? One seems to be holding an umbrella and the other a checkbook, yet banal tasks like these seem far more significant when frozen in time. The perceived action of the activities is often more compelling than the reality.

New elements for me were the graphic diagonal lines of the station glass for which I used tape to mask off the pattern. The roof of the station was cropped, so that the lines appear to extend off the picture frame infinitely, like wallpaper. When composing, I try to take advantage of these rare instances that arise when our environment can be used in graphic ways to repurpose existing design. The glass' linear pattern is an example in which everything, especially in the city, is capable of being used for interesting design. Other linear qualities are used by dividing the picture into three sections using various sections of the bus station along with the gridded tile in the lower right corner.

While *Waiting* consists of six figures up close and standing still, the painting *One Way* (Figure 16), pans away from six figures, who are in action as they walk through the city. The largest painting I've ever produced, I was certainly met with challenges never encountered before in both its size and number of figures. It is ultimately a conglomeration of all that I've learned from the previous works in the thesis by way of color, space, and articulation of form. Assuming the painting's success, I may not have been able to carry out such a large project as swiftly had I painted it a year ago when the photo was taken.

Unlike the previous works, drawn mostly by observation, *One Way* employs the rules of perspective. The deep space that occurs on the sidewalk, as well as the expanse of road to the left, was a dynamic attribute to the photograph, and one I knew would carry over well to the painting if it was done correctly. I knew that I could not freehand the perspective, so in

finding the two closest corresponding vanishing points in the photograph for both the vertical and horizontal lines of the sidewalk, I used a string and two yard sticks to draw the geometric pattern. The second vanishing point was at least twenty feet away, and the canvas was relocated to a much larger room for part of the perspective drawing. The buildings, most of them obscured, were drawn with a ruler using comparative measuring.



Fig. 16. Mike Miller, *One Way*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 75" x 30"

Using the palette knife to achieve the rigid quality of cement, I painted the sidewalk and buildings; brushes were again used for the organic subjects such as the trees and people. The title for the painting was taken from the street sign seen on the left. I have found that signage in my work increasingly informs my titles. At times my intentions for the work are just as easily said through the city itself. Part of the word “way” can be seen on the pole, and is a fitting way to sum up the painting as all the figures happen to be going their own way. Reconstructing the phrase *One Way* concisely states the entire thesis: the way of one person. Furthermore, *One Way* is actually the ways of six different people in downtown Seattle, and how each person reacts to his or her environment. Hall discusses this relationship:

Man's relationship to his environment is a function of his sensory apparatus plus how this apparatus is conditioned to respond. Today, one's unconscious picture of one's self—the life one leads, the minute-to-minute process of existence—is constructed from the bits and pieces of sensory feedback in a largely manufactured environment. (62)



Fig. 17. Mike Miller, *One Way*, detail



Fig. 18. Mike Miller, *One Way*, detail



Fig. 19. Mike Miller, *One Way*, detail

The painting quite possibly opposes Hall's findings regarding one's sensory response of a manufactured environment. Seattle here is stripped of distraction except for the people and seems eerily quiet. There are almost no cars on the street, and except for the three figures in the distance, only six people are present. They are mostly reacting to one another rather than their environment. Hall continues:

Americans who live urban and suburban lives have less and less opportunity for active experiences of either their bodies or the spaces they occupy. Our urban spaces provide little excitement or visual variation and virtually no opportunity to build a kinesthetic repertoire of spacial experiences. (62)

Though written in the mid sixties, cities have not changed so much in fifty years that I could agree with his notion that urban spaces then or today, ever provided only "little excitement."

Times Square, even in 1966, the year that quote was published, was still a barrage of lights and signs that was at the very least exciting. Oddly enough, the figures in this painting exemplify his point, and show no interest in their surroundings.

Cars, which are only hinted at in my work, are mainly exempt because they were never there to begin with, or I have removed them for reasons of taste. Cars as machines awkwardly fit into the aesthetics of landscape or cityscape. They busily dot the streets like colored metal boxes, which interrupt the visual flow of their surroundings, that is unless parked in front of a power plant. Their structures are specific and complex, calling attention to themselves wherever they are, becoming almost ugly in the context of a picture. Hall discusses the intervention of cars in the public domain as the main culprit for removing the person from the environment. "In addition, the automobile is carrying the process of alienation from both the body and the environment one step further. One has the feeling that the automobile is at war with the city and possibly with mankind itself" (62). Considering the political and environmental role the car plays in the twenty-first century, Hall's writing almost seems prophetic. Cities like New York and San Francisco make it almost impossible to own a car, and constantly contain masses of walkers, consequently providing endless source material for paintings, not to mention countless opportunities for active experiences.

