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## **Quiet Moments: My Artistic Exploration**

By Neena Jube

### **Acknowledgements**

My senior art project could not be done without the guidance and support of Prof. Walter Hatke and Prof. Sandy Wimer. With their assistance, they helped me improve my skills and inspired to further thrive as an artist. Also, I want to thank Kathie Herrington for all her help in arranging model sessions to allow me to do my art thesis. Lastly, I want to express my appreciation to my family and friends, who have helped and supported me through this endeavor.

The paint encrusted 56.2 x 51.2 cm canvas rest before me, with honeyed light beaming from numerous angles. A lined face, tired eyes, and sloped shoulders hold grasp among the thousands of decades-old brushstrokes. His widow's peak emerges from his grey-black hair, leaving my fingers following its fine texture. The worn wrinkles above his brow and the creases of his face and neck are deepened by the intense shadows. The dull glaucous blue eyes, filled with his poignant thoughts and questions, gaze off. The vivid blend of colors has stained all of his features, the strong bridge of his nose, the exhausted bags under his eyes, and the sunken cheeks. My eyes move noiselessly over to his stern mouth and then from the saddened corners to his square chin. The great attention to minute details of anatomy harvests a desire deep within. As I tear myself away from the image, a green wooden paintbrush and blank canvas alone fill my field of vision. A tingle rolls up my spine, down my arm and through my fingers, compelling me to make my first brush stroke towards my year long artistic exploration.

Looking back at that moment, I believe that fate led me to dive into my artistic study on the human form. I firmly believe all things happen for a reason. Every year, every day, every hour, every minute, and every second of my life play a significant role in how things turn out. Looking back on the past two decades, there have been numerous accounts that have brought me to where I am today. The classes I have taken and the interactions with various artists have led me to pursue art, one of my strongest passions, and have influenced the development of my current collection of work, Quiet Moments.

Since I was a child, I have always been interested in employing my creativity through drawing and colors. Despite my casual interaction with art, I never realized my artistic potential nor did I take art or my abilities seriously. That all quickly changed after staring at a 7up soda

can for 2 hours one late night during my second semester of 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Early that morning, Ms. Lalli, my 7<sup>th</sup> grade art teacher, had assigned our first project: find an inanimate object and “simply draw it.” As soon as I heard the assignment, a myriad of questions bombarded my mind. “Simply draw it”? What does that mean? How are we supposed to draw something if we have not learned how to? Although hesitant and concerned about the outcome, I decided to go along and try the assignment. I played some music and let my hand take control. Within two hours, a realistic image of a 7up soda can appeared in my sketchbook. Somehow, without any instruction or help, I was able to use my sense of sight and touch to create a realistic depiction of a can. Amongst my shock, I realized how much fun I had drawing. It was quite evident that art was something I wanted to continue to do. Little did I know that this first drawing would lead me to the beginning of my artistic journey.

Since then, I have actively pursued my passion for art. Over the years I have tried all types of media, which include soft pastels, chalk pastels, plaster, acrylic paint, photography, wood, and digital. Among these mediums, I was most drawn towards painting. Painting has allowed me to express myself using color, texture, and motion. Because of my interest, I happily registered to take Prof. Hatke’s Oil Painting course during my sophomore year in the hopes of trying a new medium. Surprisingly, signing up for this oil painting class would ultimately change my artistic style and inspire me to pursue my senior thesis project in oil.

Although I had painted previously using acrylic paint, painting with oil was entirely a new experience for me. Unlike acrylic, oil is more fluid in nature and can be used to portray subtle and small nuances more easily through layering and texture techniques. Painting with oil has allowed me to fill my artwork with a sense of depth and richness. In addition, oil is an

extremely forgiving medium that has allowed me to jump right into the media and effectively learn how to paint without fear of unchangeable damage to the artwork. Along with its fluidity, oil has a long drying time. The extra time provided gives me the opportunity to push the paint around and get the colors and textures right. These advantages lured me to choose oil over watercolor and metal as my main form of medium for my senior thesis.

Although knowing what type of medium I was going to use provided me some comfort, I was still troubled with the concept behind my project. In my previous classes, I was assigned projects and tasks, which took thinking out of the process. I did not have to develop a concept and try to figure out what I wanted to say with my art. This year was the first time I got the choice to do whatever I wanted. The options and possibilities were endless. Thus, one can easily see my problem. The infinite options and possibilities began to boggle my mind. What am I supposed to do? What do I want my art to say? What do I want to portray through my pieces? Filled with confusion, I searched for inspiration in anything life threw at me.

