

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS
Thadius J. Taylor



SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Laguna College of Art & Design

by

THADIUS J. TAYLOR

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

May 2020

Laguna College of Art and Design
Master of Fine Arts Thesis Approval

Signature Page

Title of Thesis: Searching for Answers

MFA Candidate: _____
Thadius J. Taylor

Thesis Advisor: _____
Rachel Smith, Ed.D

MFA Program Chair: _____
Peter Zokosky

Dean of MFA Program: _____
Hélène Garrison PhD, Provost

LCAD President: _____
Jonathan Burke

Date Approved: _____

©2020 by Thadius Taylor

No part of this work can be reproduced without permission except as indicated by the “Fair Use” clause of the copyright law. Passages, images, or ideas taken from this work must be properly credited in any written or published materials.

ABSTRACT

Inquiry breeds creation. As a painter, I tend to ask too many questions for my own good –this is how I develop concepts for my paintings. I question what the norm might be, and I question the rules of picture-making while also questioning my own artistic values and why they might be important. This line of questioning leads to new ideas and alternative ways for me to consider what *painting* is and what potential it has. Throughout *Searching for Answers*, I have been using collage as a catalyst, to ask more in-depth questions out of my work. I am engaging in multiple dialogues within each painting through the use of collage. I can push and pull with elements compositionally and also on the physical surface of the painting. As each painting is created, it develops new branches in my search for answers. There are a number of *why* questions that I ask in the ideation phase of my painting. But this line of inquiry has led to me digging deeper into why I create paintings and what I want to say.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge my mentor, Timothy Robert Smith, for spending these two years showing me that my crazy ideas are not as crazy or daunting as they might seem. I would also like to thank everyone that has ever chimed in and given me their opinion about the work I was doing. No matter how small the opinion, you helped me make these paintings possible.

DEDICATION

To my grandfather, Percy “Poppy” Taylor (1942-2013).

EPIGRAPH

When I am halfway there with a painting, it can occasionally be thrilling... But it happens very rarely; usually it's agony... I go to great pains to mask the agony. But the struggle is there. It's the invisible enemy.
- Richard Diebenkorn

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES	IX
TABLE OF PLATES	X
SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS.....	11
DESCRIPTION.....	12
RESEARCH.....	21
METHODS	32
CONCLUSION.....	40
WORKS CITED	42
APPENDIX A.....	44
APPENDIX B	51
ARTIST'S NOTE	56

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	<i>Experiment No. 1</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2019	12
FIGURE 2	<i>Presumption</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2019	15
FIGURE 3	<i>Jump</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2020	17
FIGURE 4	<i>Watching</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2020	19
FIGURE 5	<i>Self Portrait in interior</i> , Sangram Majumdar, 2011	24
FIGURE 6	<i>La Cena (The Dinner)</i> , Antonio Lopez Garcia, 1971-80	26
FIGURE 7	<i>Seated Woman</i> , Richard Diebenkorn, 1940	27
FIGURE 8	<i>Seated Woman</i> , Willem De Kooning, 1940	28
FIGURE 9	<i>Christopher Isherwood</i> , David Hockney, 1983	30
FIGURE 10	<i>Experiment No. 1-Portrait A</i> , 2018	34
FIGURE 11	<i>Experiment No. 1-Portrait B</i> , 2018	34
FIGURE 12	<i>Progress shot-Presumption B</i> , 2019	38

TABLE OF PLATES

PLATE 1	<i>Experiment No. 1</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2019	44
PLATE 2	<i>Presumption</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2019	45
PLATE 3	<i>Jump</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2020	46
PLATE 4	<i>Watching</i> , Thadius Taylor, 2020	47
PLATE 5	<i>Converging Lines</i> , Thadius Taylor 2020	48
PLATE 6	<i>Double Self-Portrait</i> , Thadius Taylor 2020	49
PLATE 7	<i>Shy Tiger</i> , Thadius Taylor 2020	50

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

Searching for Answers is the aftermath of my investigations through a battleground of questions. My ideation phase often starts with the question –*What if?* Complex and straightforward questions are the mechanism that I use to keep pushing myself into a new exploration of my work. In my body of thesis work, I primarily asked myself: *How might perceptual space be intertwined? How might the viewers' preconceived notions be challenged?* In that way, the act of painting is problem-solving for me. The questions that were mentioned above gained momentum in my creative process after I decided to utilize collage in my paintings. I wanted to implement collage in order to create a dynamic surface texture in my paintings. From there, I realized the potential of having multiple paintings cut up and combined into one.

My realization led to asking more profound questions about what a painting could be about. I, then, began to engage dialogue around the concepts of identity and duality, more specifically, the duality of subjects and spaces. Subjects are the figures in my paintings, and spaces are the environment that they occupy. By creating using multiple paintings, I have the opportunity to interact with many problems at once. I can, then, begin to look at ideas from different angles. By arranging multiple paintings over one another, I create a collage of different scenarios that are fragmented. This fragmentation scatters the viewers' eye, and it is their job to put together all the pieces to find the conversations with duality, that I develop within the painting. I am not expecting them to come to the answers that are in line with mine, but for them to have a memorable conversation after spending time with my paintings.

Description

As I create new paintings, I come up with more questions like – *Why am I still searching for more answers? Why am I trying to push the language of my paintings further?* I think that art and its creator should be in a constant search for new possibilities for what a painting can potentially be. For me, as a painter, I am continually trying to expand the conversation between my audiences and my work.

My first attempt at using collage to further the conversation of my paintings was *Experiment No. 1* (2019) (Figure 1). In this painting, I present to the viewer two different portraits of the same individual, which happens to be myself. Since my subject is duality, I

started by making two self-portraits. Both paintings were cut up and pieces were collaged one on top of the other. The two portraits have opposite lighting scenarios. The first portrait is illuminated by incandescent light bulbs. The incandescent lighting infuses everything with a yellowing orange glow. The second portrait is painted under natural light from a small window me, giving the entire painting a dark, cool feeling that rivals the yellowish



Fig 1. Thadius Taylor, *Experiment No.1*, 2019, Oil on Paper, 16x12in, Private Collection.

tone of the first portrait. The two lighting scenarios juxtapose the different color tones, reminding the viewer that a unified whole can come from divergent parts.

Originally, I was inspired by the varying drastic lighting that comes into my studio throughout the day. My studio is often filled with an abundance of electric lights from the eight light bulbs mounted on the ceiling. It creates an artificial yellow/ orange tint. I am exploring a conversation and confrontation with traditional portrait painting and the use of natural north-facing light. One contention is that paintings can be just as good if made with the technology of the twenty-first century. In this case, light bulbs and the presence they radiate.

While I painted the first portrait with the yellowish glow of the incandescent light bulbs, in the next painting, I wanted to expose myself to the opposite by having the lights off. With that, my studio is darker and cooler in lighting temperature. There is only one small window that lets sunlight in. All of the others are blocked off with blankets by the previous occupants. This lighting scenario gave off an almost silhouette version of myself as I had my back towards the window. This is in contrast to the electrified illumination that is engulfing my face in the first painting.

