

Dying for a Change



DYING FOR A CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

My thesis, *Dying for a Change*, explores the story telling of my own hero's journey that is yet to be fully completed. Through simile, I draw comparison between my work and my journey through life up to this point by reliving darker times and documenting how I've grown through them. Reflection, identifying conflict, and working toward resolution are all parts of the story. This work draws inspiration from the cross pollination between different art forms like film editing and storytelling as well as abstraction and realism. The paintings in *Dying for a Change* can be distinguished by the use of muted colored greys, dirty transparent glazes juxtaposed with clean opaque passages of paint. They can also be distinguished through the use of multiple paintings in context with one another to tell a story.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my mentors Kent Williams and David Clemons as well as everyone else who helped me along this journey.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Dain and Dolores Couch who encouraged me to pursue my education even when I didn't want to.

EPIGRAPH

*I heard mama 'n papa talkin'
I heard papa tell mama
Let that boy boogie-woogie
It's in him, and it got to come out*

-John Lee Hooker

*We have not even to risk the adventure alone for the heroes
of all time have gone before us.*

- Joseph Campbell

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DYING FOR A CHANGE

To my parents' eternal credit, I probably was not an easy kid to raise. I was headstrong—free spirited; I never liked obeying rules, and most dangerous of all, I was endlessly curious. When I was 16, I had to take a math class in summer school because I failed math during my first semester of my freshman year in high school. I failed math because all I wanted to do in any of my classes was draw. I have a vivid memory of sitting outside the school on the curb in the humid Georgia summer heat, waiting for my mom to pick me up after summer school let out. I remember sitting on that curb knowing I had no idea what the future held. In the summer of 2020, I will be the first person in my family to get a master's degree.

My thesis, *Dying for a Change*, is about the story of my life—the beginning of my hero's journey. Author and professor of literature specializing in mythology and folklore, Joseph Campbell, outlines the idea of the hero's journey as being about a departure, fulfillment, and then a return. In a series of interviews with PBS, Campbell proports that everyone is a hero on their own journey following the journeys of mythological heroes like Hercules or Theseus (Moyers). For me, this journey is about my departure to move away from my family and my figurative journey of becoming who I am today. In my story of change, my philosophy is that as we grow, we kill the person that we were. When this personal change happens, that person that we were ceases to exist. They are in a sense, dead. We are killed and reborn by our own actions. The hero's journey fits my progression as an artist because overcoming the dark times and changing my life is something that I've been dying to do.

Description

When discussing this body of work, it is clearest to describe them in the chronological order of the parts of my life to which each painting is analogous. This body of work is a simile for my life up to this point. To begin with, the sequence of these five paintings are related to the arch of a story. The first painting, *The Starting Point* (2020), establishes the subject in which change, the theme of the work, will occur with. Next, *I've Buried My Ballast* (2019), sets the tension and leads up to the conflict of the story. The painting, *The Confrontation with the Beast* (2019), then reveals the confrontation between the me and that which is causing me conflict. Then the painting, *I've Made My Peace* (2020), winds down tension from *The Confrontation* and reveals the outcome of that conflict. *The Ending Point* (2020) painting shows the change that has happened unto the subject introduced by the first painting.

The Starting Point

The first painting in the narrative is *The Starting Point* (Figure 1). This painting is based on the idea of introduction in storytelling. The introduction, also called the exposition, is characterized as “a literary device used to introduce background information about events, settings, characters, or other elements of a work to the audience or readers” (literarydevices.net). This painting that I use as my introduction is a straight on self-portrait. The painting depicts a lone figure standing in a room with a black band shirt on that says, “Suicidal Tendencies,” in white lettering. The figure stands looming, in the middle ground of the image with space surrounding him around the picture plane. The figure has long black hair, black framed glasses, and a bruised black left eye. The colors in the painting are muted and the value structure is dark.

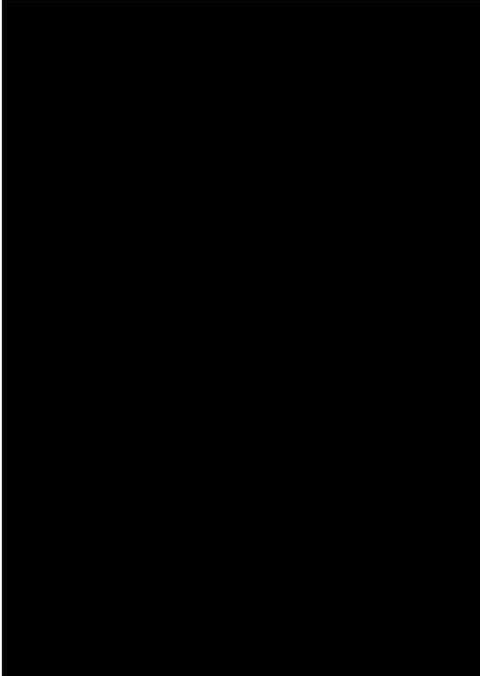


Figure 1. Jeremy Couch, *The Starting Point* (Unfinished), 2020, Oil on panel, 16 in. x 20

I used a set of dark translucent glazes around the painting to evoke shadows haunting the main character. This figure is a depiction of me as I was and how I felt. In relation to the other paintings *The Starting Point* mostly stands to set the narrative and to serve as contrast to the final painting *The Ending Point*.

