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Senior Thesis Paper

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Paige Brown

AVA 498

Professor Laini Nemett

Senior Thesis Paper

For my senior art thesis I created a series of six paintings grouped into three sets of two. These pairs include: a doll and woman lying on a bed, a doll and woman in a tub, and a doll trapped in measuring tape and a woman eating a cupcake. The purpose of these pairs is to create a dialogue between the two paintings so that they play off of each other in terms of their individual subject matter. The paintings are organized by an overarching idea that we, as individuals, have many personas that we choose to show the world depending on different situations. Some examples of these personas that initially sparked my interest in the idea are the way an individual acts with a friend compared to how that same individual would act toward a stranger or when they are alone. The idea of individuals using several facades to express themselves is something I can personally relate to and it is something that I believe everyone has done at some point in their lives.

Specifically, this series focuses on the personas we choose to show the world, in a more generalized sense, compared to the one we tend to reserve for ourselves when we are alone. To represent these various personas, I used an individual to represent one side of the pair and a doll to represent the other. Instead of showing the same subject displayed in the pairs in two different poses and representing two different sets of emotions, I chose to give one of these representations to a doll in order to heighten the contrast between the two paintings in the pair. An example of this central idea of facades represented in the actual body of the series can be seen in the pair of paintings where both subjects are residing in the tub, *Doll in Tub* and *Woman*

in Tub. The human subject is meant to represent the emotions that we sometimes wish we could show to the world, open feelings of sadness, depression, and withdrawal. The woman's counterpart shown here is the doll. In the doll's painting, she is showing the world a happy face and smiling, even though she is barely keeping afloat atop the water. In this painting, the doll showing this façade of happiness and the water is meant to represent her struggle with doing so and the struggle to remain afloat. The woman represents the emotions hidden beneath the doll's happy façade. The woman accepts the water by lying within it and chooses to show her feelings while the doll chooses to maintain her façade and struggles to remain afloat.



Fig. 1 Paige Brown, *Woman in Tub*, 2017, oil on canvas.



Fig. 2. Paige Brown, *Doll in Tub*, 2017, oil on canvas.

For this series I used oil paint as my medium of choice. Oil paint, and painting in general, is something I have only been exposed to for two years. Through my classes here at Union College, I have come to substantially appreciate the medium and hence my focus on it for this project.

I experimented with the use of underpaintings, or grisaille, during this series, something which I wasn't very familiar with before the start of this project. An underpainting is a rendition of the final painting in a monochromatic style; this monochromatic layer is useful for establishing the lights and darks in a painting as well as acting as a base for any subsequent layers. The underpainting sets the contour lines and the dark and light values for the artist. Historically, underpaintings were then followed by an imprimatura, which was a thin and transparent layer of paint that established the middle tone for the painting. This use of imprimatura would allow the artist that utilized this to establish values without as much work (Barrett and Stulik 7). Many artists have utilized this tool in the creations of their paintings, though for others it is unnecessary. This type of technique was typically utilized with techniques such as glazing.

The underpaintings were done in a similar tone across the six paintings of this series, in this case using the opaque color burnt umber. The goal of using this one color across all six of the painting was to help unify the paintings in a similar tone so that they read more easily to the viewer as one connected series of paintings rather than a mashup of six different pieces. This use of similar underpaintings seems to help with the success of each painting as an individual and, more importantly, within their respective pairs.

Glazing is another tool that I am largely experimenting with for this first time in this series. Glazing is the use of very thin layers of pigment that has been made translucent by adding a medium to it. By using this technique, one can create subtle layers within a piece that couldn't be achieved easily without it. This technique also allows for subtle changes in light that would be difficult to achieve without it. Glazing can be used on its own or as a means to build up color on a monochromatic underpainting. This technique of glazing on top of an

underpainting was popular among the early Flemish and Netherlandish masters. These masters would use glazing as a way to introduce color to their paintings, the actual forms of the subject were established mainly by the monochromatic underpainting (Barrett and Stulik 8).

Glazing has been utilized across all six of the paintings, in some cases more densely than with others. I've found success using this tool and am very pleased with the outcome. The fabric, specifically concerning the fabric depicted in the pair of paintings where the subject is on a bed, achieves a quality and luminosity that wouldn't have been necessarily achieved without the use of this tool.

The idea of colored light is something I've been attempting to utilize in these paintings. Instead of objects just having a plain white focused on them, there is some slight color to the light shining on the object, with its opposite color mixing in with the shadows. The idea behind this is that helps the painting appear as one coherent piece instead of just the mish-mashed parts of a whole. Though I might not have always been successful with utilizing this idea with my paintings, it's something I've been trying to keep to.

Many artists have influenced this series over the course of its creation, these include: Andrew Wyeth, Paul Fenniak, and William Beckman. These artists each affected different areas of my paintings, influencing the look and feel I hoped to achieve during the course of this series. Specifically, Paul Fenniak and Andrew Wyeth contributed to the overall compositions of each piece in this series and William Beckman and Fenniak influenced the coloring and shadows.

