

## The Red Flower Manifesto



The Red Flower Manifesto

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Laguna College of Art & Design

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

June 2021

Laguna College of Art and Design

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Approval

Signature Page

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## ABSTRACT

At 8 years old, I was severely injured in a very serious car accident which resulted in a coma for a week. This was an event that changed a lot of people's lives within my family. The scene was so horrific, it was only told with metaphors to lighten up the weight of the account. My mom came up with the idea of the term, *the red flower* (*la flor roja*). She had described it vividly, using an analogy of a red flower shape from the impact on the top of my head. The last thing I remembered from the accident was looking into a mirror, seeing this mass of blood cover me completely from head to toe. Then a long sleep. I dreamed so much at one point that I began to feel as if reality was the life experienced within sleeping. In awakening, I began a journey that slowly restructured my trust and faith in people.

*The Red Flower* my mother gave to me, an 8-year-old boy almost 9, would be my vessel in telling the story of these events. This bodily mass of red is a conductor that sparks memories. I am singing of something personal, a *Visual Morna*, a song about a meaningful event in my life. In the spirit of Capo Verde, I am communicating about *sodade* (nostalgia), *cretchu* (love), and *morabeza* (kindness). I compose a representation of an emotional experience using symbols, landscapes, poses of the figure, and color. It is surreal expressive realism. They are visual metaphors of emotional turbulence. These paintings are about my self-identity through these most difficult times. They depict *surreal bilocations*, two places simultaneously. Within the locations I am choosing, and within my psychological state. They are moments within my narrow existence of perceived streaming reality. In painting them, I commit what I call *Acts of Liberation/Love* to free myself. A liberation of my very being in order to change something that ails me within. I fulfill this by singing through art.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks to Jim Hawks, My Family whom I will always love, Elias and Sophie Shelby, Bill Smart, Anne Scheid, N. Maki-Dearson, Ines Limas, Dawn, Lisa, Bud, and everyone at the Ed Lund Foundation, Darlene Campbell, Peter Zokosky, Scott Hess, Keith Jordan, John Brosio, Norberto Ramirez, Nigel Robertson, Maynard, Zelda Billingsly, Zarena Amado, Emily Saeturn, Sonia and Maricela Valdez, George Tinajero, Perla Dean, Zoey A, Jasmine Parker, Joshua Dildine, Saul Jimenez, Martin Valencia, Jacqueline Doumanian, Dr. Perez (Dominican Republic), Vanessa Addison Williams, Kacie Robles, Elias Suakjian, Theodore (the arena) Lyons, Racquelle Justo (metamorphosis, spacegirl, FSU mural), Sam Lozcano (FSU Mural), Ariel Bird, Chloe Cantu, Angie, Mauro Carrera (spacegirl mural) Ome Lopez, Tony Carranza, Chris Lopez, Ultraviolet, Angel Lesnikowsky (FSU Mural), Jennifer Isom Schmidtke, N. Potter, J. Dildine, Samina Najmi, Robert Maldonado, Kenny Harris, The 2021 MFA cohort, John Farrar, Randy and Debra Perkins, Rachel Smith, Susan King, Christian Ramirez, and Yuki J. M. Acs.

**DEDICATION**

Dedicated to Elvia Rita Delgado and Emily Saeteurn,  
las flores rojas

## EPIGRAPH

*You are the Psychologist; I am your patient. Let me divulge the most intimate relationship I harbor. My story involves everything that wrenches my heart, and how it gears the machine of my artistic drive. My canvas is your notebook, and the paint allows me to articulate how I feel authentically and emotionally. Your empty pages are the safe space that allows me to talk openly with the paint itself. As I fall into pieces painting, the process is guiding a direction and leading towards a journey of healing. I create what I feel is a successful representation of who I am not only on the exterior, but intrinsically.*

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## THE RED FLOWER

### DESCRIPTION

As a child at 8 years old, I was severely injured in a very serious car accident which resulted in a coma for a week. The force of the impact propelled me forward into the front of the van. I landed headfirst underneath the driver's seat, smashing into the seat mechanism right above my left eye. The left side of my head cracked open, as the exposed metal ripped through it. I was an absolute bloody mess. When I was pulled away to unstick me from the mechanism, I began to pour out large amounts of blood as now my head was wide open from the impact. This was an event that changed a lot of people's lives within my family. The scene was so horrific, it was only told with metaphors to lighten up the weight of the account. Maybe that can be considered something my family did to build resistance to the triggering effects from the accident. My mom came up with the idea of this term, *the red flower* (*la flor roja*). She had described it vividly, using an analogy of a red flower shape from the impact on the top of my head. Instead of being gory in her story telling, she always preferred to say that there was a red flower growing out of my head. This was the only way she could describe the volume of matter within the accident and not start to cry. Within that flower shape was a release of red liquid. It was as if every time my heart pumped, more red liquid came to the surface. Blood was pouring down my face until I could not see anymore. The last thing I remembered was seeing this mass of red color cover me completely from head to toe. A month later I was awake. I began to regain connections with my family from being asleep. When I opened my eyes, I would go through what would prove to be a very challenging transition back into childhood. In the beginning few years after the accident, I suffered a

displacement of self-identity and connection with others. I didn't really know who I was before that. I couldn't remember much. All I knew was my name and that things seemed to be strange and unrecognizable. Within a span of time, I began to be more connected with my family. I began to feel a part of this world again. What I do remember is many dreams within the coma state. I dreamed so much at one point that I began to feel as if reality was the life experienced within that long sleep. I even remember dreaming of sleep and waking up as if one would in life. My coma dream life made my new life more difficult when I woke up. I remember being confused about a lot that was happening, as it was not parallel to what I had dreamed. Over the next few weeks, I had to build my identity from scratch. It took perseverance and trust in the people around me. There are people in my life that I refer to as *ambassadors of a new happy life*. In meeting them you begin to feel human again, you begin to feel connected to people once again. There is something that is found within these ambassadors that guides us back to the human we once were before the trauma. It is the essence of humanity.

