

UNINVITED; OR, A CHRONIC ROMANCE

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ABSTRACT

My current body of work is a personal narrative about my experiences with chronic illness, specifically the human Parvo B19 virus. I paint figurative and still life paintings that address themes, of private pain vs. public persona, fight and submission, gravity, loss of identity, time, and sleep. I work in oil on panel or canvas.

My paintings are notable for their use of chiaroscuro, inspired at first by master artists Georges de la Tour and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. Recently though, my interests have turned to the dramatic cinematic lighting and other compositional elements used in film noir. Dark shadows, tenebrous space, cropping, and use of diagonals all lend an air of mystery and improbability to my work. It is my intent that the viewer be able to view the paintings without an overt understanding of my personal narrative, but rather can bring their own stories to the paintings.

DEDICATION

To Franz, for many years of care and encouragement. To my girls, for putting up with an atypical mother. And to Joe Gerges, for helping me find my voice.

EPIGRAPH

Theories that diseases are caused by mental states and can be cured by will power are always an index of how much is not understood about the physical terrain of a disease.

Susan Sontag

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DESCRIPTION

My journey with chronic human Parvo Virus B19 (CFS) began on a sunny January morning in Norwich, England. I was life drawing in a studio shared with sculptor and friend, Pip Collyer. While drawing, a rash suddenly appeared on the backs of my hands. The following day the rash was joined by joint pain and swelling. The doctors tested me for Lyme disease and a myriad of other possible causes. I reminded them of a recent sign posted on the doors of the University Crèche warning of an outbreak of Fifth Disease. My youngest daughter had experienced rosy cheeks that lasted a few days – though no lasting symptoms. The only test to come back positive was for the Human Parvo B 19 virus - the same that causes Fifth Disease. The only treatment offered was Ibuprofen for pain and swelling, rest, and a daily walk. I was told the symptoms would last a few weeks. They persisted and I was overcome with debilitating fatigue. At this point the doctors said I had Post Viral Fatigue which would last up to three months. This extreme fatigue was the subject of my first painting, which depicts the figure hung over the bed, arms dangling over the edge in an awkward fashion. The bed slices the picture frame from top to bottom, the legs of the figure leave the right side, as the lower half of the cat exits the bottom of the frame; all serve to bring the viewer into the space but also lead the eye out of the space (Appendix plate 7). After six months my condition improved and I felt much better until a year later, I had a relapse. After two years of the virus I was labeled by American doctors as having Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. They told me to avoid stress, take a yoga class, get out more, and join the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) at my daughter's school. After four years I went to an infectious disease doctor in California. He knew my disease. He understood my pain and my symptoms, but admitted

there was nothing to be done; it was a permanent condition. He put me on a new drug for nerve pain whose positive effects were short lasting.

My life and those of my family members were drastically altered. I stopped driving following a serious accident when it became clear to me that my response time and ability to focus on the road and traffic was severely impaired. I lost the ability to think. In addition to forgetting names, dates, appointments, birthdays, addresses and phone numbers, I could not call to mind the correct words to convey my meaning. At times my tongue literally felt swollen in my mouth and would not permit me to speak. The sounds of every day living became a distraction to the point of inflicting pain. My sleep cycles were confused, sleeping all day, miserably awake all night. My nerves would send pins and needles down my legs for hours. I would find myself on the floor at three in the morning stretching till it burned, the burn preferable to the pain. Theater and computer screens would leave me motion sick.

The majority of the pain was in my hands, but it would move to wrists, elbows, knees, hips, and at times even my jaw. I have painted a small still life called *Labors Lost*, only 12 x 12 inches of two antique handkerchiefs, with two rusty iron clamps and a small knobby iron hammer. One of the handkerchiefs is edged in hand made lace – called tatting. The other is decorated with a form of needlework where the pattern is created with stitching and holes. The handkerchiefs and tools are indicative of work done with the hands. The items are now in a state of disuse, much like my hands inflicted by arthralgias. The tools are also indicative of pain. The organic shapes and intricate lace of the handkerchiefs are indicative of a time before the pain. The placement of the clamps in the lower right quadrant, act as sort of signature, an S, that has been twisted out of its

original configuration of two graceful curves which flow into one another creating a mangled, stiff and crooked representation of its former self, a self portrait of sorts.



Fig. 1. Serena Potter, *Labors Lost*, 2010, Oil on panel, 12" x 12".

