



**EVERYTHING IS HOURS**

**EVERYTHING IS HOURS**

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by

PETER CLARKE

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Requirements for the Degree  
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Signature Page

Everything Is Hours

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MFA Candidate:

---

Peter Clarke

Thesis Advisor:

---

Susan M. King, PhD

MFA Program Chair:

---

Peter Zokosky

Dean MFA Program:

---

Nicole Leshner, Provost

LCAD President:

---

Steven J. Brittan

Date Approved:

---

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## ABSTRACT

My thesis work *Everything is Hours* is a seven-by-seven-foot oil painting on canvas that explores our shared yet unconscious connections to this world and its elements. In this square made up of three canvases, I depict how cycles of time, the seasons, and mythical figures interconnect. By combining representational features and various symbols with abstract elements, I attempt to conjure unpredictable associations in viewers and generate a sense of wonder by layering personifications of everyday objects and other motifs that have similar shapes upon each other. Exploring these and other relationships, I have used color to amplify the painting's narrative direction and meaning. Art is one of the most powerful ways to communicate with others and ask the eternal questions: Who am I, where did I come from, where am I going? I believe that sharing a few of the possible answers to these questions could be a way to touch the keys of eternity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of the teachers, mentors and advisors who have helped me during my time here at LCAD and the valuable insights they have provided. I would especially like to thank Peter Zokosky, an artist and philosopher of the highest caliber who has shared his valuable time and knowledge with me. This paper, to say the least, would not have been possible without the steady guidance of Susan M. King. To my fellow artists in the class of 2022, I will never forget the great conversations and times we've shared on this incredible journey. Thank you all. Finally, to Maggie Smith, the sun and moon in my life.

**EPIGRAPH**

*The dynamic principal of fantasy is play, a characteristic also of the child, and as such it appears inconsistent with the principal of serious work. But without this playing with fantasy any creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable. It is therefore short-sighted to treat fantasy, on account of its risky or unacceptable nature, as a thing of little worth.*

– Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types* Ch 1, Page 82.

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## **EVERYTHING IS HOURS**

### **DESCRIPTION**

I have always liked strong winds. Not the kind of cold, sudden gust of winter snapping its fingers or the exhale of a hot heavy breath of summer. I am talking about the wind that comes when fall arrives. Winds that with one brisk pass can shear a tree of half its autumn leaves. They feel as though they have come from another place or time, one perhaps imbued with magic, which I've never been to but that I have been searching for all my life to remember and find. I am always inspired to draw or create something in those moments when a gust arrives, partly because the first thing I was ever able to draw were the clouds. Their tumbling, evolving shapes and colors grow and dissipate as they are pushed along by the winds. They are a constant swirl of rebirth on their ceaseless journey. I have always been attracted to clouds because of their ability to suggest strange shapes and creatures. These moments feel very private, as if the sky is providing a backdrop for a play full of assorted characters and objects staged just for me. The sky is but a door into another world, and I have come to understand that those doors are all around me. The clouds, trees, rocks, ocean and sky have taught me how to live in this world and are my family. Becoming an artist was my way to converse back with them.

Growing up in New York City, with its imposing electricity and chaos, fueled my desire to escape its oppressive demands and fatalism. The verticality of this "concrete jungle" tends to draw one's eyes upwards—we are looking for an end to the rising striations that are integral to its buildings. When I was a kid moving among these concrete pillars of glass and steel, it was the skies and clouds above that hinted at doorways to a more imaginative life beyond the city's bleak and monotonous pallor.



Fig.1. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *The Triumph of Marius*, 1729, Oil on canvas, 220" X 128 5/8" Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

As a boy in a large city, the opportunities to be exposed to art and culture were always just around another corner, and so I had my first experience at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The garbled sounds of unintelligible chatter and a cacophony of shoes striking a hard marble floor were echoing through my meandering mind as I ascended the large central staircase of the Met for the first time at the age of ten. When I reached the top, I was immediately removed from time and place. All the previous sounds surrounding me disappeared as I was confronted by a large painting by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *The*

*Triumph of Marius* (Fig.1). The painting's scale, majesty, color, and atmosphere filled with clouds elevated me out of my body and into a magical state. My experience with Tiepolo's paintings gifted me a path to follow and live my life on.

Clouds figure into my thesis painting *Everything is Hours* (Fig. 2). Not only do they sit at the center of the painting, they help to generate the swirling clockwise composition which is revealed and obscured by them. The painting is meant to show a symbolic and allegorical



Fig. 2. Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, Oil on Canvas, 84"x84", 2021

passage of time from birth, through youth and adulthood, to old age and eventual death, using figures as well as various motifs and symbols.

Starting on the lower left side of the canvas we see representations of birth, childhood and the opening

chapter of life. The graphics at the top morph to the right, into the second chapter and wider pursuits of the mid-day of life: adventure, discovery and the activities that shape the songs that play throughout our lives. Still moving to the right, later moments in life, old age and the coming twilight start to appear. The last chapter moves into the night with its sleep for some, for others perhaps death. This part of the painting is the dark that comes before the next dawn, the descent into the cauldron of the *Materia Prima*, which is an indeterminate matter viewed as the material

cause of the universe (Merriam Webster). The old is absorbed, fueling the new. The passing of time expressed by the sun, the moon and the natural world have provided me with the grammar and music to understand my life. They have given me the pulse by which I live my life as an artist.

The work is composed of three vertical canvases which form a seven-by-seven-foot square triptych as shown in Fig.



Fig. 3. Triptych format

3. A sinuous, implied line, moving through the sections in a circular motion, connects the canvases and completes a circuit of the narrative imagery that has no beginning or end. I chose the number seven for its symbolic significance. It relates to a complete cycle as in the days in a week, basic musical notes, the virtues and the planets and their gods. The square shape of the total piece and the implied circle within it are meant to echo the improbability of Archimedes' equation of attempting to square the circle. The solution to that equation is the search for unity, perfection and evolutive goal of the spirit: the mandala. I believe art is one of the keys of expression that let us explore and ponder the terrific force and mystery of life.