Sociologically, this painting demonstrates three of Hall's human spacial attributes, ranging from intimate space, seen on the far right, public space, seen in the center, to social distance recognizable on the far left between the woman and the couple (she is slightly in front). Each of them is experiencing the same environment, yet having entirely different experiences altogether as they walk seemingly disconnected from the world. The only two

engaging are the two men on the right, which also represents the first time in my work that two figures are in conversation.

A recurring theme in *Passer*, *The Crossing*, and *Corners*, is the depiction of people in a state of wandering confusion or deep thought. Bewilderment is an expression which consistently draws my attention, and seems to dictate which photos I choose for paintings. One professor cleverly pointed out the congruency between the dazed state of the people in the paintings and, early on, my own uncertainty as to why I painted them. To my disbelief, he said my paintings were about me, and perhaps he was right.

RESEARCH

Photography

Unfortunately, or fortunately, I cannot speak from experience about people in the city, the city itself, or even myself in the city. I grew up in suburbia where the nearest large city was 200 miles away. Now, I come to the city as a visitor, a temporary, usually for some other reason than to do research for my work. Perhaps this is where my fascination manifests: in its constant state of unreachability, in the fact that it is too far to wander, inconvenient, just beyond arm's length. My unfamiliarity with the city may be fortunate as I see it with unaccustomed eyes, and in that my focus remains outside the obvious. I started to look at photographers who also saw beyond the obvious, those who had a much deeper account of the city than I, and who were in touch with its culture because they either lived there, or went there often.

David Bradford for example, a New York City taxi driver and photographer, has made his living both driving the people of New York City to and from their destinations and



Fig. 22. David Bradford, *Untitled 1*, n.d.

photographing as he drives. He has lived and worked in NYC since the 1980s and has seen it from every angle, and every time of day, in every season. Nothing is off limits as he photographs the city, its people, and his customers—all from his taxi. He may know

and see the city better than most. His photography has highly influenced my own as he records the idiosyncrasies of the ultimate urban life, its ironies, and its mysteries. In his book *Drive by Shootings*, he presents the city through his own words and pictures in ways that only one who lived there could:

New York is energy, a festival of life, one big orchestra. New York is bustle and confusion, you can't take in the way you can the countryside. For a photographer, this is a wonderful playground. All I have to do is operate my camera correctly, the rest takes care of itself. Sure the city has so much extraordinary architecture that a great deal of it has a certain balance and structure of its own. But between the buildings there move countless people, and out of [sic] this combination pictures arise like mystery plays...In some pictures, people or vehicles are transformed into reptiles in my eyes. Then again, some photos only reflect moods, they arise through different tones of light and shade, through glorifying sunshine. (9)

Bradford's writing of his experiences photographing the people of New York is poetically similar to his pictures, which often display imagery reminiscent of abstract painting where shapes and lines shoot off a tilted frame, and where the people range from



Fig. 20. David Bradford, Untitled 2, n.d.



Fig. 21. David Bradford, Untitled 3, n.d.

secondary to primary subjects amidst the jumbled city. His photos are at times odd; things appear to be one thing but are in truth another. He can uncannily take images of which people become part of the object they're near, commonly merging them with signage or billboards—through no manipulation, only impeccable timing. His photography makes ordinary occurrences remarkable, and seemingly defies logic. Not all of his photos achieve this; some are just beautifully composed or enigmatic, while others are humorous.



Fig. 23. Garry Winogrand, "World's Fair, New York City", 1964, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase.

Where Bradford's pictures are fleeting and dreamlike, Garry Winogrand's photography is more effectuated and grounded. Winogrand, a contemporary black and white photographer, whose predominate work spans

from the early fifties to the late eighties, photographed the rural and urban American landscape. Winogrand's background in journalism and advertising imposed an editorialized style to his pictures as he shot action stills of street scenes, political events, and high-profile

parties. Unlike Bradford, Winogrand's pictures are more concentrated with a stronger narrative, and are exceedingly more empathetic to the individual. In *Garry Winogrand Figments From the Real World*, John Szarkowski writes of Winogrand's dismissal of his responsibility toward his work, revealing a resonating sentiment:

He was of course responsible for those meanings. Somewhere beneath his craftsman's love for and fascination with the ways in which photography revises and reconstructs the real world he surely understood that the revision and reconstruction in his pictures described his world. It is a world made up of energy, ambition, flaming selfishness, desperate loneliness, and unfamiliar beauty. It was his world, not ours, except to the degree that we might accept his pictures as a just metaphor for our recent past. (41)

Winogrand's pictures were the first of any pictures I had felt a kinship regarding content. I had seen pretty pictures, and I had seen beautiful paintings before; however, these photographs were the closest depictions of human experiences to that of real life human experiences I had yet seen. A flame was ignited upon viewing these photographs. I realized I cared deeply about conveying a similar sensibility towards reality and documentation. Garry Winogrand was arguably the successor to Walker Evans, another photographer whose work has influenced my paintings.