Andrew Wyeth has mainly influenced the emotional tone of the paintings in this series. In his painting, *Christina's World* (1948), Wyeth is able to successfully convey to the viewer the emotions the subject of his painting is supposed to be feeling. He creates this mainly by the composition. By having the woman gaze at an object far into the distance, Wyeth is able to

clearly show the viewer what the woman is looking at and retain some of the mystery by having that object be so far away and without detail. With the woman on the left-hand bottom-corner of the piece and the object of her gaze in the corner diagonally opposite of it, he is able to put the most distance between the two objects which further instills the implied distance and mystery surrounding the house. Having his main subject lying on the grass with her body twisted, Wyeth uses this body language to further portray to the viewer the emotions he wishes his painting to express. Emotionally speaking, Wyeth is able to instill in the viewer the sense of longing and sadness his subject is feeling as she looks into the distance towards the farmhouse. It's Wyeth's ability to convey his intended emotions so successfully that inspires and motivates me to create a similar effect on the viewers of this series, though whether that is successful or not is open for debate. By using composition to my advantage, as Wyeth has, I want to be able to instill in my viewers the emotions I wish them to feel.

In regards to specific paintings within this series, Andrew Wyeth heavily influenced the composition of the painting of the doll floating in the tub. I utilized a diagonal, something that Wyeth uses in *Christina's World*, to create a more interesting arrangement. The angle at which the doll is lying in the water is strange enough that it interests the viewer more than it would if the doll had been vertical or horizontal.



Fig. 3. Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's Worlds*, 1948, tempera on panel, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Web, accessed 15 Feb, 2017

Paul Fenniak is another artist that has influenced me over the course of the creation of this series. His singular portraits, specifically his *Portrait of R.H.* (1997) and *Scrutiny* (1998), have influenced this series. Composition is one of Fenniak's main strengths in both *Portrait of R. H.* and *Scrutiny*, as well as is his color palette. In these paintings, Fenniak seems to have caught his subjects in a specific moment, almost giving it a photographic quality to it. In *Scrutiny*, his subject is caught in a moment of inspecting her hands and appears to be frozen mid-motion. By having the woman wearing nothing but a towel, Fenniak is amplifying this idea of

his subject having been captured in a personal and private moment. By having the woman's hands be the center of the painting, Fenniak is drawing attention to them and to the personal moment that he captured. In his *Portrait of R. H.*, Fenniak uses this idea of capturing someone in a moment to a more subtle effect by simply showing the man looking off to the side. The composition in this painting is less complex than the other, though it is still effective in conveying the moment the artist wishes to portray. This idea of capturing the subject in a specific moment is something that I strived to convey in this series as well and Paul Fenniak's utilization of it influenced me during this process.