The red flower my mother gave to me, an 8-year-old boy almost 9, would be my vessel in telling the story of these events. This bodily mass of red liquid would connect to my life and be a means to tell something much more personal than a story, a *Morna*, a song about a meaningful event in my life. As a professional artist, the red flower began to overwhelm my compositions just as it once overwhelmed my childhood experience. If the figures of the paintings were at the heart of my story, the red flower was the blood of my circulatory system. The red flower became me. I became the red flower. My compositions are pathways

and directional forces as if veins and arteries connected to the heart. They are alive and they are within me in movement as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Figure 1: Danny DeMeza, *Parallel Synchronized Randomness*, 2016, Oils, 36 in. x 36 in.



Figure 2: Danny DeMeza, *Birth of the Protostar under the Umbrella of Light*, 2019, Oils, 30 in. x 48 in.

Within the Portuguese cultures of Capo Verde, there is a music that exists through stories of love, despair, and hope. These musical compositions narrate moments in turbulent relationships that are so difficult, it is almost impossible to bear. The empty feeling as a heart breaks, the anxiousness of reuniting lovers, things of such a sincere nature, the trials themselves change people. Instead of tears, the musicians and those experiencing similar hardships can only sing of them. It is as if this human adaptation from so many tears and heartaches manifests itself into the most beautiful release of emotion that can only be

described as something that becomes a part of your soul upon listening. The stories and styles differ within this folk music, but my favorite are the *Mornas* (songs specific to the region).

Why the *Mornas*, you ask? Is it possible that a *Morna* represents something in our most vulnerable nature? Yes. It is not a facade of inauthentic happiness or sadness. It is as real as love itself and as real as anybody who feels such emotion. *Mornas* have a creole origin and not only carry a culture but guide it forward through difficult transitions. They carry the weight of misplaced cultural identity. The Portuguese language exists on many continents even though the people speaking it are no longer part of Portugal. There is a loss and recovery of identity for the people that live within this diaspora. Through the hardships, identity is found in the strength and ability to be resilient and independently distinct. When witnessing singers preparing to sing a *Morna*, there is a change of atmosphere. They peer towards the sky and begin to breathe out *Morna* verses when the music starts. It is as if they are about to cry within a language that is only sung. There is a story that is communicated about *sodade* (nostalgia), *crechu* (love), and *morabeza* (kindness). It is a transformation of sadness through singing that encourages people to persevere. There is a loss, and it resonates with a lament. *Mornas* tell stories of relationships that have changed lives. (I think it is important to note that all relationships including the ones within ourselves can greatly affect us.) It has this strange ability to change something so hurtful into something so unexpectedly touching. There is a cadence within the strumming of the guitar that carries a sense of solidarity. It is as if the timing carries a rhythm that marches forward despite the feeling of coming apart. A melody that soothes an emotional wound without words. It is the unraveling of a breath. It is a breathing that is felt regardless of what cry is being made audible.

Emotionally, just before I paint, I feel a song making its way to the surface of my soul. When I feel the song rising, I begin a painting. Each painting in my thesis is a living, visual *Morna*. My *Mornas* are stories that together represent my views on myself through a turbulent time. The symbols represent a melting pot of culture that exists around me. Each painting is a song containing a story from a library of lament. I am grieving. My *Mornas*, such as *The Wine Glasses Stood in Place so the Balloon Animals Appeared to be Normal* (2019), are the way I have found to grieve (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Danny DeMeza, *The Wine Glasses Stood in Place so the Balloon Animals Appeared to be Normal*, 2019, Oils, 18 in. x 24 in.

What is the visual narrative of an emotionally distressed state? When one relives a traumatic experience, your normal brain functions break down. There are lobes in these hemispheres that have difficulty communicating. The *corpus callosum* (an area of the brain

that connects the two hemispheres) is not working as it normally does. During these moments I am in pieces as I begin to sing within the composition.

My *Mornas* are built from my sorrows, love, and kindness. They function like songs within the culture of trauma I was raised in. The red flower is a conductor for these memories. They are telling of trials and turbulence that all people might relate to. They carry layered visual metaphors for the emotional experience. Each painting gives me a chance to sing in the language of a recovery from trauma. The symbols in my art parallel the figures to say something. The paintings represent times when I had to put myself on autopilot just to live through the moment. Each one is a dream-like state. In this way, they appear to be surreal. They are not a reality that everyone sees. The works represent seeing not just with eyes and logic, but an emotional hallucination simultaneously, a type of *surreal bilocation* between two states. They are moments of emotional flooding that cause an internal change of state. I begin to react to these events by painting them. These emotional events are represented by symbols, landscapes, and poses of the figure. I am producing visual metaphors depicting how I overcome the turbulence. There is an emphasis on a psychological space deriving from actual locations. My realism is vividly affected by a state of daydreaming. Here, I am in an arena facing my emotional turbulence. I am immersed. Within this filter of reality, a fire burns, it is a red flower.

In the 1920s, the surrealist movement was heavily focused in the subconscious and a subconscious free association of sorts. Although there are parallels to this in my work, I find my own distinct vision. Researching surrealism's origins and André Breton, I started to see a correlation of the movement's motives and actions, as artifacts of a revolution. The art speaks

about the time period and a reaction to what was happening globally. This is where I begin to feel different from this aspect of modern surrealism. Like their works, my paintings derive from what I would call an Act of Liberation, an act of authentic love within the arena of the art creation process. But, my paintings are not artifacts of a revolution like something dead. I consider my visual *Mornas* to be living as music lives. One would never say that Frédéric Chopin's Nocturnes are dead. It only takes listening to the score of music, to bring it to life. The act itself results in a gift of liberation from an honest contribution. Within this liberated state of art making, it is rejoicing to feel human again. I am taking back the feeling of being alive. In this arena, my feelings quickly saturate my brain. It overwhelms me, and I am rendered speechless. In these moments I find it difficult to even form a word. There are some feelings that cannot be expressed by a written language.