I began to talk to friends about art and what it meant to them. I specifically I talked to them to bounce ideas off them and see if any of my ideas had potential. Our dinner discussions were filled with talk about new trends—like environmentalism and food processing, psychological concepts pertaining to human nature, and religion and its purpose in life—all in the hopes to find a worthwhile concept to investigate through my work. One thing that stood out in our conversations was our interest in human nature. Since a young age, I was always fascinated with how humans have evolved and why we do the things we do. To me, humans are like every other animal. Despite our high level of intelligence, humans have primitive tendencies such as jealousy, selfishness, competitiveness, etc. This very primitive nature is what drives us

to act the way we do. Thinking about my interest with human nature, I realized I wanted my art thesis to focus on my fascination with the human body and human nature.

My discussions about human nature reminded me of figure drawing. Four years ago in my Drawing 110 class, Prof. Hatke introduced me to the world of figure drawing. As a foreigner in this world, I did not know what to expect from my first model session. How would I feel during the session? Will I be able to draw so quickly in a matter of minutes to create an image? Despite my lack of confidence and doubt in my abilities, I had to put them aside. As soon as the model got into position, there was no time to think or worry. I just drew. I drew, I drew, and I drew some more. I just drew whatever I saw and whatever I could put down in the allotted time. As the model moved through her set of different poses, time just flew by. Seconds became minutes and minutes became hours. By the end of session, I was happily surprised to see I had made over 22 images in matter of hours. The time constraints forced me to overcome my “overthinking” and just freely draw the most important features. Strangely enough, I felt a sense of liberation from just fixating on the model and letting any other thoughts fade away into the dark galaxy of my mind. Right then and there, I knew that this night would not be my last figure drawing session.

I began to go to the Tuesday night figure drawing session whenever I got a chance. I also got the opportunity to experience the similar sense of freedom while I painted the figure in my oil class. Like figure drawing, figure painting helped me to not only accurately portray the human form, but also helped me to pick up on colors in the body. I slowly realized the human form is a canvas—a canvas filled with subtle nuances of shades of color, light, and darkness; a canvas filled with emotions; a canvas filled with personality and beliefs. With every experience

drawing and painting the human body, I quickly fell in love and reveled in the rare beauty exhibited by the human figure. My fascination with the body and interest in biology inspired me to pursue a study of the nude body, specifically of the female form.

To carry out this study, I decided to hit the books and do some research. I searched through some of my old art history books, I rediscovered Greek sculpture. While I studied abroad in Greece, I got the opportunity to see firsthand numerous century old marble works of art. I remember the awe I felt as I first walked into the National Archaeological Museum of Athens and laid my eyes on each statue. Just looking at their sheer size and proportion alone was mind blowing. Every piece was at least double my height, and some pediments even spanned the entire length of the room. As I traveled from room to room, I saw the progression of Greek sculpture evolving from the Archaic period to the Hellenistic and the Roman periods, starting with the famous marble female statue dedicated to Naxian Nikandre to the marble group of Aphrodite, Pan and Eros to the marble statue of Hermes found at Aigion, Peloponnese (Figures 1, 2, 3, respectively). The high level of details in the facial and body muscles become more intricate as I travelled towards the Hellenistic and Roman focused rooms. Given the limited tools available during the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D, it is astounding to see how well the sculptors were able to carve out anatomically correct depictions of the human form. What was amazing was the level of emotion the sculptors were able to effectively portray through the rigid marble material. One piece that stood out was the famous Farnese Herakles.

Herakles was first introduced to the ancient world as a 'hero.' In Greek mythology, a hero was defined as the son of a god and a mortal (Rouse, 55). As the son of god Zeus and mortal Alcmene, Herakles inherited divine characteristics such as great strength, will, and



courage, as well as the mortal qualities such as weakness, pain, and suffering. As he matured, Herakles's divine-like characteristic helped him become an excellent marksman, an undefeatable wrestler, and the holder of superhuman strength (Skidmore). Unfortunately, goddess Hera grew jealous of Herakles's success and achievements and drove Herakles insane to the point that he killed his own children (Rouse, 57). To make amends for his crime, Herakles roamed the land of Greece performing the twelve labors, which included killing the Nemean lion, capturing the Cretan bull, and obtaining the apples of Hesperides (Brommer, 1-2). His strength, determination, and perseverance despite his pain and suffering earned him immortality and the status of a god, which was granted to no other hero (Skidmore). As a result of his heroic actions and his apotheosis, Herakles was revered to and worshipped as both a mortal figure and a semi-divine hero by the ancient Greeks (Woodford, 4).

