

MOURNING GARDEN



MOURNING GARDEN

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by

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ABSTRACT

After the sudden loss of my father in 2021, I was driven to paint flowers in his memory, unable to bring flowers to his physical resting spot. I paint daisies in honor of the memories of our family dog Daisy, sunflowers as a symbol of the help and support my father gave me, and red roses to represent me, as my father gifted me roses and a sense of personal purpose.

These collections of paintings are presented within large, baroque frames. Each frame encapsulates a field of grief created by the collaged paintings. I bring the paintings together to create chaos, not to negate it, but rather to show its nature and purpose. The chaos serves to overstimulate the viewers' senses to induce a state of meditation, similar to the state of meditation I engage in when making the paintings.

The creation of these paintings is a form of therapy for me. I attach visual imagery to the feelings trapped inside my body through form, color, and repetition. This practice becomes a cathartic experience, as I seek a place of reconciliation and acceptance.

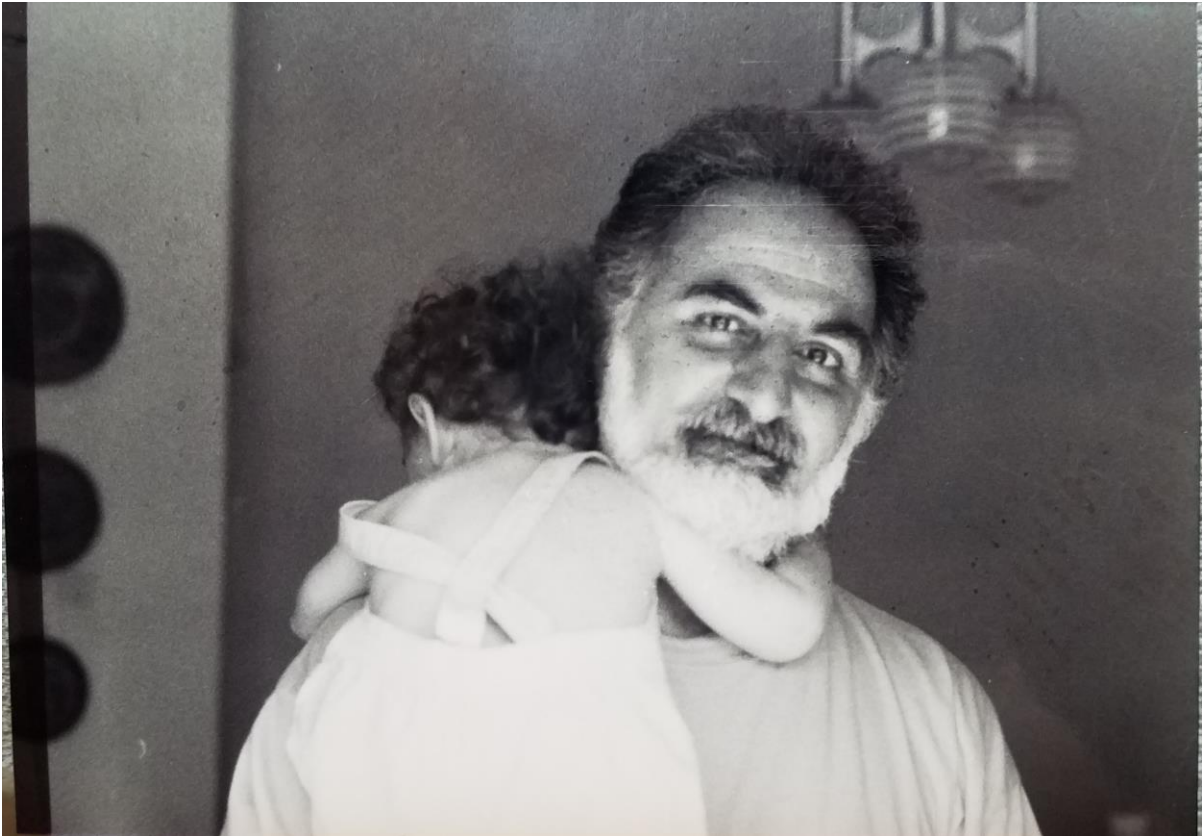
I use a wide variety of materials such as sequins, gold, glitter paper, and holographic sheets in my paintings to interact with light and bring a sense of motion so that the artwork sparkles and dances in the viewer's eye. The spectator becomes a part of the pixelization of memories. Damaged and discarded materials are incorporated to prove to others and myself that even what seems damaged has worth and purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DEDICATION

Dedicated in loving memory of my father, Joe Saporito. Thank you for sharing your love for the arts with me and all the sacrifices you've made along the way.



EPIGRAPH

*“The artist paints her soul;
Visitors find exhibit...
A sharing of love”*

-Joe Saporito

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MOURNING GARDEN

DESCRIPTION

The sudden loss of my father in 2021 changed my world and self, permanently. After the shattering of my reality, I turn to my artwork to regain a sense of balance. Art is the way that I cope and make sense of the events that disintegrate my sense of knowns. My paintings revolve around the love and loss experienced. Needing to find hope outside myself, my subject matter shifted towards flowers after his death. Flowers (Figure 1) became a symbol of my grief, allowing me to give visual identity to complex, abstract ideas.

My dad is buried in Italy. I don't have the opportunity to bring flowers to his grave in my daily life due to my location. Within the rituals of death, we are accustomed to give flowers to the deceased as well as the grieving. Painting flowers is a way to be able to give him flowers, and ones that won't wither and die. When my father passed, I wasn't able to



Figure 1. Detail, *Flowers for Daddy*, 2023, oil on canvas.

make it in time to Italy for the funeral. Once I did arrive, covid lockdowns were in place, and I was trapped in my dad's house for three months in isolation, settling his affairs. As a mourner, I never received flowers, I didn't get to participate in gatherings, or partake in any of the healing rituals we expect. These flowers are also a gift to myself to rectify what feels missing.