I care very much about the aesthetics of what I create, whether or not we can classify what I am representing. Sometimes a shape that is nameless carries more character and volume than its counterpart that is rendered to a perfect reality. It is still representational to me as it is taking up a space within a plane of existence. It adheres to the laws of light and physics, and it is not completely detached from moral concern.

As I reflect on something that has impacted me, I process it by painting about it to overcome it. It is a type of intrinsic sympathetic closure or resolve to something that ails me or has made me feel less than human. During my creative process, life experiences begin to emerge and the painting itself begins to change. There is a way I try to communicate by blurring the lines of what is real and surreal. There are areas that begin to have an organic flow of masses, shapes, and use of color. In these moments I am persevering through

something difficult. I am no longer in my studio but circumnavigating the emotional tides within a song, within me as shown in *The Metamorphosis* (2018) (Fig 4).



Figure 4: Danny DeMeza, *The Metamorphosis*, 2018, Acrylic Mural, 8 ft x 12 ft.

These *Mornas* are not just a dive into the unconscious but an emotional chart mapping an influx of emotions. Each *Morna* is a moving turbulence alive in my memory. It also correlates to the current state of feeling during my painting process. The red is contorted, fractured, or flowing depending on how I feel emotionally. In *The Metamorphosis*, a saturated emotional state equals a visual turbulence of movement. I visually depict the feelings swimming around me with the red flower. The feelings are suspended in air coming from an internal place of emotion.

The more stress, anxiety, sorrow, or difficulty in my life, the more my living *Mornas* become the focal point of my work. This is a strategy that I have found to heal from what I have gone through. I am interested in authentically recording my emotions by processing these events. In 2012, I went through an ending of an engagement that resulted in a loss of my identity. I was left feeling only empty, selfless, and as if I had suffered a wound as deep as a vortex of time. It was something that happened so fast, I did not see the impact on me until later. This was to be not only a loss of family, but a loss of what I thought to be real. To me, it was an emotional car accident that revolved around a white van much like the one I almost died in as a child. The event affected many people and families, as I would soon after have a mental breakdown. Every relationship that followed would be affected. What I knew love to be, along with my perspective on myself, was broken into pieces. It was as if this wound traveled beyond me and kept going through everything that was part of my reality. Places I knew, structures and foundations unbreakable seemed to crumble and feel empathetic to how I felt. I was always reminded of the pain within myself through exterior natural earth processes. Sometimes it was less traumatic to stay within a psychological space than to notice the environment around me. Slowly without knowing it, the environment started to become a part of me subconsciously. There were days, months, and years where daily crying was just a new way of living. Just as recovering from the childhood accident, I had to make a hard transition into a new normal life. I had to fight for a way to overcome the sadness and fear that had eaten so much of my humanity. I was left less than half a person, but I wanted to be whole.

What would occur next is a series of steps and determination to find myself within that experience. I would begin to form my identity after being decimated in hurt. I formed a new foundation that was disaster proof. An identity and self that could withstand the weather of my hardest times of suffering. If an event took place and hurt me, from then on, I would find a way to deal with the situation and move forward even stronger than before. This was an allegorical birthday to a new life as an individual with grit. I was to be reborn to withstand the weight of the world and planets that orbit around me. No impact would render me without movement no matter how much I had been ripped apart. I would only bloom. The *Morna, Hallelujah* (2021) (Fig 5) celebrates this with symbolic flowers and a celebration of birth. It is also a tribute, inspired by a Mexican roadside grave. To me it represents a sacred place that is forever impactful. It is usually in the last spot that person was alive. Regardless of where on the road, people set up flowers, rosaries, balloons, and leave notes with prayers. In this work, my intention is to create a living roadside altarpiece that brings to life a spirit and soul of something important from within a psychological space in my brain. I am creating an altarpiece in tribute to the path of my heart in loving. The location is Big Sur California, but it symbolizes a permanent location within me.

Once again, the red flower was given to me and I embraced it in order to heal from it. After falling to pieces, I was able to move forward in a healthy manner. This gave me and my art sustainable resilience and hope. With paintings like *Hallelujah*, I can persevere regardless of fractures in the past.



Figure 5: Danny DeMeza, *Hallelujah*, 2021, Oils, 39 in. x 54 in.

As I recall difficult times, I imagine everything in a state of suspended animation. As if an ability to put my fingers together to stop time just for that moment, I explain a story that is as important to me as any story in any history book. These songs of perseverance are like the forging of an artist. After making them, I began to see the world much differently. I would later notice these paintings have a strength, a gift or chance for something more. Here, with my *Mornas*, I start my story as an artist. With these paintings, there is a plasticity related to what my brain overcame, and I can begin to grow again from hard work. Working through these feelings has fueled waves of creativity. They slowly build momentum and transform into something unexpected. Every one of my *Mornas* has the ability to change and go

through a metamorphosis within the making. I sometimes depict events in my life that reflect an adjustment, an adaptation, or a determination to do something and not give up.

If something is not working within the painting, I rely on my capacity to edit and find solutions that will be aesthetically sustainable. My editing process can demand a lot of time before it is right. In the visual *Morna Heart* (2021) (Fig. 6), I originally painted a different background. Although the original idea came from my plein air paintings in Arches National Park, it was not until I returned for a second trip to make more studies that I found the perfect inspiration. I was trying to describe this hole that had been left in my body that travels through my environment and every part of my reality. My concept was touching on a theme of emotional impact. People can go through something that affects not only themselves but everyone and everything around them. Sometimes those wounds can even be inherited generationally for a long time.

