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Brittany Schwartz

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My Exploration of Treasures from the Mind of David Park

by

Brittany E. Schwartz

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for

Honors in the Department of Visual Arts

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2020

Table of Contents

Bio.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Process.....	4
Inspiration.....	9
Meaning.....	14
Acknowledgements.....	16
Figures.....	17

Who I am:

I am a senior at Union College in Schenectady, New York. I am originally from West Hartford, Connecticut, where I attended the Kingswood Oxford School, and took several art courses, including printmaking (intaglio), painting, filmmaking, photography and an independent study in painting. I have always had a love for art and the creative process. At Union, I have a dual major in Studio Art and in Art History. Courses in reading and composing poetry motivated me creatively to add a minor in English. My Union experience has afforded me the opportunity to study art during a Mini-Term at the Louvre, and a semester abroad studying art history, Italian language, and architecture in Florence. I have interned at Christie's Auction House in New York, where I was fortunate to work on the Rockefeller and Ebsworth sales. I look forward to continuing to create art, and to a career in the creative field.

Brittany E. Schwartz

June 2020

Schwartz, Brittany E.: My Exploration of Treasures from the Mind of David Park. Department of Visual Arts, June 2020.

ADVISOR: Laini Nemett, John D. MacArthur Assistant Professor of Visual Arts

My honors thesis, “My Exploration of Treasures from the Mind of David Park” draws attention to communicate my sense of the female figure to the viewer, while taking particular gestures from the figures of the Bay Area painter David Park’s work. I seek to convey how the self or essence of being can appear on canvas. David Park resonated with me because of his eye for exceptional color combinations, physicality he builds with substance on canvas, use of bold mark-making and simplicity of forms. I am manipulating David Park’s representations of figures and making my own compositions, applying drybrush, oil sticks, silicon scraper, and large washes. The purpose of this concept is to stimulate my creative process and focus on color relationships. David Park taught me to be confident with my brushstrokes and influenced me to generate more compelling compositions through gesture and placement of my figures. My thesis work includes two large oil paintings on canvas along with two smaller oil paintings which helped me develop my imagery, colors, and ideas.

Creating the four large scale paintings, I used a vast array of techniques I have learned in my time with the art department at Union College, such as adding a lot of medium to the oil paint or adding molding paste to create discordant textures. However, during my process, I explored and applied new skills like dry-brush technique, and materials including oil sticks, silicon scrapers, linseed oil, and Belgian Linen. Employing the new media helped grow my artistic abilities, and fostered a deeper understanding of painting methods. I am now passionate about

further mastering these techniques in the future. I draw inspiration from artists David Park and Jean-Michel Basquiat, as well as many other contemporary artists like George Condo and Derek Fordjour. I talked to Derek Fordjour at his studio in the Sharpe-Walentas Program in DUMBO in New York City to discuss his work and methods. I also visited the studios of Doron Langberg, Sangram Majumdar, and Didier William in Brooklyn. In my own painting, I am able to achieve a shocking response from the audience observing my paintings, which the work of these artists often elicits. The new media I was introduced to helped me grow as an artist by introducing innovations of texture by drybrush, detailed pattern, washy figures, and explosive, unexpected, intricate moments. From visiting these artists' studios, I learned that developing paintings takes time, sometimes months, to achieve greatness. I learned from visiting with artists like Doron Langberg that intimate subjects are powerful statements, and filling parts of the composition with pure color allows more opportunity to further layer. I inquired of Langberg about his use of a silicon scraper, and he indicated it helped him expose his first layer of pure color to break the top layer of paint. I decided to experiment with this technique in my own work. My work generates a shocking response to the audience by the large scale of intimate figures and juxtapositions of their body language, along with each enduring a loud color palette to surprise the viewer. People in the world of 2020 are judgmental about any type of ideas contrary to their everyday norms, and putting themselves in front of a large scale figure of a nude woman may generate conversation and stimulate responses of shock and consternation.