When given the opportunity to visit his grave, I had to decide what flowers to gift

him. What felt like a weighted decision became easy when I thought of daisies. For several years it was just me, my dad, and our dog Daisy, who was by our side since my early childhood. When I was 4, my parents and I picked her up as a puppy and brought her to our family home in Italy. She quickly became like a sibling to me, as an only child. By the time I turned 7, my mom abruptly left Italy and my dad, taking me with her to the US. The world I knew and family I had all shattered in an instant without me even knowing it was happening. I would visit my dad in the summers, and Daisy was always there to greet me. After my mother lost custody of me at 15, I was just as abruptly sent back to Italy. After years of turmoil in the US, I found peace in our family unit of me, my dad, and Daisy in Italy. Daisy became a symbol of stability for me. She was tiny, but mighty, with a bark of a big dog. She always protected us and kept us safe. That was my wish for my dad, that wherever he may be, he had protection and peace. I also felt that daisies reflected my dad; a simplicity within their complexity presented a sunny, bright disposition. Daisies allow me to connect with him beyond the space and distance between us.

I later began adding sunflowers to the bouquets brought to my dad. While participating in a grief support group, sunflowers were introduced as a symbol of hope, healing, and growth. Sunflowers represent all the love and support received throughout my grief journey. This support, and the gratitude I have for it, are



Figure 2. Marie Saporito, *Flowers*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 16".

the foundation and core of my healing process. I place sunflowers in the initial layers of my paintings for this reason. In *Flowers*, Figure 2, they're the anchor for all the elements layered above. Sunflowers always find and face the light, and the more light they receive, the more they grow (Daley). The inclusion of the sunflowers is a way of communicating to my dad



Figure 3. Marie Saporito, *Roses*, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 10 “.

that I would be okay. He left me the bonds and support needed to get through this harrowing time.

The roses, such as the ones in *Roses*, Figure 3, instead represent me. To his cemetery bouquet, I would add one single rose to symbolize I'm here. I'm here with you.

In 2017, when I had my first solo show, my father, who was not able to attend due to the distance, surprised me with a large bouquet of red roses. He was always full of surprises and would always find a way to make you feel special, but this had been the first time my father had ever gifted me flowers, and it stuck with me.

In my thesis paintings, fields of overlapping flowers represent the chaos presented by death and grief. Chaos has always been a part of my life. As I moved back and forth between continents without knowing it was going to happen, my reality constantly changed without warning. One day I was part of a family living in Italy, the next I was in the US not knowing

the next time I'd see my dad. The moment I would adapt to the new normal, another move and change would happen. After decades of waiting for the chaos to cease, I've changed my approach and am instead embracing the chaos, seeing what it has to offer and what I can learn from it. Rather than organize the chaos, I am adapting to it. The chaos serves to overstimulate the viewer, replicating what I feel during the creation.

My intent to overstimulate the viewers' senses so they feel a sense of chaos stems from a recent trip to Las Vegas. I was diagnosed with ADHD as teenager. Since the loss of my father my ADHD symptoms have worsened. Visiting Las Vegas and being engulfed in flashing lights, crowds of tourists, music blaring, water and fire shows bursting through the air, I didn't feel overwhelmed at all, quite the opposite. I found a calm and peace amongst the



chaos. It was as if my environment reflected my internal state of being. I wanted to transfer that energy and concept to my work and by extension to the viewer. After the loss of my dad, everything went dark, and I lost myself. The flashing lights, the shininess, and the glitz I found in Vegas

Figure 4. Marie Saporito, *Spiral*, 2023, Acrylic on panel, 12".

awakened a memory of who I used to be, of how drawn to sparkle and glam I am. I literally began to see the light.

Upon my return, I applied this new rediscovery in the studio by starting to work on sequins and other sparkly, reflective materials like in Figure 4, *Spiral*. I find by using these materials light begins to play an active role, and it introduces motion into a still work, animating it to life. Because I am a dancer, including a sense of movement is an important factor in these flower paintings and my self-portraits. In *Gravitational View*, Figure 5, I use a vortex background and position the mirrors to give the impression that they're falling or being sucked away. In *Gravitational View*, I'm alluding to the different parts of self we have, how they don't always line up together, and how we feel our world spiral out of our control when that occurs. The infinity of mirrors reflects a "the more I see, the less I know notion." The repetition of forms and the disorientation all create a dizzying overwhelming state. I'm continuing this practice by repeating the