I would get headaches that lasted for months; no number of shots into the back of my skull would relieve the pain. Dental pain was also an issue, as well as chest pain. At times I thought I must be having a heart attack. Shortness of breath and elevated blood pressure were the result of even the smallest amount of exercise and would leave me not only exhausted and weak, but have me gasping for air blood pounding in my ears, heart racing.

Our family life shifted to a new routine. My husband took over many of my roles. On top of already supporting the family, and running a small printing press, he learned how to do the girls hair, make breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, as well as help them with

their homework and drive them to school and all other activities. He was very compassionate but at times resented my illness and missed his wife. Not being able to fulfill his needs or be the partner I should be, would result in my feeling an overwhelming guilt. In the painting, *Without a Noise*, (Figure #2) the figure (myself) is seated on two suit-cases, representing the baggage or burden that I felt myself to be to my husband. The figure is strapped with three belts around the ankles, and torso; she is struggling against the constraints, head looking upward.



Fig. 2. Serena Potter, *Without a Noise*, 2010, Oil on birch panel, 36" x 48".

One of the uglier aspects of the illness is the feeling of being completely under the control of the virus. Unlike the painting *Without a Noise*, which depicts a figure that continues to fight against her constraints, eventually I gave up the fight. I felt the virus

had won and I was completely at its mercy. This is the subject of *Submission* a large painting that shows the figure hanging from orange electrical cords which disappear into the darkness. This figure has no fight left.



Fig. 3. Serena Potter, *Submission*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 48" x 78".

My youngest daughter feels responsible for my illness. She has heard too many times that the virus originated at her school and equates this with being her fault, no matter how often I have told her otherwise. She is a very compassionate girl, has spent many hours on my bed, reading stories together or just taking naps with me. At times we have cried together. I too feel guilty for having missed out on so much of her development as she was only three when I became ill. The still life called *Time*

Suspended depicts an old electric clock that has been unplugged and a pair of red shoes that my daughter wore at the time of my infection. For me it conveys that my ability to fully be a mother to her stopped at that time. It speaks of all the growth that I was not able to experience with her as I was sleeping, unplugged.



Fig. 4. Serena Potter, *Time Suspended*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 11" x 14".

My eldest daughter has always been one to hold her feelings inside, so responded to my illness by becoming stoic. I imagine she must be angry, and I hope one day she will be able to express her feelings about how the illness affected her life.

My experience has been the source of my inspiration-however, my story is similar to the stories of thousands of others and I do feel a sense of responsibility to tell this story not only for myself, but for them. Themes of gravity, fatigue, disuse, brain fog, pain, guilt, anger, burden, lack of control, loss of hope and renewal are all addressed. Because this is an autobiographical body of work I determined that using myself as subject and model would be most effective. This was not an easy decision. I have painted many

portraits in the past but have found it difficult to draw attention to myself, my condition and so have avoided using myself as a subject. In my first semester I used my niece and her children, as models for the painting *Coping* (Appendix plate 8). At this point I was still deflecting my experience onto others. In my second semester I determined that I needed to put aside insecurities and face that this is my story and no one would be able to communicate its aspects better than I could.

Illnesses, such as mine, are not a recent phenomenon. It is not uncommon to read of someone who experienced shattered nerves or neurasthenia in classic literature. In 1886 British novelist Marie Corellie wrote a novel called *A Romance of Two Worlds*, in which she tells the story of a young woman who "was afflicted by a series of nervous ailments, brought on by overwork and over-worry" (5). She describes her symptoms as

my system was strung up by slow degrees to such a high tension of physical and mental excitement, that the quietest and most soothing of friendly voices had no other effect upon me than to jar and irritate. Work was impossible; music, my one passion, intolerable; books became wearisome to my sight; and even a short walk in the open air brought with it such lassitude and exhaustion, that I soon grew to dislike the very thought of moving out of doors. (5)

Corellie's character finds little help from the medical profession and turns to an unconventional healer, a spiritualist of sorts. I too have found the most effective means of improvement to be found through unconventional medicine.

If literature is any measure, then we find that the illness was as much misunderstood and stereotyped in centuries past as it is now. In Elizabeth Von Arnim's 1914 novel, *The Pastor's Wife*, we read of a Bishop's wife who

had found the sofa as other people found salvation...In a moment of insight she perceived the sofa. Here was a blameless object that would separate her entirely from duties and responsibilities of every sort...All she had to do was cling to it, and nobody could make her do or be anything. She accordingly got onto it and had stayed there ever since, mysteriously frail, an object of solicitude and sympathy. (49-50)

These accounts are of course fictional, but popular literature was meant to reflect common perceptions and issues of the day.