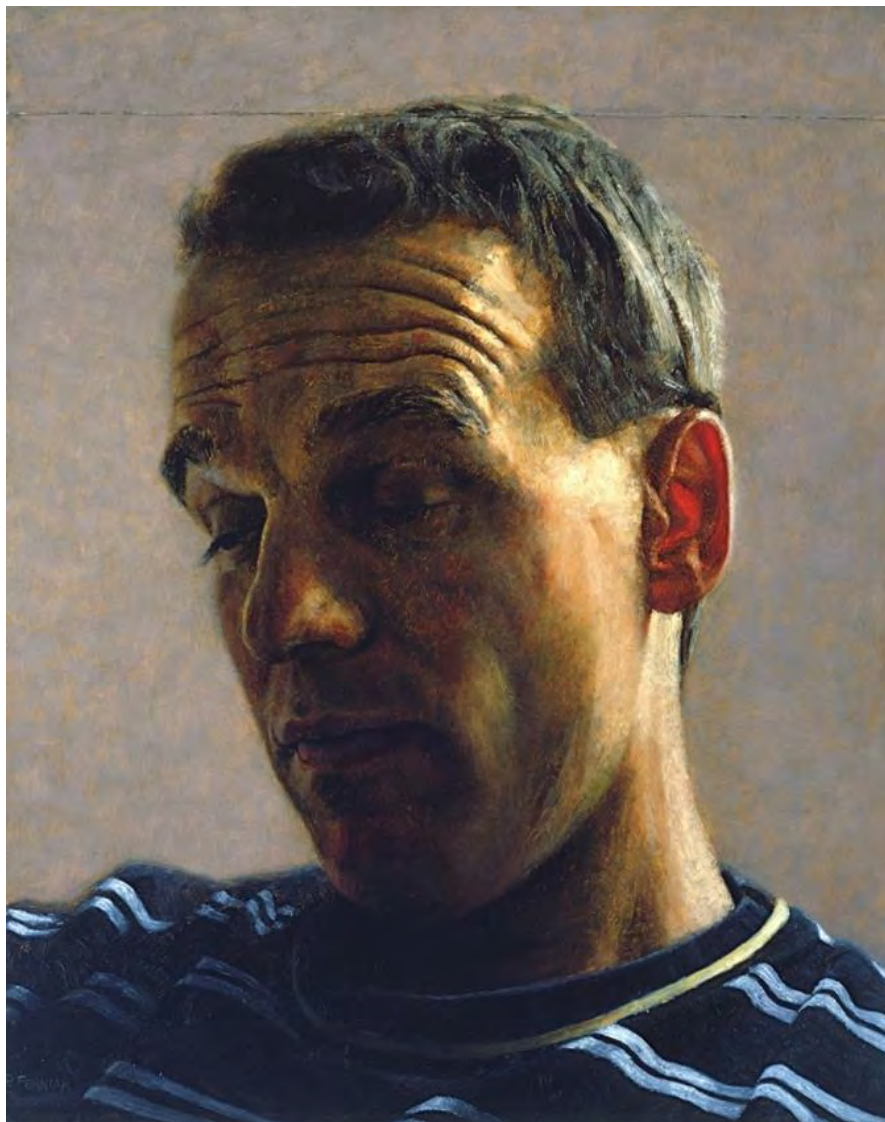


Fig. 4. Paul Fenniak, *Portrait of R.H.*, 1997, Web, accessed 17 Feb, 2017.

Fenniak's use of light and shadows in both *Portrait of R. H.* and *Scrutiny* influenced the way I attempted to utilize shadows in my own paintings during this series. The amount of darks displayed in Fenniak's paintings, the *Portrait of R. H.* in particular, really influenced the way I wanted to utilize shadows in my own paintings for this series.



Fig. 5. Paul Fenniak, *Scrutiny*, 1998, Web, accessed 17 Feb, 2017.

The influence of Fenniak's colors and shadows can be mainly seen in the stronger shadows in the pair involving the woman and doll on the bed and the pair involving the woman eating the cupcake and the doll draped in measuring tape. The boldness of the shadows themselves and the coloring within these strong shadows are an attempt to handle them as Paul Fenniak had, though the degree of the success is subjective. I attempted, and struggled, to create these strong shadows while still being able to see the color of the skin underneath.

In addition to Paul Fenniak, William Beckman was another artist that influenced my shadows for this series. Mainly, Beckman influenced the use of shadows and the color of those shadows within this series. As a contrast to the two paintings of Paul Fenniak, I looked to those of William Beckman for their more subtle nature. His painting *Self Portrait (Orange Shirt)* (2003) uses many delicate shadows and lighting in his face and neck that portrays the texture and tone of skin accurately. There are no harsh shadows present in the painting, which is something that I am dealing with in some of my paintings in this series. In my use of these more delicate shadows, I've been looking to Beckman to model them after.

With *Self Portrait (Orange Shirt)* in mind, I looked to Beckman help with the actual mixing of the skin tones I used in my figures. The tones that he uses create a very realistic overall skin tone, which is something I attempted in my own painting for this project. I looked to Beckman to help me create the variety of colors that I would need to successfully recreated my subject's skin.



Fig. 6. William Beckman, Self Portrait (Orange Shirt), 2003, oil on panel, Web, accessed 20 Feb, 2017.

Clothing is any key element in many of my paintings for this project, it being involved in four of the six. To help with the creation of the crisp folds that I wanted achieve, I looked to William Beckman once again. In his painting *Study for Overcoats (CC Elevator)*, Beckman utilizes many crisp folds in his own work, specifically when depicting the man on the left's black pants. He is able to depict these lines by knowing when to blend tones together and when not to. Beckman also helps achieved his desired outcome by using a wide range of tones that softer highlights in his pants; this is seen towards the bottom portion of his pants legs.



Fig. 7. William Beckman, *Study for Overcoats (CC Elevators)*, 1999, oil on canvas, Web, accessed 1 March, 2017.

Throughout the course of this two-term project, my ability and confidence with the medium has grown considerably. This project has allowed me to become familiar with some the techniques utilized in oil paintings, such as the use of underpaintings and glazing, that I was previously not accustomed to. The artist that influenced me during this project's creations, William Beckman, Paul Fenniak, and Andrew Wyeth, helped me shape the paintings into their finished product, with varying degrees of success. Overall, this series seems to be success, though it varies from piece to piece. By doing this project, I was able to experience the process

of taking a rudimentary idea and then develop it into a series. It was a process that I thoroughly enjoyed and look forward to doing it again.

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Senior Thesis

By Paige Brown

The Idea Behind It...

This series was centered around the idea of paintings being two parts of a whole. The purpose of these pairs is to create a dialogue between the two paintings so that they play off of each other in terms of their individual subject matter. The paintings are organized by an overarching idea that we, as individuals, have many personas that we choose to show the world depending on different situations. Each painting in the pair reflects these opposing personas we reveal to the world around us.

About the Author...

I'm originally from Clinton, Mo and attended the Missouri Academy of Science, Mathematics, and Computing before coming here to Union College. Here at Union, I persued degrees in Visual Arts as well as in Classics, with a focus in Latin.



Doll on Bed, Oil on Canvas



Woman on Bed, Oil on Canvas



Doll in Tub, Oil on Canvas



Woman in Tub, Oil on Canvas



Woman Eating, Oil on Canvas