Consequently, sculptors such as Lysippus portrayed the dual depiction of Herakles in their work as illustrated in the Farnese Herakles (Figure 4). The Farnese Herakles, also known as 'Weary Herakles,' is a colossal marble copy of Lysippus's 4<sup>th</sup> century bronze sculpture (Boardman, 58). Lysippus chose to illustrate the end of the tenth labor in which Herakles obtains the apples of Hesperides. Standing with his left foot forward, Herakles has his right hip pushed forward. His lion skin is hanging on his club, which he leans on to provide him support. He is holding the apples of Hesperides in his hand that is hidden behind his back while the other arm is hung over the club. At a quick glance, Herakles looks like a god based on its sheer size as 3.17 m tall (Boardman, Pl 37). In the past, Greek sculptors made sculptures larger than life size to clearly represent a divine god while they portrayed mortals as either life size or smaller. By creating a larger than life size sculpture, Lysippus was able to evoke a divine ethos in the Farnese

Herakles. The exaggerated well defined musculature and attention to anatomical detail further adds to this divine-like nature that the sculpture possesses. His body is inundated with muscles that are covered with bulging veins, and his fingers, feet, hair, and beard are carefully detailed. As a result of the combination of all these factors, the Farnese can be viewed as a divine invincible representation of Herakles.

Although this statue portrays Herakles as a divine-like hero with exaggerated musculature and proportions, closer inspection indicates the presence of another aspect of Herakles. The Farnese Herakles has his head tilted down with his downcast eyes illustrating his exhaustion and lack of confidence that he experiences after performing the tenth labor. This type of reaction to performing the tenth labor is consistent to how a mere mortal would react to such an arduous task and as a result, the Greeks were able to relate to his exhaustion and sympathize with him. The Farnese Herakles is also depicted with an aged mature face that has crow's feet and wrinkles on his forehead. The addition of the wrinkles and aged look on the Farnese's face further accentuates and adds to the humanistic nature of this sculpture. Although Herakles's primary iconographic attributes, the lion skin and club, are present, they seem to dissolve into the background and do not act as central features of the sculpture. By discarding the very attributes that identify him and provide him the ability to act as a hero, the sculptor is suggesting that Herakles has limited abilities and is not as invincible as society perceives him to be. By having a combination of divine and human characteristics, Lysippus illustrated the dual depiction of Herakles as a divine hero and mere mortal through the Farnese Herakles sculpture. This extensive analysis of the Farnese Herakles sculpture shed light on the subtlety in the multiple emotions and depictions portrayed in one piece, which is quite astonishing. The multiple layers

in reference to the nature of a particular figure have inspired me to find some aspect of human nature and expose it through my work.

Keeping this mind, I continued on my search for inspiration and ideas in how to effectively execute my plan to study the human form and human nature. I began to look at work of Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, Leonardo Da Vinci, and various other artists. It was quite interesting to see how each artist portrayed the body differently. Although their art was provoking and demonstrated a strong mastery in painting, I was not quite inspired. It was not until I laid my eyes on the work of Lucian Freud that the wheels in mind started turning.

Seeing the confusion plastered over my face, Prof. Hatke gave me a book filled with the work of Lucian Freud, a famous contemporary British painter. As I turned the pages of the book, I could almost hear the images talking to me as I saw glimpses of emotions and feelings in what would seem as “simple” images of nude figures. The vivid colors and shadows patch worked through the image bled with sensations and emotions. The unique combination of shadows, wrinkles, asymmetries created a typographical map—a map filled with crevasses, valleys, and mountains. My hand travelled in and out and around and over each landmark, almost feeling the texture coming off the page. Among the various paintings, Freud’s self portrait, Reflection, 1985, oil, 56.2 x 51.2 cm, captured my attention (Figure 5).