In my life story, this painting is analogous to the beginning of me as an artist. *The Starting Point* establishes the character of the story that will grow and change as the story progresses. This is the lowest point for the character signified by the black eye, the dark value structure of the painting, and the grimy dirty structure of the paint handling.

I've Buried My Ballast

The next painting, *I've Buried My Ballast*, is a painting depicting a set of clothed legs laying horizontally, a little more than halfway up in the picture plane (Figure 2). The legs are cropped just below the knee, indicating that the rest of the body is laying just off to the right. Now after the introduction of the story, this painting represents the rising action of the story. In storytelling, the rising action is characterized as “a series of relevant incidents that create suspense, interest, and tension in a narrative” (literearydevices.net). This painting represents the rising action of my story by building tension through presenting a part of an incapacitated body but leaving no indication of the fate of said body lying on the floor. The dark mark making throughout the painting evoke qualities of a deteriorating photograph. The stillness of the image as well as the muted color palette of this painting work to suck the life out of the

painting and create an uneasy atmosphere. This builds tension and curiosity about the subject of the painting by leaving no indication of the incident that led to what is depicted in this painting. The right foot of the legs laying on a carpeted floor is wearing a shoe while the left foot is just wearing a sock. A discarded shoe is laying closer in the foreground to the viewer, carelessly thrown or knocked off the subject. The carpet that the legs lay on is a green-grey color while the wall is a brown-grey color. The baseboard in the background is a dirty white-grey and even the black of the shoes and the blue of the jeans are muddied with black and olive-green glazes of color sitting within the texture of the brushstrokes that make them. These dark, muted, and murky colors are used to give a murky pessimistic moodiness to the painting.



Figure 2. Jeremy Couch, *I've Buried My Ballast*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 24 in. x 30 in.

The title of this painting is taken from a lyric of a song titled *Four Winds* by American singer and songwriter Connor Oberst. A ballast is “heavy material, such as gravel, sand, iron, or lead placed low in a vessel to improve stability” (dictionary.com). If someone is burying their ballast, they are removing it from their boat making them unable to set sail again. I interpret this as metaphorically disabling your own ability to leave or run away and face the situation that you are in. This interpretation is supported by the lyric following it, altogether reading “I’ve buried my ballast, I’ve made my peace.” My painting, *I’ve Made My Peace*, is similarly the continuation of the subject from this painting, *I’ve Buried My Ballast*. I chose this title for the

painting because this painting is a simile for a dark time in my life when I had to dig my heels in the ground and work to overcome conflict in my life.



Figure 3. Jeremy Couch, *The Confrontation with the Beast*, 2019, Oil on Canvas, 48 in. x 48 in.

The Confrontation with the Beast

The largest and sequentially center piece, *The Confrontation with the Beast*, is a painting dominated by an acrid pale-yellow green horse staring directly at the viewer (Figure 3). This painting is the climax of the story and reveals the conflict of the plot. The climax of a story is characterized as the “particular point in a narrative at which the conflict or tension hits the highest point” (literarydevices.net). In the painting, the pale horse stands in the middle of and inky blue-black background and locks eyes confrontationally with the viewer. The body language of the horse is relaxed but unyielding. Although the horse is reckoning, it is importantly

not presented as an unconquerable enemy. The light illuminating only the horse, is circular, focusing on the head and midsection of the horse and fading to dark towards the edges of the painting. This lighting implies that the horse is lit by a flashlight or handheld light of some sort that someone might carry when traveling. This reads as though the horse was stumbled upon or found. Symbolically, a pale horse like the one depicted in this painting is commonly associated with death. This association is due to an excerpt in the Book of Revelations from the New Testament, in which one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Death, rides a pale horse (*The Bible, New International Version*, Revelations. 6:8). This symbolic confrontation of death is representative of the confrontation of change that I mentioned in the introduction, we kill our former selves as we grow. In an interview, Joseph Campbell describes the hero's journey by saying "a child has to die, you might say, to their infantile psyche and come back as a responsible adult" (Moyers). In my work, this symbol functions in the hero's journey, referenced in Campbell's work, as the 'Revelation' or 'The Death and Rebirth' of the hero which Campbell outlines as the centermost point of the hero's journey (Moyers). The confrontation with this symbol results in death and rebirth. It maintains a high contrast between the light shape of the horse and the deep dark background. The color palette of this painting is also much more chromatic than the others, with the horse being painted in pale yellows and greens with green blues as the shadow forms