I ask the viewer to take time with my paintings in person. I am singing in metaphors and symbolism. They are songs that carry a living amount of time compacted into a condensed windowpane. They are about a few seconds in movement—a moment of time within my narrow existence of perceived streaming reality. They are acts of liberation. There is freedom from my sentence of hurt. Sometimes in the gasp of a song, there is a release that can only be described as a hallelujah. The *Mornas* are poetic exhales of breath. Each one carries many Hallelujahs. Painting them, I can stand up again to continue working toward goals. Art has the ability to rebuild bridges that were once destroyed or unstable. I have a wild hunger to build a bridge that intimately connects me with the viewer, with the same

reaction one would have after having a very in-depth conversation with a loved one.

Sometimes even in silence, listening to the right song can really help build these bridges.



Figure 6: Danny DeMeza, *Heart*, 2021, Oils,  
30 in. x 48 in.

## RESEARCH

There is a man, with a hole in his head, that lives forever in my internal landscape. I don't know who he is, as we have never met. He doesn't even know he is a part of me, yet we coexist somehow in one body. This is the man I witnessed being shot in the face as an 11-year-old in East Los Angeles. In the distance, he ran toward my direction (perhaps for safety or mercy). I watched him as he was chased into my lemonade stand (where I was also selling hand drawn hockey sports emblems). Here in front of me is where they caught him.

None of the three men cared that I stood right in front of them, about two feet away. One man pulled out a gun so fast that it seemed like a knee jerk reaction to an involuntary movement. A gunshot sounded out and before I could blink, two men were gone, and one man was on the ground. I stood completely frozen in time, everything continued but I was unable to move. The man that was shot stood up! He was shot in the head! Through the hole in his head, I began to be pulled into an emotional laceration. I trembled in fear. He got up and moved even closer to me. He asks, "Hey Kid, did they shoot me in the face?" He starts touching his wound, feeling around the mound in his forehead. I disappeared and did not respond. I stood there, but it was as if I ceased to exist, and at the moment, I was nowhere in the world to be found. Annoyed at me, he walks over to a car where he looks at his reflection in the glass. Meanwhile blood is falling from the back of his head. He turns around. "They shot me. They fucking shot me in the face." He falls and passes away about a foot away. I was the last thing that man saw. There he died in that very spot. There he continued to exist, in the recollection of my first memories after my accident. I used to ask myself, "How could a person have survived that long with a hole in his head? How is that possible?" It was something that became a metaphor correlating to my life during a breakdown in 2016. I had such an emotional wound within me that I, even myself, could not notice how severely I had been affected. Regardless of how bad I hurt, I only continued to push myself forward. It was as if I could not stop myself from wanting to heal no matter how bad I was destroyed. There I was... living, breathing, existing, yet I had an emotional wound so deep I had related to my mother in her past relationship traumas. She went through a lot of what I did. She survived it. It was inspirational to me. This concept of surviving traumas began to be a story I wanted to

tell from my own experience. This man who was shot in front of me became a symbol of this, in between stages of healing. He existed in this grey area of life for me. He is symbolic for what I went through. The difference is that I did not die. Instead, I chose to heal. Heal through this series of very intimate works.

In 2017, I was given an opportunity by the California Arts Endowment to go to various locations all over the state of California and build Altarpieces for *Día De Los Muertos*. It was a life changing experience. So much culture, flowers, and gathering of people saturated each location in festivities. Honestly although I am mixed Latin American, I had no sense of the ceremony's meaning. I was learning something new about my roots.

Within a *Dia De Los Muertos* altarpiece, elements are placed on an altar in a very specific way. There are levels, with individual tributes arranged in relation to each other. The tributes are packed within the confines of the altar, as there are many things that hold cherished memories. When finished constructing an altarpiece, there is little space left, as the tributes are representations of loved ones and saturated with memories. Although they are just objects like a shoe, cards, or pictures, they are reappropriated as living representations of something sacred experienced with unconditional love. They become as special as the person's memory. They now live to hold that place in time, preserved within the hearts of the people they affected. They are alive and a part of the family in that way. There is honor in that, as it is a connection believed to exist beyond death. Here, within the structure, the altar becomes a beacon. A beacon to connect loved ones though life and death.

There is a flower that is pivotal to the connection of both living and the dead within the altarpiece. It is a Marigold. It is a bright orange-red flower that illuminates the whites of

your eyeballs when looking at it. It has a scent that is unique and gives a comforting feeling like lavender. People plant Marigolds within gardens to keep pests away. Within Mexico, it is not just a flower, as it carries a different spiritual purpose. Its color is vibrant, as it is a beacon of sorts to guide loved ones that have passed back to the living. This flower almost acts as a spiritual lighthouse bridging two places that should not be bridged. The living and the dead. The idea of a flower and its symbolic possibilities started to develop within my practice. Flowers hold inspirational momentum that continues to be a part of me.

During this tour of altarpiece making, each altar I assembled with love, became a tribute to something in my life that had passed. I found myself in each location, building altars in tribute to all of the people and situations that have impacted my life. I was gracious. By the end of the tour, I had built 50 altarpieces. Each one was respected, and people cried looking at them (myself included). This was another symbolic representation of the red flower I was building in my artistic career. Although the red flower in my *Mornas* is not a specific type, it represents a flower with a spiritual purpose in an emotional sense. It is a bridge that connects me to a memory (as with Marigolds and the bridge between realms), to a loved one, or to a feeling that makes me warm and happy. Flower shapes in my work represent cultural tributes, drenched in love. Flowers remind me of gratitude and respect for all living and nonliving moments and people.

## **Application of Paint and Light**

I imagine that throughout time and history, when an oil painter sits down in front of the canvas, there is a sacred moment that occurs, with no audible sound. Though there is nothing to hear, there is magmatic movement within the mind that sweeps like a tide of lava over one's sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. That energy condenses, collecting all your experiences, emotions, imperfections, successes, failures, love, and it signals a release of acetylcholine, dopamine, and norepinephrine.

Although old masters before us picked up their brushes to smear paint as we do, I think their brushes were a conduit to what was happening within them. The paint became an extension of themselves. As you and I have fingers and phalanges within our moving skin, old masters developed an extension of instinct in aesthetically skilled decision making.

