

BROAD DAYLIGHT



BROAD DAYLIGHT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Laguna College of Art & Design

by

OLIVIA STUDE

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Fine Arts

May 2023

**Laguna College of Art and Design
Master of Fine Arts Thesis Approval
Signature Page**

Thesis Title: **Broad Daylight**

MFA Candidate: Olivia Stude

Thesis Advisor: Susan M. King, PhD

MFA Program Chair: Peter Zokosky

Dean MFA Program: Vice President of Academic Affairs

LCAD President: Steven J. Brittan

Date Approved: _____

©2023 by Olivia Stude

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

Am I the only one in the throes of imposter syndrome in a room brimming with faith and heavenly adoration? I went to mega churches with my family when I was younger and witnessed the live performative baptisms, aerial Christmas eve dancers' extravaganzas, and dedicated Christian rock bands. Yet I felt like an outsider. I felt inadequate in my faith because I wasn't moved to raise my hands during worship. My arms were halted by a subconscious distrust in the words of every hymn. If God was watching over me, why wouldn't he intervene when things got bad at home? My paintings are a series of reactions to my life and faith in and outside of my parents' home. They are allegorical paintings that examine the family system I was cast into and my struggles to ascertain my identity outside of my family. My painting style is influenced by classical narrative painting and impressionism, with a healthy serving of technical influence from plein air painting to depict my sunny outdoor settings. By painting outdoor scenes that reflect family struggles and internal religious struggles, I bring my trauma into the sunlight, transform my memories of my childhood, and forge my identity as an independent adult.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my mentors and advisors D.J. Hall, John Brosio, William Neukomm, Eric Merrell, and Serena Potter for their guidance and encouragement throughout my MFA candidacy. To my friends Luke, Collin, Elijah, and Tahlia for their undying support and input on my artwork throughout the years. To my partner Ian for emboldening my spirit and supporting my artistic ventures.

DEDICATION

For my parents, Lia & Randy Stude, and my siblings, Shealyn, Cayleigh, and Blake, whose support, advice, and flexibility gave me agency to paint honestly.

EPIGRAPH

Through the fire through the flames

You won't even say your name

Only "I am that I am"

But who could ever live that way?

-Vampire Weekend, "Ya Hey"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BROAD DAYLIGHT	1
DESCRIPTION.....	1
RESEARCH.....	10
METHODOLOGY	17
CONCLUSION.....	22
WORKS CITED.....	23
APPENDIX	24
ARTIST'S NOTE.....	43

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	<i>Moving Out or On</i> , Olivia Stude, 2023	3
FIGURE 2	<i>Moving Out or On (study)</i> , Olivia Stude, 2021	5
FIGURE 3	<i>Eve in the Garden</i> , Olivia Stude, 2022	6
FIGURE 4	<i>Hiding from God I</i> , Olivia Stude, 2022	7
FIGURE 5	<i>Hiding from God II</i> , Olivia Stude, 2022	7
FIGURE 6	<i>Burning Bramble</i> , Olivia Stude, 2023	8
FIGURE 7	<i>Mom and Dad</i> , Olivia Stude, 2023	10
FIGURE 8	<i>View of Saintes-Maries</i> , Vincent van Gogh, 1888	11
FIGURE 9	<i>Mom</i> , Olivia Stude, 2023	11
FIGURE 10	<i>Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)</i> , Vincent van Gogh, 1888	12
FIGURE 11	<i>Recollections of a Visit to Leningrad</i> , Richard Diebenkorn, 1965	13
FIGURE 12	<i>One of the Flowers (detail)</i> , Olivia Stude, 2022	14
FIGURE 13	<i>Roses</i> , Calvin Liang, 2017	14
FIGURE 14	<i>Moving Out or On (left canvas)</i> , Olivia Stude, 2023	15
FIGURE 15	<i>Auto-Baptism</i> , Olivia Stude, 2023	16
FIGURE 16	<i>One of the Flowers</i> , Olivia Stude, 2022	18
FIGURE 17	<i>One of the Flowers (sketch)</i> , Olivia Stude, 2022	19
FIGURE 18	<i>One of the Flowers (photo reference)</i> , Olivia Stude, 2022	20