My thesis painting belongs to a mixture of two basic cannons in the history of art: Symbolism and a blend of Romanticism. These connections give my work a magical atmosphere in which mythical events and symbols coexist, and they propel this work and my art in general. The arrangement of the shapes, allegorical figures and mythical personifications in my painting are engaged in symbolic activities, but also are rendered in a romantic feeling and manner. The

Symbolist Gustav Klimt has been terrifically inspirational to me. I try to emulate some of his fantastic and inventive uses of shape, line and color. I combine these with more classically rendered figures to explore life, love and death through symbolism. In a clear reference to Klimt, I have flattened, stylized and patterned the group of figures on the right side of my composition as shown in Fig. 4. Emulating Klimt, I have organically elongated figures occupying an invented space.

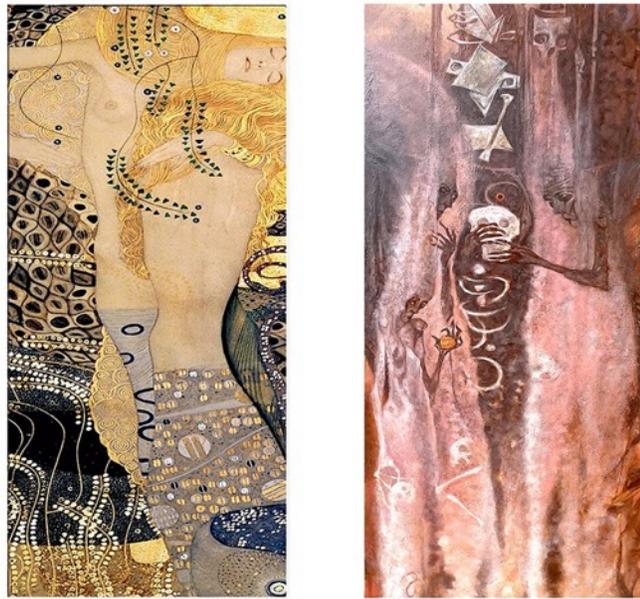


FIG. 4. Gustav Klimt, *Water Serpents II*, 1907, Oil on Canvas, Private collection. Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, detail

Alphonse Mucha has also greatly influenced me, especially his paintings of the *Slav Epic*, a series of twenty enormous canvases that embody an ineffable and amazing feat of storytelling and symbolism. After staring at reproductions of them in books for many years, when I was able



FIG. 5. Detail of Alphonse Mucha, *The Apotheosis of the Slavs*, 1925, Oil on Canvas, 188.98" X 159.45", Prague compared with Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, detail

to travel to Prague specifically to view these great works, I was forcibly sucked into another world and time through the gateways his paintings created. Mucha's use of various-size figures in invented atmospheres has influenced my approach to the thesis painting, as shown in Fig. 5.

On the upper left side of both our

paintings, small figures float in front of a visage of a very large figure. In each case, the small and large figures exist in different but shared realities that are merged together through the use of atmosphere.

The romantic flourishes in my art are best represented by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. His

ability to  
capture a  
booming and  
magical  
sense of  
space, with  
the use of  
clouds and

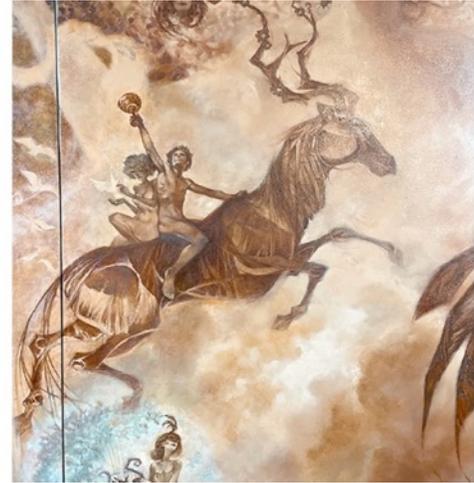


FIG. 6. Detail of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Ceiling fresco at Wurzburg Residence, Germany, 1744, 190 X 30.5 meters compared with Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, detail

atmosphere, allows his work to touch the ethereal. I attempt to conjure some of this magic as it lends a timeless and eternal nature to my work. For example, in the center of my thesis painting, as shown in Fig. 6, there are clouds that open and close as they support various figures.

Myths, and the characters and animals that are part of them, have given me further insight into both the collective unconscious and my personal attraction and fascination with dreams and “other realms.” Because I believe the collective unconscious contains ancestral memories and experiences that are common to all mankind, I have combined disparate and unlikely elements using a common rhythm that the shapes share. J. E. Cirlot in his book *A Dictionary of Symbols* states that primitive man “could identify the movement of a wave with that of the backs of a moving flock of sheep” (xxxii). I feel a strong design can carry common rhythms of shape and enable me to connect what might seem to be unrelated subject matter. In the thesis painting, I

repeated related and overlapping images to amplify each stage of the life cycle. In the end, the large size and structure of the painting should have an impactful visual presence which will pull the viewer in for closer inspection.

At the bottom center of my painting, the figure of *Charon*, or “Ferry Man,” is represented. Charon “in Greek mythology ... ferried the souls of the dead across the river Styx to Hades” (Hall 67). Here I am using Charon and his boat to act as a bridge between night and day. He is returning departed souls to birth—the regeneration of matter into new life. His boat is made up of a rendering of *Ouroboros*, which is an ancient symbol that shows “the cycle of disintegration and regeneration, power that eternally consumes and renews itself” (Cooper 124).