These two different lighting scenarios affect the amount of details being captured in each painting. One of the paintings has more information in it compared to the other, the lighting of the first painting allowed for more details to be rendered onto my face. Compared to the back lit natural light painting which was left vaguer because of the lack of light hitting the form across my face. which increases the complexity that I want within my paintings when they are being collaged together. Also, the backgrounds are different color temperatures of the same white wall behind me. As so, when these pieces are collaged together, they have a sense of push and pull. Selectively amplifying and diminishing the

elements back and forth throughout the painting help reminding the viewer that they are looking at two separate paintings and two separate scenarios.

Although both of the portraits that I used in *Experiment No. 1* are relatively flat in their representation of space. I wanted to play with a few visual elements helping facilitate the illusion of space being manipulated in different ways. Placement of elements can be subtle in execution but significant to the viewers in the way they move their eyes through the paintings. Cutting pieces of one painting into a direction that fights the original paintings idea of perspective and pasting one portrait over the top of the other gives an illusion of it coming forward in space. Moreover, layering parts of the painting forms a separation of space between them. Thus, the picture plane has a forward and backward fight for position in the painting.

The collaged fragments in this painting allowed me to interlock the painting together, creating a sense of depth as well as discombobulation. Discombobulation comes from areas like the offset ear, as well as the placement of the dark painted collar on my shirt and neck. They both are intertwined but not connected to the "correct" painting. I also painted on top of collaged elements after they got pasted together in order to further push the space and help smooth out some edges in the painting, caused by the inherent sharpness of paper cutouts. I want instances of sharp edges but not to overpower the overall visual appearance of the painting. I recognized the need to balance the disruption and integration.

I realized that *Experiment No. 1* had successfully met the criteria that I hold for a successful painting; it contains interesting surface quality while challenges the viewer in some manners. Notes of experimental color throughout the painting and a composition that do not follow the traditional notion of painting, contributes to making the painting a success.

After feeling satisfied with that painting, I asked myself, *where do I go from here?* I decided that the next painting had to be larger with a full-body figure, and it would also deal with the duality of an individual's personality. In the painting *Presumption* (2019), I went on to explore that challenge (Figure 2).



Fig 2. Thadius Taylor, *Presumption*, 2020, Oil on Paper, 48x32in, Private Collection.

Having the ability to join two paintings together creates a potential for unifying two divergent perspectives. Those perspectives can be as physical as space or as conceptual as the multiple identities that someone might have. For the painting *Presumption*, I wanted to capture the different personalities of my close friend – Ed. He grew up in a rough neighborhood surrounded by gang culture, that influenced his rough and tough appearance. When people see him, they make a presumption that he can be a gang member, although he is not. Once I

strike up a conversation with Ed, I learned he is the nicest and goofiest person in the room.

In this painting, I played with the duality of personality by showing the audience both sides of him – the first tough impression of his outer shell and the actual warm person of his inner self. I placed them both on the picture plane at the same time and gave them equal

opportunities to be showcased. This challenges the viewer, to deal with their own prejudice and preconceived notions of whom this person really is. The facial expressions that Ed makes are the focal points of this painting. The other visual elements in the painting are arranged in a way that drives the viewers' gaze towards his eyes.

Working in a large format helps give this painting Ed's presence in a room. The scale makes him almost life-size and confrontational. It gives the figures in the painting stature and emphasis. Ed is not fighting with any other figure in the painting beside himself, so his placement holds a lot of weight in the composition. At the scale that I painted him; it also gave me plenty of room to play with large fragments of collage. I pushed abstraction and flatness throughout the painting while maintaining that Ed is the most important element. Building up the collage allowed me to play with the background and foreground of the painting as I let them interlock and exist in the same space. Adding to the notion of duality, finished sections are contrasted with areas left deliberately unfinished.

Presumption helped me answer questions about the potential of elements like space, scale, and multiple personalities in my paintings. It challenged me in thinking larger and broader when it came to designing graphic shapes and compositions. It helped create the basis for paintings about an individual's identity, and as a result, leading to a search for something deeper than surface appearance of an individual. After painting *Presumption*, I began to ask more questions: *What is my definition for a portrait? What is the minimal information that I can give to the viewer for a painting to be considered a portrait? How can I look within and capture my personality with paint?*

In my painting *Jump: You will find out how to unfold your wings as you fall* (2020); I began to answer questions on self-identity while confronting the traditions of portrait painting (Figure 3). In this painting, I am introducing a new challenge to myself in dealing with interior versus exterior spaces. The inspiration for this painting came from questioning myself about, what a portrait could be. In traditional portrait paintings, the figures are facing the viewers either straight on or at three-quarters view, and



Fig 3. Thadius Taylor, *Jump: You will find out how to unfold your wings as you fall*, 2020, Oil on paper, 50x35in, Private Collection.

in my paintings, I am essentially following the same rules. As so, I began to wonder if a portrait could be painted from the rear view where the figure's face was not pointing toward the audience.

When the viewer is looking at the painting *Jump*, they are presented with two figures. One figure is sitting in a chair, facing away from the viewer, looking into the abyss of an empty wall. This figure is me sitting inside my studio. This space is where a lot of the contemplations of life happens, where crippling anxiety and depression get the best of me and feeling unmotivated to work. Though this is also the space, where I make discoveries and do the thing I love, making paintings. So, this space has its own duality with me and my mental health. The other figure is placed above the first one as he jumps into the picture

plane. The read of his pose can either be falling or jumping as he is on the outside of my studio, specifically the roof. The environments of the two portraits are torn and pasted together in order to create a conversation of the duality of space. Where you have in exterior, you inherently have an interior. The flat interior is constantly fighting for attention against the busy exterior.

These self-portraits are developed in this way because I have questioned myself, *why does the tradition of portraiture painting revolve around the representation of a face? Why can it not be a body part? Why can it not just be a foot?* Those questions were answered the second portrait of this painting, a fragment of myself jumping off the roof. The main subject of that portrait was my feet. I gave the viewers only that amount of information to see if it could pass as being a portrait of someone. To me, clothes and fashion are so individual; you can usually recognize a person from a hundred yards away through the way they dress.

The arrangement of the figures in *Jump*, created a sense of a looping film roll. In a way, the viewers are getting a full figure in the painting. However, in reality, the figure was cut from different scenarios, looping from the interior setting to the exterior setting. This looping helps the viewer identify that both bodies are from the same individual in two different spaces at two different times. The different spaces are metaphors for my mental state. The interior space is the more secluded state of my inner thoughts. The thoughts that I keep to myself like depression, anxiety, and my crippling lack of motivation. The exterior space is my personality when free from those thoughts, and I want to jump into doing the work and forgetting those feelings. Additionally, it also can be my outer shell that I use to hide those internal struggles from the world.

Upon completion, the two portraits in interior and the exterior settings, were cut and torn apart, by me, to be combined into one. The collage portion of this painting is about the confusion in my head when thinking between the two mental states – my depression while facing a problem, mixed with the desire to jump into a solution. There is a cycle to my internal logic, as well as the order in the collage. My brain is usually one way or the other, just like the scenes are heavy arranged on either side, while still being disjointed. Therefore, my satisfaction with *Jump*, is the validation for me to further explore the potential of collaging inside and outside spaces together. Moving forward, I wanted to see how far I could merge the two environments. When I think of environment and space, I think of perspective and depth, that are lacking in my paintings at that moment. Because of that, I looked for scenarios where I could better convey that.