TABLE OF PLATES

PLATE 1	<i>Mom and Dad</i> , 2023	24
PLATE 2	<i>Mom and Dad (left panel)</i> , 2023	25
PLATE 3	<i>Mom and Dad (right panel)</i> , 2023	26
PLATE 4	<i>Eve in the Garden</i> , 2022	27
PLATE 5	<i>Hiding from God I</i> , 2022	28
PLATE 6	<i>Hiding from God II</i> , 2022	29
PLATE 7	<i>Auto-Baptism</i> , 2023	30
PLATE 8	<i>Please Don't Help Me</i> , 2023	31
PLATE 9	<i>Madonna & Child</i> , 2023	32
PLATE 10	<i>One of the Flowers</i> , 2022	33
PLATE 11	<i>Moving Out or On</i> , 2023	34
PLATE 12	<i>Moving Out or On (left canvas)</i> , 2023	35
PLATE 13	<i>Moving Out or On (center canvas)</i> , 2023	36
PLATE 14	<i>Moving Out or On (right canvas)</i> , 2023	37
PLATE 15	<i>Moving Out or On (study)</i> , 2021	38
PLATE 16	<i>Burning Bramble</i> , 2023	39
PLATE 17	<i>Forbidden Fruit</i> , 2021	40
PLATE 18	<i>Adam & the Absence of Reason</i> , 2022	41
PLATE 19	<i>Adam, Eve, and the Serpent</i> , 2022	42

BROAD DAYLIGHT

DESCRIPTION

Commercially designed homes surrounded by imprudent landscaping masquerade family crises indoors. If you listen closely as you walk along the sidewalk of my suburban childhood home, you may hear objects colliding and incoherent shouting. As you step onto the manicured front lawn, past a few cars collecting cobwebs in the driveway, you are greeted with muffled doors slamming. If you cup your hands to adjust your eyes for a better look through the double-paned windows, the scenes within aren't kosher. Growing up I endured trauma in an unstable home, my parents fought constantly, and that chaos in tandem with religious condemnation smothered my childhood. Every decision I made was scrutinized under religion, and this judgment haunts me. I am compelled to paint religious stories especially after moving away from my family.

At a young age, I took on a troubling role in my family, consoling my parents after blowups and reassuring my little sisters that everything was going to be okay. My childhood, however scary at times, continues to have a profound impact on my artwork. I use my paintings to channel my relationship with my family, religion, and my identity now. These paintings help me understand my past and confront the real effects of my childhood on the development of my adult identity. I paint scenes of my parents, siblings, and myself to alleviate my internal and external struggles with religion and my spiritual identity and transform them into something more tangible.

If you looked from the outside in, my family was wonderful. A nuclear family with distilled Christian values. Whenever my family was in turmoil, financially or otherwise, the

solution was to give it up to God. God would make sure we got the power back on. God would make sure we had food on the table. The Lord giveth. God would also cast judgment on my choices, like choosing to have a boyfriend at 19 years old, choosing to get a tattoo, or choosing to move out. If my family went to church and showed up for God, indeed he would show up for us. Responsibility and hope were delegated to God, and this pattern really poisoned my relationship with religion. I didn't trust that God would provide for my family, myself, or anyone else. Naturally, I cannot detach my familial distress from religion which in turn bleeds into my paintings. Christian stories like Paul and the Ephesians, Genesis, and the Book of Numbers resonate with me because these stories address themes of distrust, uncertainty, grief, and loss of identity in religion. I paint allegorical and religious narrative paintings of myself and my family due to my upbringing. As I investigate religion independent of my family, relating my artwork and moments of trauma to biblical stories helps me translate my internal frustration, sadness, and confusion into something more coherent.

My triptych *Moving Out or On* (Fig. 1) was the first of my religious allegorical paintings. Inspired by the biblical story of Paul and the Ephesians, *Moving Out or On* details the series of events that led me to leave my parents' house. This painting symbolizes my spiritual and physical separation from my family. This painting depicts the layers of conflict and revelations I experienced in the process of moving out. Seeking my own independence had a profound impact on my relationship with my parents, and it was a bittersweet termination of my position within the family system. Because of my religious upbringing, I approached this painting with a classical device *simultanbild* found in Christian paintings



Figure 1. Olivia Stude, *Moving Out or On*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 9' x 4'

throughout history. *Simultanbild* is an artistic device used to show the progression of time or events through repeated figures. Most examples of this device involve the life and crucifixion of Jesus. Netherlandish painters from the 1400s often used *simultanbild* for storytelling on an epic scale, and I used *simultanbild* to echo that epic storytelling in my triptych *Moving Out or On*. In the biblical story of Paul and the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul goes to Ephesus to spread the word of God and is subsequently imprisoned because of his belief. In prison, Paul writes a letter to the Ephesians detailing the Gospel story and expressing God's love for all his people. Paul ends this letter with a prayer of hope that the Ephesians are strengthened by God's spirit and understand the love of Jesus Christ. Paul ultimately leaves Ephesus after being told by God to spread the gospel in Macedonia. His departure is bittersweet, and the Ephesians don't want him to leave. I related to the Apostle Paul in my efforts to leave my family home. Moving out was hard for me, not because I was scared to live separately from my family, but because I feared what might happen in my absence. In this triptych, I express the anguish and futility I felt as I weighed whether I should leave or stay in place. The event that swayed my decision is highlighted on the left side of the triptych—a moment of conflict

and blind rage that I felt compelled to halt. The sequential figures represent my emotional stages of moving out. The first figure symbolizes my exhausted efforts within my role, the second figure symbolizes my grief and recognition of necessary change, and the last figure embraces my mom and accepts the change. The triptych is formatted so that the painting is an altarpiece that cannot close comfortably. The side panels are larger than the middle panel. The repeated figure and bright outdoor setting illuminate my story and embrace my first act of independence.