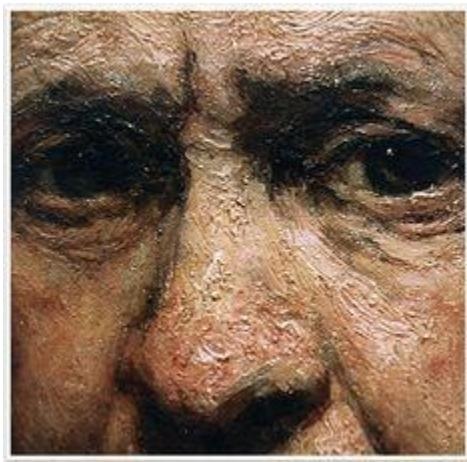


Figure 7: Van Rijn, Rembrandt, Oils, *Self Portrait*, 2' 9" x 2' 2". 1659. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

When looking at artwork by Rembrandt van Rijn, such as *Self Portrait* (1659) in Figure 7, the paint application reveals something about empathy with viscosity. The paint represents real skin tone, as it is layered in cools and warms, thickened in light areas, and is

dragged through the hierarchy of light into half tone areas, like a river that flows. It is almost as if a sculpture with texture exists within the paintings. This aesthetic quality has a real tactile sense. I can almost feel the warmth in the skin as it pumps blood through arteries when looking at the work. This formula fascinates my senses into feeling more empathy. This reaches me on a different level than creatively making something. I am working to evolve and achieve Rembrandt's level of paint handling. I am searching for a bridge to balance paint handling in realism and active creativity..

### **The Ability to Freeze Time in Movement**

One of the most influential museum exhibits I have seen in California was at the DeYoung in San Francisco. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) were shown together under one roof. I was there to see John Waterhouse. His work absolutely connected with me, and I had never actually seen any PRB paintings in person. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was a group of painters who defined a new realism in England. I was completely enthralled by their abilities. Seeing the exhibition immediately changed my work. These painters were skilled but also resistant to mainstream ideas of art in their time.

In particular one work completely awed me. It was *Lady of Shallot* (1888) (Fig 8), a painting inspired by the legend of Astolat by William Holman Hunt. A new artist I knew little about.



Figure 8: William Holman Hunt, *Lady of Shallot*, 74.1 in x 57.6 in. Oils 1888, Wadsworth Atheneum

The painting represents everything I value. There are so many elements that I was completely overwhelmed by—its symbols, content, freezing moment of time, color, and

rendering. The objects within the room, including the hair, had a loss of gravity. Things were frozen suspended in the air. I could see that every pathway of orbit carried possibilities of poetic suggestion. I could see multiple arabesques. This is the current of air that I wanted things to flow through in my work. I began to see the weightlessness of his figures and weave this into my artistic direction. A freeze in a moment of time, a moment where everything stops in the middle of movement and is suspended in weightlessness. I hope to reproduce this idea in my own work. It affected me for months and months to come. It would change my art. I began to visualize my compositions with helix arabesques formed by an object within a context—an arabesque that can be like arteries and veins surrounding a heart. By the time I got to graduate school at LCAD I would meet Scott Hess, and Peter Zokosky. Meeting them, I would develop a new understanding of accomplishing this by researching in detail the masters of the past. This would be the arena in which I challenged myself. I did not just want symbols and elements put together randomly anymore with personal sincerity. I wanted to communicate cohesively within my work with context and content. I started to research how I could do this.

### **Jan Toorop**

Who is Jan Toorop? A secret treasure in art history if you want my opinion. The very first time I was introduced to his work, I had been drawing obsessively in class not paying attention to what the teacher was talking about. In response, Bill Smart, my professor, walks over and throws down a book right on top of the very drawing I was making. The weight of it broke the pencil that was in my hand. It was the art of Jan Toorop. He told me first that I should be paying attention, but then said, “You know, your style is a lot like this master.” He

was referencing these waves of organic lines I was obsessed with drawing. To me, I was just anxiously drawing to keep myself sane during a bad time in my life. My house had been recently burned down by unknown suspects while my family slept in it. I was alive but very shaken. This was my introduction to moving to Fresno, California from Los Angeles.

I picked up the book and said thank you. There it was. A moment in time where I would soon feel more human than ever. I looked at the pages of the book and cried as they were in a language I could almost hear as loud as sound. It was a connection I related to through time. Toorop lived in the 1800s. His work in a particular series included an array of waves that were representations of hair without gravity. His sinuous parallel lines were a lot like my sinuous lines that represented my anxiety circling me within my own art. In his work lines circled the figures harmoniously and created a composition that just wrapped me within it. This influence has stayed subtly in my artwork. Even before I knew who he was, we shared an interest in sinuous parallel lines as shown in his design *Delft* in Figure 9.



Figure 9: Jan Toorop, *Delft Salad Oil*, 33 in x 21 in. 1894 Duffy Study Room, Yale University

After a series of different events that correlated with my accident, I returned to the very book that Bill Smart gave me, *Jan Toorop*, in 2019. It was stored away deep within the subconscious nature of an old garage. Way below everything in the shadows under cobwebs sat a blue trunk with my books from school. I flipped the book open and saw it, almost as if this page had not existed in any part of my recollection of the book. It was Toorops' painting, *The New Generation* (1892) (Fig 10). This painting of a red forest was a beacon to me. It was as if we were having a conversation through time. At the time I was working on the *Morna*, *Hallelujah*. Toorop's red trees strangely reminded me of what I had just painted. There was part of me that began to feel validated. I was able to recreate the red flower at a graduate level, using new techniques based on Toorop's work.