Process

The first step of this thesis work was deciding my topic. I had experience working with female figures, but I had to choose a focus as a main idea to connect my female figures to.

Initially, I generated a series of works from my mind. I envisioned bold, solo female figures capturing expressions and gestures, with the distinct personalities based on their paint handling.

In Picasso's work, for example, *Woman in Hat and Fur Collar*, 1937, (Figure 1) I gained first-hand knowledge of how geometric shapes determined recognizable elements. I see recognizable images in *Woman in Hat and Fur Collar* including: a sun, a heart, multiple triangles, and a banana. I relished these abstract forms in which the viewer could interpret the meaning and significance being conveyed by the artist. For example, if I was painting a tree and used three geometric shapes to do so, the abstract forms would differ from recognizable features and show significance by not giving the viewer a direct depiction through the medium used, textures, technique, brush strokes, and color palette.

However, I wanted to explore and apply new techniques and materials to my thesis works. I sought to draw and paint with oil sticks (oil paint in a solid stick-like form) as Jean-Michel Basquiat did and George Condo does, and to apply acrylic molding medium and silicon scrapers that allow the first layer of paint to seep through the last layer, like Doron Langberg. Employing these new media helped me grow my artistic abilities, process, and foster a deeper understanding of painting techniques I am passionate about mastering.

I was eager to employ oil sticks because they have a different feel, flexibility, and control as compared to paintbrushes, and I expected to integrate oil sticks and tube paint experimentally. Additionally, I wanted to experience painting on linen canvas, to achieve a smoother surface. Painting on linen stretched onto a large-scale frame allowed me to experiment with the same materials and techniques centuries of painters once employed, to achieve my vision for this

project. The large-sized stretcher frames allowed me to work on a bigger scale than I ever have before.

At first, I sketched five compositions in my sketchbook with pencil, and then developed about six, twenty to thirty-minute color studies with outlines of geometric forms. The purpose of this process was to develop imagery and color to commence my “walk through the forest” experience.¹ My “walk through the forest experience” means learning from each time I come face to face with the canvas and increasingly develop the composition. The practice of this was to unleash my mind on paper. I painted the timed color studies on Dura-lar, clear plastic sheets, to help accelerate my painting time and confirm that my strokes were definite once marked. These studies were fundamental in determining sharp angles, lines, shape, and color.

A motivational artist during my studies was Jean-Michel Basquiat. Basquiat was American born in 1960 of Haitian and Puerto Rican backgrounds.² Basquiat had an expressive style, who detailed his work with oil sticks to cover any part of the painting with a bright highly saturated color. However most of Basquiat’s work was inspired by everyday imagery and poetic texts.³ Basquiat's use of oil sticks inspired me to learn this form of meaningful transcription on canvas.

Next, I created a painting that I named *True to Self*, (Figure 2) which I worked on for a series of weeks, layering, and adding newly learned techniques like dripping acrylic ink as part of toning the canvas, putting the oil sticks to use, using tape to leave sharp lines, along with utilizing the silicon scraper to take away paint to reveal the color layer below. Jean-Michel

¹ Channel, Louisiana. YouTube. YouTube, November 7, 2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhRdlVcQnjK>.

² Jean-Michel Basquiat, Dieter Buchhart, and Sam Keller, *Basquiat*, (Riehen/Basel: Beyeler Museum AG, 2010): 2.

³ Buchhart, Keller, *Basquiat*, 5.

Basquiat inspired my new use of oil sticks because throughout his career it was his specialty, especially in his work, *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump*, 1982 (Figure 3). I further experimented with dry brush and vibrant neon colors. Using the Dura-lar, I cut out an organic shape resembling a form in a rug to use as a stencil to reproduce a mass array of the shape repeating throughout the painting. I coated the pattern already on the canvas with another layer of the same stencil that was slightly mis-aligned with the first to allow a three-dimensionality. This taught me about creating organic shapes and my penchant towards making patterns to establish a deeper analysis and meaning along with adding my own twist to the David Park composition.