In my painting *Watching* (2020), the viewer is confronted with two paintings collaged together of different spaces – an exterior and an interior (Figure 4). Both are scenes of my son Max going through his own everyday adventures – playing outdoor and inside in the tub with his toys. For a while, I have wanted to make another painting of my son, Max. I have been painting about his growth since he was a baby and how he



Fig 4. Thadius Taylor, *Watching*, 2020, Oil on Paper, 50x33in, Private Collection.

navigates the world all through his eyes. He is at the age where he loves to discover the world independently, but as a parent, I still have to keep my eye on him. In both paintings, the viewer is placed at my point of view while watching Max. I am forcing them to take my position as the observer and gaze at him. I want them to feel like they are intruding into his time alone. It creates a voyeuristic point of reference since I often stand back and look at him from afar. That scene takes place in both an indoor and outdoor setting. This dynamic of our interactions is a strong vehicle for me to utilize space and perspective in order to make a painting about my vantage point.

While the painting is chaotic in its use of perspective and visual elements, the majority of the painting is about the mundane and everydayness of life. Much of being a parent is about having a consistent routine and maintenance for your child. Through this painting, I wanted to show the norm of how he and I interact together, as he played outside and as he took his bath every night while the cat was watching. This painting helps me answer the question: *How can one capture the mundane and everydayness of life?*

Even though the subject of *Watching* is my son's navigation throughout his life, I did not want to make him an overtly visible figure in my painting. My goal was to hide him in plain sight, so he is not the gorilla in the room per se. It is too often that I see paintings of scenes with the figure being the focus, and you can tell right away that the one figure in the painting is the most essential part to the painter. Thus, the figure stands out from the environment; I am guilty myself of doing so sometimes. Therefore, with this painting, I wanted to take my time to find ways within the application of paint and the compositional design of the painting to partially hide the figure. I want to make it a surprise for the viewers

as they observe the painting for an extended period of time. After painting *Watching*, I discovered even more questions to be answered and more potential to be explored.

This cycle of questioning and answering continues to fuel the creative process of my paintings. It keeps me wanting to come back for more. To me, this is how art should be done; this cycle feels most original to me. However, staying inquisitive is both my blessing and curse, though I would not choose to do it any other way. The inquiry of questions has been the way for me to tackle formal issues in painting, with those building blocks I am able to answer more conceptual things out of my paintings. For example, questioning space in *Presumption* let a dialogue with the duality of an individual's personality. Many of the artists whom I look up to for inspiration stands by the same value. For them and me, it is less about the finished product and more about the line of exploration, that one takes before arriving at the destination.

Research

I am a painter that traffics in oil painting as a medium to dynamically represent figures in the multifaceted and complex spaces they traverse. Using collage techniques and layered compositions, I question and develop an evolving conversation in my art around the concept and meaning of multiplicity. While my style of painting is grounded in realism, I actively challenging the traditional notions of what a representational painting can be. Through my careful composition of stylistic choices, I take elements from abstraction, minimalism, and graphic design to orchestrate the "technical narrative" in my paintings.

My own multiplicity is the voice I am dialoguing with as I paint. Many different cultures and heritage shape the persona and artist I am today. As a young adult trying to find my way through life, I wrestled with the complexity of growing up multiracial. My mother is

African American and Thai. My father is Caucasian. I did not grow up with them for most of my life. Most of my adolescence was spent with my aunt and uncle in an African American and Cambodian household, situated in a Latino neighborhood. The culturally multifaceted nature of my upbringing informs the way I represent figures in my thesis work. Each person is constructed, layered, and multifaceted in terms of their personhood and that construction is ever-changing. I see multiple personalities in people, and this supplies insight into how I can use old principles and traditions of painting in new ways; to start conversations about identity and space. My approach to painting figure, therefore, begins a dialogue that forges a more holistic understanding of the identity for me and the viewer of my paintings. There is good in what I believe that conversation can offer the world.

While my upbringing shaped my ideas around identity and the individual, my early days as a graffiti writer helped shaped my interest in color and design. Graffiti developed in me an appreciation for complexity. The fundamental building blocks of graffiti involve transforming letters and words into designs which are almost unreadable to someone, not in the know. It is an intricate coding system. Graffiti also piqued my interest in color, line, and shape. However, when I moved away from graffiti into figurative art, I also began to reject these elements. I was trying to separate myself from the graffiti world and enter a new one, the fine art world. I learned over time that these fundamental elements are vital to me and that I should make space for them in my work. It does not take away from who I am as a painter. It informs my decisions. I manipulate my compositions with collage, in the same way, I would manipulate letters when doing graffiti. As such, I am continually incorporating the more graphic elements of design I obtained through graffiti into my paintings.

I purposefully make paintings to engage in a conversation with the viewer. I ask them the same questions I ask myself. *Why are rules made the way they are? In which ways can space and perception be challenged? How can I intertwine and connect different, traditionally clashing aspects throughout art history with each other?* These questions are an attempt to challenge my understanding of representational art as well as the viewers understanding. I believe there is benefit in challenging the viewer, in ways that might be unfamiliar. I also want to invite them to take their time and develop their understanding of what my art might be about.

Some of my favorite painters from different styles and genres, of the past and present, have the ability to challenge the viewer quite well. Each possesses the ability to hold the audience's attention by challenging some notion of what the general public might think art is and flipping it on its head. The paintings have the potential to draw me back into the room even after I have left. When I view a painting, I may ask: *What can be considered a portrait? What way may space be challenged? How can two styles of painting be fused, and what conversation emerges?* Making painting more about investigating the painting's context, as opposed to what the narrative is within the painting. The artist that inspire me make me ask questions about what a painting can do.

An artist that investigates the surface of their paintings is contemporary painter Sangram Majumdar. Majumdar commented on the role of a painting at an artist talk at the Asia Society Texas Center: "...I am very much a proponent of painting," he said, "being a space where questions are met with questions, fragments interact, and you are asked to linger..." (Majumdar). My philosophy of painting is analogous to a battlefield where you cannot see which side is winning. Lines are blurred. It is bloody and, at times, even ugly, but



Fig 5. Sangram Majumdar, *self portrait in interior*, 2011, Oil on linen, 15x18in, Private Collection.

you are too fixated to look away. Painting does not always have to be so clean cut and precious of an object. It can be an absolute mess. Looking at Majumdar's painting *self portrait in interior*¹ (2011), the push and pull of the painting surface along with evidence of Majumdar's decision

making is evident throughout the painting

(Figure 5). Layering and marking the painting

until Majumdar is satisfied with the outcome of his own inquiry.

Investigating the surface of the painting and leaving traces of the artist's working process throughout the painting creates its own kind of visual language. A language that American-Lithuanian contemporary figurative painter Alex Kanevsky spoke about at Dolby Chadwick Gallery in 2018. In his talk, Kanevsky discusses how “ambiguous and lawless” the act of painting can be. He stated:

To me the visual language is something that nobody masters, there is no grammar, there are no rules but there is certain understanding of how it might function. If it is used well and if the artist gets lucky, sometimes it is also understood by other people.

(Kanevsky)

As an artist, I am always searching for the perfect way to visualize my ideas. To take them from abstract thoughts of words and feelings and turn them into a picture that conveys those same words and feeling to the viewer. This can be hard at times because, there are only a few

¹ The title is intentionally lowercased by artist.

concrete rules when it comes to painting and drawing and the sometimes those rules are not enough to depict what needs to be said.