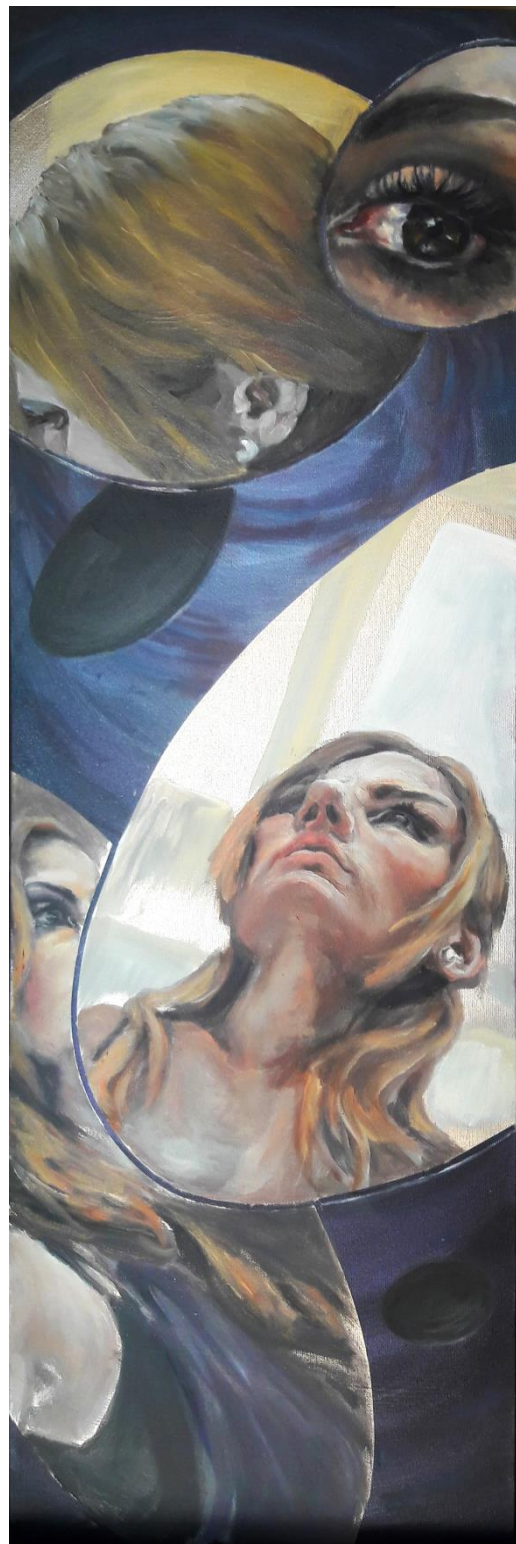


Figure 5. Marie Saporito, *Gravitational View*, 2019 Oil on canvas, 12 x 36 “.

subject, using spirals, capturing the appearance of motion, and layering paintings within the artworks.

To that end, the chaos of flowers in my paintings like *Flowers of Chaos* (Figure 6), create meditation spaces for restless minds. When I was a child and couldn't sleep, my mom would tell me to imagine a blank sheet of paper and think of nothingness. I wasn't able to think of "nothing." My mind would race to notions of infinity, spreading out from the edge of the white rectangle of paper to the edge of the rectangular table. I needed something for my attention to latch onto, rather than spiraling into racing thoughts. I needed the opposite of nothing, but I couldn't find it then. Now, the floral chaos allows for my mind to wander and



Figure 6. Marie Saporito, *Flowers of Chaos*, 2023, Mixed media, 46 x 36".

get lost in the details. My paintings become regenerative spaces. My intent is that the color fields of flowers allow the viewer to engage in this same meditative process alongside with me, experiencing their own visions and voices.

To further accommodate the meditative aspect of my floral color fields, I began painting flowers on round surfaces like my earlier portraits in Figure 7. The shape references mandalas, whose creation symbolizes the transformation of a universe of suffering into one of joy (Blume). The mandala is a symbol of the universe in its ideal form and is used as an aid to meditation, allowing the meditator to envision how to achieve the perfect self (Blume). The circular shape also symbolizes infinity. This is a testament to the love and bond between me and my father.



Figure 7. Marie Saporito, Collage of artwork, 2019.

Previously, my paintings focused on trauma and suicide. I used self-portraiture to confront myself and rebuild myself literally and figuratively. I utilized symbolism to express a parallel narrative of what I was experiencing in the wake of trauma after my recent suicide attempt.

I'm drawn to these round shapes as they represent the cyclical nature of trauma. I like the fact that there is no set orientation like there is with a rectangular canvas. This allows me to disorient the viewers' sense of orientation and direction, allowing them to share that experience with me. In producing my art, I'm working towards a state of resolution or

completion. As circles represent that for me, they provide a mindful framework of my goals from beginning to completion. These aspects all remain pertinent to my current work.

Another element that has remained consistent from my previous body of work, is the use of layers as seen in Figure 8. Layers allow me to both address the complexity of the aspects of my life that trouble me, as well as break them down into smaller pieces and make them manageable. I'm interested in layering both imagery and concepts. In *Time After Time* (Figure 9) from 2019, I build the image up through

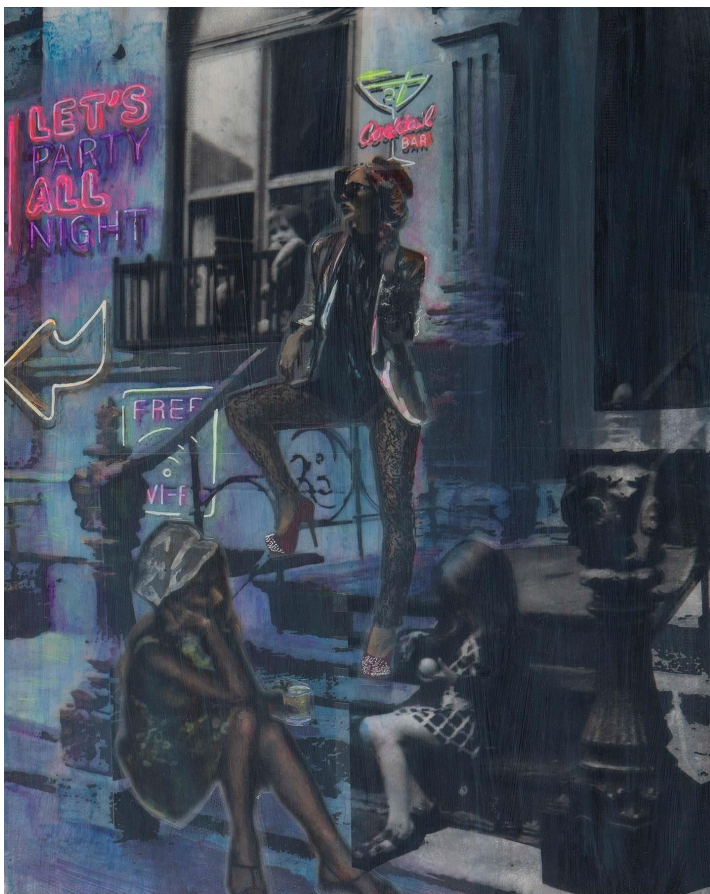


Figure 9. Marie Saporito, *Time After Time*, 2019, Mixed media, 16 x 20“, Private Collection.