Furthermore, I developed a medium size study of a work emphasizing my inspiration from George Condo's use of line (Figure 4). During this study, I used a variety of geometric shapes, altering perspectives, and the use of variation of color and space. The study led me to create the larger work on linen, *Red Lipstick Portrait* (Figure 5), using my imagination to invent the composition with inspiration from George Condo's *Wild Man of Borneo*, 2013 (Figure 6).

George Condo was born in 1957 and his work is in prominent museums all over the world. Condo's paintings reference and are inspired by Western art history. For example, Condo's *Dreaming Nude*, 2006 (Figure 7) was inspired by Édouard Manet's *Olympia*, 1863 (Figure 8).⁴ Condo exaggerates, distorts, and echoes compositional elements in the work. Condo also painted completely from his mind— as he said, “I paint from memory for the most part. I

⁴ “George Condo - Dreaming Nude.” Phillips, March 9, 2020.
<https://www.phillips.com/detail/GEORGE-CONDO/NY010718/3>.

don't like to work from life and I never work from photography. I enhance my memory by just imagining.”⁵ Condo inspired me to have the same mind set during my journey.

During my exploration of these new tools, techniques, and styles, I altered my idea emphasizing my own interpretation from Park's work. I decided not to work solely from the imagination to create figures. I am more honed in on evolving my figurative paintings of women, a common subject of mine in previous paintings. Beyond sketching on paper, I also digitally designed a work on the iPad app, *Procreate* (Figure 9) to envision color combinations. The new types of tools, skill, and color handled in the studies, and the two ensuing linen works eventually blossom into the topic of manipulating David Park's representations of female figures, making my own compositions and growth of using a variety of brushes. The practice of drybrush to build layers and use of a myriad of patterns helped sharpen my focus.

My thesis has become an examination of David Park's figurative works of women, and an exploration of my own imagination by manipulating his forms and applying my own variety of new techniques. I drew ten sketches based on Park's female figures in a variety of works, and colored them with colored pencil. These sketches gave me ideas about which drawings to enlarge on canvas. I stretched each canvas and worked on two works at the same time to achieve the benefit of working quickly and efficiently, especially while waiting for paint to dry.

The process that worked for me to navigate my path was researching a variety of artists like Wangechi Mutu, Nicole Eisenman, Kristen Schiele, Brenda Goodman, Robin F Williams, and Richard Diebenkorn along with George Condo, David Park, and Jean-Michel Basquiat, to help

⁵ “George Condo on Claude Monet's *The Path through the Irises*: The Artist Project Season 1: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.” The Artist Project, March 9, 2020. <http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/1/george-condo/#>.

develop my skills and to facilitate applying their styles to my own works focused on David Park. The artists I studied helped me develop skills by watching Youtube documentaries of George Condo painting. Visually I tried to model after them. My skill improved by reading about Park's work in books and learning his way of drawing the figure as a simple interpretation, and painting with one stroke at a time. Jean-Michel Basquiat helped the growth of my skill by seeing his work in person at the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris, France and imagining how quick his use of lines with oils sticks was. Hearing feedback from colleagues during weekly critiques encouraged me to push my work further.

Inspiration

In the course, Painting: Oil, an introductory painting course, Professor Nemett introduced me to an artist named David Park, and immediately his work resonated with me. David Park was an American painter and spent most of his career around San Francisco. Park was also a professor at the California School of Fine Arts (now known as San Francisco Art Institute) and began his career by painting abstractly and then focused on the figure. Park uniquely had an eye for exceptional color combinations, which has been something I have been interested in as well. Park used gestural paint handling to build substance in his work. Park's physicality on canvas resonated with me because I enjoy using the palette knife to apply paint along with using large brushes to feel my body talking to the canvas. The viewer can then feel the painter's movements and consequently, allow for a deeper analysis of the artist's psychological state.