I am an avid watcher of classic movies, my preferred being from the 1930's, through the 1960's. I have found that the cinematic elements and themes found in film noir relate to my narrative. In director Gerd Oswald's 1957 noir classic *Crime of Passion*, actress Fay Wray plays a character named Alice Pope who suffers from an unnamed illness. She complains of being "just so tired" and after several days in the hospital is prescribed a respite from the stress of her husband's over demanding job as police commissioner and moves to Hawaii (Oswald).

Many of my paintings utilize a chiaroscuro lighting that is found in film noir. I love the simple compositions and dramatic lighting found in scenes such as this one from Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 *Dial M for Murder*.



Fig. 5. Alfred Hitchcock, *Dial M for Murder*, 1954.

Or this scene in director Billy Wilder's 1944 film noir *Double Indemnity*.



Fig. 6. Billy Wilder, *Double Indemnity*, 1944.

In the painting *Uninvited* I have used the classic film noir motif of a figure reflected in a mirror (Figure #7). Author Foster Hirsch explains in his book *The Dark*

Side of the Screen, Film Noir that use of mirrors place the character in a frame within a frame and those reflections suggest self-division, masquerade and loss of identity (89 - 90). This seemed a perfect tool for suggesting my public persona vs. my private pain. In this painting my back is to the viewer, my reflection confronting the viewer, in the act of unbuttoning my shirt, or as implied, removing my public façade; this painting also depicts the broader narrative of what this body of work is to me. Other noir motifs used in this painting are diagonals in the composition, dark shadows, cropped figures and as I see it, a perceived claustrophobic space.



Fig. 7. Serena Potter, *Uninvited*, 2011, Oil on birch panel, 32" x 46".

Objective

My series of figurative paintings often places the viewer in the position of a voyeur, looking in on very personal, intimate, moments of struggle with chronic illness. The paintings use simple composition, shallow space and dramatic lighting to focus in on the figure, coupled with a very quiet, contemplative pose juxtaposed with elements of constraint and restraint.

RESEARCH

As I proceeded through the journey of painting this body of work I came to realize that I had actually been laying the research foundation for many years. Whenever I read a book that had a character whose experience was similar to mine I would underline that page and make mental notes. The movies that I watched were selected because they offered an escape from my illness and elements of those movies have found their way into my work. As I became more conscious of this I was able to pursue my research further.

Reading is as necessary to my living as is food. I was raised by a mother who was a librarian. I spent my childhood summers curled up in a corner of the Culver City Library, lost in a world of fiction. It is no surprise that many of my concepts would be defined by words read. Several books have influenced this project. Marie Corellie's *A Romance of Two Worlds* helped me to see illness as something that could be addressed in a metaphysical manner. The character who is ill finds release from her pain through creativity, in this case painting, and through out-of-body travel. Many of my figures are situated in spaces that do not read as actual space. *Down Again*, *Submission*, and *Without a Noise* are all paintings that exhibit a quality of other-worldliness.

Another book that influenced my work is *The Pastor's Wife* by Elizabeth Von Armin. As mentioned in the introduction section of this paper, there is a character in this book, a Bishop's wife, who spends her days sequestered to the couch. The author employs the stereotypes that are still used today to describe this woman as someone who is avoiding her responsibilities by feigning illness. My experience has been that most people including the medical profession do not have a clear understanding of what one

really suffers, with an illness such as mine. They seem to think that one can be rid of the illness by a change of mental outlook. This prevalent point of view has been an impetus for me to paint my illness with an honesty that I hope will convey the true nature of chronic fatigue type illness.

Susan Sontag's book *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* addresses these stereotypes and has helped me to put into perspective how much influence our society's language, the way they talk about an illness, has on our own recovery, how we and those around us approach the illness. The epigraph in this paper is a quote from her that says "Theories that diseases are caused by mental states and can be cured by will power are always an index of how much is not understood about the physical terrain of a disease" (5) It has been my goal with this body of work to give the viewer an understanding of some of the physical terrain of this disease as well as the emotional terrain of this disease. The painting *Labors Lost* is about pain, specifically in the hands and the loss of ability to do the things you love. The painting *Down Again* is about the gravity that sucks you into the ground each time you try to get out of bed, as well as the emotional struggle that one has with depression as a result of that fatigue (Appendix plate 4).