This symbol helps to

connect the graphics on either side of the painting as shown in Fig. 7. The water and waves beneath



Fig. 7. *Everything is Hours*, Detail

Charon allude to the silhouette of a phoenix, which representing water “stands as mediator between life and death, with a two-way positive flow of creation and destruction” (Cirlot 346). At these moments in the painting, I have visually combined disparate and unlikely elements using a “common rhythm” that the shapes share. My art has always possessed fantastical elements like Charon. I do this to express my thoughts and feelings because these kinds of landscapes and characters allow me to symbolically connect to all ages and times.

In creating this painting, I not only reflected on my life but aimed to conjure scenes and figures which reveal the stages of life in broad terms that others can relate to. Much in the same way that we all can read a clock and understand its connection to different times of day, I hope

my painting has broad appeal. I want my art, and this thesis painting in particular, to be universal, with no reference to a specific country of origin or nationality. Thus, any viewer can travel through their memories or to a future possibility. The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung believed that the contents of dreams and other unconscious states created passageways to the collective unconscious: an inherited store of universal images and symbols that is inborn within us all (43). Using various symbols, both geometric and mythical, I attempt to express events and passages in life that any viewer can perceive and identify with.

In J. C. Cooper's book *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*, he states, "Symbolism is an instrument of knowledge and the most ancient and fundamental method of expression, one which reveals aspects of reality which escapes other modes of expression." Cooper goes on to say, "It contains the vast ever-expanding realm of possibilities and makes possible the perception of fundamental relationships between seemingly diverse forms or appearances" (7). Symbolism is a means to directly apprehend wordless thought. Symbols, symbolic content and situations pass beyond the self to the universal. They can operate on more than one level at the same time, both as object (i.e., apple) and as subjective symbolic meaning (knowledge, temptation, immortality). A symbol in its objective manifestation can not only service a narrative through its visual placement and surrounding elements, but it can also transcend its own visual construct to invoke spiritual, intellectual and emotional reactions. This is how I use symbols in my work—they aid in the narrative of a story on the surface, but their meanings also speak to universal themes and eternal relationships.

My color palette in this painting, at times symbolic and unnatural as shown in Fig. 8, is meant to impart an ethereal atmosphere and so move the viewer emotionally as well as

intellectually. Natural elements have been combined with other graphics to create a sense of movement with the addition of color.

My imagination, which is the source of my art, emerges from the darkness through the medium of oil paint on canvas. My handling of paint and its viscosity is meant to give my work a fresh and spontaneous appearance. I aim for just enough realism in my paintings to activate the viewer's involvement with the figures and settings. Painterly areas act as layered screens or veils, much like the sets and lighting of an opera.

In the final stages of a painting, I alter specific figurative elements to better serve the emerging narratives and equations. Various graphics are added to the painting to further the image's growth. Looking back, I can see that my tendencies to daydream or wander inwardly provided me with a plethora of ideas and narratives. I am always searching. My evolution as an artist has always been powered by my imagination, which inspires me to jump from one ride to the next, in an ever-evolving adventure.

Art can expand our perception of the world around us. By dancing with the unconscious, art can break through the veil of familiar tropes and so breathe new interpretations into universal themes. My goal with this body of work is to inspire mystery and wonder. The unconscious—the well from which our creative impetus springs—is where we can all find connective emotional tissues. We all share similar outward experiences, regardless of what form they take. By presenting symbolic imagery in a narrative manner, I hope to expose the viewer to visual equations that might augment how they see the world.



Fig. 8. Panting Color Rough

If I can achieve this response, perhaps I can bring a sense of the magical to my fellow passengers as we clock our time on this mysterious and epic journey called life.

## RESEARCH

*What is essential in a work of art is that it should rise far above the realm of the personal life and speak to the spirit and heart of the poet as a man to the spirit and heart of mankind.*

-Carl Gustav Jung

## Artistic Inspiration

Time is always ticking, moving forward. Like the moon's gravitational effect on the earth's waters, we are inextricably connected to the same forces and cannot be separated from them. Artists who employ compositions that carry their subject matter aloft and defy gravity or time have always been the most inspirational to me. Their work possesses a spiritual and otherworldly presence which speaks directly to my imagination and creativity. Two artists stand out the most and set fire to my mind and imagination. The first is Alphonse Mucha. When I first encountered his series titled the *Slav Epic*, I was in the Strand book store in New York City. Wandering through the endless stacks of used books in their extensive collection, which I did often, was the only way for me to discover artistic treasures before the internet. One day, I pulled a slightly tattered book on his work off the shelves and, flipping through the pages, I arrived at several images near the end. I will never forget the immeasurable awe that I felt viewing those paintings for the first time. His graphic layouts of figures in a narrative form were a revelation and, like an explosive charge waiting to be set off, my mind blew up at the lengths and potentiality a painting could attain. His ability to combine an amazing sense of design with figurative content, as well as his symbology, was like nothing I had seen before!

One work from Mucha's series of twenty paintings was particularly powerful to me. *The*

*Celebration of Svantovit on Rügen 1912* (Fig. 9) stood out to me above all the others because it captured an incredible feeling of space and majesty in the way only clouds can do. With figures in the upper half of the painting floating above the din of a crowded festival, Mucha combined different moments in time. This is further accentuated by the graphic delineation of the figures which are floating near the top of the composition. These figures and their actions are rendered less realistically, and as such they become symbolic. Mucha's use of multi-dimensional layers of time and history, brought together in a tidal wave of powerful design and figurative execution, is masterful. His ideas and process for creating these paintings started with quick gesture drawings on paper. I find his approach to these images liberating, and I sometimes also work in this way.



Fig. 9. *The Celebration of Svantovit on Rügen*, Alphonse Mucha, 1912

Like Mucha, I have floated diminutive figures and motifs above and in front of an interplay of events that narratively connect but exist in different moments in time from those in



Fig. 10. Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, Oil on Canvas, 84"x84", 2022

the background (Fig. 10). Mucha and I share a similar color palette, using cooler foreground elements with warmer backgrounds. This further highlights the foreground elements.