David Park inspires me because I see similarities between his work and mine, reflected in our simple, but not rendered forms, bold color choices, physical strokes, large scale canvas, and

the use of female figures. Janet Bishop, author of, *David Park-A Retrospective* informs that David Park said, “I often miss the sting that I believe a more descriptive reference to some fixed subject can make. Quite often, even the very fine non-objective canvases seem to me to be visually beautiful that I find them insufficiently troublesome, not personal enough.”⁶ By the phrase “some fixed subject”, David Park is referencing people.⁷ Park believed that referencing from humans creating figurative paintings gave him an urge to paint and even the most simple are still visually pleasing. The exploration of the female figures and their simplicity excited me about Park’s paintings and drawings. Park uses color to emphasize three-dimensionality and to explore tonal values. He uses simple shapes and lines to describe women figures; however he arranges them on the composition in a challenging format.

Park poses the women on the canvas in juxtapositions that invite the viewer into their space. For example, body parts extending off the edge of the composition, extreme close-ups, and the figure looking away from the viewer are not expected. My work gives special importance to borrowing David Park’s figures and manipulating them into my own by using my own perception, color palette, and techniques, creating a parallel between David Park’s paintings and mine.

David Park’s work, *Seated Woman*, 1955 (Figure 10) reveals a charcoal drawing of a nude, young, female model. The female figure has a very distinctive haircut which looks like a wig is placed on top of her head. The hair is one of the most obvious elements in the drawing and appears the most unnatural. The drawing depicts a young woman sitting on the ground with her

⁶ Janet Bishop, *David Park - A Retrospective* (University of California Press, 2019): 17.

⁷ Ibid.

right hand holding her right bent knee, and her left hand placed on the floor next to her left leg. The drawing shows a side profile looking away from Park. The composition conveys a physicality through the use of shadow and sculptural charcoal. The torso of the body is communicated as the darkest area, along with behind the female figure, while her neck and shoulders are the lightest. In her book, Bishop explains how David Park and Richard Diebenkorn sketched at a live model session, representing the same models in different angles.⁸ Bishop highlights that Park stays away from using “Caucasian flesh tones” in his work, and instead, uses bold color choices like his inspiration, Willem de Kooning.⁹

My oil painting on canvas, *Seated Woman in a Wallpapered Room* (Figure 11), demonstrates my version of David Park’s figure in *Seated Woman* enhanced with my focus on color, pattern, and gestural strokes. I painted the woman figure in a lemon yellow wash with darker tones of ruby red, magenta, and pumpkin orange highlighted on her back, legs, and inner left arm to contrast with the wash of lights throughout her body. The viewer’s eye is drawn to the figure’s lips because of the bright red color. The lips are painted with a thin layer of solid colors of paint, to depict the simplicity of this drawing. The contrast to the simple lips is the intricate detail in the eye. The eye on my female figure gives an illusion that the face is looking in one perspective, but the eye is straightforward. The detailed eye with variations of reflective color allows the eye to look realistic but the face is positioned to the side. The illusion helps the viewer to see the visage in two different perspectives. The background wallpaper is an oriental rug pattern, as I thought about the cut-out pattern I used in my process within *True to Self*. The oriental rug patterned wallpaper symbolizes the local sale of oriental rugs and how this woman is

⁸ Bishop, *David Park - A Retrospective*, 124.

⁹ Ibid.

locally selling her body as a model for others to draw and paint. The oriental rugs are showcased in local markets and sold for their looks, a perfect analogy as a background for this work.

David Park's *Nude Resting on Side*, 1955, watercolor and graphite on paper (Figure 12), appealed to me because of the isolated female figure in such a specific pose. The woman's hair and eye are the only shaded sections besides the tonal light and dark values to represent the dark shadows. I enjoyed that this work was created the same year as David Park's *Seated Woman*, allowing me to clearly compare and contrast them to each other. *Nude Resting on Side* and *Seated Woman* are similar to each other by the small amount of detail on the figures. Both figures are looking away from the viewer to the right. Both figures are in positions with their arms and legs bent. In *Nude Resting on Side*, the model is plump and in *Seated Woman* the female is more bony. I wanted my own manipulations of the two works to be, in some ways, similarly painted to one another. The heaviness of gesture and the thickness of paint of the figure's body attracted me to paint her. The position the woman lays in excited me because it was atypical to see a vulnerable pose so simply transcribed.