As mentioned previously, movies have provided a means of escape from my illness. I have always been drawn to movies that were made in times before my existence. I love the beautiful world of sliver light and shadow created with black and white cinematography. It leaves color to the imagination and the imagination is always better than the real thing. The illness makes it very difficult to tolerate too much visual and audio stimulus so this too made classic films easier to watch. The black and white

eliminates some of the visual stimulus and old movies tend not to have the fast moving cameras and loud sound effects found in contemporary film. A few notable titles watched were Gerd Oswalds, *Crime of Passion* (Oswald), *Out of the Past* (Tourneur), *Don't Bother to Knock* (Baker) and *Panic in the Streets* (Kazan).

In addition to watching the films I have also used a series of books called *The Film Classics Library*, which take old movies and break them down still by still accompanied with dialogue as text (Anobile). These have been useful for analyzing the compositional elements used to create feelings of entrapment, danger, and psychosis. This is often accomplished by closely cropped figures, a camera angle that is slightly below the figure, showing the ceiling or deep space of an alley-way, and use of reflections in mirrors or other shiny surfaces (Hirsch). In addition to movies I watched a documentary called *Film Noir: Bringing Darkness into Light* (Leva) which offered insight into the methods used by noir cinematographers.

The internet has been an indispensable resource. I used netflix.com to research and watch film. I used Imbd.com to learn more about those films. I used Google to research images. I used e-bay.com to search for items that might be useful in my paintings.

Another method of research I have used has been attending gallery shows, museum lectures and slide show lectures. I attended an exhibit at The Getty Center in Los Angeles titled *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme* followed by a lecture by Marc Gotlieb, director of the graduate program in the history of art at Williams College. Mr. Gotlieb pointed out how Gerome told his story not by depicting the event as it was happening but often after the event. In his painting *Duel After the Masked Ball* Gerome shows us the wounded harlequin and his assassin walking away.



Fig. 8. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Duel After the Masked Ball*, 1857, Oil on canvas, 27" x 38", Collection The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland.

This led me to thinking about the timing in my work. Is the viewer looking at a moment happening in a split second or is the action of the painting taking place over a longer space of time? Are we viewing the event before or after it took place? I have made decisions based on these questions, determining that I wanted the viewer to linger in the painting and have a sense that the figure has been in this place or situation for a longer length of time. In the painting *Submission* the viewer should get a sense that the figure has been hung up in those cords for quite some time and will most likely be there for an indefinite amount of time. In *Uninvited* the viewer encounters the figure just as she is unbuttoning her shirt, catching her in the act of undress, but not yet fully revealed. I chose this moment in an effort to communicate that this body of work is actually a part of an ongoing process of my revealing my inner struggle and private side.

Other lectures that I have attended were the monthly slide shows held at John Swihart's house in Santa Monica; Ca. Swihart is an artist and mentor in the Laguna College of Art and Design's MFA program and has been holding these events for many

years. The artists whose lectures I attended that influenced me the most were Rebecca Campbell and Yu Ji (Ji). Rebecca Campbell's work is, like mine, autobiographical. It covers a vast range of mediums. Seeing her work and hearing her lecture has helped me to see outside of the constraints I had placed on myself, that I could take an event in my life and instead of depicting it literally could think laterally and chose an image related in another way (Campbell). Yu Ji is a Chinese artist who teaches in The University of Long Beach's art department. What struck me most by his work is how organic his process is. He may start with seven figures and ultimately have only three in the painting. This helped me to start thinking more organically about my work, to let go of that photographic image and be willing to make changes part way if something isn't working. In the painting *Submission* I struggled with the dark space at the top and at one point added in a fog or mist, which later determined was not working, and thus, sanded it out and painted in the dark and diminishing cords.

I attended an exhibition of Laurie Lipton's drawings titled *Weapons of Mass Delusions* (Lipton). I was very impressed with how she can take very serious and disturbing images and yet make them compelling and beautiful. She has a drawing titled *Watching* that depicts a girl peaking through venetian blinds, eyes wide. This drawing is two hinged panels that you open and on the inside is another drawing of the façade of an apartment building. The viewer can see into each of the windows of the various apartments, viewing personal effects and individuals, some occupied, others not. On the street below the building, front and center is a woman being attacked by a man with a knife and no one is doing anything about it, just watching. I've thought of this drawing many times as I've composed my paintings. I considered the viewer and what I want the

viewer to feel when looking at the painting and how to accomplish that. The painting *Uninvited* was composed in such a way that would bring the viewer in close to an intimate space, much like an intruder, who is then confronted by the expression on the face of the reflection, which signifies that they are not supposed to be there.