Figure 8. Detail *Flowers of Chaos* (Plate 4). 2023.

repeated layers of acetate and paint. I'm also layering the concept of time, overlapping past and present within the same space. One of my dad's passions was photography, in particular, street photography. He had a large collection of photos he had taken in the 1960s while living in New York City, his favorite period of his life. These photographs were proudly

displayed, covering the walls of each house we moved into. They're a visual reminder of home. The base image of this mixed-media painting seen in Figure 9, is one of my favorite photographs of his. When I was about the same age as the little girl on the balcony in the photograph, I would stare at her and try to connect with her on the balcony. I felt like she was searching for something or feeling a bit troubled. The loneliness of being an only child made me want to desperately be her friend and help her. The aspects of the photo that I wanted to leave untouched, stuck in a past time, I left untouched in the painting, leaving the black and white of the photo transfer visible. What is in color in the painting is in the present, and what is in black and white is in the past. The stairs in the photo reminded me of the church steps of the small Italian mountain village I consider to be my hometown. The cemetery there is also my father's final resting place. The church sits central in the Piazza with a large staircase leading up to it. The town tradition is to gather and sit on those steps. As children, we'd play games on them and sit there to enjoy our gelato from the bar directly attached next door. As teens and adults, my friends and I would grab beers and drinks from that bar and drink them on the steps until the early hours of the morning. The catholic guilt would kick in around 2 a.m., and we'd collectively start judging ourselves and question what we're doing with our lives. I wanted to encapsulate those two very different experiences that occurred in the same place but at a different time of life. I created this painting while my dad was visiting me here in California. It was a bonding experience for us to see how both our works, despite being different mediums and styles, could blend together and unite. The last time I sat on those church steps was in 2021 immediately after my father's burial. He was initially buried elsewhere, but he previously expressed wanting to be in that cemetery to be by his mother. It

was a struggle, but I was determined to fulfill his wishes, and with a lot of help from others, we moved him. My husband and closest friends were surrounding me as we toasted to my father's life and memory. Shortly after, I felt a brief sense of peace. Sitting on those steps, looking out to the familiar view, seeing the sky that had suddenly opened after the rain, I knew I did right by my dad and brought him back home where he belonged.



Figure 10. Marie Saporito, *Flowers for Daddy*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 16 x 24".

In my current paintings, I now use layers to define the complexity of the grieving process. I'm controlling the chaos step by step, and every layer is a move forward towards healing and reconciliation. In *Flowers for Daddy* (Figure 10), I began by placing sunflowers and large flowers to fill the void a blank canvas represents. Over the course of a few weeks, every day I would face the void and replace it with flowers. I used bright colors because I wanted to replace the void with life and vibrancy. I want elements that reflect joy to stare back at me as I work. I continued this daily ritual until February 13, my dad's death anniversary. Unable to visit him at the cemetery, this is my tribute and offering to him.



Figure 11. Marie Saporito, Detail *Flowers of Grief* (Plate 2). 2023.

In creating these flowers, I'm very intrigued by blending and mixing colors, either through the overlapping of flowers, wet into wet, or by placing a flower over a previously laid color. In Figure 11, I laid down color and painted white daisies directly on top, letting the bottom layer bleed through the paint transforming white into color. By creating these variations in the petals, the flower is enriched and more dynamic. It becomes a metaphor for what we gain through our human connections. Those bonds make our lives more colorful and vibrant. Gratitude is my

antidote to grief. What I'm most thankful for is the love and help received from those close to me and my dad. Their outpouring of support gave me strength and hope when I had none. The color blending also represents how those who influence my life become a part of me and therefore are always with me. As my dad was my greatest influence, it serves as an important reminder for me.

My flower paintings feel both traditional and contemporary. This dichotomy is part of my being. Being Italian and having lived in Rome, I am at home with a rich ancient history. My Italian identity rivals my being American and living in a new country where history is still in the making. Tradition is important to me, but I also want to move forward and fully participate in the moment. Likewise, this has paralleled my artistic journey. As a dancer, I



Figure 12. Marie Saporito, *Good Mourning Dad*, 2023, Mixed media, 30 x34”.

began and developed my base with ballet, but later fell in love with contemporary genres like tap and hip hop.

Being surrounded by Baroque art in Italy is a comforting sign of home. This influenced my choice in frames. I wanted to juxtapose Baroque or Baroque-like gold frames with contemporary

collages of paintings such as in *Good Mourning Dad*, Figure 12. The idea came when my mentor, Peter Zokosky, displayed several of my paintings within one single frame. Seeing my artwork grouped and contained sparked a vision within me. The frames don't just contain my chaos, they encapsulate it. The frames make the statement this work is important. I also use smaller frames within the large frames seen in Figure 13. Many of the smaller panels measure 5”x7”, 4”x6”, and 4”x4”, the size of photographs and polaroids. Like photos, each of these panels has a story,



Figure 13. Marie Saporito, Detail *Mourning Garden* (Plate 1). 2023.

a moment, and idea of who my father and I were. The smaller artworks within the frame create a collage of memories.

I begin each painting without knowing what the final outcome will look like. The focus is on their creation. They're about the journey, not the destination. Each artwork uniquely documents my healing process. I'm moving away from my practice of conceiving a visual idea and working until that exact image is rendered. I now resolve individual challenges, building up the layers of the painting to realize an unexpected result. I'm interested in replicating what I think or feel over what I see in the world. Without a final anticipated goal in mind, I have more freedom and control in choosing what directions and u-turns to take along the journey.

RESEARCH

Who I am as an artist is a consequence of my upbringing in the creative arts. I began studying dance at the age of 4, and it became my first passion and means to cope with trauma. The internal restlessness and anxiety I felt found an outlet in movement and expression. After a botched spinal injection in 2015, I was left temporarily paralyzed. It took me over a year to relearn how to walk and regain alignment, but when I did, I wanted to dance again. With years of formal training from my past, I was able to retrain myself to dance. My style and approach changed, morphing from carefully planned choreographies to freestyle fusion dance. I am now replicating this approach in the studio. Rather than painting carefully planned portraits, I now paint by instinct. Painting and dance serve as a means to improvise, develop, blossom, and grow.