The song *Four Winds*, which the paintings that come before and after this one reference, has within it a reference to a poem titled *The Second Coming*. The refrain from *Four Winds* has a line that ends with the words "slouching towards Bethlehem" which is a line taken from the poem *The Second Coming* by Irish Poet W.B. Yeats. The Second Coming as well as the Four

Horsemen of the apocalypse, of which this painting derives its symbolism from, are both described in the Book of Revelation found in the Bible's New Testament.

I've Made My Peace

To the right of the central horse painting is a painting of my upper body, continuing across from the legs of the painting *I've Buried My Ballast*, is the fourth painting in the sequence, *I've Made My Peace* (Figure 4). This painting represents the falling action of the story plot. The falling action of a story is characterized as “the section in a story that occurs right after the climax and is when the main problem resolves” (literarydevices.net). This painting came about to balance and fill out the story as an answer to the tension built up in, *I've Buried My Ballast*.

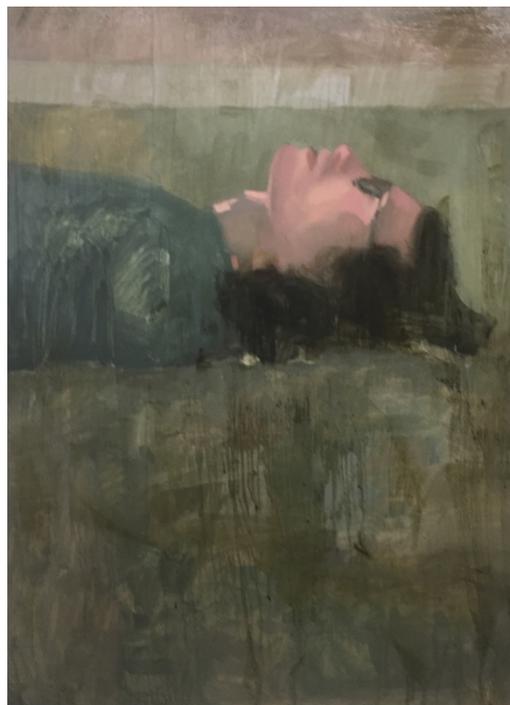


Figure 4. Jeremy Couch, *I've Made My Peace* (unfinished), 2020, 24 in. x 30 in.

Although this painting returns to somewhat muted colors of previous paintings, these colors feel calmer. Here there are cleaner and less gritty passages of paint and the use of paint glazes is less visible when compared to *I've Buried My Ballast*. In this painting my upper body, continued from the legs in *I've Buried My Ballast*, is laying down with no tell-tale signs of struggle or fight. The body sits, face up laying on the carpeted grey-green floor. The worst fears of what might be found as a result of the confrontation are left ambiguous. However, the less murky colors, cleaner passages of paint and flesh tones indicate optimism and lively when compared to the dark murky, highly muted painting in *I've Buried My Ballast*.

The title, *I've Made My Peace*, comes from the song *Four Winds* by Connor Oberst and is the second half of the lyric “I’ve buried my ballast, I’ve made my peace.” I’ve chosen this title because the interpretation of the line altogether signifies an acceptance of the situation that needs to be faced.

The Ending Point

The Ending Point is the final painting in the arrangement (Figure 5). This painting was started based on the idea of resolution in storytelling, “in which the conflict presented in the climax is resolved” (literarydevices.net). However, this story, and this journey is still ongoing. It was made as a piece that represents the end of this period in time for me and the beginning of the rest of my life. The painting in comparison to *The Starting Point*, is of a self-portrait that takes up most of the foreground.

Although the painting is not colorful, the tones of color are much lighter than the first painting. The figure occupies the same location as the figure in the first painting. Lighter in value scale and having less muddled passages of color, this painting is an optimistic bookend to the dark pessimistic painting of *The Starting Point*. Instead of dramatically ending with a resolution to the story, this painting really just serves to document the most present moment where the story currently is. Although this is the ‘ending point’ for the story that I’m telling through these paintings, it is really just a resting point in my life.