Another work by Mucha which is significant is one of the panels from a set of murals he painted for a German theater in New York in 1908 (Fig. 11). The powerful graphic design sensibility that

meshes a mother-earth-like figure into the background of this image imparts a spirituality that makes Mucha's painting eternal and unforgettable. With her hands held up as if she is conducting the events below, Mucha's figure is overseeing the image from an ethereal atmospheric sphere. I have placed a similar figure at the top of my painting in almost the same gesture. With his figures placed in an omnipresent, Mucha allows them to speak to anyone in any time. In *Everything is Hours* I also generate a story in



Fig. 11 Alphonse Mucha, *Comedy*, (detail), 1908, *Everything is Hours* (detail)

which strong design, imbued with a fantastical combination of mythological presences and figurative actions, narrates the drama and journey of existence (Fig. 11).

Spontaneous combustion is a startling event. When driving home from my studio one afternoon carrying a trash bag full of oil- and turpentine-soaked rags in the passenger seat, the car suddenly started to fill with smoke. Swerving to the side of the road in a panic, I was able to

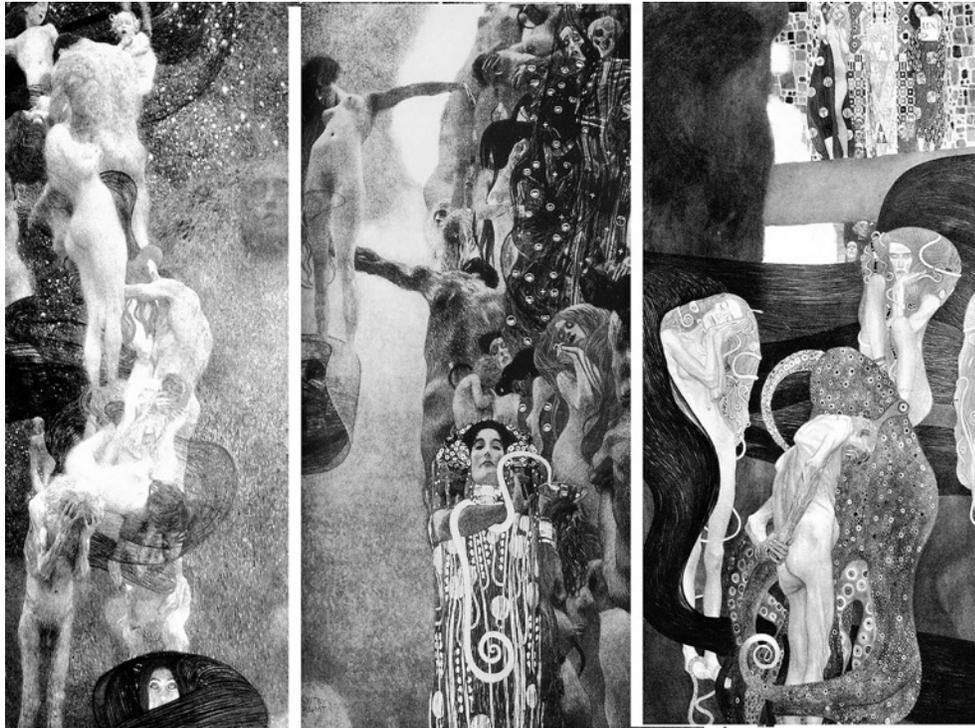


Fig. 12. Gustav Klimt, *University Mural Series*, 1900-1907

attain a bucket of water from a store and douse the bags of hot hazardous waste. When I first came upon Gustav Klimt's University of Vienna ceiling paintings (Fig.12),

it was as if my brain spontaneously combusted like the rags. His work exemplifies a personal conviction that shape and design can illuminate the theater and events in life. By creating flat, symbolic passages that intertwine with more representational figures and landscapes, he opens doors to dream-like spaces. Through his paintings we can feel our way into ideas and spaces by joining the familiar with the imagined. If we look at the dominant figure in the lower section of his painting *Jurisprudence* which is part of the ceiling paintings (Fig. 13), we see the shivering figure of an old man with his head tilted downward and his arms behind his back. He appears to

be holding on to the last vestiges of his existence. This is amplified by the graphic presence of an



Fig. 13. Klimt, *Jurisprudence* (detail) of the university of Vienna ceiling paintings.

octopus-like creature that seems to ensnare and devour him. Like Mucha, Klimt's work is timeless and will always speak to the human condition. In *Everything is Hours*, I also incorporate graphically flattened figures with patterns to relate narratives and symbols in an imaginative manner, in my attempt to speak directly to our shared human experience. In the middle, far right of my painting (Fig. 14), I depict the originating human couple, now in the throes of decay and imminent death. Wrapped in disintegrating clothing that is graphically represented with decaying foliage

and fracturing human architecture, they descend into an impersonal and universal liquid: water.

Klimt's genius for capturing the universal, by means of flattened graphical patterns with figurative action, is a symbolic way to generate overlapping narratives. He was a native of Vienna at a unique time in the development of human thought and perception and was one of the founders of the Secessionists art movement that attempted to alter the cultural scheme of Vienna:



Fig. 14. *Everything is Hours* (detail)

The Secessionists wanted to break that isolation, organizing and participating in international exhibitions and bringing foreign art to Vienna to cultivate the public taste. Jung believed that archetypes exist because of the human tendency to produce over and over again similar mythical ideas, and that symbols are the means by which the unconscious archetypes communicate to the consciousness. In his three University paintings, Gustav Klimt touched upon the collective unconscious of the twentieth century. (Sark)

Like the Secessionists that Sark describes, I like to speak to the viewer through symbols and archetypal images. My first apprehension of Jung, a Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology, was much like a moment I experienced while standing in the yard to enjoy a light rain at twilight on a lazy, late summer day. *Crack!* A lightning bolt shattered the silence and exploded a tree just thirty feet from where I was standing, completely dissolving the tranquility of the moment. Jung's work was shocking and life altering in a similar way. His writings cracked open my mind and gave shape and meaning to my fascination with mythological figures, creatures and stories, and to my desire to paint and draw them.