METHODOLOGY

My concepts usually start with a memory or vision of my past experience, and then I free write, jotting down descriptions of images, feelings, and colors. For instance, at the start of my first semester I wrote “asleep during the day, on bed with cat (a constant), changing seasons, passing of time, children's objects – changing. Toys, game boy, instruments, getting larger”. After the journaling I will talk with my husband. As an observer, caregiver, spouse, he offers a different perspective on my experience with the illness. Sometimes he can offer a twist on an idea that I had not thought of before. For instance, he says that when I am in pain, I hold my hands in a manner that communicates the pain. I was particularly thinking of my hands when I composed the painting *Without a Noise*. Choice of color and placement of color was key to expressing pain in that painting. I increased the saturated reds in the hands and feet, used cool colors in other areas of the painting to communicate isolation.

After journaling and talking I will go to bed and start tossing images around in my mind, comparing and contrasting elements. I usually end up falling asleep, but quite frequently it will be just before fully waking that an idea will come to me. Once I have that seed of an idea I start to research. I start with the Internet, typing in key words, searching for images that use the same concepts. I use image data-bases as well as just

image searches on Google. I also have gone through the National University Library System to access academic journals online, trying to find historic reference to illness such as mine.

Something mentor Joe Gerges taught me was to research the images that I am working with in early stages; find out who has used the image in the past, how it has been used, what concept it was used to convey, and if it has been over-used. At this point if I am still interested in it, I try to figure out a way to make it mine, to make it new and surprising. For instance, after coming up with my initial idea for a painting dealing with gravity, I went online and I found a sculpture by Chinese artist Quiangli Liang ("Falling"). I loved the feel of his sculpture and used his composition to help formulate mine.



Fig. 9. Quiangli Liang, Falling, 1857, bronz sculpture, Collection Galerie Mokum, Amsterdam.

I read books, literature, biographies, essays, trying to find out how authors have imagined illness through words. One book previously mentioned, that made an impact on me was Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. In addition to the quote at the beginning of my thesis, I have underlined "Patients who are instructed that they have, unwittingly, caused their disease are also being made to feel that they have deserved it" (57). Having felt this guilt imposed on me by well-meaning doctors, friends and family members who were certain that if I took the right combination of vitamins, or adopted a more positive attitude, would be cured, took this statement to heart. maybe

instead: I took this statement to heart, having felt this guilt imposed on me by well-meaning doctors, friends and family members who were certain that if I took the right combination of vitamins, or adopted a more positive attitude, I would be cured. The painting *Without a Noise* includes the suit-cases, or baggage, which is a direct reference to the guilt one feels as she has become nothing but baggage to the people in her life.

Another important aspect of developing a concept is by looking at objects in my home or gathered from elsewhere. I wander around my home physically and mentally taking stock of my possessions and trying to determine if any would be interesting to paint. This is how I came upon the handkerchiefs and clamps for the painting *Labors Lost* as well as the clock and shoes for the painting *Time Suspended*.

After I have narrowed down an image idea, I start to sketch compositional ideas. For the painting *Down Again* I began with sketches of myself in various forms of dress, and with different positions of the arms. After determining that it would be best to simplify the dress as much as possible, exposing the feet, which to me has always indicated a form of vulnerability,--I went shopping. I wanted something that was intimate – not sexy – but just simple, sleep wear or underwear. I settled on a plain white slip, no lace or adornment.

The next step is to set up a photo shoot. This is often the most difficult step and frequently the most frustrating. Because I am using myself as the subject of my paintings I am not able to be behind the lens. For this reason I elicit the help of my husband, daughters, fellow students and on occasion a professional photographer. It usually takes three or four photo shoots before I get an image that I feel I can work with. For instance with the *Down Again* painting I had a difficult time trying to figure out how to leverage

myself into the upside down position without my sliding onto the floor. I also had to try lighting from different angles before finding a position that worked. Ultimately I rigged a narrow board onto the step of a ladder and put a blanket on the board to avoid splinters. I was able to slightly hook one foot on the underside of a step to keep from sliding. I was then able to go into Photoshop and tilt the photo to a more extreme angle.