I choose oil paint as the primary vehicle for my painting because it has so much history and yet still has the potential of discovery. It is a slower drying medium compared to other paints like acrylic or gouache, so there is more time to play with each stroke of paint. I use oil paint in a way that American painter, Vincent Desiderio calls, the "technical narrative." Leaving some of this evidence of the working process in the finish of the painting. Desiderio describes this term in an interview:

For me, the "technical narrative" is the usual starting place for a picture. I imagine qualities of paint application, optical mixtures and strategic layering's of opacity and transparency. I paint the picture in my mind a thousand times, never having a clue as to the "dramatic" narrative or subject. As I do this, the technical processing, as I imagine it, links up with memories, associations and particularly, at this stage, with thoughts that I recognize as encoded within the history of marks on canvas.

(Kerstetter)

For myself, when I start planning out a painting, a lot of my creative process is spent trying to find avenues to develop this "technical narrative" that Desiderio is talking about. This gives the potential of having time to erase, time to build, time to form shapes within the paint layer finding opportunities for the paint to be impasto and thick, areas when forms can be conjoined and simplified. This buildup of surface qualities throughout the making of a painting leaves behind the evidence of the artist's hand.

When deciding how to convey this "technical narrative", Spanish painter Antonio Lopez Garcia gave me all the permission I needed to start using collage as a tool in my painting, before I was hesitant because I was not sure it could work in a painting, I was following the traditional notions of painting too closely. In his painting, *La Cena (The Dinner)* (1971-80), Garcia uses cut out images from magazines as stand-ins for references so he can move them around to change the composition as he pleased (Figure 6). In an interview with representational painter David Kassan, Garcia stated that while making the painting, he had left the painting to work on some other projects, and the gallery had sold it as it was with the photo attached. It was then he decided it would stay that way (Kassan). There is a piece of meat on the dinner table, that the viewer does not immediately recognize as being a photo of meat because of the way it is integrated into the painting. The viewer can only tell in person or hi-res reproductions of the painting. This opened my eyes to the potential that collage might have as an element in my paintings.



Fig 6. Antonio Lopez Garcia, *La Cena*, 1971-80, Oil on Board, 35x4in, Private Collection.

I am attracted as both a painter and a viewer to the physicality of the surface of a painting. The surface contains evidence of its creation. It reveals importance in how much the subject is or is not rendered, heaviness in how loaded or unloaded a brushstroke is. It can give away the energy behind each movement the artist makes; this all lays on the surface of every painting. My attraction to it also plays a massive part in my interest in collage, which

comes from the French verb *coller*, which means to glue and or stick (Webster).

Incorporating collage into my painting allowed me to challenge the traditional flatness of a painting surface. Pasting layers onto the painting gives me the possibility to think of additive qualities to my painting, the ability to freely, add and move things around in the painting. Although at first, I was very hesitant to accept that collage was a technique I needed to use in my paintings. Collage allowed me to get out the ideas about space, multiplicity, identity, it gave me the freedom to tackle them with its own inherent multiplicity.

Many artists have utilized collage in different ways while making paintings. One example is an American painter and printmaker Richard Diebenkorn and his approach to the figure. His paper collage titled, *Seated Woman* (1940), struck me for its use of flat and simplified space (Figure 7). The way Diebenkorn was able to manipulate space with the use of diagonals and large shapes, moving the viewers eye across the picture. These collages of



Fig 7. Richard Diebenkorn, *Untitled (Yellow Collage)*, 1966, Pasted Paper, Gouache, and ink on paper, 28x22in, Richard Diebenkorn Foundation.

Diebenkorn were inspired by French painter Henri Matisse's paper cut-outs that he did later in his life when he was bedridden. Both used collage in different ways to work through their formal issues being investigated; much the reason I have turned to collage in my body of work.

Richard Diebenkorn's and Henri Matisse's use of bold graphic shapes have allowed me to embrace adding graphic elements into my paintings, favoring simplistic background shapes instead of highly

rendered backdrops. The use of graphic elements can be used as a device to aid in the development of a composition, to flatten the space in an image by not rendering its pictorial depth but presenting the viewer with perceived depth through color and contrast. Matisse would cut out painted sheets of paper, into forms of shapes and sizes, some abstract and some figurative, of varying degrees of color and contrast. He was utilizing elements of decorative art to help design his compositions (MoMa). Matisse's cut-outs have also influenced the act of using cut-out elements in my paintings to depict figures and shapes of shadows. To reduce complexity, I am making them into their simplest, most universal form.

Willem De Kooning, a Dutch American artist, known for being an abstract expressionist, incorporated the figure through much of his work. While working with the figure, he pushed the formal elements of graphic shapes, lines, and the challenging of space to the forefront of his early figurative paintings. Realistic representation was pushed back and made subservient to the design and feel of the painting. One example is De Kooning's *Seated Woman* (1940), where the figure bends and contorts to aid in the balancing of the composition as opposed to making the space work

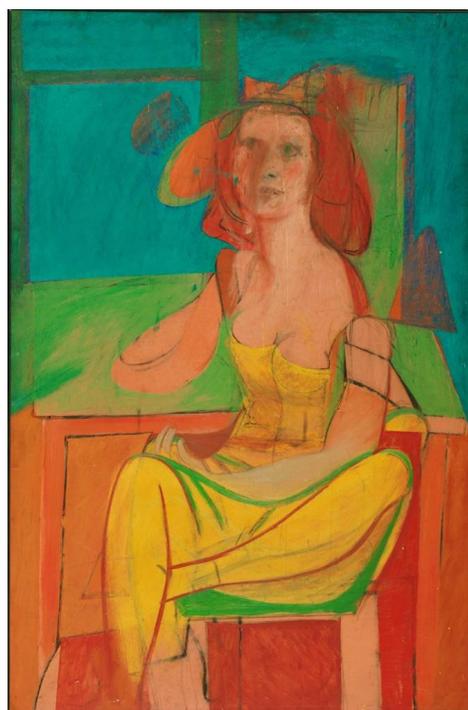


Fig 8. Willem De Kooning, *Seated Woman*, 1940, Oil and Charcoal on Masonite, 54x36in, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

for the subject (Figure 8). De Kooning is simplifying and using flatness to turn the space around the figure into a mix of shallow yet deep at the same time. The window being illustrated is only a few changes of color with a few painted shapes. The body is not rendered

in a way to be faithful to the traditions of light and shadow as many other figurative painters, but instead simplified to one overall tone that fills in the drawing of shapes De Kooning has made.