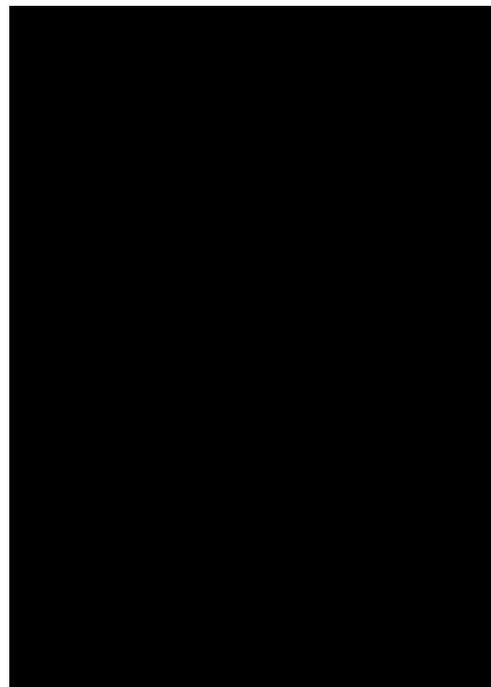


Figure 5. Jeremy Couch, *The Ending Point* (Unfinished), 2020, Oil on panel, 16 in. x 20 in.

Research

My work focuses on the traditional medium of oil painting but borrows structure, form, and inspiration from contemporary storytelling and sources such as film. The most impactful art for me has been work that conveys an interesting narrative. As I began this thesis, I was working to structure paintings with things that I had borrowed from films or film analysis. I realized later that the thing that I was actually interested in was the storytelling. So, towards the end of the thesis the research shifted from film to storytelling. As I researched more and improved as a painter these inspirations shifted, however, notable elements remained and informed the work.

Film

One of my main introductions to visual arts that I had was film and tv entertainment. While growing up, my accessibility to art was scarce. From my early stages as an artist up until now, television has informed and curated my visual and storytelling preferences. When looking for a starting place to draw inspiration from for both my research and my work, film was the obvious place for me to begin.

Some of the most informative research I did for my work was into the art of the film editing process. This research is used most notably to inform the sequencing and planning of the three paintings *I've Buried My Ballast*, *Confrontation with the Beast*, and *I've Made My Peace*. While working on these pieces I stumbled on a film editing theory called "The Kuleshov Effect." Named for its founder, Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov, The Kuleshov Effect is "a phenomenon by which viewers derive more meaning from the interaction of two sequential shots than from a single shot in isolation" (studiobinder.com). This idea can be applied to paintings because, much like a series of shots in film, the way a series of paintings relate to one another in a body of work tells a more informative story than each painting could individually. I applied this idea to my

three paintings, *I've Buried My Ballast*, *Confrontation with the Beast*, and *I've Made My Peace* (Figure 6). I applied this idea by separating a single horizontal figure laying on its back into two paintings, in *I've Buried My Ballast* and *I've Made My Peace*. Then inserting a third, seemingly unrelated, painting in-between the two, *Confrontation with the Beast*. This encourages the



Figure 6. Jeremy Couch, Center three paintings grouping, 2020, Oil on canvas, 84 in. x 48 in.

connection of the two similar paintings while prompting the viewer to investigate themselves the reason for the painting's placement.

In a 1964 interview with Canadian actor Fletcher Markle, English film director Alfred Hitchcock goes on to explain the impact of *The Kuleshov Effect* on film (Hitchcock). In the interview Hitchcock describes

“what film can do” by presenting two small montages (Figure 8). The first starts with an old man looking towards the camera, the next shot is of a woman with a child, then the



Figure 7. Hitchcock's interpretation of the Kuleshov Effect film stills, 1964.

shot returns to the old man and he smiles. Hitchcock explains that this man could now be seen by the viewer as kind, or sympathetic. In the second montage Hitchcock presents the same old man looking, however the next shot is now of a woman in a bikini, the shot again returns to the old man and he smiles. Hitchcock now explains that the man could be viewed as a creepy old man. Although in my work I am using the association of the paintings next to one another in a single sequence, this interview made the effect easier to understand and has given me inspiration on how to continue this work in the future.

In my research I use mostly film theory, however, one specific film that did become a jumping off point for my work was the 2007 *Blade Runner - The Director's Cut*. This film impacted my work both narratively and aesthetically. In the movie a police officer Rick Deckard, who is specifically issued to kill robots who look like humans is struggling with his own humanity. The film establishes early on that replicants can have implanted dreams and memories that make them feel human. During the movie Deckard has a dream about a unicorn running in a forest. As the movie progresses another character, known as Gaff, folds a piece of origami that is symbolic of what is going on at the different plot points of the movie. At the end, Deckard finds an origami unicorn inside his apartment. It is left purposely ambiguous in the film, but the implication seems to be that Deckard is a replicant due to Gaff knowing what Deckard's dream was.