These photo shoots often involve my getting into unusual and often painful positions in order to get the source photo that I need. The process for getting the photos for the painting *Submission* involved looping a long orange, industrial electrical cord through the railing of the balcony of the loft above our living room. With the help of my husband and daughter I was able to get into the chords and hang without other support. My daughter stood near by to help prevent my swinging. My husband was behind the camera. All of my weight was actually supported by a cord under my arm pits and another under my knees. Because I was limited on how long I could handle the pain, we were not able to get the light exactly as I would have liked it. So, I used Photoshop to change the exposure on the legs, which had become blown out.



Fig. 10. Serena Potter, *Reference Photo for painting Submission*, 2010, photo.

Once I have gathered useful reference photos I will often do more in-depth drawings. This sometimes leads to yet another photo shoot, making adjustments in lighting, or camera angle. When I have a final image in hand I will go into Photoshop and play with cropping. When I am happy with the composition I do a color composition. I print out a black and white inkjet copy of the photo, spray fixative on the paper, then paint with oil paints directly onto the photo, playing with color, saturation, value, and editing of information, till I am happy with the outcome.

At this point I go into Photoshop and play with proportions. When I have determined how large the painting should be, usually by judging how big the head of the

figure will be, I special order a canvas or birch panel. I found a local cabinet maker to make larger birch cradled boards for me. It cuts down on shipping costs and delivery time and gives me more input into the finished product. I prime my boards and canvases with three layers of gesso, sanding between layers.

My first mentor, John Brosio, suggested I try gridding my image onto the larger surface. I struggled with this at first, but found it to be a useful tool in later work. On a really large painting a projector has been useful for just laying in the dimensions then finishing free hand.

Once the sketch is as I want it, I move on to blocking in color and value shapes. With each layer I add more information, smaller shifts in color gradation, finer detail. I entered the program as a seasoned user of Liquin as a medium. With direction from mentors and faculty, I have switched to an approach that eliminates medium in the early stages, relying on Gamsol to thin paint. At times I find something needs to be sanded out and re-painted. Each painting takes several months to complete. When I feel I am near completion I sign the painting, as I feel the signature is part of the composition. This is not an indication though that further honing will not be done. Working with Joe Gerges as a mentor, I learned that there is nearly always something to be improved upon and the painting is not done till there is next to nothing else to fix. This has really taught me to hold my work to a higher standard.

CONCLUSION

I came into the MFA program questioning weather or not I really had anything of importance to communicate. Part way into my first semester I had a moment of inspiration when I suddenly knew exactly what I wanted to say, my personal experience

with chronic illness, but had no idea how I would go about doing it. In my second semester I faced and accepted that in order for my work to be powerful, it had to be honest and to truly be honest I would need to expose myself, my pain. I questioned whether or not I had the courage to do this. I found that courage, in small doses, as I approached each painting, attempting to push a little further outside of my comfort zone. For the next two semesters I continued to hone my painting skills, while always trying to formulate the next best way to tell my story.

As I contemplate the body of work that is my thesis I find that it has been an enlightening experience. I have learned a lot about who I am as a person and as an artist. I have come to acknowledge parts of myself that were always there but never spoken of. I have remembered aspects of my past that I had put away. I have pin-pointed influences on my work that I had not recognized before. I feel freer for having done so. Art is therapy and once used as such can be addictive.

I do not know if I am finished with the chronic illness narrative. I suspect that as I am not finished with the illness, I will at times revisit the topic in my work. I do though have ideas bubbling in the back of my mind for new bodies of work and look forward to getting started. The journey that is the body of my thesis work has given me the tools that I need to move forward with new narratives.

Each of my instructors, mentors and advisors contributed to my growth as an artist and I leave Laguna College taking pieces of them with me. I feel prepared to enter the competitive world of art and teaching. It is my goal to secure gallery representation, to continue to strive to create high art, in hopes of one day having my work displayed in museums. I will find studio space closer to Los Angeles and dedicate certain days of each

week to painting. I hope to have an opportunity to teach so I can share what has been given to me. I came into the program feeling timid and insecure. I leave feeling like a stronger, more capable artist and woman.

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APPENDIX



Plate 1. Serena Potter, *Submission*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 48" x 78".



Plate 2. Serena Potter, *Uninvited*, 2011, Oil on birch panel, 32" x 46".



Plate 3. Serena Potter, *Without a Noise*, 2010, Oil on birch panel, 36" x 48".