Fig. 24. Garry Winogrand, "New York", 1961, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase.

Walker Evans, born twenty-five years before Winogrand is noted as an icon of American photographers, and is best known for his collaboration with writer James Agee on the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which documented the lives of three sharecropper families in the south during the great depression. Though Evans' career was expansive in various subject matter, it was his street and subway scenes which interested me the most. In 1966, the book *Many Are Called*—a collection of anonymous portraits taken by Evans on a New York subway train from 1938 to 1941—was published in conjunction with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Over the course of two years, Evans sat bravely on the train, and photographed people sitting across from him through a hole in his coat.



Fig. 25. Walker Evans, Untitled 1, 1938-1941, Gelatin silver print, 7 5/8" x 9 1/2", The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota



Fig. 26. Walker Evans, Untitled 2, 1938-1941, Gelatin silver print, 6 3/4" x 8 15/16", The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota

These images of people on the subway are captivating and put the viewer directly across from the sitter, where one is forced to look at faces from which he or she may otherwise feel compelled to look away. There are at times in the photographs, when the viewer is boldly confronted by the subject with looks of complete awareness, and one can't help but wonder if they are unknowingly looking into the camera or are acknowledging Evan's project. In *Many Are Called*, Agee aptly described the significance of this kind of vulnerable portraiture:

Before every other human being, in no matter what intimate trust, in no matter what apathy, something of the mask is there; before every mirror it is hard at work, saving the creature who cringes behind it from the sight which might destroy it. Only in sleep (and not fully there), or only in certain waking moments of suspension, of quiet, of solitude, are these guards down; and these moments are only rarely to be seen by the person himself, or by any other human being. (15)

Painting

Street photography in Winogrand's time was considered sub-par and was often referred to as simple snapshots by critics, overshadowed by journalistic photography. In photography, street scenes have only been recognized presumably in the past twenty years as a form of fine art; yet painting has accepted this genre for much longer. Artists like nineteenth century French painter Gustave Caillebotte, or contemporaries like American painter Burton Silverman, both painted the city dweller, albeit the latter very differently than the former.

In painting, the collection of my influences remains in a cache of stylistic and formal qualities. I recall traditional issues in painting from several different artists that remain in my memory bank consistently. These painters have inspired my style of painting over the past decade, and they continue to inform my work. These artists are not necessarily included as a result of my research, but they are mentioned as a result of my experiences throughout my painting career, from books, museums, referrals, and places I cannot recollect.

Looking back, I believe it is in our childhood—our earliest uneducated captivations—that rests the purest hallmark of our instinctual, natural tastes. Early on, I regarded as one of my first influences in painting, and so regard today, the nineteenth century English painter John William Waterhouse. Known for his Pre-Raphaelite works of mostly women in Greek

mythology, his painting embodies a cohesion of composition, color, and value, a uniformity difficult to acquire. In his work, an astonishing sense of balance between smooth and rough textures of skin, hair, wood, stone, fabrics, foliage, and rock were executed naturalistically with an earthy palette, giving the sense that much of it was observed in the real world.



Fig. 27. Nikolai Ivanovich Fechin, *Portrait of Varya Adoratskaya*, 1914, State Art Museum of Tatarstan, Kazan

Nicolai Ivanovich Fechin, among others, greatly influenced the formal decisions made throughout this project. Though I mostly admire Fechin for his formal qualities of paint application, he seemed able to bridge the gap between abstract and representational, and furthermore, having them coexist together without ruining their respective qualities. For this, there is a hazy discernment by the viewer of what his paint

articulates in form, and what it does not, yet sustains a holistic clarity. Where Sargent simplified, Fechin complicated, and, in doing so, gave something else to the paintings he made: a graceful messiness and an air of fury. Many of his figures rested in chaotic masses of paint strokes where paint was dragged dry across the surface creating textures quite contrary to the smooth flesh they often encased. From this, there is a heightened sense of what parts are humanistic in the painting. Fechin's work made me aware that refined painting is not exclusively synonymous with beauty.