I created my painting, *The Confrontation with the Beast*, inspired by the dream sequence from the 2007 *Blade Runner - The Director's Cut*. Initially, I just really loved this scene from the movie and wanted to find a way to replicate it in some capacity in a painting. The horse that appears in this painting was inspired by the scene in which the unicorn appears in Deckard's dream. The color palette of this painting is inspired by the colors in the film; saturated, moody,

and dark. Using the principle proposed by *The Kuleshov Effect*, I composed this series of paintings in order to emulate something that might be equitable to a dream sequence in film. First one shot of the subject having the dream, *I've Buried My Ballast*. Then a shot of what the dream is, *Confrontation with the Beast*. Then a shot back to the person who was having the dream and their reaction, *I've Made My Peace*.

Another film editing technique that I studied in my research is pacing in film. In film, pacing is the timing of cuts in an edit. It is comprised of four parts: pattern, symmetry, flow, and timing (Hockrow 101). The parts I found most relevant to my work of these four elements are pattern and symmetry. "Pattern is the reoccurring style that mirrors itself in key moments that require closer viewer attention" (Hockrow 105). Symmetry refers to the overall mirrored arcs of a story, for example, the rising action is a reflection of the falling action (Hockrow 106). This helped inform, most notably, the number of pieces, the organization, and the sizes that I finally determined for this work. For instance, the sizes of these paintings mimic the building of tension within the story by getting larger in size. The paintings after the largest painting and the climax of the story, *The Confrontation with the Beast*, begin decreasing in size again as the tension of the plot winds down. This size organization not only emphasizes the importance of the climax, but it also mimics the rising and falling action of the plot.

Story telling

My main inspiration for research into story telling were the analytical structure of German novelist Gustav Freytag as well as the works and interviews of American author and literature professor Joseph Campbell. It might not seem complex, mapping out a story can be tricky. Although the overall structure that I based my work on is the narrative pyramid outlined by Freytag, I drew inspiration for development and meaning from Campbell's hero's journey.

When I knew that I wanted to have a narrative to this body of work I began researching ways to set up that narrative to best tell my story. Freytag's Pyramid, a simple narrative structure outlined by the analysis of works of literature, was my initial starting point. Through analysis, novelist Gustav Freytag found similar plot elements within a variety of stories and began mapping these elements out. The outline of Freytag's Pyramid can be visualized by imaging a triangle in which the lower left corner is the starting point and the lower right corner is the ending point. The lower left corner of the pyramid represents the introduction, the highest point represents the climax, and the lower right corner represents the resolution to the story. The side of the pyramid between the introduction and the climax represents the rising action and the side between the climax and the resolution represents the falling action. Mimicking these five elements was one of the ways I curated and structured the number of works in this thesis and what the content within these paintings should be in order to progress the story.

Another resource to my research into storytelling and how to use it in my paintings was the work of Joseph Campbell. Campbell's work, focusing primarily on mythological storytelling archetypes, outlines mythological storytelling structures in detail. Most notably to Campbell's work is his description of the hero's journey. Generally, the hero's journey has three basic components: a departure, a fulfillment, and a return. I used this research to help guide me in creating what exactly I wanted to say with my story. Although the idea of a hero's journey sounds grandiose, at the beginning of the interview series with Joseph Campbell, Bill Moyer summarizes Campbell's position by stating:

“Campbell believed that the most heroic of all act is the courage to discover who you are and what you would like to be. To slay the savage dragon of the ego and to follow your bliss to the truth of your life” (Moyer).

In my own hero's journey, my departure was moving away from the life that I knew in order to chase my dreams of simply being a better painter and discover who I am. My fulfillment was becoming a better painter by leaps and bounds while working on this body of work. My return in whatever sense of the word, whether that be figurative or literal, is yet to be finished. Maybe I will always be on this journey. Freytag's Pyramid gave structure to the paintings while Campbell's hero's journey gave the paintings meaning. Together, these two sources helped me to understand what moments were important to capture and where to work them into the story.

Methodology

A general run down of my current working process would begin with a smooth painting surface. A couple of layers of white acrylic gesso on a wooden panel that I've made is my preferred substrate. I prime a handful of these surfaces at the same time so that I can work on multiple paintings at once. I usually have several of these newly primed surfaces around so that, at the end of a painting session, I can mash any excess paint onto them in order to help me overcome their pristine white surface. This helps to start later paintings on these canvases by having a buildup of paint that I can react to and by 'ruining' the intimidation that a pristine white surface can have. When I start a painting, I will usually do a simple line drawing of the subject to scale and then transfer it onto the canvas. This allows me to move the placement of drawing around as much as I want and preserve any paint layers that I have already worked onto the surface. I then block in as much of the main colors and values of this image as I can using paint mixed with a cobalt drier. Cobalt drier in oil paint accelerates dry time and allows a fair amount of texture to remain in the brushstroke when applying paint to canvas with a stiff bristle brush. After I am done blocking in as much as I feel is satisfactory, I mash any excess paint onto a nearby canvas for a future painting.