Before moving out in 2020, I was stuck indoors with my parents' conflict. Like most of the world during the pandemic, the fear of venturing outside engulfed my family. My mom peppered me with health worries, and my dad enforced a strict “no public spaces” policy, restricting my freedom to the yard of my parents’ home. My only relief from isolation was painting and sketching the exterior views of my parents’ house, which was an eerie experience during the pandemic. I remember the quiet very vividly, sitting in my parents’ backyard midday. With the spring sun warming my shoulders, the lack of noise was deafening. That emptiness was amplified by an expansive grass yard occupied only by our oldest family dog. At that time, I came to appreciate the simple layout of my parents’ yard and home because the house felt bare and in harmony with the neighborhood around it. My parents’ landscaping and home are fascinating in their practicality. The backyard is split perfectly into three sections: one grass patch cradled by rectangular pebbled patches, all outlined by short wooden edging. A straight line of citrus trees along the left side of the yard provides shade in the afternoon and fruit in the spring. The back fence is guarded by a line of manicured arborvitae trees. The right side of the yard has a pebble-lined runner with air

conditioners and power boxes with the occasional bee infestation. The utilitarian landscape is nestled perfectly against the textured concrete walls of my parents' house. This stillness and practicality stand in stark contrast to the people inside the home, and I've grown to love this disparity. Painting outside provided a sense of freedom and normality I craved during the spring of 2020, and because of restrictions, my parent's house became the focal point for my exploration in plein air. *En plein air* is a French expression meaning "in open air" that has been incorporated into English, and it refers to the act of drawing or painting outdoors. *Moving Out or On* jumpstarted my full incorporation of plein air and impressionism into my paintings. Plein air has become an avenue for me to explore color and light, and it influences every aspect of my technical approach to my religious narrative paintings. My paintings are set outside the houses I have lived in, and the subjects are drenched in natural light. It is important for me to paint my subjects and narratives outdoors because it sheds light on the conflicts that occurred behind closed doors all my life.

I began *Moving Out or On* with a smaller plein air painting (Fig. 2) of the setting—the driveway where I broke the news of my departure to my mom. Starting with a vibrant purple imprimatura, and chasing the warmth of the midday sun, I painted the front yard of my parents' house, ending the session with dollops of gold haloing the flowers within the scene. I start each narrative painting with a plein air study of the scene



Figure 2. Olivia Stude, *Moving Out or On (study)*, 2021, Oil on mdf, 9" x 12"

with a bright imprimatura on an oil primed wood panel. Depending on the time of day or setting for the painting, the color of my imprimatura changes. Most scenes begin with a Dioxazine Purple to capture the imprinting haze of the midday sun. Afternoon and golden hour scenes begin with Quinacridone Magenta, and shady backlit scenes begin with Phthalo Emerald. Plein air painting at the inception of my narrative work establishes the mood and context for each painting. Sometimes this context is literal and depicts the exact spot where a story occurred, and other times the context is allegorical. It is vital for me to have my paintings take place outside to halo my narratives with the beauty of daylight. My paintings shine a light on the regular and unconcealed trauma I and others have experienced. These kinds of situations can, and often do, occur in broad daylight.

I often explore my conflicted feelings about religion and family dynamics in my paintings. My personal relationship with God is frequently questioned by those around me, and honestly, I struggle constantly with my faith. After consoling loved ones' tragedy after tragedy, my faith is wavering, and I feel enormous shame for my disconnection from God. This shame is amplified by outward judgment and questioning by my loved ones who often



Figure 3. Olivia Stude, *Eve in the Garden*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 16" x 20"

use salvation and talk of end times to ensure conformity in my life. This pattern compels me to prove my faith on shaky ground. I often feel like I am hiding from God, and I feel shameful about my wavering faith after being raised in a Christian home. I painted



Figure 4. Olivia Stude, *Hiding from God I*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 16" x 20"

Eve in the Garden and *Hiding from God I & II* (Figs. 3-5) to tackle my sense of religious uncertainty and outward shame. Composition and perspective are important within these paintings. The role of the viewer in this perspective is to judge or discern where the figure is and why she is hiding. The viewer becomes God in

these paintings, judging the figure and recognizing the futility of the woman trying to hide. The viewer is a witness to the silliness of it all. I relate my religious uncertainty to Eve in Genesis, who after consuming the forbidden fruit realizes that she defied God and hides in shame. The comments my family makes about my faith weigh heavily on my spirit, because they have been my religious guides all my life. My parents introduced me to God, so when they question my faith, I become especially confused and lose sight of what I believe and



Figure 5. Olivia Stude, *Hiding from God II*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 16" x 20"

who I am. This confusion has led me to change my approach to Christianity. Without churches or other people's interpretations, I now read the bible on my own. I feel a degree of spiritual separation from my family because of my tailored approach to Christianity.