The idea of collage as both a technique and style choice, provided the opportunity of the potential for multiplicity in my artwork. Multiplicity is the ability to illustrate multiple components all in one image. To bring to the painting, multiple points in space, multiple personalities, or even; two or more images that have nothing to do with each other, but in some way when joined can engage in some type of conversation. My paintings, thus, study how we as humans see the world. British painter David Hockney (1937) did a series of investigative photo collages he called the *Joiners* series. He combined many photos from different points in space to try and understand how the eye works, and how perspective can be challenged. In the book, *True to Life: Twenty-five Years of Conversations with David Hockney*, author Lawrence Weschler writes about Hockney's thoughts about "the eye." He quotes Hockney as saying:

I realized how much thinking goes into seeing-into ordering and reordering the endless sequences of details which our eye delivers to our mind.... The general perspective is built up from hundreds of micro-perspectives. Which is to say, memory plays a crucial role in perception. At any given moment, my eyes catch this or that detail-they really can't keep any wide field in focus all at once. (Weschler, 20)

The role of the "eye" is also illustrated in Hockney's photo collage, *Christopher Isherwood Talking to Bob Holman, Santa Monica* (1983) (Figure 9). In this work, he depicts multiple perspectives of just one space. Each photo, Hockney is taking a little snapshot of some detail of the scene, while the figures are still in motion. Hockney compiles the photos together in a

way, that captures a panoramic view of the room in motion. Much like how our eyes wander around a space as we occupy it for any amount of time. Thus, the figures I choose to be in my paintings have a factor that stands out to me. A factor could be how the individual's personality lingers with me after they are gone, and it leaves to wonder how I could capture that personality with my painters' eye. There is something special about their personality that I need to tell through my paintings. The subject could be myself and my investigations of who I am and the battles I struggle internally in my head. The subject can also be a stand-in for some broader idea, as an actor in a scene playing their role on stage to illustrate some greater idea than themselves. Being the director of my paintings allows me to dictate who and what the subject is and what role it plays. The subject gets manipulated into this game called painting.



Fig 9. David Hockney, *Christopher Isherwood Talking to Bob Holman, Santa Monica, 1983*, Collage of 98 color photographs on rag paper, laminated to rag board, laminated to stretcher of wood and upsom board, 44x65 in, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

My goal is always to make a painting and not a photograph of someone. If a photograph sufficed and everything I needed got captured in that photograph, then I would not need painting. But because all these elements come together through the push and pull of painting, a photograph could never be enough for me. I hold design principles at the forefront of my creative process. These elements help build a painting. I am continually thinking about

elements of composition, scale, and graphic qualities (simplification, broad shapes, flattening of space) to make up my painting. These elements, in many ways, are more important than any subject in the painting. They are the elements that can help push a painting further away from realist representation of a space or subject and help give them a life of their own. They are also where I ask myself a lot about the push and pull of space in my paintings. *Where elements be made flat? Where can elements merge into each other? What happens if this element is moved here or there? Or made bigger or smaller?*

Over time, my painting technique has gotten less reliant on the forever rendering of realism. While I still utilize representation in my paintings, I have become more accepting, letting flat shapes of color do a lot of the heavy lifting in the painting. I am activating the space, leading the viewers eye around the painting. While also creating resting points, through collage, for the viewer to meditate in, as well as finding areas that can be simplified into shapes and outlines. A balance of representation and graphic elements gives the viewers eye places to rest as they move throughout the painting. I like to think of these mixtures as pictorial tools that I can push in a multitude of ways to achieve different effects of what I am trying to get across in each painting.

Every useful visual tool, in my opinion, should not be overused. Over-usage devalues the work that a particular tool can do, it can ruin the preciousness of finding evidence of the specific tool being used. One might like how a squeegee might look in painting and start to use it in all areas of the painting. But, if you begin to use it too much, the painting can tend to look generic and underworked. You have lost the spark of that mark-making. You do not want to go around hammering down every staple you use, but every once and a while, you might want to use a sludge hammer to make sure that nail is in there securely. Therefore, I

am not relying on a single visual element such as flatness, line, or color, nor a physical device like paint texture or paper tears but a careful balance of them all to help myself achieve the look and feel I want from my paintings.

My value for what makes a great painting constantly changing. Elements, artist and the philosophy that they have, come in and out withing my creative process. New elements and ideas are always challenging my own philosophy. This change is usually to address whatever problems I perceive to have or a preconceived notion of painting that I begin to question. However, what does not change is my calligraphy of mark-making. I think that is what keeps my paintings distinctively mine. The style or narrative might change, but how I go about applying paint to the surface rarely changes.

Methods

As an artist, I am always searching for answers. *Answers to what?* Well, that depends on the questions I find myself asking. When it comes to painting, questions fuel the process of art. They also breed new questions, recharging my creative energy. I am a problem solver by nature. Problem-solving is the drive behind my passions in life. The pleasure that I feel from solving problems is the motivation for me to continue with finding more answers to obscure questions. In that way, this addictive cycle keeps me chasing after creative ideas and coming back to my studio to execute them.

Inquiry breeds creation. I tend to ask too many questions for my own good – but this is how I develop concepts for paintings. I often question what the norm might be, question the fundamental rules of picture-making, or question my previous ideas. These questions lead to new ideas and alternative ways for me to consider what painting is and its potential. A lot of my inquiries begin by coming into contact with art, seeing paintings and sculptures in

museums and galleries, as well as constantly browsing books on the different forms of art. I might come across an expression or concept that resonates with some new lines of questioning in my head. For example, studying minimalist paintings has led me to favor simplistic surroundings in my work, as opposed to busy narrative-driven backdrops. I can go from place to place, looking for inspiration and also complex ideas that can be implemented into my work. This search for inspiration is often about actively digging through numerous thoughts and ideas until I discover the one idea I cannot shake away.

Even though we each have our own taste and opinions, the overall lines of inquiry and challenges persist in art. *What happens if I do this? What happens if I challenge this notion?* These are the questions that prompt real change and real discovery. I am constantly searching for that in my work. To be able to do discover and build new rules for making a painting, I find that my process of painting has to be structured in a way that I feel is familiar. For the majority of my painting practice, the act of painting has its base rules for me, rules that I have made up that guarantee me some results, and the ability to paint myself out of any problems I might get into. The results of experimentation are sometimes not always the prettiest things, and I have to be able to make the overall painting work as a painting and not just an experimentation by my standards of what painting is.

A painting that sums up my creation process is one of my first collaged *Experiment No. 1*. For the painting, I took two self-portraits from life, from different angles and lighting settings. Then I tore one into pieces and collaged it on top of the other one. This process highlights my method of creating problems in order to react to and solve them. I pose questions that focus on the fundamental elements of my work that I feel might be lacking in some way. In this case, the question was, *how do I make a more interesting painting that*

challenges the viewers' perceptions of space? By collaging these two separate self-portraits together, I was able to address my question, and also find a way to grab viewers' attention and encourage them to stand in front of the painting, putting the pieces of torn paintings together in their head.

Utilizing collage became a viable option for me when I was painting the first self-portrait (Figure 10). I realized that if I had a second, contrasting



Fig 10. Thadius Taylor, *Experiment No. 1 A*, 2019.

portrait to act as an opposite to the first, it could become an interesting compositional device. The original self-portrait was very warm in color, because of the proximity to my face of the lights sources I had chosen. Additionally, I had my face in a slight profile to the left. I wondered what the result would be, therefore, if I painted a self-portrait in which I was



Fig 11. Fig 10. Thadius Taylor, *Experiment No. 1 B*, 2019.

facing to the right, and had nothing but cool sources of light (Figure 11), before cutting up that painting and laying it over the top of the first painting. I was eager to discover what kind of interesting visual effects might occur as a result.

I began the first self-portrait by setting up a mirror in front of me and adjusted the height and angle of it to tilt the view of the room ever so slightly. I then set up a warm spotlight, which would bounce off my

skin and give nice strong shadows. These undertones contained hints of blues and purples because I intentionally left on the overhead lights in order to preserve some cooler light in the background. After arranging my colors, I taped up a sheet of oil prepared paper. This paper is soaked with a solution by the manufacturer that allows it to accept oil paint and medium without damaging the paper over time. This substrate allows a lot of play within my painting process because it can be very absorbent at times and then, after a few layers, become very rigid, almost like painting on a panel.