Art has always been a therapeutic escape for me. In my previous self-portraits, like *The Mirrored Self* (Figure 14), I tackled my relationship with trauma and suicide, beginning with introspective reflections and proceeding towards addressing the point of impact. They're investigative by nature. I'm painting the answers to my questions through meticulous planning and rendering. I built a visual language for myself through motifs and themes such as mirrors like the one the portrait is painted on.



Figure 14. Marie Saporito, *The Mirrored Self*, 2019, Oil on Mirror, 24 x 18".

According to Kathy Malchiodi, art therapist Vija Lusebrink observed in 1990 that images are “a bridge between body and mind, or between the conscious levels of information processing and the physiological changes in the body” (18). Imagery and art can have a vital, active role towards reconciling issues of the human condition such as the mind-body problem. The mind body problem concerns the relationship between mental and physical properties including consciousness, intentionality, perceptual experience, emotional experience, and the many other properties our self possesses (Robinson). We're learning more about image formation and mental imagery as neuroscience advances in understanding the regions of the brain that involve image creation. For example, research shows that imagery we see or we imagine activates the visual cortex of the brain in similar ways. Malchiodi provides another source, Antonio Damasio, who stated in 1994, our bodies respond to mental images as if they are reality (18). Thus, when reality

doesn't make sense, art allows us to create a reality that holds truth for us. I keep this in mind as I create my self-portraits as well as my daisy paintings. My painting becomes a communicative, analytical form of escapism.

In 2019, I was inspired by Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia*'s poster (Figure 15) where Kirsten Dunst is posing as a contemporary Ophelia. I was drawn to the figure of Ophelia in my effort to express a narrative of trauma and death. Having recently gotten married in 2018 and suffering from a traumatic event in my personal life shortly after, I

felt like the bride that had gone crazy and fallen to her demise. The bird's eye view of her floating in water, with that threatening waterline looming, inspired the compositions for some of my self-portraits, such as *Ophelia*, Figure 16. I wanted to capture the mood of the poster but wanted to make the face the central point. While Dunst's gaze is engaged with the viewer, I chose not to interact with the audience, closing my eyes

to leave the viewer wondering if the figure is alive or dead.



Figure 15. Poster for *Melancholia*, 2011, Directed by Lars von Trier.



Figure 16. Marie Saporito, *Ophelia* 2020, Oil on canvas, 14".

This body of work is a result of my need to confront and rebuild myself. My father's death changed how I view death and suicide. The importance of legacy triumphs over the desire to end it all.

My work evolves and transforms in reaction to the events that have changed my life. In my present daisy paintings, I find peace in the cathartic action of repeating subject matter and brushstrokes. Detaching from my previous way of working, I find freedom in approaching my work without a plan, limiting the rules to a bare minimum.

I had a strong desire to paint flowers for my father, but it was after a visit to the Getty that I became inspired. After seeing Vincent van Gogh's *Iris*es (Figure 17), I became excited by how grand the effect of a simple subject matter like flowers can be. It drives me to want to make my own floral contribution within larger picture of art history.

After episodes of hospitalization and self-mutilation, in May 1889, Van Gogh chose to enter an asylum in Saint-Rémy, France where he created almost 130 paintings in the last year before his death. Working from life in the asylum's garden, within the first week he began *Iris*es (Getty).



Figure 17. Vincent van Gogh, *Iris*es, 1889, Oil on canvas, 29 x37 “, Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Like me, Van Gogh also found healing from painting flowers and used his art to search for his sanity. Historians now determine painting was the best remedy for his psychiatric disorder (Van Gogh Museum). Likewise, painting and making art allow me to

externalize what I feel and visualize my states of being, allowing me to learn more about myself and how I cope.

The flowers in my painting relate to the tradition of vanitas. Associated with artists in Northern Europe in the 16th and 17th century, vanitas still lifes depict objects with symbolism. These works depict versions of mortality and are meant to emphasize the fragility and transience of human life, while highlighting the emptiness and meaninglessness of worldly possessions (Fry). Flowers were a recurring subject depicted in the vanitas still lifes. I'm addressing the aspect of mortality that the flowers were used for, but taking the narrative outside of a still-life format, giving them a more active role. My paintings are a proof of existence, within the transience of life, my dad is important.

I am not the first to incorporate the traditional subject of flowers into a contemporary setting. Andy Warhol famously made a *Flowers* series in 1964, followed by his later *Daisy* (Figure 18) series in 1982. My *Daisy* painting (Figure 19) and Warhol's share the same complementary color scheme, yet have different interpretations and renditions. His



Figure 18. Andy Warhol, *Daisy*, 1982, 40 x 60 " Lenox Museum Board



Figure 19. Marie Saporito, *Daisy*, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 20 "

silkscreens offer a more graphic representation of the subject, opposed to the Dutch vanitas still-lives and my painting of daisies. My beginnings in the visual art world started in graphic design followed by illustration. I borrow from my roots, without the need to depict hyper-realistic daisies, I depend on my imagination. Warhol was also very interested in the repeating flower forms in his prints, stating “My fascination with letting images repeat and repeat— or in film’s case, “run on”– manifests my belief that we spend much of our lives seeing without observing” (Hoory). I instead believe that repetition adds emphasis to the subject matter which forces us to observe. A major difference between my work and Warhol’s is that the flowers Warhol has chosen for this series are impersonal, their source being a photograph whose import was never identified (Hoory), whereas my representation of flowers is indeed deeply personal.