My paintings are my impression of



Figure 6. Olivia Stude, *Burning Bramble*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 24" x 30"

biblical stories and practices within Christianity, and how I relate these stories to my family and my life.

Outward analysis of my family's struggles in addition to my internal struggle is incredibly important to my paintings, and this allows me to create empathy for each person's point of view in my

artwork. In my paintings of my family, I address the individual pressures and pasts that haunt each of them, including religious prejudice, blind faith, isolation, and marital strain. My paintings address the stories of my family but depict them allegorically. *Burning Bramble* (Fig. 6) demonstrates my brother Blake's dedication to God and religious discourse in relation to the story of Moses in Exodus. My brother has his master's in theology and studied for years to become a pastor. He volunteered as a youth pastor after graduating and now works for a Christian ministry in Arizona. He has dedicated his life to God and travels the world documenting places of worship and religious summits to spread the word of God and lead others to salvation, much like the prophet Moses. In the book of Exodus (Chapters 1-18), Moses leads the Israelites out of slavery and toward promised land after being called on by God and given guidelines for salvation. The Book of Numbers (Chapters 1-21) details the treacherous journey of Moses and the Israelites through the wilderness toward the promised land and demonstrates God's requirement of total dedication and conformity or blind faith in

order to reach salvation. While I admire my brother's path, I wanted the painting of him to relate to the destruction and horrors that religion sometimes ignores. This painting of my brother is a prophetic examination of my feelings about blind faith, where the figure is occupied by a small weed burning in a field while the building in the distance is on fire. This painting explores one of the issues that occupies my family, while the diptych of my parents examines the source of my family's dynamic (Fig. 7). This diptych addresses the masked unhappiness of my parents that I witnessed throughout my childhood.

The portrait of my parents is an altarpiece, a golden-framed diptych detailing the pain and conflict between them and my empathy for both of their positions. In the portrait of my mother, I captured her melancholic gaze upon my father to represent the wavering spirit I witnessed in my mom throughout my childhood. The portrait of my father is theatrical in pose to demonstrate the performative role I witnessed my dad adopt as I grew older. The diptych closes perfectly, in contrast to my triptych *Moving Out or On*, to emphasize the impact that relationship has had on me and my unease in leaving them alone. This diptych also contains slight disjunctures within the perspective of my parents and the surrounding architecture. My father is looked down upon by the viewer, and my mother is met at eye level, these discrepancies in perspective allude to my emotional entanglement with my parents. The architecture of the house is disjointed between the two panels, reinforcing their imperfect union. Through this art historical format, I am creating a painting that alludes to



Figure 7. Olivia Stude, *Mom and Dad*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 48” x 36”

the Christian values of my parents, while detailing their experiences of each other. My goal for all my paintings is to bring the internal and external conflicts to light.

RESEARCH

Stylistically my artwork is influenced by three colorful movements: Post-Impressionism, Bay Area Figuration, and California Impressionism. These movements attract me because they focus on color, shape, and light. I revisit the paintings of artists from these movements when I encounter compositional and colorful snags in my artwork or when I need a little inspiration. I Frankenstein these three movements in my paintings to satisfy my need for impactful design and lively color.

Vincent van Gogh is the poster child of Post-Impressionism, known for his expressive brushwork and spirited use of color. In a letter to his brother Theo, Van Gogh describes his intentions with color in his paintings, “Instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I have before my eyes, I use color more arbitrarily, in order to express myself with force” (Norton Simon). Van Gogh’s expressive use of color and emotive brushwork inspired many artistic movements including Expressionism, Fauvism, and early Abstraction. Although Van Gogh created a plethora of outstanding paintings, I am taken most by his paintings made in Arles, where he created over 300 paintings of the countryside featuring blossoming fruit trees, still lifes, and views of the town. *View of Saintes-Maries* (Fig. 8) is particularly captivating to me because of the light shift within the painting. The canvas is split in half by the afternoon sun raking over the church and surrounding town. Rows of lavender drenched in shadow are closest to the viewer, while the town is highlighted and glowing in the sunlight. The contrast of warm mustard color in the lights versus the lavender shadows in *View of Saintes-Maries* is