Figure 10: Jan Toorop, *The New Generation*, Oils. 37.9 in x 43.3 in. 1892, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

## Vincent Van Gogh

There is an interesting correspondence between Vincent Van Gogh and his brother Theo. Within it, Van Gogh describes what he was going through in his painting at the time. His written words within the letters correlate to the emotional states that revealed themselves in his body of work. What he chose to paint was not a direct reflection of the language he was speaking, yet his painting carried a narrative that people had never spoken before. It was a narrative spoken with the language of color. Van Gogh's use of color was an authentic display of the intense emotions he was feeling. His narratives were about what he was going through internally, just as my paintings are. His paintings carry his expressive gradient and represent the intensity of his life experience as my paintings do. They speak of who he was through a symbolic language of color. The feelings he was experiencing became part of the painting itself. Van Gogh's painting could be a landscape, but instead be speaking of an intent only read through his use of color and viscosity of paint.



Figure 11: Van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 2 ft 5 in x 3 ft. 1889 Museum of Modern Art, New York

Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889) (Fig 11) is a good example of how his emotional state is expressed through the turbulence of light. Turbulence, in artistic jargon,

has the aesthetic value of light movement within a painting. This is created by many transitional brush strokes of color swirling around points of interest. Van Gogh did this to create a sense of being alive. I believe his work shows movement just as a video camera, flip book, or hallucination can show movement. In comparison, my take on turbulence refers to a stirring of emotions created with compositional movement.

### **Marina Abramovic**

As an undergraduate, I was introduced to Marina Abramovic. Without her I would not have never known how to break free from being human to feel human.

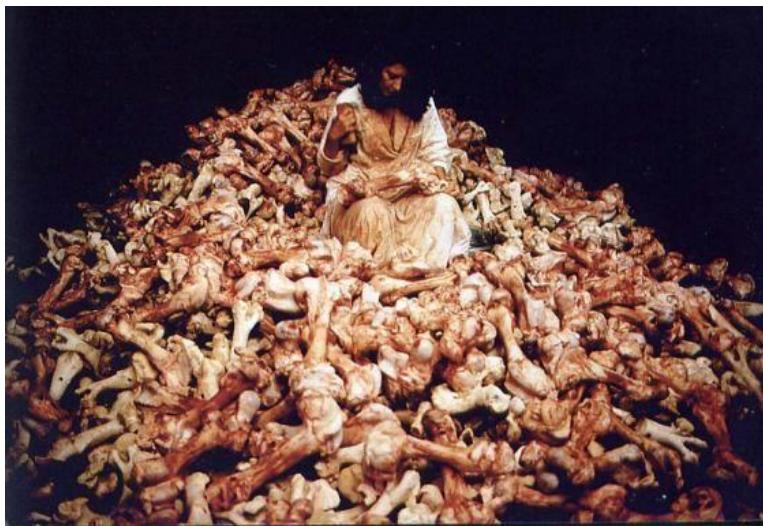


Figure 12: Marina Abramovic, *Balkan Baroque*, 1997 Venice, Italy

Inspired by her fearless performance acts of liberation like *Balkan Baroque*, *Rest Energy*, and others, I began to have an internal reaction to some of the things that modern art was saying. Contemporary art and artists were defiant in these acts, just like the PRB, just like the surrealists, just like me. I began to perceive some of the drive behind her art as an act of love.

She is an artist that lives authentically. Her performances, like *Balkan Baroque*, evolved into these living, breathing art pieces that had concepts that allowed us to explore ourselves and the society that we were living in in 1997 (Fig 12). Although my result is a painting, the driving force of her art very much resonated with me. In a modern art history class at Fresno State, I found solace. I yearned to create an act of liberation worthy of the art I passionately believed in. I was soon commissioned to paint four murals on the school art building during my regular classes. I was overwhelmed, but the idea of doing it was absolutely explosive to me. Right before I began to paint, I made a series of videos of physical acts of liberation that stirred up my emotional states. I continue to revisit these videos throughout graduate school. These acts began to accumulate in my art. It was a jumping off point of momentum.

### **An Act of Love/ Liberation**

When I listen to master artist perspectives, I find myself aligned with academically skilled art. My soul is stirred when artists speak of building tones of warm and cool, turbid medium, core shadows and everything that comes with learning precision in building beautifully representational reality. Renaissance and Baroque art carries a lasting quality to me. That being said, how can we grow as modern artists today, if we continue to look at art through the lens of past masters only? Are we shackled to the idea that art is only considered good if it carries the traditional perspectives that existed in classical ateliers? How can we break from that into new ways of looking at art today?

I break from those classical techniques purposely to feel human. They are acts of love/liberation (kind of like pretending to be a zombie, an unexpected action in the middle of your day-to-day activities). Being able to paint differently and unexpectedly allows me to

feel more human. In a way, I would say our contemporary generation is the bridge generation of painters. Past and future exist together on one bridge. The red flower symbolically becomes a bridge to me, just as a marigold is a bridge during *Dia De los Muertos* in Mexico. It connects the past to the future. This series symbolizes a bridge to me and my future. My visual *Mornas* are acts of love/liberation, sometimes without any physical representation, and they can be more solid than earth or rock.

### **Perseverance Within the Cannibalist Manifesto**

After WWII, life had changed within the world, and a new creative climate was about to begin. Writers and poets, musicians and artists, all were interested in experimenting in new art forms. As this literary shift was taking place globally, one writer addressed ideas about the identity of a culture amid colonization and industrialization. In 1928, Oswald de Andrade, a vanguard poet and native of São Paulo, Brazil pioneered a modern notion. A new piece of literature was born, *Manifesto Antropofago*. Translated in English, it was *The Cannibalist Manifesto*. It was a document that encompassed a displaced country and its connection back to its roots of humanity. During this time in Brazil, Portuguese people no longer identified with Portugal and considered themselves new Brazilians. Here they would become new inhabitants of Brazil and find a new identity on the world's stage. Andrade's document made connections to the indigenous native philosophy of Brazil to guide this transition into the future. The writing spoke of ways to overcome identity loss and embrace where you are. Andrade described a new world culture that worked together in building monuments of creativity. It was a call to the cannibals that inhabited the land. Here they would learn to

embrace other art forms and art in order to develop something distinct within themselves. A new world culture would soon begin.