The collections of flowers in my painting can act like color field paintings. Looking at these color fields induces meditation. My intent aligns closely to the artist Mark Rothko, who also wanted the viewer to meditate while engulfed in the paintings. Rothko stated, “I’m interested only in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on,” (MoMA) which parallels my own intent. He explored color contrasts and



Figure 20. Mark Rothko, Rothko Chapel, 1971, Houston, Texas.

modulations pushing their expressive potential within his oversized, floating rectangles of color (NGA). In creating my color fields of flowers, I too am investigating color's expressive potential. In 1954 Rothko expressed, "It would be good if little places could be set up all over the country, like a little chapel where the traveler, or



Figure 21. Marie Saporito, *Mourning Garden*, 2023, Mixed Media, 50 x 50".

wanderer could come for an hour to meditate on a single painting hung in a small room, and by itself" (Mencher). I follow a similar philosophy, appreciating having viewing rooms with meditative spaces, and wanting the viewer to get lost in a meditative space found within my paintings. However, our targeted audience is different. While Rothko wanted to reach a wide range of people, I'm targeting more specifically a neurodivergent audience. By introducing a chaos of different elements and representations of daisies, I'm overstimulating the targeted viewers' attention, forcing them to have to slow down and wander through the different paintings that make up the whole. The collections of overlapping paintings within a larger work, along with the reflective materials, provides too much information to digest in an

initial glance. The viewer needs to take time to observe the individual elements and how they also work together.

METHODOLOGY

In creating my paintings, I'm applying an abstract process to a representational subject. I lead with feeling and instinct geared towards developing a stream of subconsciousness. I'm expressing what I'm feeling as it's occurring. I apply this through my color choices, application method, or by deconstructing and reconstructing. As I'm approaching my work in layers, each layer tells a story of what I'm experiencing.

With these paintings I've shifted from referencing photos or life experiences and am working from my imagination. In the studio, I keep open a photograph of bouquets of flowers that I had brought to my father's grave for inspiration. When my father passed away, my entire world stopped. We had a daily practice of watching the news together, followed by hours of commentary and

discussion. As a professor within the faculty of political science, he had a lot to teach me, and he was my guide. When he died, I could no longer watch the news and blocked out the outside world. It all became unrecognizable. The depression from grief drained all the color

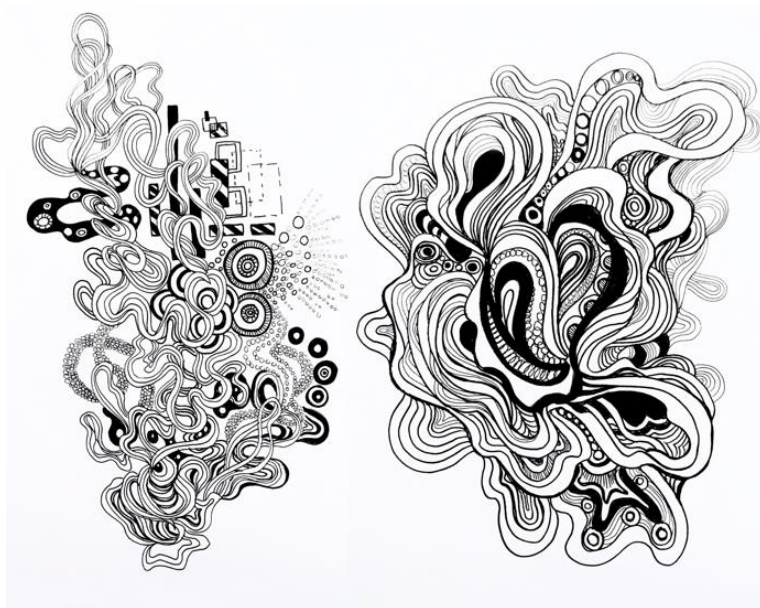


Figure 22. Marie Saporito, Drawings, 2021.

out of my world. I lacked inspiration and creativity within a world that felt meaningless, but I knew that I had a lot to express. I began creating abstract black pen drawings focused on lines and circles, like in Figure 22. I was interested in expressing, documenting, and visualizing my subconscious of the moment. In the spirit of the surrealists' automatic drawings, I created hundreds of these drawings over the course of two years.

Similarly, while creating this body of work I experienced a period of strong depression. I began using acrylic paint markers and naturally started creating various patterns such as Figure 23. The making of these patterns was the only thing I was able to do while depressed, but making them was also my

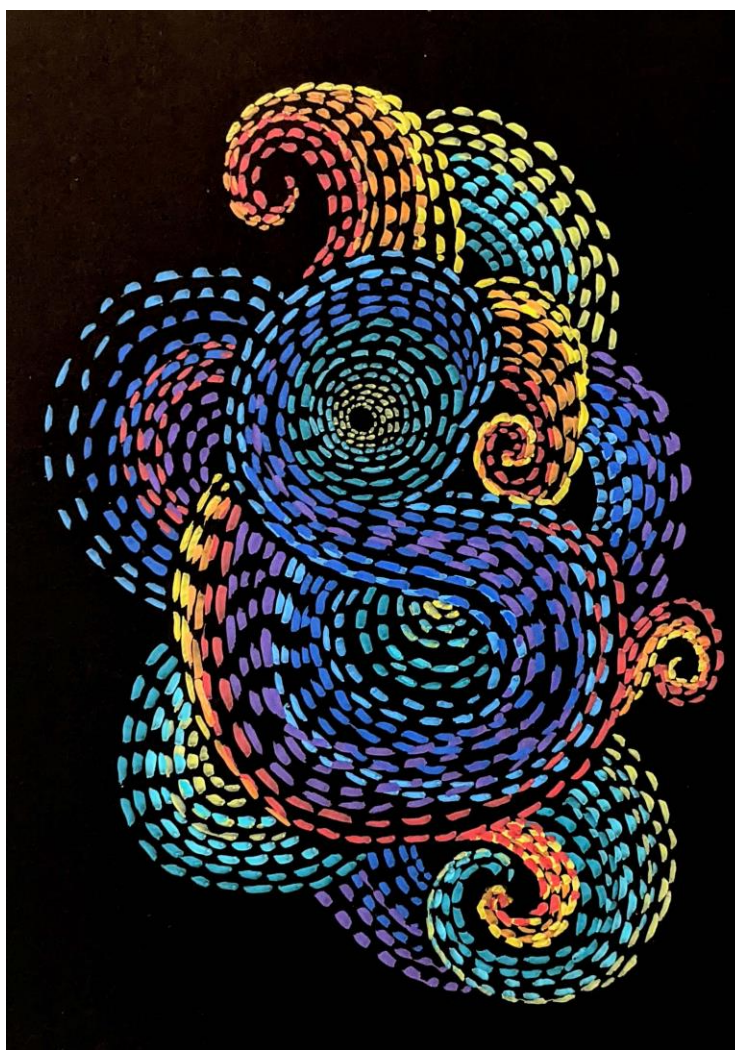


Figure 23. Marie Saporito, Drawing, 2023 .