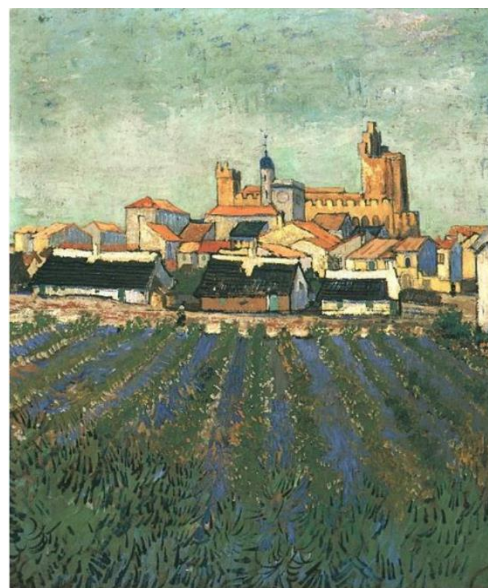


Figure 8. Vincent van Gogh, *View of Saintes-Maries*, 1888, Oil on canvas, 25” x 20”, The Kröller-Müller Museum



Figure 9. Olivia Stude, *Mom and Dad (right panel)*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 24” x 36”

something I captured in the portrait of my mother (Fig. 9). The highlighted flowers and my mom's yellow shirt mirror the warm facades of the buildings in Van Gogh's painting. The shadows cast onto my parents' house challenge the sunlit concrete wall with cool blues and purples, just like the shadowed facades counter the brick red roofs and tan walls in the town of *Saintes-Maries*. I find Van Gogh's evident hand and impasto brushwork incredibly helpful as I approach my paintings. I strive to achieve the same honest texture and quality of light.

As I examine Van Gogh's paintings and his process, I rely on the evidence and research provided by art conservators. In my research into how Van Gogh built up his color, I found a surprising similarity in my process. The Norton Simon Museum lent Van Gogh's *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)* (Fig. 10) to the Frick Collection and the J. Paul Getty Museum recently to examine the surface of the painting. To illuminate Van Gogh's process and materials, art conservators from the Getty Museum applied different observation processes like infrared reflectography. Through these processes, the conservators discovered that Van Gogh's paintings were made in multiple sittings beginning with a layer of vibrant color. As an artist experimenting with vibrantly pigmented underlayers, I found the examination in this video enlightening. In *Portrait of a Peasant*, Van Gogh used a green underlayer to unify the shadowed areas within the face of the subject, a local

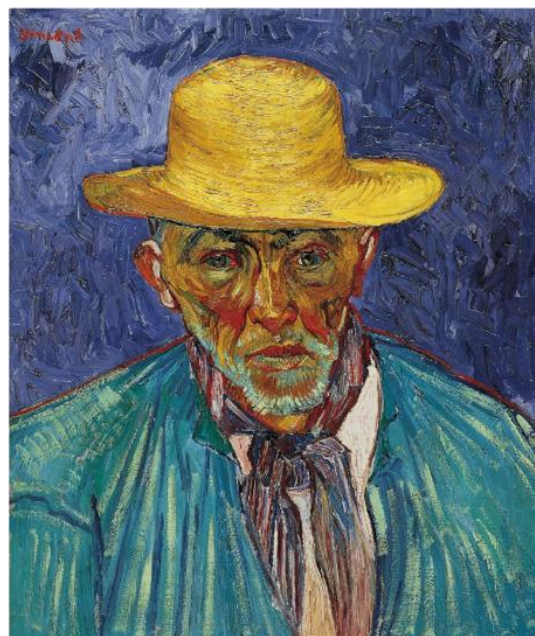


Figure 10. Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*, 1888, Oil on canvas, 25" x 21", Norton Simon Museum

gardener named Patience Escalier, similar to my own use of Dioxazine Purple in my paintings to unify and convey the midday light and color. Speckles of the green peak through the warm impasto skin in *Portrait of a Peasant* capturing the wrinkles and whites of Patience Escalier's eyes in reaction to the sun overhead. The green underlayer also balances the extreme red hues of the subject's skin tone in this portrait. The green peaks through alongside the most vibrant forms of the cheeks and nose. In my paintings like *Mom and Dad*, the purple underlayer is similarly intended to balance the warmth of every object in sunlight. This in-depth examination by the Frick Collection and the Getty Museum validates my use of vibrant colors in the beginning layers of my paintings and has deepened my fondness for Van Gogh's paintings and process.

During my initial exploration of plein air landscape painting in my undergraduate studies at LCAD, my professors often hailed Richard Diebenkorn as a master of shape and color. After completing some plein air work independently and looking back at the paintings of Bay Area figurative artists, I am inclined to agree with them. Diebenkorn was one of many Bay Area artists disillusioned with the strict non-representational approach of the New York Abstract Expressionists who promoted a notion of "purity" in art (Berggruen). Diebenkorn first turned against Clement Greenburg's pure abstraction, only to later depart from his fellow Bay Area figurative



Figure 11. Richard Diebenkorn, *Recollections of a Visit to Leningrad*, 1965, Oil on canvas, 73" x 84", The Richard Diebenkorn Foundation

artists with his *Ocean Park* series of abstracted landscapes (Fig. 11). His works like *Recollections of a Visit to Leningrad* (Fig. 11) are incredibly abstract yet grounded in realism through color and shape, and I strive to capture the same quality in the backgrounds of my work. I painted the background in *One of the Flowers* (Fig. 12) with simplicity and accuracy in mind, finding a delicate balance between the abstract shapes and realism and complimenting the figure in the foreground. Simplifying large color areas down to angular shapes allows the viewer to mentally fill-in the details, harking back to Impressionism.