The next day the block-in layer will be dry (typical dry time is 4-5 hours due to the addition of cobalt dryer). What I first like to do is unify the painting with a glaze of a translucent dark (usually olive green) over the entire painting. This glaze is made up of a dab of paint diluted with odorless mineral spirits. Glazing like this helps to unify the colors of a painting and visually deepen the physical texture of the paint because this thin glaze will easily sit in the low points of texture left by the brushstrokes from the day before. I came about with this method from guidance from my mentor, Kent Williams, and through experimentation of my own. This thin glaze dries in about 30 minutes to 1 hour.

While waiting for the glaze to dry I usually mix up a couple of piles of appropriate color. First, I mix up a large amount of the background color. For paintings like *The Rising Action* and *The Falling Action*, I mixed up and enough grey to fill a 150ml paint tube. This was so I wouldn't have to continue mixing this grey if I ran out and so I could maintain a consistent grey if that's what I decided I wanted. Then I'll mix a dark color based on the main subject of the painting, I generally like to make a large mixture of this too because a little bit of it will usually end up in all my other mixtures. Next I pick out the main colors and values of the subject, I aim for about 5 additional piles before I jump into the painting. I also tend to try to make note of the general colors and amounts I used for each mixture.

When the thin glaze dries, I begin working on painting the subject from dark to light. I mix in a little bit of medium, either Liquin™ or Galkyd™, into the paint with my brush. This gives the paint a smoother consistency and accelerates dry time (usually anywhere between 8-12 hours depending on the environment). I do this by taking a little dab of paint from the pile and a little dab of medium and stir them together next to the pile of paint. I do this on a small scale and not with the entire pile so that the next morning when I go back into this painting, I still have the

larger piles of paint left undried that I can use again. I prefer to start by painting my darks and have the next sequential lighter colors overlap each previous layer a little. I like the way this allows the darks to be the deepest physical paint layer because every additional paint layer is stacked on top of the last.

I allow the previous layer to dry overnight and in the morning the next day I begin by glazing just like I had done the previous day but this time I glaze more selectively. Usually this means that I only glaze the area that I painted the day before and not the whole canvas. In the case of my painting *The Confrontation with the Beast*, I glazed the whole painting multiple times with the Prussian blue that I used as the background color in order to make sure the colors were all harmonious. In the case of the paintings *I've Buried My Ballast* and *I've Made My Peace*, I glazed the paintings to harmonize them and for the sake of having more interesting paint texture in the areas that were predominantly one color. After this glaze I look at my source material and try to pick up on any subtle colors that I hadn't mixed the previous day. As a rule, if I see a slight shift in color on the subject, I try to exaggerate it with paint. The rest of this process repeats itself trying to refine the subject more and more with each new pass.

The last refining layer are usually preceded by some kind of abstraction or disturbance. In the painting *The Confrontation with the Beast*, I flung paint at the canvas that had been mixed up with copious amounts of medium to make the paint less viscous. After the paint splattered across the canvas, I would scrape it away or move it around with a rubber spatula or squeegee. In a painting like *I've Made My Peace*, I drew on the surface of the painting outlining or refining certain areas with a color pencil designed to draw on plastic, metal, and glass. I then painted over these areas, trying to leave as much of the colored pencil as possible while also addressing and fixing any areas that might be problematic. and repeated my previous steps of refining an image.

Troubleshooting

Conceptually, I see my process of trouble shooting a painting as the guiding structure of my methodology. My troubleshooting process is filtered through a series of ‘logic gates.’ They are a set of rules that I put in place so that I can know when I am achieving what I have set to work on. I think of these gates like doors to a room. One long hallway runs through the center of these rooms and, when working, I am traveling through that hallway to go through each room. Each doorway is a threshold that yields when certain criteria are met. I have included a simple diagram for my troubleshooting process as reference (Figure. 8). A general rule that I have concerning the advancement through this ‘hallway’ is that the logic gate tends to be pretty rigid, however, the solution to that threshold is extremely flexible for each piece.