strongest desire while in that state. Producing them attenuated my depressive symptoms and gave me a state of calm. It felt good to work towards a larger project. I was able to see myself move forward while feeling stationary.

I'm now incorporating these drawings into my work. They form part of a base layer from which the colorful flowers develop. In Figure 24, *Chaos*, I collaged three different drawings and created my color fields of daisies weaving through the patterns. My intent is to create a net contrast between the black-and-white and color sections of the painting, while maintaining a harmony and connection between the painted flowers and drawings.

Color serves a primary role in my work. Getting back into painting after a long break, I returned to my palette of origin using what my undergraduate mentor, Nathan Lewis, referred to as an Impressionist palette of titanium white, lemon yellow, cadmium yellow, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, dioxide purple, ultramarine blue, pthalo blue, and burnt umber. I wanted to start from a familiar place and one of comfort. I additionally observed that this palette choice would allow me to

achieve the color range and vibrancy I desire, while still being able to control them to achieve harmony. This palette also allows me to mix the colors without losing their vibrancy. For example, by mixing cadmium red with cadmium yellow I can produce a beautiful cadmium orange while being able to control the hue.



Figure 24. Marie Saporito, *Chaos*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 12 x 24".



Figure 25. Marie Saporito, Progress shot of *Family*, 2023.

combination feels authentic to my state of being.

Over the background color, I begin to assemble in layers. I want to confuse viewers' perception through the placement and overlapping of the panels (Figure 26). I want

I choose my background color based upon my mood. There's an equal mix of bright and happy colors such as bright blue, and other gloomier and dark colors such purple. Purple is a funeral color in Italy. I like to layer alizarin crimson over the majority of the surface and blend in dioxide violet on one portion of the canvas and pthalo blue on the opposite side (Figure 25). This



Figure 26. Marie Saporito, *Family*, part of *Flowers of Grief* (Plate 2). 2023, 12x 24".



Figure 27. Marie Saporito, *Flowers of Grief*, 2023, Mixed Media, 61x 49".

there to not be an immediate read of what's in front of what of where everything is sitting. I want the audience to feel disoriented.



Figure 28. Marie Saporito, Detail *Good Mourning Dad*, (Plate 3). 2023.

When developing larger collaged compositions such as *Flowers of Grief*, Figure 27, I'm applying the same formula as in the individual paintings, looking at color to determine what painting goes where and how the pieces fit together. I'm looking at the composition as a whole, as well as breaking it down into a grid and assuring that each section is carefully curated. I pave a path of reflective materials to lead the eye through the

painting. The collaged artworks create dimension and dramatic shadows. Some transparent panels are mounted to give the illusion that they're floating to further this effect as seen in Figure 28.

My brushwork has become more expressive and less controlled. I'm more interested in seeing what happens naturally rather than controlling details. I vary the brush size and type based on my mood and instincts to create the rings of petals. I use repetition within my process to create a sense of calm within myself. I'm shifting approach from wanting smoothness in my work, like in my portraits, towards incorporating texture and dimension. To emphasize these aspects, I've incorporated mediums like thick modeling paste, heavy gel



Figure 29. Marie Saporito, *Decay*, acrylic on wood, 8 x 10 “, part of *Good Mourning Dad* (Plate 3).

medium, crackle paste, and a beaded medium. In *Decay*, Fig 29, I use the beaded medium to create an elevated, textural center, and then layered rings of petals with the crackle paste to make the daisy appear damaged.

To appease my neurodivergent ADHD brain, I work on multiple pieces simultaneously. I rotate between the paintings, working on some long term paintings and others for briefer periods. Sometimes I hyperfocus and work on

one piece for several hours, other times I work in 20-minute spurts moving from piece to piece. I go to where I'm drawn and provide myself with variety to follow my moods and inspiration.



Figure 30. Marie Saporito, *TrilogY of Grief*, part of *Flowers of Grief* (Plate 2), 2023.

A part of the variety in my work is the shape of the surfaces. I'm drawn in particular to round, square, and long and narrow panels. I enjoy working with these formats as they present both challenges and opportunities. I used oval panels for the series *TrilogY of Grief* (Figure 30), as I liked how they reminded me of eggs or seeds—the start of life. As the topic of these paintings is the fading of life and memories, their shape serves as a symbol of hope.

As I began working with more mixed media to accommodate the materials and shorten the drying times between layers, I switched from oil paint to acrylic. I made this switch while painting *TrilogY of Grief*. In this series, I wanted to show the progression of my memories and my father's presence



Figure 31. Marie Saporito, Panel 3 of *TrilogY of Grief*, 2023.

fading away from my life. As time passes, I hear his voice less distinctly and his words become muffled and unrecognizable. I began the first panel in oil and continued the other two in acrylic, maintaining the same color palette. I wanted to collage my father's words over the painting, seen in Figure 31, and acrylic lends better for this intent. My father's greatest passion was writing; his MFA was in Creative Writing and he dedicated his retirement from teaching to publishing poems and short stories. My father was a great storyteller and was bursting with various exciting stories from his life. He would enjoy vividly sharing them. Now that he cannot retell them, the stories are fading. I wanted to use his actual stories to convey that. The process of cutting up his words was painful, but it felt ritualistic. The act of gluing them down was cathartic and restorative.