Figure 12. Olivia Stude, *One of the Flowers (detail)*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 18" x 24"

California Impressionism took root in the mid-1920s in the foothills, mountains, seashores, and deserts of California. Heavily influenced by European Impressionism, California artists chose to paint outdoors, working directly from nature, to capture the light, color, and shapes of the local landscape. Working in that tradition, Calvin Liang is one of many contemporary California Impressionists inspired by the Orange County geography and climate. He began his career in the US as an artist working for Nickelodeon, producing painted backgrounds and portraits of pirates for the television series



Figure 13. Calvin Liang, *Roses*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 18" x 24", Huse Skelly Gallery

Spongebob Squarepants. He is now a celebrated and successful plein air painter, showing his artwork in renowned painting competitions and landscape galleries up and down the California coast. I discovered his paintings while working for a plein air art gallery in Newport Beach and fell in love with his varied brushstrokes, sense of color, and glowing depictions of light. Calvin Liang brought in his oil painting *Roses* one morning during my shift (Fig. 13). *Roses* is a fantastic ebbing composition, demonstrating the beauty of botanicals in plein air. After spending hours viewing this work, I felt compelled to tackle the same subject in my triptych painting *Moving Out or On* (Fig. 14). By placing the roses in waves along the bottom of this triptych, the light and contrast they provide guide the viewer in and along my painting.



Figure 14. Olivia Stude, *Moving Out or On (left canvas)*, 2023, 9' x 4'

The content of my work is influenced by personal understanding of Old and New Testament stories in the Bible. Religion felt concrete and load-bearing to me when I was younger. Untouchable. I did not even feel like I could read the Bible independently up until recently. Being raised in an ethically Christian household under constant observation, I felt

like I would misinterpret the Bible's lessons without supervision and guidance from my parents or the church. I just had a Bible as a symbol of truth and performative dedication, relying on preachers and animated Christian movies, like the collective works of *Veggie Tales* and DreamWorks' *The Prince of Egypt*, to decipher the books for me. After starting my master's program, I began researching biblical stories that related to situations I was struggling with in my life. I felt like my artwork needed more depth than the generic lessons I learned in Sunday school. While researching specific ethical struggles explained by the bible, I related to the stories and understood God in a way that felt more intended. The stories invigorated my artwork and helped me connect to God in a personal way. I spent hours in the nooks and crannies of Genesis, Numbers, and Paul, scribbling thumbnail sketches.

Looking for stories and lessons in the Bible that I could relate to my family and internal struggles led me to paint many of my thesis artworks like *Auto-Baptism* (Fig. 15). *Auto-Baptism* references the Christian act of Baptism which symbolizes the purification and admission to the Christian Church. In Romans (Chapter 6 Verses 1-14), John the Baptist performed a ritual cleansing of followers of God who repented their sins by immersing them into water and lifting them out. This ceremony is meant to mimic the death, burial, and resurrection of



Figure 15. Olivia Stude, *Auto-Baptism*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 20" x 24"

Jesus Christ. I painted *Auto-Baptism* to represent my initiation into Christianity after feeling complacent with religion for so many years. This painting demonstrates my newfound control over myself and my faith, which has been a strange and scary journey. Baptizing oneself is unorthodox, much like my journey with Christianity outside of the church and my family. My paintings like *Auto-Baptism* are intentionally reactive. Each was made in response to my relationship with God and religion. Old and New Testament biblical stories and lessons are vital to my thesis paintings because they give my narratives religious agency and personal depth.

METHODOLOGY

I remember my first night after moving out of my childhood home. My mind drowned in silence. I became overwhelmed in the chasm of absent noise. The stillness reminded me of what I left behind, and my ears yearned for the lulling sounds of my raucous family. Oddly enough the slam-banging and curdling shouts in my parents' home were conducive to my sleep, and I'm unsure whether falling asleep in chaos resulted from adaptation or disconnection. I couldn't sleep that first night away. The contrast of sound was harder to face than my mom after telling her I wanted to leave. It reminded me of the permanent mark my absence left on my parents, and the silence they would feel in the room I left behind. It reminded me of the emotional support I could no longer promise my mom and dad. Often, I find reflecting on my entanglement helps me develop the ideas for my paintings.