Fig. 28. Nikolai Ivanovich Fechin, *Portrait of Varya Adoratskaya* (detail), 1914, State Art Museum of Tatarstan, Kazan

Theory

As I looked at painters like Fechin whose work was so anti-photography and so purely defined as painting, I began to wonder how painting could partner with photography and what their respective qualities could say about one another. One person who addresses this issue among others, is Susan Sontag. At the start of my two years in the MFA program, before photography was ever mentioned as part of my thesis, my mentor gave me a book by Sontag titled *On Photography*. The book was a collection of essays; I read the first essay without much thought, and put it away. After a year and a half of questioning the roots of my work, I suddenly became aware that it was the first photographs in Chicago that provided the germination for the work, and it was the photography itself that inspired the paintings. So I reopened Sontag's book, read the collection of essays, and was amazed at her theories on the photographic image and its relationship to the camera, the viewer, painting, and the world.

Sontag discusses photography in almost every sense, relating it to the surreal, the factual, the snapshot, and the simple machine that requires only the push of a button (53). She also discusses photography through the opinions of others, Charles Baudelaire for example, as she recounts his perspective of the camera as a tool for the wide-eyed wanderer.

Photography first comes into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle-class *flâneur*, whose sensibility was so accurately charted by Baudelaire. The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. (55)

On Photography introduced me to the marriage that Sontag had explained between the

camera, the photograph, and the photographer. For the first time I could understand my own connections to the photograph and how they related to my paintings.

Before Sontag, came Edward T. Hall, who informed my work most unexpectedly. His research on proxemics and kinesics in humans and animals provided information about how people of different cultures were responding to their environments and each other. His writings served as a language through which my work could speak. My paintings are arguably a branch of Hall's research since they occupy the same spaces of which he discusses: the distance relationships of people. Displayed in the paintings are the proxemics of the various levels that Hall states. In his book *The Hidden Dimension*, Hall examines the four types of spaces humans occupy: intimate, personal, social, and public space. Each category has been assigned a specific measurement in feet that a person generally allows between him or her and the next individual, depending on the person's cultural background. Of that person, Hall makes clear his intent in the preface:

In writing about my research on people's use of space—the space that they maintain among themselves and their fellows, and that they build around themselves in their cities, their homes, and their offices—my purpose is to bring to awareness what has been taken for granted. By this means, I hope to increase self-knowledge and decrease alienation. In sum, to help introduce people to themselves. (ix)

In my paintings, there exists on top of the implied narrative and factual nature of their photographic source, the cerebral state of the people in the paintings and their relationship to myself as the photographer, and to the viewer. Most importantly from this relationship, it is my own experiences of finding people in the city which allow the paintings to exist.

Experiences

From my walking in Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Chicago, I have accumulated hundreds of photographs in hopes of uncovering a select few from which to make paintings. Photographing is the most enjoyable part of the research, but it also remains a strange process with its hunting-like feeling. There is undoubtedly a charge of excitement when looking for prospective material; however, there is also a certain amount of guilt that comes with the procedure. I am, in a sense, stealing a scene, and with it stealing the identities of those within the scene for my own benefit. Would they care? Yes, I believe some of them would care very much. For paintings of people like those in *Discovery*, whose consent was never obtained, one may feel intruded upon; the painting is very much a portrait of the girl sipping her straw.

When the stakes are higher for being noticed, for example in an elevator, or a subway train where space is limited, the feeling is much more uncomfortable for myself and for the person being photographed. Respect for the individual is important to me, and though I would and do photograph them from a distance with *less* shame, I rarely exercise the same bravery at a closer distance; I am not a daring photographer. I find it interesting that my own proximity come into play, even as I strive to stay hidden and invisible. Mostly, the pedestrians of whom I take pictures become part of the background, inclusive and without intrusion.

A key problem with painting photographs is that the viewer looking at the finished painting must take the word of the artist that what exists in the painting really took place. There is a certain amount of trust that must lie within the viewer. I have placed emphasis on the nature of photography and its impact on my painting, so that they are recognized together.

My goal is not to manipulate the scene, which is why I do not direct or pose people, or interact with those I photograph; their candidness is important to the integrity of the painting. The paintings also exist as proof that I saw something, if nothing else. And finally, an important note to be made is that the paintings only exist because of my natural born tendencies of a draftsman and painter. I simply love to paint. If I were unequipped with the sense of a draftsman and painter, I would undoubtedly be a photographer.