My painting on linen, *Nude with Blue Hair* (Figure 13), demonstrates a similar figure as David Park's *Nude Resting on Side*, close up. The tone of the flesh is pale, with variations of light reds, yellows, and oranges. The original black and white influenced me to form a pale to high contrast background. The background of my composition, *Nude with Blue Hair* is a colorful quilt. The quilt symbolizes that there is heritage waiting to be unfolded. The relationship of the quilt to the woman figure depicts that the woman has a story beyond her role as a nude model for artists. The quilt emphasizes story-telling in general and the power of words and history. Storytelling complements the idea of copying figures from an impressive artist, and

repeating the same story a little differently, just as people paint the same figure differently. I think of my process as a form of storytelling because I repeat the subject from a previously known painting with my own twist. The hair of the figure is blue with dry brush technique, and I used the silicon scraper to take away strands of the hair.

The gouache painting, *Back of Nude*, 1960 (Figure 14) was brought to my attention by the gestural strokes Park used and the simple marks and line employed to represent the woman's body. The vibrant color palette of tinted Phthalo Emerald, Cadmium Red Medium, Cadmium Orange, and Olive Green was also striking to me because Park uses a variety of colors with many variations for one figure. The background was a wash of orange and yellow colors, hinting at an outdoors setting. The viewer only sees the back of the nude female and the side of her face. The left arm was bent, pressing on her back. The figure was irresistible to manipulate.

My composition, *Barbra* (Figure 15), emphasizes the front of the female figure from my own interpretation of David Park's, *Back of Nude*. The woman's hair is a pyrrole orange and the eyes are slightly angled and well-rendered. The patterned button down top on the figure was a top I bought in Paris at a boutique. I love looking at the vibrant pattern the top has and liked the idea of incorporating myself into this composition in some form. The eye in *Back of Nude* was shown looking from the corner of the eye. The eyes in my composition look slightly to the corner as well. Park's vulnerable composition of the figures backside allowed me to think of the vulnerability of the front side of a nude. Like Park, my figures shoulders are on different planes. In Park's figure the left leg is slightly bigger than the right. My nudes left leg is slightly bigger than the right. The nude figure is sitting on a tiled bathtub ledge with the repeating tile on the

right side of her. The tiled bathtub implies she is about to take a bath. Just like in Park's composition, the figure in *Back of Nude* is about to take a bath.

Lastly, David Park, *Two Bathers*, 1958 (Figure 16) excited me because of the intimacy of the gestures and poses in the composition. The woman in the back is my favorite aspect because of her position reaching to get the towel fully wrapped around her backside. The arms are open, the left arm reaching for the left corner of the towel along with the right hand hugging the right corner of the towel tightly, depicting the vulnerability of the female figure. The figure's body suggests she is a middle-aged woman with her substantial curves and thick legs and excess skin under the upraised arm. The woman is turned slightly to the right and the towel leaves a shadow. The woman in front is turned toward the figure in the back with her hands on her hips.

In my painting, *Lady in the Mirror* (Figure 17), I took the figure in the background of David Park's, *Two Bathers*, and gave importance to this figure by not including the other bather in front. Instead, in the bottom left corner of the composition I included a reflection of the figure in front. The figure reflected in the back left corner is creeping off the edge of the composition allowing for interpretation and mystery. I want the viewer to think about why this figure is not fully shown in a mirror and think about if it is one person. The left arm of the bather with the towel in Park's composition inspired me to use a similar arm position for the mirror to reflect in the bathroom. The vibrant gestural paint strokes in this work are similar to aggressive strokes David Park would convey.