The ideas for my paintings start with interactions with my family and evolve as I examine my feelings toward those events. Paintings like *Moving Out or On* (Fig. 1)

document my feelings toward events in my life, but other paintings document my feelings about specific conversations with my family. Sometimes these are pleasant and reminiscent conversations, and other times family confabs devolve into critical, uncomfortable, and performative defense sessions.

In an initially pleasant chat with my mother, I recalled moments from my childhood when I was told to cover my body in the presence of older family



Figure 16. Olivia Stude, *One of the Flowers*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 18" x 24"

members, friends, and strangers. I couldn't wear a certain length of shorts, expose my stomach, or wear anything too form-fitting. These restrictions were introduced to me at seven years old and enforced until I turned 18, with incredibly uncomfortable public situations and unbridled comments by my parents. My parents policed the provocativeness of my developing body, and the onus was on me to avoid outside attention. I overcompensated with large clothing to hide my body and protect myself from the leers of old men and my parents' confrontation. Memories of that time inspired my painting *One of the Flowers* (Fig. 16).

In my initial sketches of *One of the Flowers*, I played with multiple objects associated with femininity and female obligations or tasks that could obstruct the identity of a figure (Fig. 17). This obstruction was meant to generalize the figure so that the viewer doesn't linger on who the woman is while looking at her body. I considered painting the

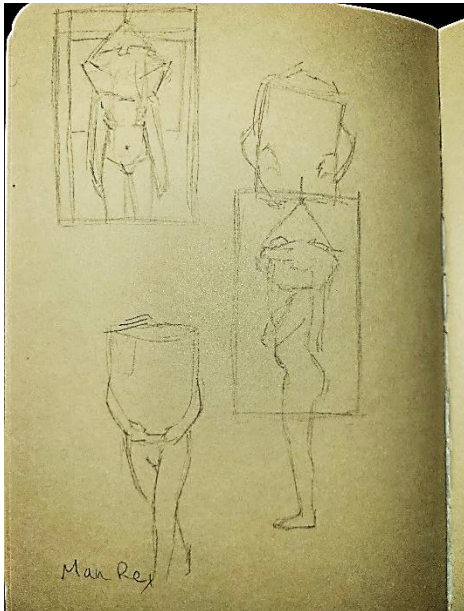


Figure 17. Olivia Stude, *One of the Flowers* (sketch)

figure holding a clothing hamper or potted plant so that the image captured a moment in passing. I also considered having the figure almost completely obstructed by a potted plant except for the face. Those poses felt too inconsequential or confrontational for the message I wanted to paint, and I needed something between the extremes. I wanted the painting to communicate an aspect of dehumanization and voyeurism toward the female form, which felt best described through an obstructed head and profile view

of the subject where protruding forms are most evident. I felt the head obstruction still needed to allude to duties or chores commonly associated with women, so I placed a hanging flowerpot over the portrait.

After the thumbnail sketches, I photographed myself in the pose and lighting situation I wanted to paint. I found a spot outside my house that felt like the settings in my other paintings and observed the light as it shifted throughout the day, settling on 3:00 pm for my photograph. 3:00 pm was critical to the development of color and tone in my painting because the sun created an interesting, speckled lighting situation through the hanging flowerpot; the turquoise color of the house was invigorated by the reflective light from the concrete below; and the leaves of the flowers in the hanging pot glowed a toxic green. I took the photo and immediately pulled it into Photoshop for further adjustments (Fig. 18). In Photoshop, I shifted the flowerpot down to obstruct the face so that my reference was

consistent with my thumbnail sketch. Once my reference photo was resolved, I painted from the photograph focusing on rendering color, texture, and light.

Color is an enigma. I struggled to capture it honestly and effectively in the past and found relief by working in plein air. In plein air painting, artists are forced by weather and rapidly changing light to work quickly and creatively to capture the feeling and atmosphere of a scene. I learned the importance of vague specificity and cohesion while painting under the



Figure 18. Olivia Stude, *One of the Flowers* (reference)

shifting sun. I learned through my studies in plein air that good paintings involve a lot of inventive and spontaneous color decisions. I treat every painting, big or small, like a plein air painting. I work quickly and try not to spend more than 24 hours on each painting, which allows me to not obsess over small details and ultimately focus on larger color effects.