METHODOLOGY

Sequentially, I shoot the images, make selections, edit, and execute the final painting in the studio. When I have chosen a city to photograph, (usually because I am there for another reason) I make my way downtown, keeping in mind that street photography requires a heightened awareness of what is going on around me. Everyone is of possible interest and of consideration as long as a human situation is taking place. When I go out with my camera, I simply shoot wherever I see people. It happens fast and many times I don't know what I have photographed until afterward. For these works, I used a digital Canon PowerShot S530, which is small enough to avoid calling attention.

Different methods are used depending on how close I am to the people I want to photograph. Typically, I am not looking through a viewfinder or LCD screen, but I instead shoot blindly by pointing the camera in the direction of interest. I will begin walking, and I do not stop to focus the lens unless I feel the subject's attention is completely occupied and I have more time. Mostly, I walk the sidewalk with my camera extended shooting continuously. This looks to people as though I am photographing the city, and it seems to neutralize my aim, so that no one feels (I assume) as though I am personally taking their picture. There is always a risk of being caught when taking photographs of strangers, which

is usually undesirable, but sometimes delivers interesting results. Occasionally, I cross my arms and shoot from under my elbow, or I will walk and hold the camera at my thigh and photograph from below. This method is rarely effective, but has yielded interesting outcomes.

Apart from mere happenstance, another strategy I use is time. If there is an ample amount of time, I allow for people to essentially compose themselves as I wait to hit the shutter. *Corners* (Figure 8) is the only painting that resulted in this way. The conditions were ideal; there were no obstructions, no bikers or extraneous pedestrians to interrupt, and most importantly, the figures were completely oblivious to me. It played out as if they were indeed actors on a stage. I have no control over the people and where they move; I only can control when I take the picture, which is a compelling thought for me.

By the end of the excursion I will have taken 200-300 photos, which I will sort through multiple times before selections are made. For every 200 photographs, three to five are selected for paintings, while others take longer to appeal. Coming back to the photos later has proven to be successful in finding the right image. Surprisingly, I have passed over an image multiple times only to see something completely different in the fourth viewing.

That is the case with *Discovery* and *The Crossing*, where the image originally contained a much larger scope of the city. Illustrated in Figure 29, I later noticed the girl sipping on her straw with a row of people behind her, glaring at me, and thus my



Fig. 29. Mike Miller, reference for *Discovery*, Seattle, 2010

interest was renewed. Oddly, I experience these situations first hand, and consequently find myself rediscovering them again. Cropping has become increasingly important for my paintings, and is one of the few conditions I can control. The crop generally creates the final composition, but there are instances where structures such as street lamps, signage, or garbage cans need to be omitted to simplify an otherwise overwhelmingly complicated area. Lens distortion is another issue that is corrected before painting, or sometimes left alone, depending on the desired effect. At times, figures need to be moved a quarter of an inch or so to clarify the space.



Fig. 30. Mike Miller, studies for *One Way*, 2011, prisma color on paper, 5 1/2" x 8 1/2"

If the painting includes close figures with facial features that are important to the content of the work, for example, *One Way*, I will do a small drawing on paper of each head. Once this is done, I will do an 8" x 10" color study which is usually very crude, to quickly generalize positions of color, form, and value. Once the studies are finished, I will print out 5" x 7" photos as well as a print out of the entire composition. This size is small enough to unobtrusively hold in my hand while painting, and large enough to contain useful information. On the surface of the full composition photo, an Exacto knife is used to lightly score a four square grid, which is easily seen by the eye without obstructing information, and a corresponding grid is drawn on the canvas in graphite. The image is then drawn again, in

graphite directly on the canvas' oil ground, using the grid for general placement with the majority of drawing relying on comparative measuring.

The surfaces of my paintings have always been a fight for preference. I have gone back and forth between canvas and wood, always unsatisfied. The only redeeming quality of canvas I found was its light weight. Wood became too strenuous to carry, and panels always needed to be braced. Over time, my paintings began to warp, and ultimately turned against me, as one did in my senior thesis show. Once hung on the wall, I noticed a large crack running down the surface of my best painting. Since then, I have worked

exclusively on canvas. When preparing the surface, four coats of gesso are applied, allowed to dry, and sanded with wet sandpaper, resulting in a very smooth finish, eliminating most of the canvas' tooth. This allows the brush strokes to sit on top of the surface without the weave of the canvas filling with paint. Afterward, a single coat of oil primer is applied, sealing the acrylic, and prohibiting the oil paint from absorbing and drying matte.