The presence of the honeyed light rhythmically beaming on his face creates such interesting images in a simple manner of just playing with light and shadows. The tired eyes, wrinkly face, creased neck create a distinctly raw image of himself in mid poignant gaze, further attracting me to this image. As I stared at Freud’s self portrait, all I wanted to do was learn more. Learn about Freud. Learn about who he “really” is. Learn about his state of mind when he

painted this. The combination of light and shadows, color, texture, and natural to almost exaggerated features sparked something inside of me, and I felt compelled to begin my artistic exploration with Freud lingering in the back of my mind.

With my area of study pinpointed and my term abroad and experience with Freud's work as my sources of inspiration, I began my work hitting the pavement running. With the help of Kathie Harrington and Prof. Hatke, I got the opportunity to work with a personal model, who posed for me twice a week. We tried 3 to 4 30-minute poses each time she came. I found myself intently studying her body and painting what I saw. In the style of Freud, I attempted to portray the model in a natural manner by including even the more unflattering features such as excessive fat rolls, wrinkles, and darkened and sunken eye sockets. Although I have previously drawn or painted nudes without a model, I have never been able to depict figures with such detail and subtle nuances previously. The use of a model helped me paint better than I ever could have if I had created an image out of my head.

By immersing myself into my art thesis, I found myself studying the model's nature and personality during each session. I quickly discovered frozen moments that quietly exist through time— moments lost, moments of self reflection, moments of victory, moments that are normally unnoticed. With each piece, I focused on exploring various quiet moments while studying the human form, and thus, ultimately creating the Quiet Moments collection. The Quiet Moments collection consists of the following pieces:

1. *The Things I Carry*, 2011, Oil
2. *Morning Silence*, 2011, Mixed Media (Oil and Digital)
3. *Physical Meditation*, 2011, Oil

4. *Longing*, 2010, Oil
5. *Beauty Rest*, 2011, Oil
6. *Lost Moments*, 2010, Oil
7. *In the Fields*, 2011, Oil
8. *Silent Roar*, 2011, Oil
9. *Staring*, 2011, Oil
10. *Day Dreaming*, 2011, Oil
11. *Reconnaissance*, 2010, Oil
12. *In Session*, 2011, Oil
13. *Back*, 2011, Oil
14. *Hand*, 2011, Oil
15. *Flexing*, 2011, Oil
16. *Torso*, 2011, Oil
17. *Dressed Up*, 2011, Oil
18. *Watching*, 2011, Oil

In this collection, one of my favorite pieces is Morning Silence. Although I intended to paint in oil for my entire collection, I ended up mixing media with this piece. During my winter term, I got the opportunity to take Prof. Orellana's Digital Art class. It was during this class I began to create art in a different manner. With each digital assignment, we were asked to evoke an emotion or idea. I began to think about more about the concept and less about the aesthetics of the image. Thinking about the concept first while developing an image consists of a different

artistic approach than figure or still life painting. Instead of simply finding an object or an image to paint, I first developed a concept or theme and searched for source images I can use to manipulate to evoke a specific emotion or idea. Although I have created art in this manner before, digital art was first time I consistently used this process to make artwork for every assignment. This kind of thinking further influenced me to develop my concept of focusing on still moments found throughout the day.

Enjoying my experience working with Photoshop, I was inspired to mix media. I created *Morning Silence* to capture the quiet moments we have to ourselves while in the bathroom; moments contemplating what happened last night, moments wondering what will happen today, and moments dreaming about the future. The bathroom is a sanctuary and for some, the only place we get to be by ourselves and separated from all the problems and responsibilities we experience. After using photography and Photoshop, I created an image on a surface that I was able to paint on and developed a new enhanced painting that can be tied into my collection.

*Lost Moments* is another one of my favorite pieces in the collection. *Lost Moments* focuses on how individuals day dream and find themselves in a new world. While they travel through this parallel dimension, people lose themselves to their thoughts and lose track of time and space. Personally, I find myself always pondering about world issues, the future, what I can cook tonight, what I have to do, etc. Sometimes, I find myself drowning in my thought as opposed to actually being productive. Staring at this piece, I have unknowingly found a way to share one of my quiet moments with the audience, and as a result have a particular emotional attachment to this piece.

Overall, looking back on the past decade, every piece of my life has lined up like a game of dominos. Each event has lead or impacted consequent events. The discovery of my artistic abilities and the guidance of my supportive family and mentors have nurtured my passion for art. I have always viewed my interest in art as a hobby—something I love to do as extracurricular activity and nothing more. However, within the past few years, I realized art is not just a hobby anymore—it is part of who I have become.