Like many of my recent works, *One of the Flowers* started with a vibrant purple underlayer. Dioxazine Purple is a fantastic color to start with. I find that purple works well as an underlayer in my paintings as it provides a surface to fight against, and it pushes me to achieve the vibrant colors of the midday sun. Oranges, pinks, yellows, and bright greens are especially challenged by this underlayer, and once they are placed on the panel, the purple creates a contrast around the color that aligns with what my eyes perceive in the midday sun. I intentionally leave speckles of the underlayer color throughout my paintings to subtly unify the image and to ensure that my colors are not meeting perfectly edge to edge. This underlayer effect ties back to my plein air painting process, emphasizing the brevity of the

scene and the colors my eyes perceive. Color also enforces the nature of my composition and ideation for *One of the Flowers*. The scene is meant to be observed in passing, where the viewer only looks at the woman's body as her head is briefly obscured by the hanging flowers. The color helps justify the leer of the viewer. Glowing green leaves in the dangling pot attract attention first, and then the woman is seen. Speckled highlights guide the eye down her figure and the framing blues and grays of the house vibrate around her form. Radiating brush strokes within the blues surrounding the figure provide texture and variation to the background while emphasizing the womanly curves I had to cover for so many years. I find this radiating method helps guide the viewer to what matters most.

Adhering to this process is vital for each of my paintings. The underlayer and successive considerations of light and color application breathe consistency into my paintings, so that each painting whether it is a plein air landscape, carefully rendered portrait, or allegorical multigure painting speak the same language.

I title my paintings in reference to a greater narrative or history that is meaningful to me. *One of the Flowers* refers to a term of endearment my grandma had for my sisters and me. She would call us her "flowers," but this term also highlights the lack of identity in the subject. The figure becomes one of the many objects seen and appreciated only for its physical attributes. *Burning Bramble* is a play on the burning bush from the story of Moses. The word "bramble" is subbed in to emphasize the absurdity in the figure's fixation. *Eve in the Garden* is a literal definition for the subject and background but also references the period of time immediately before the original sin in the Bible.

CONCLUSION

I have struggled with my identity outside of my family since moving out. These paintings and this MFA program have made it increasingly clear to me that I need to forge my own path and think for myself rather than relying on religious institutions or familial expectations. I didn't think I could tackle half of the issues my paintings address so easily now, like my family system or feelings toward my faith or lack of identity. These paintings have opened conversations and helped set healthy boundaries within my life that previously felt out of reach. My relationship with my parents has changed completely and I credit therapy and my education in intent as entirely responsible for these changes. When I applied to this college, I expressed a longing for a link between my plein air landscape paintings and my narrative figure paintings. My paintings now bring me a sense of therapeutic resolution, while fulfilling the technical desires I had when I joined this MFA program.

As for what's next, I'm not entirely sure. I still have a profound craving to push the boundaries between the figure and its environment, so technically that is my path. Blurring lines and weaving figures into my plein air practice is my natural inclination. With that approach, I believe I can rationally reflect on my struggles with enmeshment. These paintings have inspired some insightful introspection, and I hope to continue this journey of self-reflection in future paintings.

WORKS CITED

“About the Collection.” *Norton Simon Museum*, 2 Feb. 2017

www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/M.1975.06.P

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Vincent van Gogh Summary”. *Encyclopedia*

Britannica, 2 May. 2020, www.britannica.com/summary/Vincent-van-Gogh.

Accessed 12 October 2022.

Christian Standard Bible. Christian Art Publishers, 2017.

Frick Collection. “The Painting from the Canvas Up, Van Gogh’s ‘Portrait of a Peasant’ from

the Norton Simon Museum.” *YouTube*, 26 Oct. 2012, youtu.be/DlhCtERqI10

Nash, Steven A. *Abstract and Figurative: Highlights of Bay Area Painting*. John Berggruen

Gallery, 2008.

Russell, Peter. *Vincent Van Gogh*. Delphi Classics, 2014.

APPENDIX (A)



Plate 1. *Mom and Dad*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 48" x 36"



Plate 2. *Mom and Dad (left panel)*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 24" x 36"



Plate 3. *Mom and Dad (right panel)*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 24" x 36"



Plate 4. *Eve in the Garden*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 16" x 20"



Plate 5. *Hiding from God I*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 16" x 20"



Plate 6. *Hiding from God II*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 16" x 20"



Plate 7. *Auto-Baptism*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 20" x 24"



Plate 8. *Please Don't Help Me*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 18" x 24"



Plate 9. *Madonna & Child*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 18" x 24"



Plate 10. *One of the Flowers*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 18" x 24"



Plate 11. *Moving Out or On*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 9' x 4'



Plate 12. *Moving Out or On (left canvas)*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 4' x 4'



Plate 13. *Moving Out or On* (center canvas), 2023, Oil on canvas, 1' x 4'



Plate 14. Moving Out or On (*right canvas*), 2023, Oil on canvas, 4' x 4'



Plate 15. *Moving Out or On (study)*, 2021, Oil on mdf, 9" x 12"



Plate 16. *Burning Bramble*, 2023, Oil on mdf, 24" x 30"



Plate 17. *Forbidden Fruit*, 2021, Oil on mdf, 6" x 6"



Plate 18. *Adam & the Absence of Reason*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 12" x 16"



Plate 19. *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, 2022, Oil on mdf, 24" x 36"

ARTIST'S NOTE

www.olviastude.com

ostude90@gmail.com