This piece of literature, thanks to Inez Limas, was enough to finally begin to bring me back to humanity. My displacement, this feeling of nothingness I was in, began to implode on itself. I began to see the importance of my connection artistically to everyone else. The manifesto was a beacon guiding my return as a painter. I began to paint in order to be able to be in that arena. I began to find my identity. Although before I could not describe it, I knew what I felt inside. It was something truer than I had spoken all my life. I began painting *Mornas* like *The Metamorphosis* and *Wine Glasses* soon after this.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In 2018, the year that I painted *Metamorphosis*, I was on a plane to the United Kingdom from California. The night I traveled to London there was a horrible storm. The plane was violently shaking as it flew over the North Atlantic's icy winds. I spent hours clenching my seat in complete fear. As soon as the plane wheels hit the tarmac, I began to throw up all over myself. I tried to hide it at first by opening my backpack. Soon it would overflow and cover me. This was symbolic as I saw it as a prelude to what was about to happen to me emotionally.

Some places we visit have a certain energy about them. They can be exactly where we need to be at the time we need to be there. They are interwoven into normal everyday events that make up our experience. Noticing these moments is not as easy as one might think, as we spend most of our days locked in complete focus with our everyday tasks. I think there is a strength in being aware enough to notice them.

Up to this point in my life, I had gone through a series of emotional events that really affected my trust in everything around me. My thesis concepts for paintings, although conceived since 2016, became a reality in London 2018. I was only there because of a scholarship that financially allowed me to grow in my artwork. My airsickness was a release of everything I had been keeping in emotionally and physically. In London my true love for painting would drive out everything from my body. It was when I would firmly establish my working methods. At nightfall after walking all day, I began making compositions representing an emotionally filtered psychological space. Here I condensed my thoughts and feelings for paintings within a flat in London and started to feel human. When I got back to California, painting each painting from beginning to end represented a coil in perpetual motion. Each painting has a start, middle, and end related to the physics of the release.

### **Memories and Locations**

Behavioral psychology teaches us that we are able to remember things longer when we associate them to a location or symbol. A type of dual coding happens within our brains. These memories of locations/symbols and the ability to reconstruct them internally give the memory more recall through the extra firing of neurons in the process. In remembering the location and associating each location/symbol with a subject, we are able to heighten our ability to remember it. The nature of my figurative work is heavily associated with locations and symbols placed within them. These places keep living within my internal landscapes regardless of where I am. These locations and symbols are the first part of remembering something emotionally impactful. The location begins to provide an atmosphere for my work. It provides value, light, tone, and color. For me, a figure placed in an environment is a

metaphor for a heart and its arteries. The locations and what events happened to me influence my painting process, my heart. As an example, if I am reading Russian literature while traveling, everything in that book becomes associated with the places I physically visit. In making a *Morna*, I attempt to interweave two spaces—my psychological world and the physical world—(a type of bilocation) into one. The balance between the two environments is usually guided by how I feel about something that I am working through. It is a realism fueled by emotions and an overactive imagination.

A moment of inspiration occurs, and an event takes place that changes me. Wherever I am, I begin to condense. I take many candid photographs such as the one in Figure 13, some serendipitous, some planned. I make videos, and I sing musical lyrics in my head as I make them. I write the lyrics down with my thoughts. These writings serve as an emotional memoir. They carry an emotional weight that is as heavy as my physical being. An example of this would be my written epigraph. They build slowly through experiences that are meaningful to me. They consist of poetic lines that speak of love and earth processes. Written in poem form, they act as an emotional release with words. I underline books I am reading that carry passages that mean something to me. Within the margin I relate my philosophical perspective in life to the book. When I close my eyes, I can visually represent them into something I can feel visually. They are made into visual metaphors. I begin to draw sketches that represent ideas I've been writing down. I collect color and texture samples, I collage sketches, I read poetry zines, I associate my memory to its location and how it makes me feel. I start to plan the environment. These are now ideas with more complexity than the original words themselves. They begin to evolve. When I am speaking in visual imagery, I

find it easier to say things that are deep within me. There is an intensity of feeling that begins to overwhelm me. This process is a condensation. It is the beginning of a painting.

After absorbing it all like a sponge, I begin to ring out every tear, every hurt, every everything. It becomes a visual recipe with multiple collages of emotional and logical sentiment. They range from plein air paintings and color studies of locations, to cut out pages from school textbooks, or tickets saved for extra memory recall. By blending these elements that I am interested in, I create a personal symbolic language as I did for *Hallelujah* in Figure 14.



Figure 13: Photoshoot for *Wine Glasses*, 2019.



Figure 14: Photoshoot for *Hallelujah*, 2019

I am ready to begin drawing on large paper or canvas. I have been contemplating a structure (composition) and I am now ready to execute it as shown in Figures 15 and 16. When thinking of the composition as a whole, I visualize directions of possible arabesques. I start to place organic lines (resembling a pimento) with a graphite stick on paper. This line work represents compositional ideas and is different from figure drawing. I am not caring about smudges or extra lines where they shouldn't be, because in this process they are simply

guides for where I would like to lead the viewer. I compose drawings with local points and piece them around my psychological space.

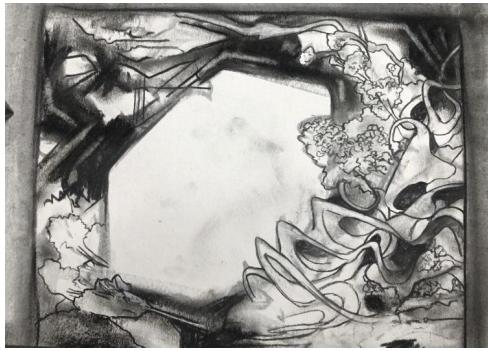


Fig 15: *Compositional Sketch in Charcoal*,  
2019



Fig 16: *Collage of Drawings  
with Photograph*, 2021

I then began to build on it like a skeletal structure. I am ready to introduce the figure. I sight measure with lines. They extend from one end of the paper to the other. I am introducing different angled lines that are parallel to the contours of the human form. I then begin to draw the figure from within the plane lines, so the figure successfully relates to the space I am structuring it in as shown in Figure 17.