Once I had everything set up in a place where it would be undisturbed, and where I could spend weeks painting from life, I began the painting by laying down a thin wash of oil paint mixed with solvents. Doing so, takes a tiny bit of absorbency away, and allows my drawing layer to glide on the paper. After that wash of paint, I began to draw directly with paint, usually in a burnt sienna tone, but lately, I have been using alizarin crimson and a bit of ultramarine to make a warm purple color. This color has nothing to do with the overall painting but is just pleasing to my eye and moves the viewers eye around. Once I had drawn out most of the shapes in my face, I began to mix a larger batch of that drawing color with less solvent in the mixture. This batch, I then used to block in my shadow shapes, so I could begin to see the relationships of light and dark.

With the relationships between dark and light established, I mixed a few different batches of middle-value flesh color to interpret what I could see in the mirror. Some of these tones were on the cooler side, while some were more in the greenish/brown camp. I then mixed a large batch of a tone to act as my base, as well as my in-between. With these mixtures, I began to paint in the areas on my face that are hit by light. Turning the form and adding volume and contrast to the portrait. With the second portrait, it was the same process,

but the temperature was shifted; shadows were relatively warmer, and the highlights were cooler in comparison. Since there was no spotlight hitting my skin, I allowed my skin to be lit by ambient light in the room. The values and shifts were much closer to each other than in the first self-portrait.

This stage in a painting is where I begin to experiment by adding colors that would not normally be there, scraping away certain areas, and redrawing aspects, or even the whole painting, if that is what I feel it needs. Experimentation is when I get lost in the process of painting as a push and pull exercise. At this stage, I have everything mapped out, including the relative structure of the whole painting. Anything added here is more about making the painting feel more like my hand is at work in the mark-making, and my color cues are happening. I like to sneak in glimpses of pure color here, to give off vibrations of what I interpret when I squint my eyes towards the subject. It is about being direct and unapologetic; if it works, it stays, and if it does not, I will scrape away and try again. I am constantly saying to myself at this stage, *what can you get away with?* and then acting on those ideas. For example, making the paint on the brush extra-thick, and applying it copiously and loosely in some areas, or scraping away a layer of paint to see what lies beneath and if I can leave it be.

The painting process is complete when one of two things happens. Either I feel like my efforts are not adding to the overall painting, or I step away from the painting when I am convinced it embodies whatever mood I am trying to represent. For me, the image does not have to be a photo-realistic finish. I like to incorporate moments of incompleteness in the painting to give the viewer a chance to interpret what they see for themselves. I do believe in realism and representation, but I believe that abstraction and minimalism can play a part in those schools of painting.

Once the two paintings were complete and have dried (relatively thoroughly, since oil paint is never fully dry), I selected my favorite of the two and began to cut into it. The reason I chose my favorite was to prevent myself from stopping the process of cutting up the painting and just keeping the good one. As I was cutting up the painting, I looked for pieces that could be arranged on top of the other painting. The goal is to present the viewer with the same subject, but at two different times of the day, from different perspectives. I was also fragmenting both images, so the viewer must 'connect the dots' between two scenes in order to appreciate both images.

I began to glue the layers together to make the arrangement permanent. I did this once I have come to an arrangement that I am satisfied with. The criteria being strong compositionally, having good color harmony and strong bold shapes throughout the painting that leads the viewer's eye around the painting. I wanted to retain the physicality of the torn and beveled edges on the surface of the painting. I did not want to hide the fact that it is a collage; I wanted it to be evident, right in the viewer's face.

With the lessons learned from *Experiment No. 1*, I began to start on a larger collaged painting titled, *Presumption*. I wanted to focus on perception again but differently. Instead of the perception of space and light, I wanted to play with the perception on a societal level. I wanted to start a dialogue with the prejudices that we project on to people that we encounter, and how that first read of a person can be far from the truth.

For this painting, I took photo references of my friend Ed, I had him pose in a way where his look was cold and intimidating, but he was very much just 'hanging out'; the way you might look while walking down the street. In the next, I aimed to capture his goofy and quirky personality, the personality that anyone who knows him is familiar with. His friends

do not see the tough guy, but people who meet Ed are often intimidated by him at first, because of his stature and build. After the photoshoot, I proceeded to pick the ones that we are able to tell different stories of his personality. While also keeping him planted into the same chair and space in the room. I wanted these two distinct perceptions of Ed to push the

viewer back and forth between how he might look and how he is.



Fig 12. Thadius Taylor, *Progress Shot-Presumption B*, 2019

After I had laid down the drawing on a large sheet of unrolled Arches Oil Paper, I proceeded to lay in washes of colors, to block in areas in a higher chroma than what might be there (Figure 12). The use of this loose wash high chroma was is to have the potential for parts of it to peak through the layers of paint I would be building on top of it. This first step is about getting myself acquainted with the scale and space in the painting, like a rehearsal for a performance. I want to

make sure it works at that scale because there is a difference between seeing it on a photo and seeing it on a large surface on your wall.

One of the paintings, I painted in a more tight and controlled manner, while the second painting was kept looser and bolder. The first painting was kept more in line with the reference photo, more realistic colors, less experimentation. With the looser and bolder painting, I experimented with the color, and graphic shapes of the painting left areas unfinished and loaded the brush with more paint than the first painting. They were giving

variety to the painting once they were collaged, adding another layer of push and pull throughout the painting.

When it came to the collaging aspect of this painting, I focused a lot on big, broad movements, cutting out shapes that would help guide the viewer's eye around the painting, but also to draw it toward the figure. Creating a disjointed viewing experience, where the eye might want to do two things at once, and the viewer must actively control how their eye moves around the picture plane of the painting. These moves in the painting process give the painting a flat but infinite space to play in. Elements of the paintings overlap each other, but they are mostly graphic in nature, and this, tied in with the representational quality of the rendered figure, creates its own push-and-pull aspect simultaneously.

After the collage was assembled and I had a flat surface to work with again, I began the process of painting over the collage in several areas, reacting to places that were not working as well after the collage process. I was identifying passages that could benefit from blending to make a more unified space and reworked them by adding large brushstrokes of color and glazes to unify the two paintings together. I also found places where I could paint marks that were bold and chromatic, to add splashes of color that contradicts what the viewer would typically expect from representational painting.

The tools I use in my paintings are mainly paintbrushes of all different shapes and sizes, with a few exceptions for brayers, squeegees, and scrapers. There is always that inquisitive side of me, which questions the marks I am making with paint, I question the calligraphy of my hand, and looks for areas where I can challenge my ideas about how to use these tools. The tools I use to add and remove paint from the painting surface is to add variety and build up history on the surface of the painting.

My palette is based on split warm and cool primary colors, with a few additions. I used to use a very earth-based palette, meaning naturally occurring mineral pigments, but I started to question why I was painting modern scenes with the colors of the old masters. The world is filled with vibrant and highly pigmented colors, so I decided to change my palette accordingly. Now, I use almost entirely modern pigments and arrange them in warm-cool order. A warm yellow like cadmium yellow sits next to a cooler yellow, such as yellow ochre. Colors do not always fit the logic on my palette also. However, they are there to make my mixing process easier, and to allow me to focus more on the act of painting and not so much on the mixing of color, allowing me to further react while I am painting.