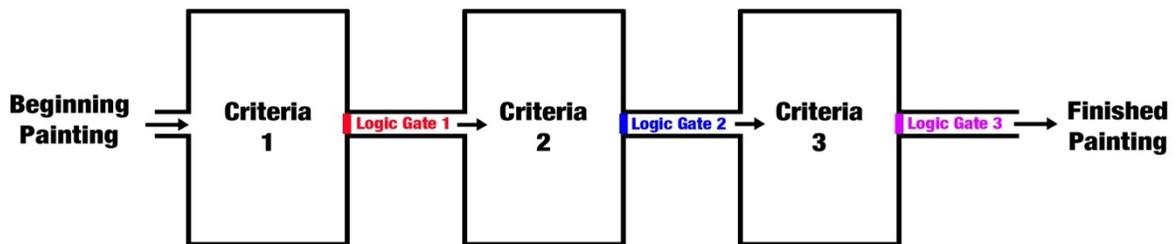


Figure 8. Logic Gate Visual Model, 2020

The general way that I use this process to gauge how a piece is going is simply to ask myself: *Does the piece match the criteria to move through the logic gate onto the next criteria?* If yes, then the gate is opened, and the work moves to the next room. If no, then I attempt to find the root of the problem that prevents the criteria from being met by asking myself questions in order to distill what is going wrong. Usually if a work advances from Criteria 1 to Criteria 2 through Logic Gate 1, the work does not return to Criteria 1. Occasionally though, when meeting the next criteria, a work will change in a way that I wasn't expecting. This will change the

previous criteria and the work will have to go back through the previous criteria and logic gate to be adjusted.

In all my current paintings I am talking about myself and my experiences in regard to emotion up to the present time. The logic gate is the 'what' the criteria is the 'how.' For the purpose of simplifying this explanation I have assigned each gate a number. However, each painting in this body of work did not necessarily start in the same place of the path as the other works, nor did they necessarily work sequentially from the first gate to the third gate. For this body of work, the logic gates that I focus on are 1. The narrative of how each painting fits into the overall story, 2. The paint handling of each individual painting, and 3. How the title that helps set the painting and make it flow in this body of work.

Narrative

First and foremost, this is the most important gate for determining the success of the painting in this body of work. When beginning this body of work, I already knew what I wanted the narrative arch to be, my own coming of age story. For this first logic gate, the narrative that I wanted to portray was the time from the memory that I have of sitting on the curb after summer school not knowing where the future would take me to the present time where I live in California and am finishing my Masters of Fine Arts. For this narrative logic gate, I knew beforehand what I wanted as my story, but I didn't know exactly how each painting would look in order to illustrate that. Each painting had to work together in a narrative, so satisfying the criteria for this gate was more complex than the others. For example, at a later stage in this work I had the body of the narrative painted and realized that the work would benefit from a way leading into that narrative. I used the simple dramatic structure that the paintings get their names from, and then based the last two paintings in my thesis, *The Starting Point* and *The Ending Point*, off of the

parts of that structure that needed to be fulfilled. The first part of this structure is to establish the main character so that the audience knows who to follow along with. I knew that the overall narrative would be about my hero's journey, so I needed to depict the self-portrait of myself as I was or as I felt. These criteria had to be met in order for this painting to fit in the narrative.

Paint Handling

For the second logic gate, I seek to use the paint handling to modify the surface of a canvas in ways that I find satisfying outside solely how those the marks come together to form an image. One of the main questions I ask myself at this stage is "How can I use the vocabulary of mark making to create a work that exists in the paint in a way that it could not exist anywhere else?" When I was in my undergraduate program, I was talking to one of my teachers who was not a painter. She told me how when she was going to school for her Master of Fine Arts her teachers challenged her by asking her "why was she painting?" She said she realized the more she thought about it the more she didn't have an answer, she had no tie to the medium and it wasn't important to what she wanted to say as an artist. So, she reinvented her art practice and stopped painting. I realized when she told me that story what it meant to love a medium, and I love painting. When used correctly every brush stroke is a captured moment. All the thick texture is a deliberate choice built up. Painting reeks of the artist. Every mark, every stroke, is evidence of a choice and a process. Brushstrokes are the visual record of practice and struggle and triumph. The technical process that I go through pivots on the paint handling being satisfying to me. The clearest test for whether or not the paint handling is satisfying is if the mark making and three-dimensional qualities of paint create a piece of art that exists in paint in a way that it could not exist in any other medium.

Titling

Titles are very important to my work and I find are often an underutilized element of a piece of art. When working through this final logic gate I ask myself questions like: How can I use titles to inform the viewer How can a title lend more to a painting than an obvious description of what is already painted? Generally, this is always the last stage that a painting will go through before it is finished. Initially I intended for the paintings *I've Buried My Ballast*, *Confrontation with the Beast*, and *I've Made My Peace* to all be grouped together under one title. Previously, I was planning to call this grouping *Act II: Confrontation with the Beast*. Although I still like this title and idea, however I thought it would be much more helpful to the viewer to title the paintings with the name of the part of plot structure that they represent. This would allow the titles to give additional information, instead of just a description of what is in the painting, while also helping the viewer follow the narrative. To follow dramatic story line structure the other paintings fell in line with this too, mapping out the literal narrative with their titles. This changed again however, and I gave the five paintings the five separate names that they have now. This was largely because I felt that naming the paintings by the part of the plot structure, they represented felt a too close to just number them in order.