Fig 17: Danny DeMeza, *Anatomy Drawings 1 and 2*, 2016

I am constantly measuring to check for errors and things that could be adjusted. When I am content with these dimensions, I start building compositions and directional forces deriving from the collage of sketches and writing done previously. When I introduce paint to the architecture of drawing, I work in layers, starting with underpainting using a transparent scumble, building values in a layering process. I fill the entire canvas with some kind of tone relating to the planned collage. I establish shadow shapes, mid-tone shapes, and light shapes in the figure and its environment. I explore palettes and relationships between color previously worked out in my condensing stage. I form stroked edges with cool toned transitions, I reiterate values, I layer a surface focusing on relationships between cool and warm color. I incorporate classical and modern approaches as they are both important to me. It is an intuitive process that builds momentum over time. As I paint, I bring in new elements that add strength to the work. There are books open to bookmarked pages around my easel. There are writings on my wall. There are props and textures surrounding my workspace. It becomes a sentimental collage made up of smaller sketches, props, and paint collages. I

consider this the middle of the process where now I am in the thick of the painting process. I am interested in ways to aesthetically improve an idea and evolve as I work. I am blurring my eyes in and out of focus. I am looking for shapes to refine my drawing. I nerd out in this process and I imagine unique shapes like floating islands or continents in their orientation.

I am becoming something of a different person when I paint. It is me, but maybe I am a better version of myself. It is a future version of me, working at my best. Over time, the more I paint or participate in the act of painting, the more I am more acquainted with myself. I find that this perspective promotes my growth as an artist and person. It is like I am in this state where I just know what needs to be there—a heightened creative sensitivity. I see color and composition during these times almost in suspended animation, spinning around a person or structure. I sit patiently, peering into space, as I wait for the perfect combination to reveal itself. Right then I take a mental photograph and associate it with my emotions in the moment. This leads to new ideas and feelings attached to them. I can see the painting in a state much further along than it actually is as I did with *Hallelujah* in an early stage (2019) (Figs. 18 and 19).



Fig 18: Painting Process Photograph  
Of *Hallelujah*, 2019



Fig 19: *Hallelujah*, 2021

I paint and I feel in the process—everything I am going through in my life; every thought I had that day; every ounce of happy, mad, or sad all mixed into one. In these times emotions become louder. I begin to tear when I feel something that is right. Logic and emotions begin to work as a team. The two approaches are in a symbiotic relationship providing perpetual energy. They spin in the tide pool, they blend, they get smeared into the atmosphere of the room. The visual representation that emerges from this process is the red flower within the *Morna*. I am there, within a monster somewhere, painting. I see the next steps I need to make. In this state I am intentional. I am communicating, not only to myself but to the world around me.

When I listen to a nocturne by Frédéric Chopin, there is a different kind of human reaction that occurs. Each note is played with the precision of a skilled hand that speaks without words. The composition is practiced and practiced until it is just right. Listening, a narrative begins to form within me. The music inspires feelings that are difficult to speak about. I reflect... In one of my favorite Nocturnes, each note begins in a cluster of harmonic

scales. It is as if Chopin begins a painting himself in harmonies. I listen. There is a space between each note that is resolved with the next note to come. Chopin is using instinct and logic to produce emotion, as I do in a painting.

I paint because it is innate in me. I not only value the hours I spend, but honor every frustration, every tear, every moment of healing that comes along with it. That is where I find my identity. I sing to you with gratitude for what the process reveals.

## **CONCLUSION**

Looking back at my educational and artistic growth, there is a common theme. It is healing through a pursuit of fine art education. Where once I could not describe my art form, I now am proud of my strengths. It is a logic built on a solid foundation of intention, rather than solely on emotion. In my painting practice, I have developed new aesthetic capacities. With integrity, I can say I am a better version of myself than I was before entering the program. At LCAD I was able to develop a foundation of classical and modern methods that can ground my future as an artist. That was not an easy task as my process is unorthodox. This balance is a dance of give and take. It requires authentic love, skill, and passion. I learned to trust in the things I was taught and the people who were teaching it. I gained a capacity to adapt in my own work. I want to travel and paint to learn more about the world and myself. I have lived only in California. I plan to apply what I learn to my professional career and teach to others what I am learning.

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William Holman Hunt, *The Lady of Shalott*, c. 1888–1905, oil on canvas, 74 1/8 X 57 5/8

inches ([Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art](#))

## APPENDIX



Plate 1. Danny DeMeza, *The Metamorphosis*, c. 2018, Acrylic, 8 ft. x 12 ft.

Plate



Plate 2. Danny DeMeza, *Birth of the Protostar, Under the Umbrella of Light*, c. 2018, Oils, 30 in. x 48 in.



Plate 3. Danny DeMeza, *The Wine Glasses Stood in Place so that the Balloon Animals Appeared to be Normal*, c. 2019, Mixed Media, 18 in. x 24 in.



Plate 4. Danny DeMeza, *The Art of Listening*, 2020. Oils, 18 in. x 72 in.



Plate 5. Danny DeMeza, *Hairdresser on Fire*, c. 2020, Acrylic, 18 in. x 24 in.



Plate 6. Danny DeMeza, *Muscle Memory*, c. 2020, Oils, 36 in. x 48 in.



Plate 7. Danny DeMeza, *Hallelujah*, c. 2021, Oils, 39 in. x 54 in



Plate 8. Danny DeMeza, *Heart*, c. 2021, Oils, 30 in. x 48 in.