While each of my paintings focused on different areas, having different conversations with the viewer, the structure of how my paintings come together stays relatively the same. Some aspects might vary slightly, but as I have been painting this body of work, the overall rules I had started with has, for the most part, stayed the same. I have tailored my painting process so that it is structured but very carefree at the same time. Allowing me for room to play with new ideas I have conceived and allows for less stress of failure. It also enables me to problem-solve any mistakes rather than just erasing and starting over. I have painted some collaged outliers that were not as successful, but they were great at letting me open the door a little wider when it came to the potential of collage. I am always looking for ways to improve my ability to paint and depict the world around me.

Conclusion

The power of inquiry has led me to search for answers, in questions that I did not think needed to be answered. When I started my MFA candidacy, I had started with a vague idea that I wanted to flesh out over the next two years. That was the springboard for my

investigations —each new painting taking either a new approach or furthering my examination of that problem. I did not know how in-depth the multiple meanings for each painting would go or what questions they would lead me to.

My body of work asks a lot from the viewer. I would not want it any other way, because as a viewer myself, I want to be challenged. This can make me less accessible to the masses, but that is not my concern. I want to make paintings that stick in the back of your head for a prolonged period. That makes you come back to it, and while you are looking at it again, you find more.

What I have learned is that there are no crazy ideas. Artists owe it to themselves to seek out what solutions come out of those ideas, no matter how ugly they may look. Those answers could fuel you into further development that you would not have had if you did not take that leap. Painting, to me at least, should be about searching for answers and seeing where those conclusions take you.

WORKS CITED

- “Collage.” The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc.,
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collage>. Accessed 1 December 2019.
- De Kooning, Willem, “*Seated Woman*”, 1940. Artstor, library-artstor-
[org.ezproxy.lcad.edu/asset/AMICO_PHILADELPHIA_1039584307](https://www.artstor.org/ezproxy.lcad.edu/asset/AMICO_PHILADELPHIA_1039584307). Accessed 2
 December 2019.
- Diebenkorn, Richard, “*Untitled (Yellow Collage)*”, 1966, Richard Diebenkorn Foundation,
[https://collection.diebenkorn.org/objects/589/untitled-yellow-collage?ctx=715a0c7d-
 06a7-4972-b0aa-78eac178eddb&idx=0](https://collection.diebenkorn.org/objects/589/untitled-yellow-collage?ctx=715a0c7d-06a7-4972-b0aa-78eac178eddb&idx=0). Accessed 19 November 2019.
- Garcia, Antonio Lopez, “*La Cena*” 1971-80, Museum of Fine Arts Boston,
<https://www.mfa.org/collections/publications/antonio-lopez-garcia>. Accessed 4
 November 2019.
- “Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs.” Museum of Modern Art, 2015,
www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1429. Accessed 15 December 2019.
- Hockney, David, “*Christopher Isherwood Talking to Bob Holman, Santa Monica*”, March
 14, 1983. Artstor, library-artstor-
[org.ezproxy.lcad.edu/asset/ARINGLINGARTIG_10313021594](https://www.artstor.org/ezproxy.lcad.edu/asset/ARINGLINGARTIG_10313021594). 4 December 2019.
- Kanevsky, Alex, “Alex Kanevsky in conversation with Kenneth Baker” Dolby Chadwick
 Gallery, 2 November 2018, San Francisco, California, Interview.
<https://youtu.be/l8qPMwanhgM?t=385> 6:25. Accessed 10 December 2019.

Kassan, David J. "Artist on Art- On Painting Antonio Lopez Garcia", Davidkassan.com, 27 Nov. 2012, <https://www.davidkassan.com/on-painting-antonio-lopez-garcia>.

Accessed 10 December 2019.

Kerstetter, Barbara, "Vincent Desiderio: Painting as a theoretical vanguard." Two Coats of Paint, 26 Feb. 2019, [https://www.twocoatsofpaint.com/2019/02/vincent-](https://www.twocoatsofpaint.com/2019/02/vincent-desiderio.html)

[desiderio.html](https://www.twocoatsofpaint.com/2019/02/vincent-desiderio.html). Accessed 29 Nov. 2019.

Majumdar, Sangram, "Artist Talk: Sangram Majumdar." Asia Society Texas Center, 19 June 2017, Houston, Texas, Lecture. <https://youtu.be/mmk5ZnE24nQ?t=975> 16:15.

Accessed 1 January 2020.

Majumdar, Sangram. "*self portrait in interior*", 2011, Artist website,

<http://www.sangrammajumdar.com/20112013/bixz63dgjsukq9udjqvkyi32kmfpuv>.

Accessed 4 December 2019.

Weschler, Lawrence, et al. "*True to Life: Twenty-Five Years of Conversations with David Hockney*". University of California Press, 2008.

APPENDIX A



Plate 1. Thadius Taylor, *Experiment No.1*, 2019, Oil on Paper, 16x12in, Private Collection.



Plate 2. Thadius Taylor, *Presumption*, 2020, Oil on Paper, 48x32in, Private Collection.



Plate 3. Thadius Taylor, *Jump: You will find out how to unfold your wings as you fall*, 2020, Oil on paper, 50x35in, Private Collection.



Plate 4. Thadius Taylor, *Watching*, 2020, Oil on Paper, 50x33in, Private Collection.