Jung's theories in some aspects were a response to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Jung proposed and developed the concepts of the extraverted and the introverted personalities, archetypes, and the collective unconscious. In addition to psychiatry, his work has been influential in the studies of religion, literature, and related fields. Jung's work expanded my consciousness and guided me to look past the veil of my own awareness and see that we all share and draw upon a common well of inherited images and experiences. His groundbreaking examinations into the inescapable and extreme gravitational forces of the collective unconscious, as well as archetypes, have had a profound effect on me and how I perceive this world. His

writings have shown the degree to which these concepts bind art and all of us together. My thesis painting, in short, is an image of inclusion and universality which is meant to be perceived and understood by all who encounter it.

His theories of the collective unconscious, which pose that all human beings are connected to each other and their ancestors through a shared set of experiences, are profound. The content that rises up into one person's subconscious, from a deeper "collective" one, can take the shape of symbols and archetypal images. As Jung said, "Archetypal content expresses itself first and foremost in metaphors" (3). Through the use of visual metaphors, symbolically combined with archetypal imagery, I express my thoughts and feelings to open doors so that others can connect to my work.

### **Symbolic and Narrative Content**

The perpetual motion of time circumscribes our life and death. Sitting motionless within a stand of trees, the subtle changes in the light and wind tell me that the day and my life are passing. Whether it be by sundial, hour glass, pendulum or candle, time and its movement are something we have learned to measure and predict. Some methods of tracking time are more advanced than others, but they all address one basic question: when will the light end, and how long will the darkness last before the light returns? The layers and complex interactions of gear wheels that make up a mechanical watch work together for a singular purpose: to move the clock hands forward. In *Everything is Hours*, the overlapping layers of images, mythical figures and



Fig. 15. Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, oil on canvas, 84"X84",2022, A mechanical watch structure.

symbols connect and rotate through the painting, much like the mechanism of a watch; they move a symbolic narrative of life, its beginnings, end and renewal, forward (Fig. 15).

Born in Barcelona in 1916, J. E. Cirlot was one of the most brilliant poets of the Spanish postwar period. He wrote many books about symbolism and surrealism in art, including *Dictionary of isms* (1949), *Introduction to Surrealism* (1953), *Cubism and Figuration* (1957), *Informalism* (1959) and *Dictionary of Symbols* (1974). *A Dictionary of Symbols* is a comprehensive culmination of his experiences and research into symbols and their universal connection to all cultures and the human condition. His ability to cross-reference and lay out the intricate connections between various concepts and states of existence, when expressed visually, has been invaluable to my growth as an artist. My thesis painting has harnessed his insights linking symbols and life events. This book has been a treasure trove of solid cobble stones, providing me with several paths forward in my work.

Starting in the lower left corner, early morning time, with the waters and waves which are teeming with graphic representations of single celled organisms, we see the heads of two infants



Fig.16. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

contained in an orb. They are being carefully lifted out of and above the waters by three female figures (Fig. 16). This image is meant to show the births of a male and female as they emerge from the waters that we all originally came from. Although I have portrayed them both inside the same circular shape, they are not related and are joined here to show the two genders in one instance. The swirling aspect of the orb is presented to personify the precious spirit and spark of life now lit and being set

upon its journey. The Rhinemaidens are a set of mythical German characters whose job is to protect the Rhinegold. The symbolism of gold “is that of the elusive treasure, the mystic center within the spirit of man” (Cirlot 327). Since this is the start of two life journeys, I have used the orb in its perfect and pure essence to symbolize the yet un-lived life, and because it is adjacent to the moon in the lower center of the painting behind Charon, it also represents the sun in its new morning glow. The base of the tree is hit with waves that morph into sinuous snake-like patterns representing plants and grasses. The twisting designs of the snakes continue up through the tree, at times forming the branches which support the male and female figures as they take on more

life. Snakes, or serpents, are “symbolic of energy itself... they are a life force” (Cirlot 272). A snake possesses many characteristics, such as “its common association with the tree and with the roots and branches of the tree” (Cirlot 272). The snakes’ positioning here in the painting is meant to support and mirror the children as they grow into adulthood. “The serpent is the life force which determines birth and rebirth and hence is connected to the wheel of life: Ouroboros” (Cirlot 274). By biting its own tail, Ouroboros is meant to symbolize the eternal and cyclical nature of life and death.

The infants have become two young children in their second incarnations (Fig. 17). Sitting on the tree, each character interacts with a specific totem that represents their life spirit. The boy’s symbolic totem, a snail, is a manifestation of a spiral, its shell echoing that design. “The spiral is a symbol for growth and the creative breath of life” (Cirlot 291). The girl’s totem,



Fig.17. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

a butterfly, is “an emblem of the soul and of an unconscious attraction towards the light” (Cirlot 33). I use