Fresh pigments are laid out for each new work. Mediums used consist of either linseed oil or a mixture of stand oil and turpentine. Additionally, a putty made from burnt plate oil (boiled raw linseed) and chalk powder, is mixed equally and added to the pigments to heighten their viscosities and allow for impasto effects. Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn was known to use this and was introduced to me by artist James Morton a dedicated researcher and practitioner of Rembrandt's techniques. The "Rembrandt Putty" as we call it,

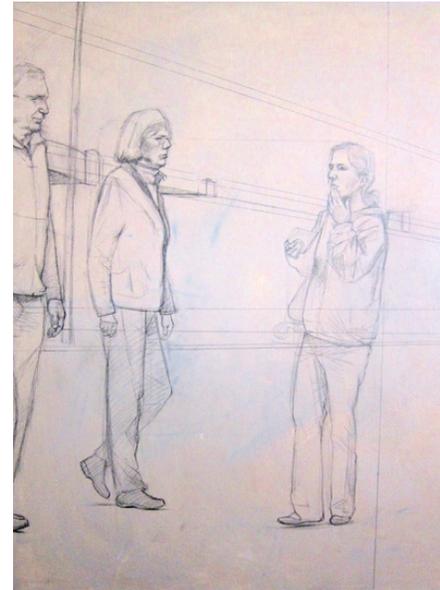


Fig. 31. Mike Miller, preliminary drawing for *One Way*, graphite on canvas, 75" x 30"

allows me to paint wet into wet more effectively, acquiring textures and layers, while slowing drying time. The duration of the painting process from beginning to end depends on the size and complexity of the work, usually ranging from one to four weeks. After drying, the works are coated with a damar varnish to regain any lost darks or vibrancy due to pigments drying matte.

CONCLUSION

Recently I returned from a trip to Las Vegas for the first time. During my stay, as we walked the busy streets filled to the edges with people, I noticed that I could not stop photographing. The crowded scenes of people standing at the street corners, crossing in hoards to the other side, excited me and reminded me of a saying by artist Wes Christensen, “On the street, my friend Kenny always sees people as opportunities, whereas I see them as obstacles.” I suppose, it is these two types of people that make up the majority of the world. With a camera between myself and them, people *are* opportunities for myself as an artist—like a shield and a butterfly net in one device.

Crossing the streets of Vegas, the drones of people came toward me while the camera separated us, and, with the click of the shutter, I swooped them up all at once, preserving them, making them useful, giving me something to marvel at—a picture. I found the picture-taking to be compulsive. Even when I realized my rudeness toward my friends by my distracted photographing, or even my own concern to conserve limited memory space, I found I could not put the camera away for long. Again, I turned on the camera for fear of having missed another opportunity, one that could be my best painting; once it is gone, it is gone forever.

Las Vegas is a melting pot of cities to say the least. With an array of themed hotels on the same street, one feels they are in Paris, New York City, and Rome all at once. The people there pour in from these parts of the world as well, consumed by the icon that is Las Vegas. Its beauty at night often hides the mismatched ugliness evident by day: a kind of circus of cities. Social distances among people seemed ignored or forgotten with tourist distractions in all directions. It seemed very few had time to notice the people around them when they moved in waves, overstimulated and overcrowded, yet some of them did.

There were a select few that looked into my camera, noticing me noticing them. Others gave the once over, approving or disapproving in seconds. This happened quite often as such a vast array of people walked the streets at one time: the poor, the rich, the hussies, the “big-shots”, the damaged, the homeless, the children. There was no shortage of class systems, no shortage of humanity. At night, in the lights of fluorescent pink and blue, two women stood enthralled aside a fountain as they watched a single duck paddle around in the not-so-clean water. Several others took notice and started to gather for the duck who had gone astray from another fountain nearby. A single duck whose aloneness in the unnatural pool made it the center of attention.

This two-year project has changed my view of the world, perhaps redirecting my attention to the lone duck, who sits in an unfamiliar setting, reacting to its environment, making do with what it was given. Las Vegas, Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, among the many other major cities, are in a sense part of a stitched together “Las Vegas as America.” People are the common thread, proving the city name matters very little as a place for people to gather, outdoors or in. People live where there are people, as their lives ultimately depend on one another. Considering this notion, it seems natural that my

future work contain larger, close-knit groups of people—crowds—which fluctuate between outdoor and indoor gathering places with less focus on the individual. Indoors, Hall's rules of interaction change, and there exist minimal distances between one another. Effects like those of thermal space—the spaces which occupy the heat we give off—allow one to identify one's own spacial relationships to another. In crowding for instance, without using visual sensory, panic can easily be induced through the rising of people's trapped body heat. This notion of enclosure and closeness to others is one I feel will emerge in future paintings.