Plate 4. Serena Potter, *Down Again*, 2010, Oil on birch panel, 24" x 40".

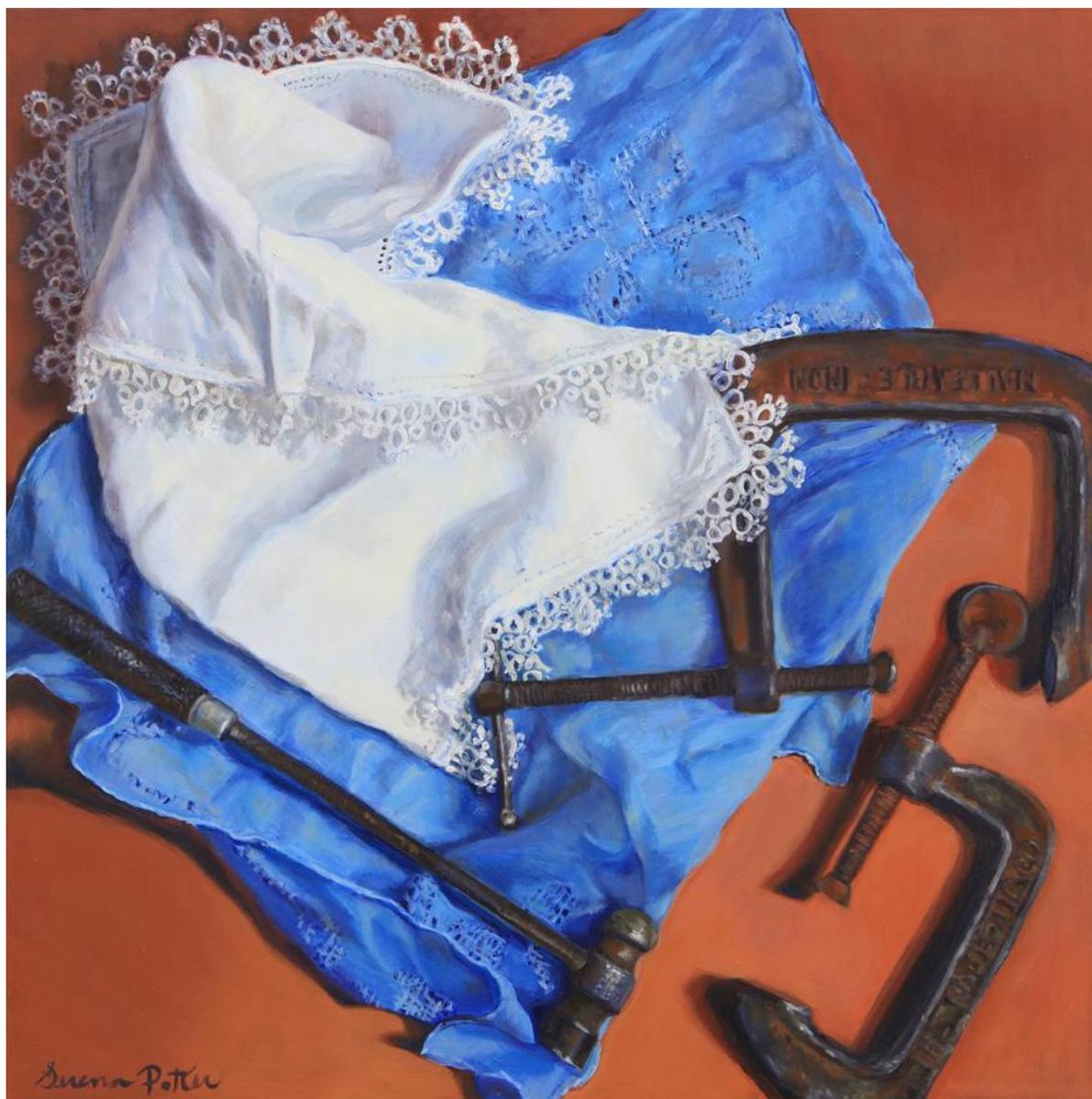


Plate 5. Serena Potter, *Labors Lost*, 2010, Oil on panel, 12" x 12".



Plate 6. Serena Potter, *Time Suspended*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 11" x 14".



Plate 7. Serena Potter, *Exhaustion*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 18" x 20".



Plate 8. Serena Potter, *Coping*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 20" x 24".

Painting to be added later.

Painting to be added later.

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