Some of the surfaces I use are canvases that I have repaired or abandoned materials. There's an aspect of grief that makes me feel damaged, subhuman, and scared to be discarded by society. To redeem these feelings, I take what's broken and discarded and prove to myself and others that just because someone or something is damaged, they still have



Figure 32. Marie Saporito, Detail *Flowers of Chaos* (Plate 4). 2023.

purpose and worth. While creatively blocked after my father's death, I quelled my artistic restlessness by repairing torn canvases I had around my studio. I carefully patched and applied gesso to each one, granting them a new life and



Figure 33. Marie Saporito, *Itinerary*, 2023, Acrylic on vinyl, 16 x 16”.

fresh start. When I started painting again, those canvases were the first I picked, it was their time to pass from the junkyard into the spotlight.

I also used vinyl flooring samples that were destined for a landfill. While they may no longer serve their purpose, they’re useful to me. I like using the floor samples as there’s an immediate connection to grounding—something I strive for. Their

texture, transparencies, and patterns add to the work. In Figure 33, *Itinerary*, I use the flooring pattern to help create abstract fields, like the ones I would see from the plane when I was close to my destination flying back and forth between my homes. The daisies represent the various homes and places I’ve lived. The lines connecting them are the experiences gained moving from place to place.

When I ran out of panels to paint, I began using the box they were shipped to me in. I wrapped the cardboard with vinyl left over from previous projects and painted on top. I also cut the vinyl up to make flowers on some panels as well as incorporating the different types of vinyl into my backgrounds. I want to upcycle these materials and discards into a new purpose, much like the internal processes of healing through grief.

CONCLUSION

The making of my floral painting collages has been a means to cope and make sense of the great loss that I have experienced. The paintings have helped me find a way to connect and communicate with my dad in a way that goes beyond the limits of mortality. It has allowed me to visualize externally for viewers the turmoil and confusion that I experience internally. As for my artistic practice moving forward, I am open to new work, embracing my intuitive approach.

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APPENDIX



Plate 1. Marie Saporito, *Mourning Garden*, 2023, Mixed media, 50 x 50".



Plate 2. Marie Saporito, *Flowers of Grief*, 2023, Mixed media, 61 x 49".



Plate 3. Marie Saporito, *Good Mourning Dad*, 2023, Mixed media, 30 x 34".



Plate 4. Marie Saporito, *Flowers of Chaos*, 2023, Mixed Media, 46 x 36".



Plate 5. Marie Saporito, *The Mirrored Self*, 2019, Oil on mirror, 24 x 18".

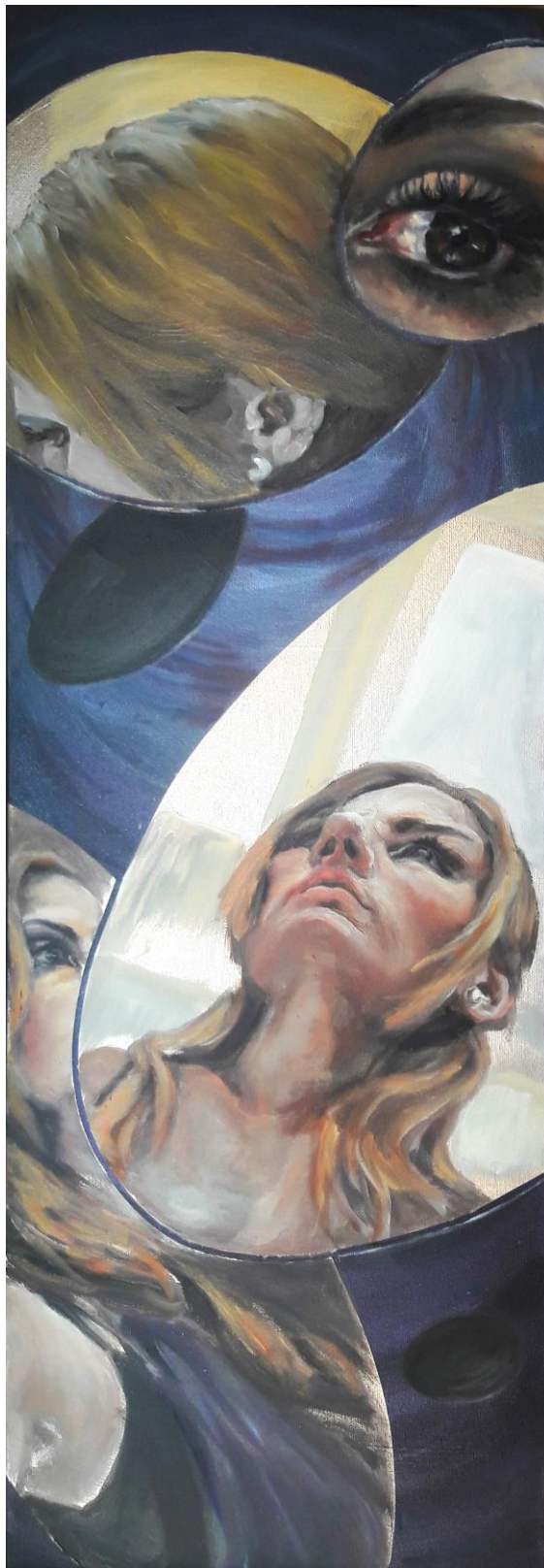


Plate 6. Marie Saporito, *Gravitational View*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 12 x 36".



Plate 7. Marie Saporito, *Ophelia*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 14".



Plate 8. Marie Saporto, *Time After Time*, 2019, Mixed media, 16 x 20".



Plate 9. Marie Saporito, *Flowers for Daddy*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 16 x 20".



Plate 10. Marie Saporito, *Roses*, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 10".



Plate 10 Marie Saporito, *Daisy*, 2023, Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 20".



Plate 11. Marie Saporito, *Flowers*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 16".