In response to the processes of this body of work, the finished paintings, and the research that led to them, I now see the people on sidewalks and in rooms through a lens of documentation that I feel is more refined. I look at them differently with a perception of the eye that Sontag suggests of the photographer as *photographic* (3). Some of the paintings are more successful than others; however, I continually push to find new ways to crop the image. Ideally, my work should exceed the conventional view of humanity in all its strangeness, and hopefully offer a refreshing glimpse of urban life. I know just as much about the next paintings as I do about tomorrow. However, I am confident that as long as my camera is in hand, I will have work to show. If I have learned anything from this endeavor, it is that life presents infinite amounts of material, all I have to do is be aware of it. David Bradford once said,

When I drive through the most spectacular urban form of the universe, I see order and disorder, beauty and lack of beauty. In all of this I move quickly, very quickly, with my finger on the shutter release, in order to catch, to capture this beauty, this order. For nothing exists which is not recorded. Except within oneself. (9)

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APPENDIX A



Plate 1. Mike Miller, *Passer*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

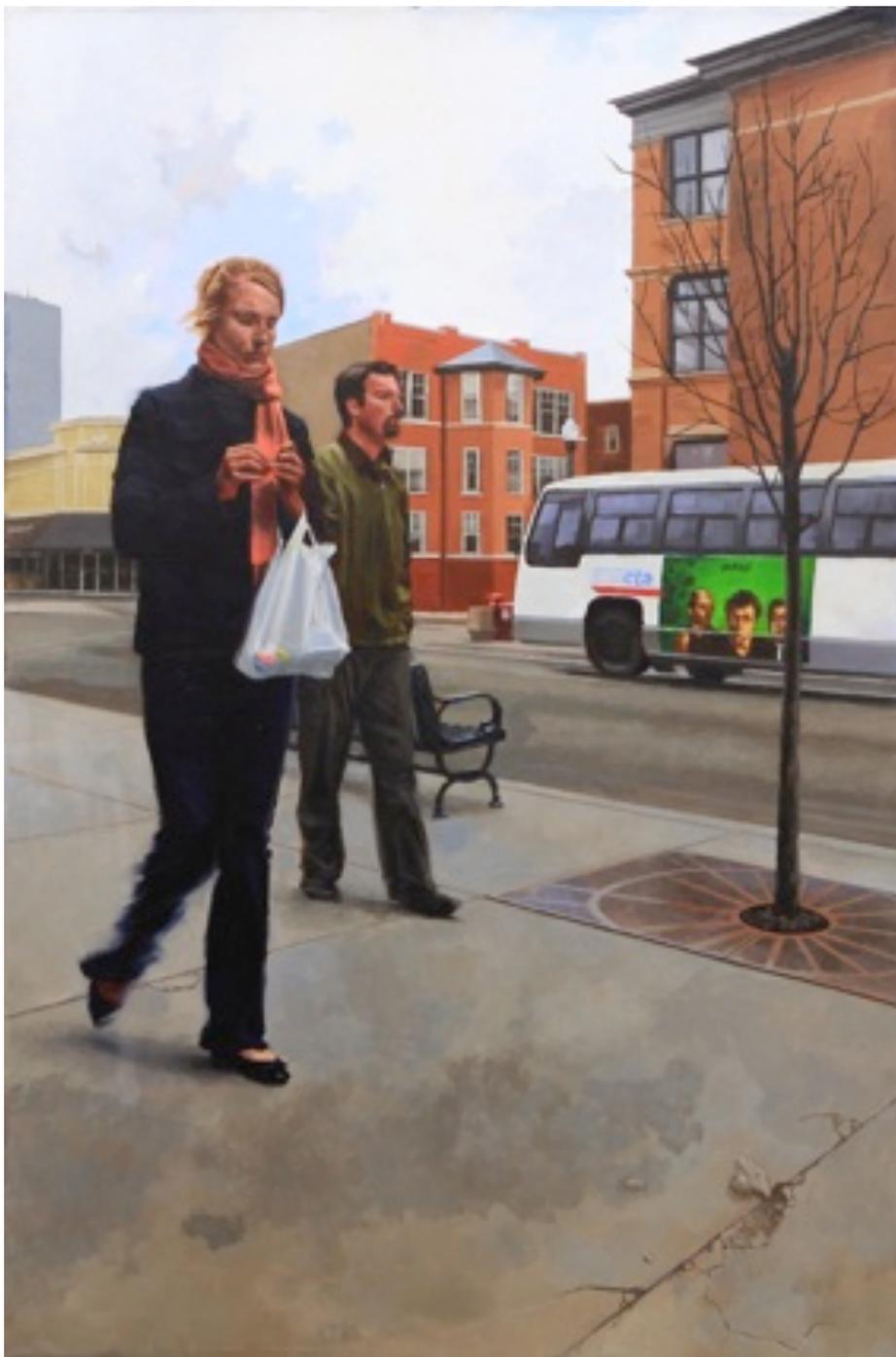


Plate 2. Mike Miller, *Proximities*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"