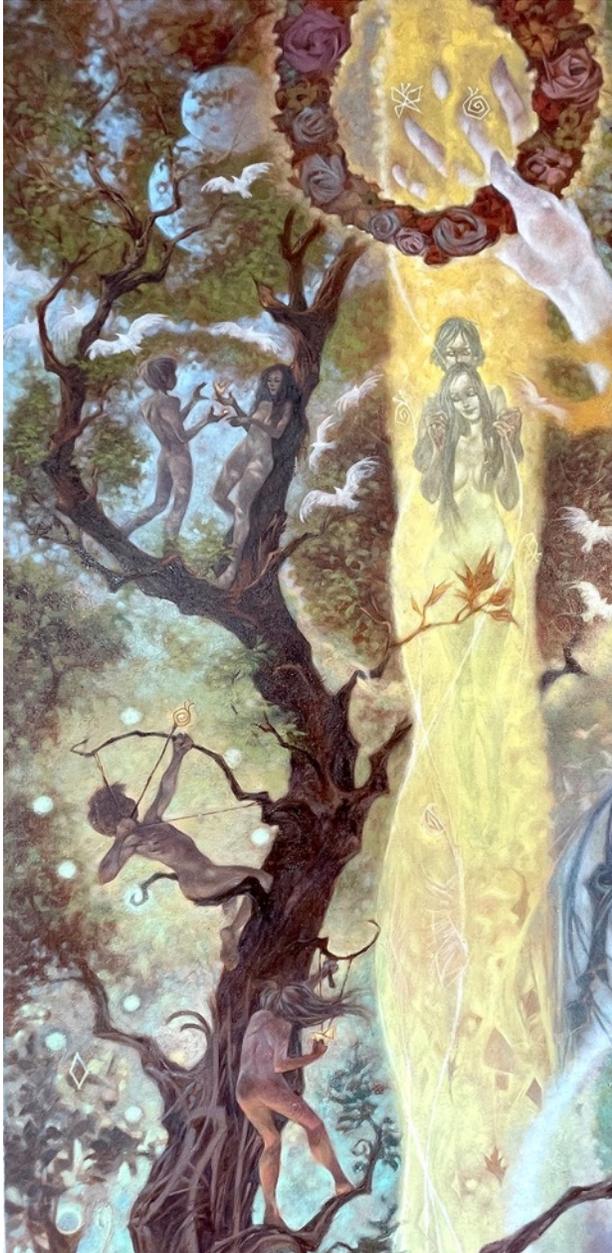


Fig.18. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

these totemic symbols to visually communicate the children's actions and the courses their lives will take through time.

Further up the tree of life, the now teenagers are engaged in their own real and symbolic forms of play which grow from the branches.

The boy's bow and arrow and the girl's slingshot can be seen both as sport and as weapons (Fig. 18). "Weapons are an expression of the will directed towards a certain end"

(Cirlot 348). The projectiles for each weapon contain the teenagers' totems: the snail at the tip of the arrow and the butterfly—simplified into two rigid triangles—as the "projectile."

Their shared target is the large garland at the top left of the canvas. The garland's symbolism "is related to all other tokens of bond or connection" (Cirlot 110), as well as to "The

Brass Ring," due to its circular design. The brass ring is the prize for riders on a carousel, which in itself symbolizes the wheel of life. By launching their totems, or spirits, at the garland, I am foretelling what will not only be their first encounter, but also their ultimate union: marriage.

Their first meeting occurs on the highest branch of the tree where, in an act of bonding, boy and girl exchange totems, spirit to spirit.

Like a lake whose still surface reflects the sun while being supported by moving currents below, the more apparent images and symbolic content in my painting, *Everything is Hours*, sit atop other equally important symbolic layers beneath, as they combine and dial through the rotating narrative of

the image. Circular bundles of leaves frame most of the pair's activities and are meant to echo the rotating gears in a mechanical watch (Fig. 19). Doves emerge from the tangents where the leaf wheels touch each other, in the locations where the teeth of a gear would interact.



Fig.19 *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

“Generally speaking, birds, like angels, are

symbols of thought, of imagination and of the swiftness of the spiritual process and relationships” (Cirlot 27). They also “denote the ‘height’ and - consequently - ‘loftiness’ of spirit” (Cirlot 27). The dove specifically “is also symbolic of the soul” (Cirlot 81). Their

presence here is to amplify the happiness and joy of the boy and girl, now adults, as they are engulfed in a pillar of flame that passes through and is crowned by the large garland above. This rising column of flame is significant, for “fire manifested as flame symbolizes spiritual power and forces, transcendence and illumination... passion” (Cooper 66).

Directly to the right of the embracing lovers, a large leaping stag, in a mythical, slightly abstracted design, carries the same couple, now more mature, on its back, (Fig. 20). The stag is symbolically “linked with that of the tree of life, because of the resemblance of its antlers to



Fig. 20. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

branches. It is also the symbol of the cycles of regeneration and growth” (Cirlot 294). The stag’s antlers merge with the tree branches that are attached to the great mother figure above. The riding couple is meant to represent a major life challenge that has been accepted and conquered. At this zenith hour in the painting’s narrative cycle, they ride into the future, the young man holding up a chalice of flame in a moment of spiritual, life-affirming victory and celebration. His head is

crowned with laurels, symbols of victory, and his mate, with a garland in her hair, is enraptured with the release of a dove. The chalice also serves as a symbol of the grail. Says Cirlot: “The grail implies, above all, the quest for the mystic center. The ‘unmoved mover’” (Cirlot 115-116). It also represents the center of the round table and the twelve knights, or in the case of my thesis painting, the hours in a day or months in a year. The stag also, “like the eagle and the lion, is the secular enemy of the serpent which shows that, symbolically, it was viewed favorably; it is

closely related to heaven and light, whereas the serpent is associated with the night” (Cirlot 294). This is why I have designed Charon’s boat as the serpent Ouroboros.

Above the stag, almost the entire upper edge of the painting is occupied by an image of the Great Mother (Fig. 19). She symbolizes “all phases of cosmic life uniting all the elements. The keeper of the keys of fertility and the gates of birth, death and rebirth. Her symbols are legion: the crescent moon, spiral, all waters” (Cooper 108-109). With her head tilted back and a downward gaze, she observes the actions below, holding court over all. Her outstretched arms



Fig. 21. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

act as a bridge between late morning, mid-day and the late afternoon, and each of her hands is meant to symbolize and communicate this transition, (fig. 21). The symbolic gesture and position of her right hand (on the viewers left), which holds the garland, “is the hand of power, it is held up in blessing and pledges the life principle...The left hand is the passive aspect of power” (Cooper 78). So here I have her right hand above the union of the man and woman, while her left hand is snapping a branch and is meant to signify the start of the coming of the end of day, the fall, as the evening approaches. Each side of her head also reflects the transition from summer to autumn, from midday light to its fading towards twilight. Renderings of the man’s and woman’s heads pass through the blooms of her flower-laden headdress. Their faces and emotions age and diminish as they float through this passage, for they are nearing the end of their life’s journey as the hour of death approaches.