Motivation

This body of work is of one isolated female figure taken by David Park with my own spin and creative imagination. Like Bishop describes in *David Park - A Retrospective*: David Park said, “Living consists of the present tense— we cannot foresee and all we can do is sort of improvise on the chance that the immediate moment presents.”¹⁰ It is important to collect information from the author, Bishop, to gain insights on direct quotes and information regarding David Park’s work. In my thesis, I improvised from the figures that David Park gave me the opportunity to learn from, while using present contemporary painting techniques to further my own exaggeration and originality.

The motivation behind my work was my passion to express myself through art since I was very young. By creating art, I seek to communicate my sense of the world to others. Painting gives me a voice. My art is my half of a conversation with the viewer. I make art to lose myself, to share my thoughts, and to be appreciated. Because each piece is inherently unique, it makes me feel valuable because I am formulating something no one else ever will. I create works of art because my innermost world gives me an indescribable feeling which I can observe and convey, learn and teach, understand and challenge. It is my reality and my dream state. There are no words needed, just color and form to communicate the visions concocted from my soul. In photographs, I like to capture a certain look on someone’s face, or a view that I will miss out on if I take one more step. Time and space are suspended during these processes, until a tap on the shoulder brings me home. Imagination can lead you on an adventure of the mind. My imagination allows me to make these worlds – real and imaginary -- come alive on canvas and paper. So I continue to dream – fantasy by fantasy, scene by scene, image by image, detail by

¹⁰ Bishop, *David Park - A Retrospective*, 7.

detail – in the hope my artwork initiates a conversation conveying my adventures, ideas, perspectives and emotions. Hopefully, this exchange will challenge and provoke my audience in an inspired way.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Laini Nemett for guiding me through the thesis process, always helping me through the journey and throughout my four years at Union College. Professor Nemett has mentored me as an artist, with her critiques, and her arrangements for visits to New York City galleries and artist studios. She has motivated me to expand, explore, and enhance my techniques, always encouraging my own style and vision. Special thanks are also extended to Professor Lorraine Cox of the Union Visual Arts Department for helping me elaborate on ideas along the way, and for her enthusiasm and guidance over the past four years. I am also appreciative of the faculty in the Department of Visual Arts, and for the Student Research Grants which assisted me in creating this thesis.

Figure 1

Pablo Picasso, *Woman in Hat and Fur Collar*, 1937, oil on linen, 24 x 20 in.

<https://www.pablopicasso.org/woman-in-hat-and-fur-collar.jsp>



Figure 2

Brittany Schwartz, *True to Self*, 2020, oil on linen, 38 x 30 in., 2019.



Figure 3

Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Boy and Dog in a Johnnypump*, 1982, oil on linen, 94 x 165.5 in.

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/jean-michel-basquiat/boy-and-dog-in-a-johnnypump>



Figure 4

Brittany Schwartz, *medium size study of a work*, 2020, oil on canvas, 8 x 11 in., 2019.

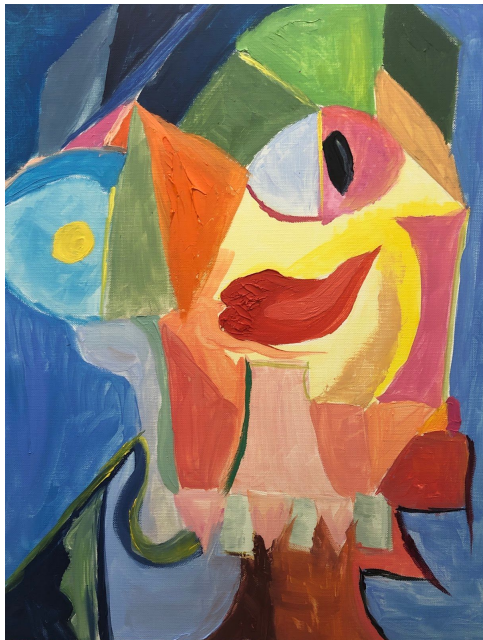


Figure 5

Brittany Schwartz, *Red Lipstick Portrait*, 2020, oil on linen, 28 x 38 in., 2019.