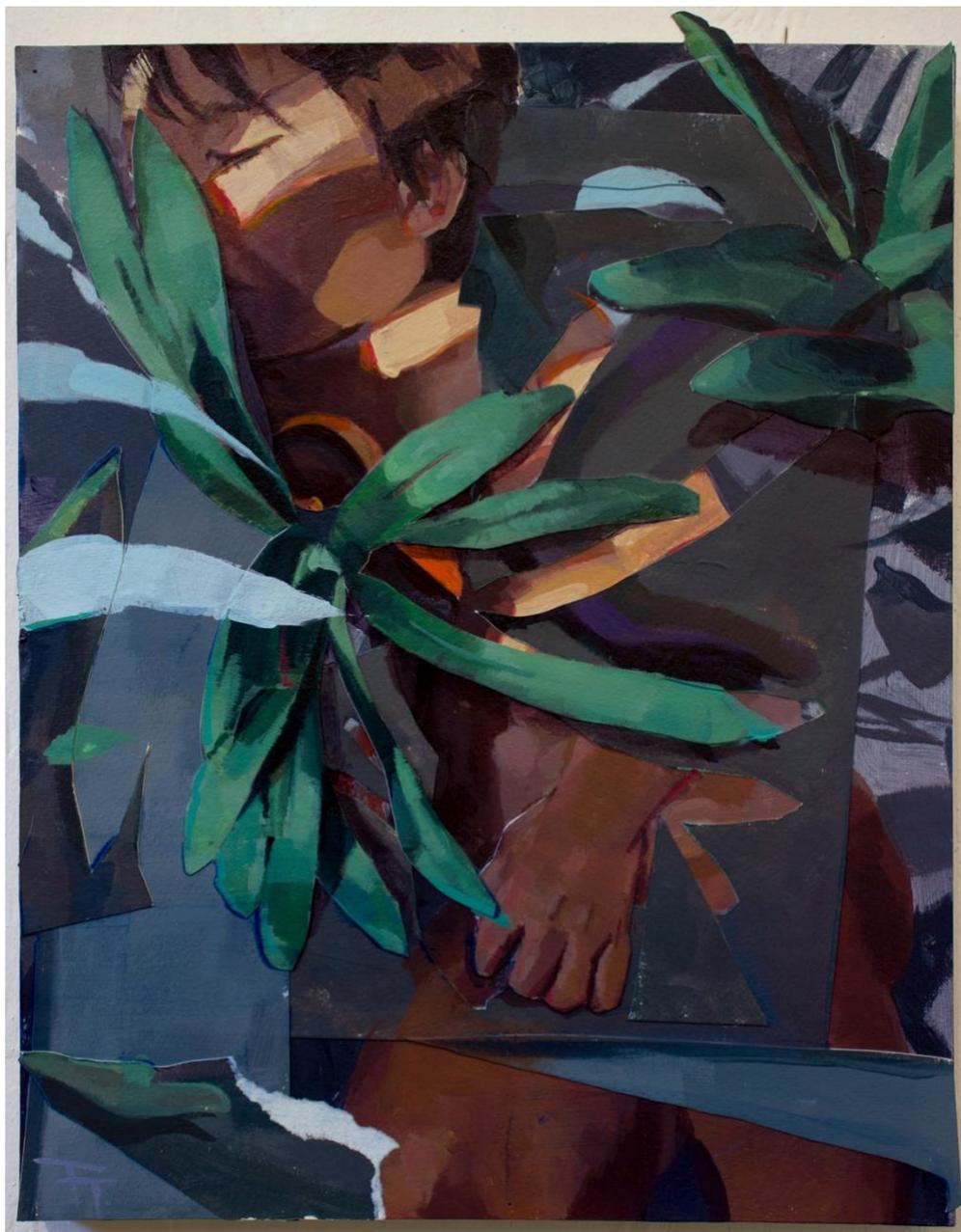


Plate 5. Thadius Taylor, *Converging Lines*, 2020, Gouache on Paper, 12x9in, Private Collection.



Plate 6. Thadius Taylor, *double self-portrait while breaking panorama view on phone no.1*, 2019, Oil on Paper, 16x12in, Private Collection.



Plate 7. Thadius Taylor, *Shy Tiger*, 2019, Mix Media on Paper, 10x13in, Private Collection.

APPENDIX B



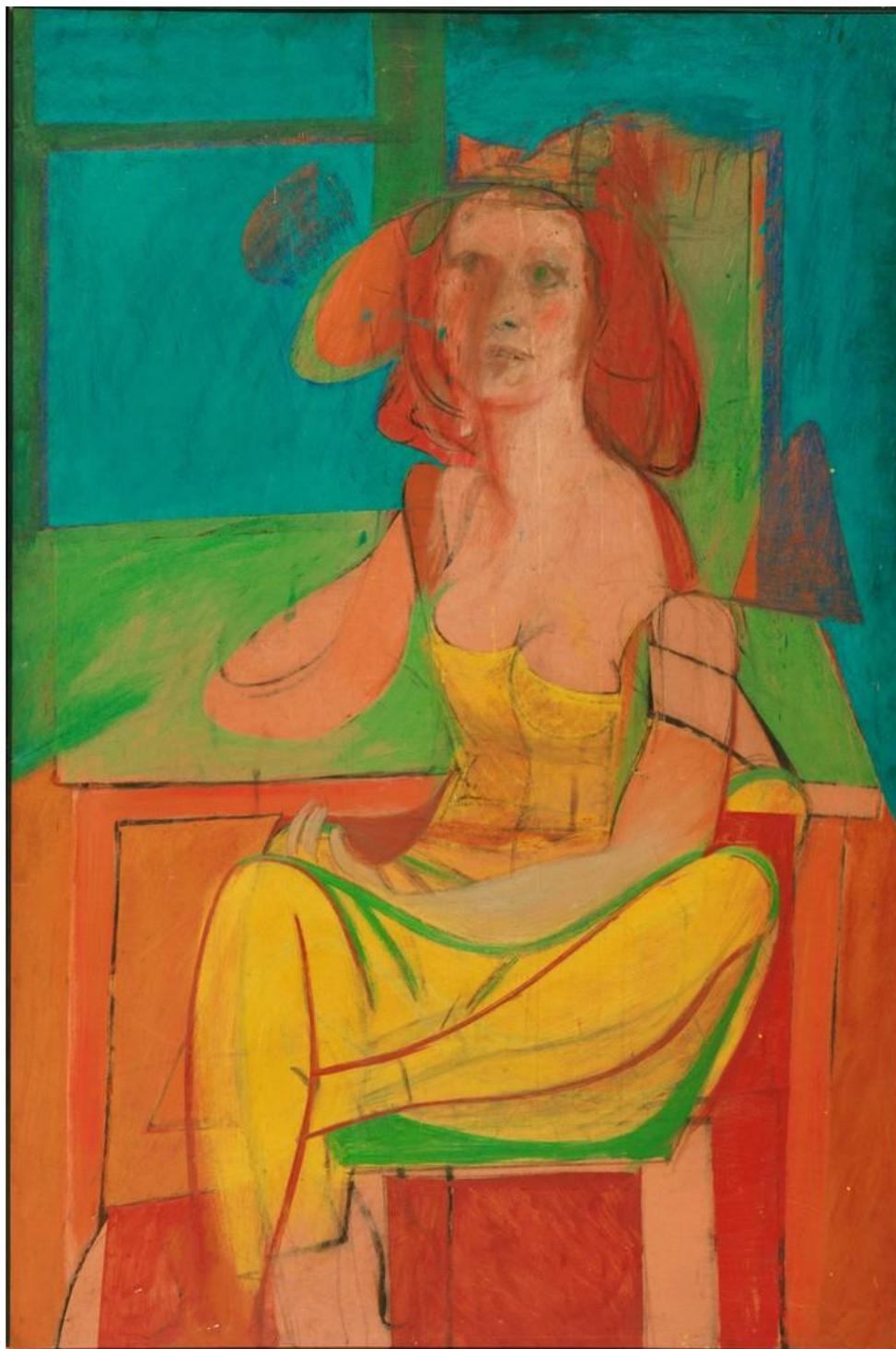
Sangram Majumdar, *self portrait in interior*, 2011, Oil on linen, 15x18in, Private Collection.



Antonio Lopez Garcia, *La Cena*, 1971-80, Oil on Board, 35x4in, Private Collection.



Richard Diebenkorn, *Untitled (Yellow Collage)*, 1966, Pasted Paper, Gouache, and ink on paper, 28x22in, Richard Diebenkorn Foundation.



Willem De Kooning, *Seated Woman*, 1940, Oil and Charcoal on Masonite, 54x36in, Philadelphia Museum of Art.



David Hockney, *Christopher Isherwood Talking to Bob Holman, Santa Monica, 1983*, Collage of 98 color photographs on rag paper, laminated to rag board, laminated to stretcher of wood and upson board, 44x65 in, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.

ARTIST'S NOTE

Website: www.ThadTaylorArt.com

Email: Thadtaylorart@gmail.com

Social Media: @ThadTaylorArt