The last two small floating heads in the upper right corner of the canvas are in a more frightening state of extreme old age. Their ravaged hair echoes the small broken twigs and



Fig. 22. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

crumpling autumn leaves that move past them and are blown downward. The essence of material existence, now dry and brittle, descends as the couple's existence also further decays (Fig. 22).

These dried and broken aspects of nature start to fall more directly downward as they pass through the almost dead and corpse-like male and female figures. The final disintegration has begun. All the wisdom acquired in life, symbolized by the owl, is also mirrored in the rotting book being grasped by the male figure's boney hands. The figures' baggy and tattered clothing, the broken candles, and the

pages falling from the book and transforming into skulls and bones, all further separate them from the living. These motifs are now flowing vertically downward into an image of a large raven and the three Fates. "The raven is the symbol of the blackening and mortification and represents the dying of the world" (Cooper 137). The Fates, looking at the bones and human debris falling in and out of their hands, are meant to represent their task to draw out and cut the thread of life (Hall 312). Moving further down this side of the canvas, the elongated, connecting shapes of the Fates' hair, and the various bones within, become more turbulent and varied, like a waterfall flowing downward until it smashes into the waters beneath. Here is the final shattering of matter as it is returned to the primordial waters of life from which it first sprang.

Now arriving closer to the end hour in the revolving wheel of this journey, the flowing rough waves and waters at the lower right side of the canvas contain, within their more circular foaming attributes, the images of skulls. The skull “is an emblem of the mortality of man, however like the snail shell, it is in truth what survives of the living being once its body is destroyed. Therefore, it comes to acquire significance as a receptacle for life and for thought”



Fig. 23. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

(Cirlot 285). For this reason, I have symbolized one small glowing skull descending through the dying man and woman as it reaches the many other skulls in the rough waters below (Fig. 23). These skulls tumble onto Charon’s boat as his journey, across the midnight of death, returns the kernel of the human spirit back to the beginnings of this timeless life cycle. The moon behind Charon and the waves that spread out from underneath his boat form the image of a Phoenix, who “in every respect symbolizes periodic destruction and recreation. It signifies the triumphs of eternal life over death” (Cirlot 242).

The final symbolic element in *Everything is Hours* is that of a masked woman, playing a lyre, who sits atop a branch which originates from the tree of life (Fig 24). The lyre is “symbolic of harmonious union of cosmic forces... the seven strings of the lyre corresponding to the seven planets” (Cirlot 186). Music, and its “melodic elements, is an image of the natural connection between all things and at the same time, the communication, the spreading and the exaltation of the inner relationship working all



Fig. 24. *Everything is Hours* (detail) oil on canvas, 2022

things together” (Cirlot 215). The woman’s function the painting is the same as the viewers’, that of an observing witness. Her face is hidden with the mask, for “secrecy tends towards transfiguration: it helps what-one-is to become what-one-would-like to be; and this is what constitutes its magical character” (Cirlot 195-196). The repeating crescent shapes are not only meant to appear as clouds but also represent planets and gear wheels. As these shapes in their more cloud-like formations move to the upper center of the painting, they start to dissolve into the light as the masked woman ponders this obscured, mysterious nexus. All the hours that we spend on life’s journey will bring us to the shores of transcendence. By looking to and letting the well of our shared inherited unconscious material rise up, we may join a symphony of souls to aspire beyond our corporeal coil and discover ways to achieve our desires.

## METHODOLOGY

Can we truly give something everlasting to someone else? I believe the answer is yes, and I feel that the most eternal gift is art. Tiepolo changed my life. On that day in the Met, I saw my possible future flash before me. This was a defining moment, for it was the first time I had ever visited the museum and its art galleries. I would return time and again with increasing frequency, especially after I entered college. It has always been a wellspring of continuing artistic inspiration for me now and in the past. Tiepolo's paintings, and in time the work of Klimt and Mucha, changed my world.

From initial sketches to finished painting, the arc of my process mirrors how I perceive and process the terrific energy of this life and where I can realize and equate it. For me, the practice and use of oil paint on canvas is much the same as the blood flowing through my brain and body. Oils allow me to form concrete thoughts and feelings. The natural behavior of the oils is as fluid and changeable as the emotional stirrings and thoughts that constantly surface from my dreams and experiences.

I have always constantly scribbled and sketched as a means to explore picture-making possibilities. Some sketches will become paintings. These initial visual mutterings can happen anywhere. Whether it be a restaurant, the beach or just sitting in my car, the mindset is the same. They can be based on a thought or inspired by the play of light moving across a table, or just a fleeting sensation. Sometimes I simply start to draw, and an idea comes to me. I let the lines flow and in an act of "play" allow any thoughts or feelings to emerge and follow them as shown in Fig. 25.