Conclusion

My thesis body of work has been a cathartic exploration of personal growth and change. My paintings are reflections of my life, telling my story through my own hero's journey. When I began this journey, I was wide eyed and still coming into who I was as an adult and as an artist. Although I am still growing both as an adult and as an artist, the progress that I have made thus far warms my heart. I think back to a time in my life when things didn't feel quite so hopeful for me and truly appreciate how far I've come. Now going into the next chapter of my life and art I

am ready for the next adventure that awaits. Within my story, my philosophy has been that as we grow, as we change, we kill the person that we were. Through this we are able to overcome who we were and what was holding us back, our inner conflict. Before this work I was dying for a change in my life, now I'm just looking forward to the next adventure.

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APPENDIX

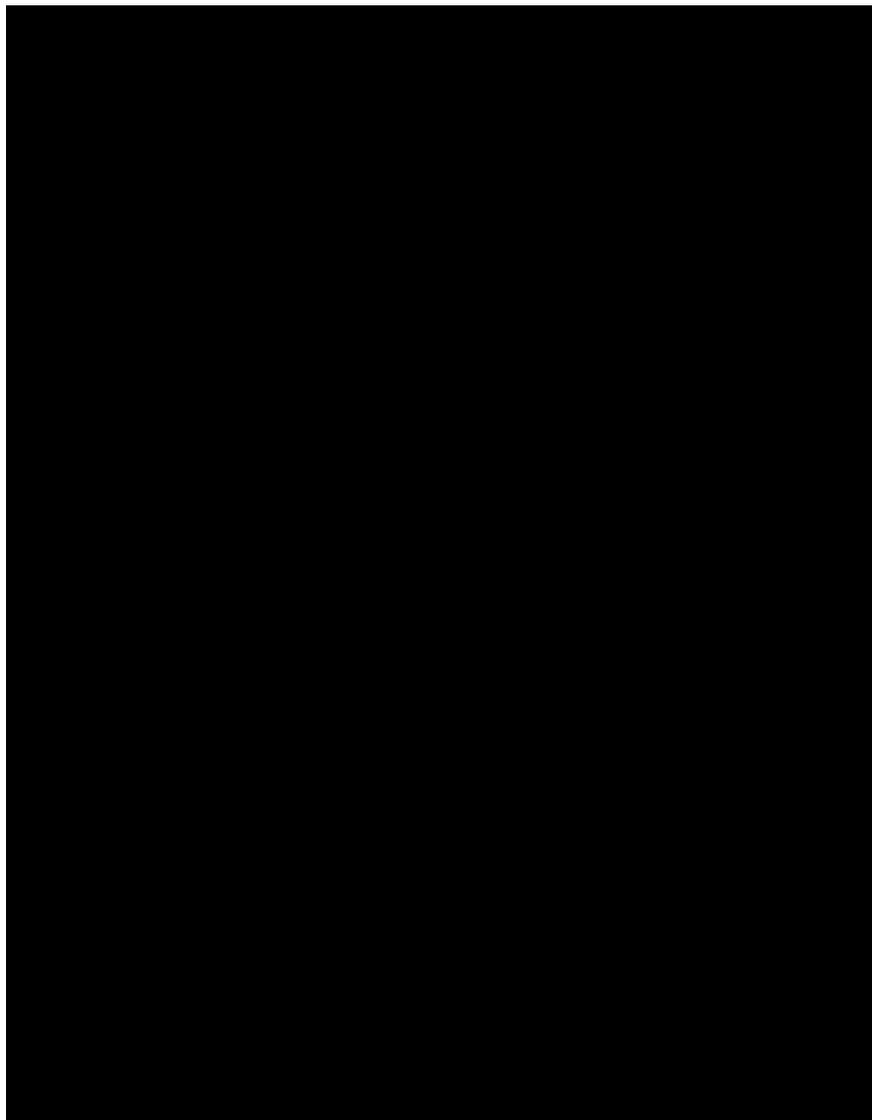


Plate 1. Jeremy Couch, *The Starting Point*, 2020, oil on canvas, 16 in. x 20 in.



Plate 2. Jeremy Couch, *I've Buried My Ballast*, 2019, oil on canvas, 24 in. x 30 in.



Plate 3. Jeremy Couch, *Confrontation with the Beast*, 2019, oil on canvas, 48 in. x 48 in.



Plate 4. Jeremy Couch, *I've Made My Peace*, 2020, oil on canvas, 24 in. x 30 in.



Plate 5. Jeremy Couch, *The Ending Point*, 2020, oil on canvas, 16 in. x 20 in.