Drawing and painting have opened doors for me and have made me become more aware of who I am. With Prof. Hatke's urging, I took Sculpture 1, where I got the chance to play with my hands using clay, plaster, and wood. Despite my concerns working with such an unfamiliar material, I found myself actually enjoying sculpting 3D artwork. My new found interest inspired me to even take the opportunity to learn how to weld and throw clay, two activities that are generally out of my comfort zone. Although sculpture and ceramics are foreign worlds where things can easily collapse and the material is sensitive, I have gradually learned to embrace the process of trial and error, learning from the process, and being more open and accepting of the potential of failure. Working outside of painting has made me realize that I love to work with my hands—more than I ever knew. This passion to work with my hands in my art work has also crossed over to my passion to cook.

Within the past 4 years, I have shown a strong interest in learning how to bake and cook all types of food. In the Indian culture, food is a key focus of most family gatherings and religious events and has impacted my life significantly. My grandparents were owners of large plantations and made their living and provided for their family by harvesting food from their large farmland. Because of Indian American culture and my family's history with food, I

instinctively want to learn how to cook Indian food to feel more connected to my culture and show my pride as an Indian American.

I view baking and cooking as another form of art. The way one dices onions and vegetables, to how they assemble and decorate the cake, to how they plate the food—cooking is another way for me to use my hands to express my heart and soul through food. I enjoy sharing my culture and personality through each dish. My passion for cooking has inspired me to make my own tumblr blog, [bakingmarathon.tumblr.com](http://bakingmarathon.tumblr.com), which is a new adventure I have embarked on in the hope to become a more educated cook. In my blog, I post recipes I find online that are worthwhile to make and share with the online community. Everytime I cook or bake one of the recipes, I update each post with comments, ideas, and suggestions in how to improve the recipes.

My passion to use my hands to create works of art, including edible dishes, has recently made me aware that I want to continue working with hands in my professional life. As a pre-med major, I have always wanted to be a physician. However, I was never sure what particular specialty or field I wanted to enter in. One thing I knew was I did not want to be a surgeon—or at least I thought so. From the beginning, I crossed surgery off my list of possible fields I could enter into because I did not like the surgeon's lifestyle nor did I like the low level of patient interaction. But the more time I spend using my hands in art, cooking, and in the laboratory, the more I see myself as physician who is more hands on. I am slowly envisioning myself as a medical artist, who may build new limbs, reconstruct broken bones, or create new pathways for blood to flow better. This new realization has forced to uncross surgery from my list and become more opened mind to the numerous specialty possibilities. It has made me acknowledge that my artistic journey does not have to end or slow down after I leave Union. I hope to find a way to



continue experience life hands on and integrate my passion for art into my professional medical work. This epiphany could not come at a better time as I am about to embark on a new adventure known as medical school.

As I sit in my studio and slowly tear myself away from the canvas, I imagine seeing an operating room filled with high-tech technology appear into my field of vision. Chatter amongst my future colleagues fills the air. At first, the words are unclear and hazy. I take a moment to refocus my senses and take a deep breath. As my lungs expand and fill with crisp cool air, the smell of clean tools fills my nostrils. In that one moment, it suddenly all becomes crystal clear; my colleagues—the very people who have putting their confidence and trust in my medical expertise—are waiting for my instructions. Slowly the image of the surgical room begins to dissipate, and I am back sitting in my studio once again. As a tingle rolls up my spine, down my arm and through my fingers, I feel a familiar compelling urge to put down the green wooden paintbrush and pick up the scalpel to make my first cut towards my future and the beginning of my medical exploration.



Figure 1. Marble female statue, found on Delos, Cyclades, dedication of the Naxian Nikandre ca. 650 BC. (National Archaeological Museum, 2011).



Figure 2. Marble group of Aphrodite, Pan and Eros, from Delos, Cyclades ca. 100 BC. (National Archaeological Museum, 2011).



Figure 3. Marble statue of Hermes, found at Aigion, Peloponnese Work of the Augustan period (27 BC-AD 14). (National Archaeological Museum, 2011).



Figure 4. Farnese Herakles. Marble sculpture, 4<sup>th</sup> century. (National Archaeological Museum, 2011).



Figure 5. Lucian Freud. *Reflection (Self Portrait)*, Oil on canvas, 56.2 x 51.2 cm, 1985.

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