Fig. 25. Various small drawings for *Everything is Hours*

upon each successive line, until the image becomes clear. The genesis for *Everything is Hours* started with a one-by-one-inch scribble made while ordering a hamburger (Fig. 26). After the initial small thumbnail scribble, I rapidly create a succession of other small thumbnails based on the first one (Fig. 27). It is at this stage in the process that I start to discover and delineate other dimensions which then open “doors” and give me access to a larger well of ideas and thoughts. I play with and combine these elements in even more sketches as they emerge from both personal experience and my unconscious mind. As the series of small drawings continue to develop over the course of several days, I meditate over the images and make note of the symbols, myths and figurative relationships that appear in them. In *Everything is Hours*, this process allowed me to discover ways to visually generate my ideas about life and the passage of time with its cyclical motion, which are at the core

These first impressions can be based on a preconceived concept or just a spontaneous invention of characters and designs that I find stirring. My small thumbnail drawings can be created in pen, pencil or watercolor, and when something interests me, I will continue to build



Fig. 26. Thumbnail drawing for *Everything is Hours*

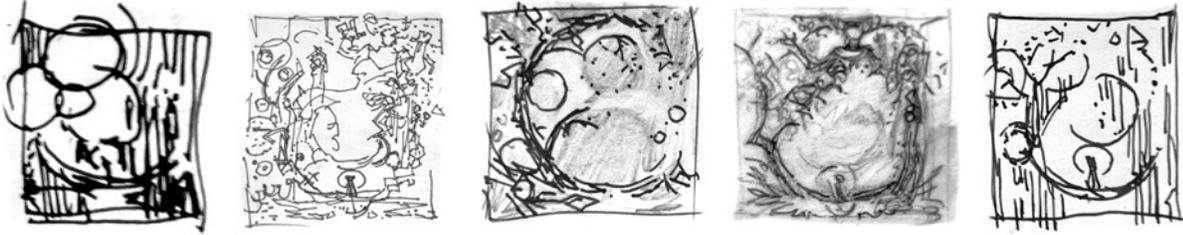


Fig. 27. Thumbnail evolutions for *Everything is Hours*

of the work. As I investigate the symbolic meanings and interpretations of the various motifs that have grown out of the small sketches, I start to combine characters and symbols until the narrative evolves to a point of clarity. At this moment, I will start to make a single larger drawing which incorporates many of the compositional and symbolic ideas and characters that the previous sketches provided. Coming to a final, clear and graphically pleasing composition can take roughly a week. The final drawing can emerge from the paper much like clouds parting to reveal a horizon (Fig. 28). Up to this point, the image felt elusive yet always present.

The drawing can still change, in the way that a stream finds new direction based on the terrain it encounters as gravity draws it to its final destination. The final canvas will help determine this. I am ready to transfer the image onto the canvas, but first I create a small rough



Fig. 28. *Everything is Hours* final painting design

color study. My color choices, as shown in Fig. 29, tend towards the symbolic to amplify the atmosphere and visual narrative.

After the drawing has been transferred onto the canvas, I might start to add other details or improve upon certain aspects of the transferred image. Whether it be related to anatomy or a specific character or perspective, I have the opportunity to push and alter the drawing further



Fig. 29. *Everything is Hours* color rough

now that I can view it at its true scale. When this part of the process is completed, I can begin to paint full scale.

After laying down an imprimatura or a thin layer of color, I create an underpainting with burnt umber and ivory black and start to render the entire image in monochrome as shown in Fig. 30. This initial stage is

vital to the painting's ultimate message. In this phase I

adjust the contrast, lighting, and textures. Even though I have indicated passages of light and dark in my sketch, they will be altered as the painting takes on its own life and the pulse it needs to possess. These issues constantly evolve and are very important to the painting's final emotional impression. Formal and compositional aspects can only be attained and realized as I

move my brush on the surface of the canvas. No matter how much pre-planning I have done, I need to stand in front of the actual canvas to be emotionally moved, as hopefully the viewer will be when they stand in a similar spot. For example, in Fig. 31, which is on the middle-left side of the canvas, I've begun to



Fig. 30. *Everything is Hours* underpainting (detail)

work out the specific characters and actions of the young boys and girls, before color is applied.

This allows me to create an overall value pattern so that I know what the final character and impact of the painting will be.

I have adjusted the postures of the small children as they ascend to the top of the tree and become teenagers. Since one needs to look up at these figures due to the painting's scale, I have intensified the lighting and shadow shapes that are created on the children to amplify the perspective and vaulted position they occupy. This increases the feeling of space and the majesty of the tree on which they climb. I adjusted the lighting so these figures appear to move up and grow into young adulthood, to dramatize their shift into different stages of life and their further involvement with the environment. I will also tweak the textures of the painting as it evolves into its final state. For example, the boat at the bottom of the painting has taken on a much rougher carved and thatched look (Fig 32) than I had originally implied in



Fig. 31. *Everything is Hours* (detail)

my preparatory drawing and underpainting. This rougher texture on the boat and in other parts of the painting can also add a sense of physical presence and the passage of time to certain objects in the picture. These variances are vital to the painting's final emotional message and lend a



Fig. 32. *Everything is Hours* (detail)

unique reality to the image.

When all the values and textures have been established, I start to glaze and scumble in layers of color on the picture plain. The glazes at this stage are very thin and correspond to the rough color study. From there more layers of color, some of which are loaded with impasto putty to add additional texture, are applied to various passages of the painting (Fig 33, left). I then continue to alternate glazes and overpainting until I am satisfied. The thesis painting is now



Fig. 33. *Everything is Hours* thin glazes (detail) versus later version with more color and impasto putty

virtually complete. Over the course of the following weeks, I might come back to the canvas and fine-tune certain aspects of it that I wish to make clearer (Fig. 33, right).

## **CONCLUSION**

My art has always acted not only as a mirror in which I see my inner self, but also as doorways that allow me to discover new creative frontiers. These portals made of paint, canvas and wood allow me to invite others on a journey into the world of the imagination. Our thoughts, experiences and lives are propelled forward in the time we are given. Our shared connection to the unconscious content of humankind becomes accessible when we are able to look within and bring it forth.

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## APPENDIX



Plate 1. Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, Graphite on parchment paper, 12"X12".



Plate 2. Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, 2021, Oil on board, 8"X 8"



Plate 3. Peter Clarke, *Everything is Hours*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 84"X84",