Plate 3. Mike Miller, *Pennies*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 24" x 36"



Plate 4. Mike Miller, *The Crossing*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 30" x 40"



Plate 5. Mike Miller, *Corners*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 28" x 48"



Plate 6. Mike Miller, *Discovery*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 25 3/8" x 40"



Plate 7. Mike Miller, *New Couture*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 24" x 30"



Plate 8. Mike Miller, *Among Storms*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 27" x 48"



Plate 9. Mike Miller, *Muni*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 26" x 34"



Plate 10. Mike Miller, *Indifference*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 48" x 36"



Plate 11. Mike Miller, *Waiting*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 30" x 46"



Plate 12. Mike Miller, *One Way*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 30" x 75"



Plate 13. Mike Miller, *Stranger*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 26" x 26"

APPENDIX B



Plate 14. David Bradford, Untitled, n.d., Collection David Bradford



Plate 15. David Bradford, Untitled, n.d., Collection David Bradford



Plate 16. David Bradford, Untitled, n.d., Collection David Bradford



Plate 17. Garry Winogrand, "World's Fair, New York City", 1964.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Plate 18. Garry Winogrand, "Staten Island Ferry, New York", 1971.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Plate 19. Garry Winogrand, "New York", 1961. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Plate 20. Garry Winogrand, "Los Angeles, CA", 1969. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Plate 21. Walker Evans, *Untitled*, 1938-1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Plate 22. Walker Evans, *Untitled*, 1938-1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Plate 23. Walker Evans, *Untitled*, 1938-1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Plate 24. Walker Evans, *Untitled*, 1938-1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

APPENDIX C

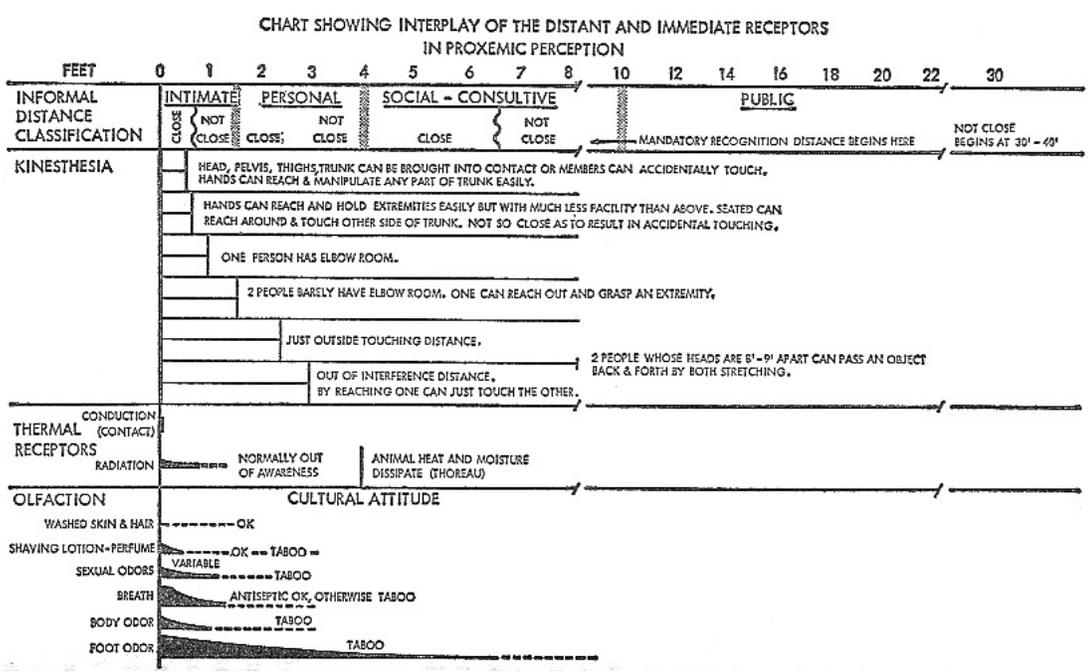


Plate 25. Edward T. Hall, proxemic chart, 1966. *The Hidden Dimension*.

ARTIST'S NOTE

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