Figure 6

George Condo, *Wild Man of Borneo*, 2013, 65 1/4 x 61 1/4 x 3 1/2 in. © George Condo Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London.

<https://www.simonleegallery.com/artists/28-george-condo/works/6167/>



Figure 7

George Condo, *Dreaming Nude*, 2006, oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in.
<https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Dreaming-Nude/2CFD9F513583C7A1>



Figure 8

Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas, 51.4 in x 74.8 in
https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/olympia-7087.html?cHash=d2a816b40c&tx_kleemobileredirection=1



Figure 9

Brittany Schwartz, *Procreate on an iPad*, 2020



Figure 10

David Park, *Seated Woman*, 1955, charcoal on paper, 9.5 x 11.75 in.

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/david-park/seated-woman-rRQ0iJIVQls7oIA3r-cR9g2>



Figure 11

Brittany Schwartz, *Seated Woman in a Wallpaper Room*, 2020, oil on canvas, 38 x 56 in.

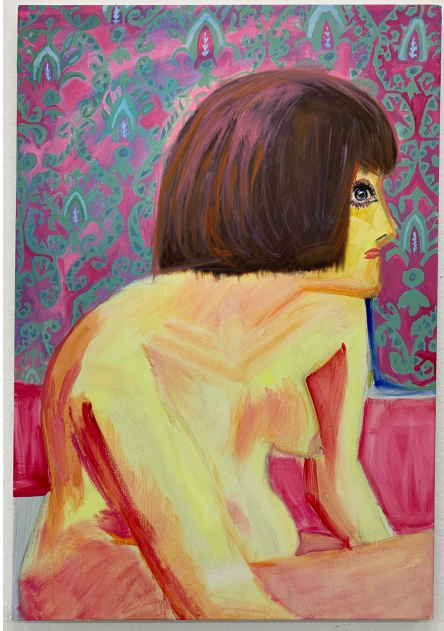


Figure 12

David Park, *Nude Resting on Side*, 1955, watercolor and graphite on paper, 16 x 12.25 in.

http://www.artnet.com/artists/david-park/nude-resting-on-side-257-Owb1Ts1ll_g813Dm5ekdaw
2



Figure 13

Brittany Schwartz, *Nude with Blue Hair*, 2020, oil on linen, 34 x 46 in.



Figure 14

David Park, *Back of Nude*, 1960, gouache on paper, 13 1/4 in. x 10 in.

<https://www.crockerart.org/collections/american-art-after-1945/artworks/back-of-nude-1960>



Figure 15

Brittany Schwartz, *Barbra*, 2020

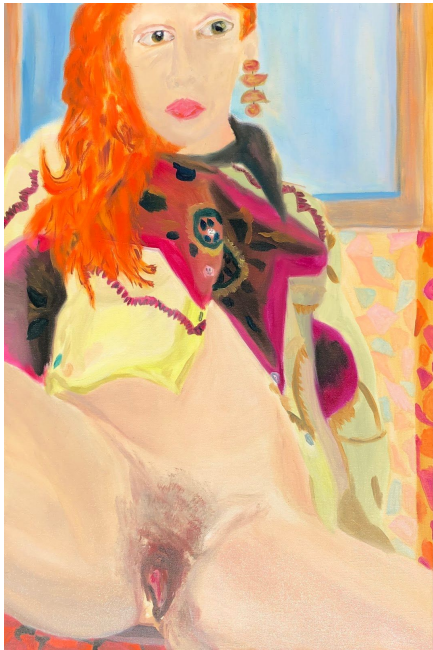


Figure 16

David Park, *Two Bathers*, 1958, oil on canvas, 58 in. x 50 in.
<https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/2008-22/>



Figure 17

Brittany Schwartz, *Lady in the Mirror*, oil on canvas, 11 x 14 in., 2020.

