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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Falling Mythologies
By

Melissa Mance-Coniglio
Spring 2008

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This thesis is dedicated to all those who fell from this earth during this process.

To:

Uncle Bill for the outdoors
Uncle Shorty for the laughs
Aunt Judy for the trips to the garden
Alan Edwards for his wit and words
Chris for Elvis and his magic drawings
Tori for her sweet smile
Little Ryan who was never to be
Mr. Andrews for opening the door to new worlds
Tim for being a hero to many

This thesis is also dedicated to my committee members, for their tireless efforts on my behalf and willingness to walk this path with me.

Thank you to:

Alan Singer
Eileen Feeney-Bushnell
Thomas Lightfoot

Abstract

This thesis follows the exploration of the subject of falling within the context of mythology. This mythology is both a personal journey through the process of creating figurative paintings and one that explores archetypes from our cultural past. It links this journey through the process of painting to other artists who have explored their own subjective themes in their work and built relationships between representational work and abstraction. As these paintings have developed I have been driven by the desire to capture the transient nature of flesh and beauty. This seeking to preserve the fragments of movement and sentient being has led to me to the media of painting and the topic of falling.

Falling can imply a moral state or a sense of mortality. In Abrahamic religions the fallen are the damned. To be one of the fallen implies that the soul will not be elevated into heaven. Suddenly these birds can be dropping souls and the atmosphere around them becomes mythic and otherworldly. Mythologies rise and fall and yet their archetypes remain. Within this thesis I explore the inclusion of archetypal symbolism in the paintings I create in order to make a reference to the context of the fall. This thesis also follows how tragedy shaped the depth of my painting. Each work contains the ramifications of death and how it pushed me further into the reasons behind the paintings.

In summary, this thesis explores the concrete aspects of paint in order to catch images of fallen, falling, and crashing birds. The paintings explore space, value, compositional line, and the amount of information necessary in order to create the sense of the individual bird. The paintings explore various contexts for the birds, such as the inclusion of the figure or aspects of the figure, metaphorical and mythological catalysts, and elements of landscape.

Table of Contents

Thesis Proposal	4
Spring - The Season of Increase	6
Summer- The Season of Growth	11
Fall – The Season of Dying	12
The Prints	14
Themis Swing	16
Achilles Leap	17
Atropos	19
When Apollo Caught Her	20
J’s Bags	24
By the Roadside	25
Winter- The Process of Waiting	26
Spring- The Season of Re-Growth	28
Images of the Paintings	29
Reference List	36

Thesis Proposal

What is it to fall? The verb fall is used in many different expressions, to fall in love, fall out of favor, to have a falling out, to name a few. It is related to physical and emotional states of being. It is a feeling of air within the body and around the body. If we are relating falling to a feeling of air, birds are the supreme masters of that element. What is it then if the masters of the element succumb to the fall? What does it look like when the unexpected happens and the bodies so at home in the sky plummet downwards to the earth? In this thesis I seek to explore the concepts of falling, catching, crashing and the alchemy and mythologies of air.

As my paintings have developed I have been driven by the desire to capture the transient nature of flesh and beauty. This seeking to preserve the fragments of movement and sentient being has led me to the media of painting. The first influence of this desire of permanence came from my journey to Italy. I was struck by the encompassing darkness of works by the artist Caravaggio. I could not help but notice the simple fact of their absolute perfect beauty despite their antiquity. His model's faces are forever cast in their masks of paint and have been intimately greeted by all those who have seen them. The mixture of oil and pigment has lasted beyond the fading light of photography. Our modern media that records life have become less and less permanent to the point of only existing as light and memory. Paint has staying power and its own language. I am driven to become fluent in the expression of paint. I want to create permanence by catching in paint the moment when the flight fails and the body no longer can hold itself aloft.

In all fragments of moments there is a connection to some greater action. One bird falling can relate to all birds that have fallen and will fall again. It is a continuum of actions as regular and predetermined as the arch of a blade on its axis. Can one face looking; one set of eyes watching and viewing the recorded fall change the axis of the blade? Can we stop the momentum of the destruction our lack of seeing is causing in all of the small things around us? Does the recording and interpretation of the fall have the ability to change the pattern of thought and once changed create a new axis for the rotation of the world? Or is it only a swan song and I am a recorder to what was and in the face of history will become a relic like the painted mask face in a Carravagio painting that refers to a living being no longer present in this world? Will the materiality of paint outlive the very individual species that I record? I want to explore how the history of our mythic relationship to the landscape and other animals relates to the fall of our civilization and humanity during our present time.

I had a long conversation with the painter Emily Eveleth. We discussed the difficulty of creating movement within a static sphere of paint and canvas. We both shared our artistic desire to capture a state in between one action and another on canvas. In her painting "Pass" the hoop has not begun to spin and the figure dressed in formal attire is a collection of opposites. As we both formalized ideas in this conversation I began to see similarities in our efforts. She worked with a camera and was interested in how it stops action and how the freeze frame of action implies a future and a past motion.

Emily and I both grew interested in the prospects of the awkwardness of those recorded movements when action is taking place but not yet done. I relayed to her about the collection of photos I have of birds jumping off of branches, legs akimbo, in unusual states. The camera caught these movements and I decided to use it as a tool to record falling. In this thesis I will explore the principles of the chaos of the loss of control. I will isolate a painted snapshot that insinuates a past and future movement. I will explore the need for focus balanced with areas that blur. I will also play with proportion and perspective in order to exaggerate the gravity of the fall. I will also explore the placement of the birds within the scope of a figure, still life or landscape in order to create a catalyst, crash or final action.

Falling can also imply a moral state. In Abrahamic religions the fallen are the damned. To be one of the fallen implies that the soul will not be elevated into heaven. Suddenly these birds can be dropping souls and the atmosphere around them becomes mythic and otherworldly. Mythologies rise and fall and yet their archetypes remain. I want to play with the inclusion of archetypal symbolism in the paintings in order to make a reference to the context of the fall.

In summary, I will be working with the concrete aspects of paint in order to catch images of fallen, falling, and crashing birds. These paintings will explore space, value, compositional line, and the amount of information necessary in order to create the sense of the individual bird. The paintings will explore various contexts for the birds, such as the inclusion of the figure or aspects of the figure, metaphorical and mythological catalysts, and elements of landscape.

Spring –The Season of Increase

It is at the fringes of Modernism, Minimalism and Romanticism that you find the artists that have the most influence on my work. Generally these artists have deep roots into other movements and relationships with other artists. I could not fully explore Georgia O’Keeffe without seeing the range of artists that surrounded her. Nor could I find a place for Emily Carr without the Group of Seven. For the sake of simplicity I will not address these connections but describe my discovery of these artists. I find that I am drawn to artists who do not necessarily fit tightly in a style. Their work has a tendency to be idiosyncratic and has the unique stamp of their vision. These painters were individuals and remained true to the singular quest of their idea of what the work would be and what they must paint.

*“Though everything was so still, you were aware of the tremendous forces of growth pounding through the clearing, aware of the sap gushing in every leaf, of push, push, push, the bursting of buds, the creeping of vines. Everything expanding every minute but doing it so subtly you did not actually see anything happen”*¹

In the summer of 2006, I was fortunate enough to travel to Ottawa, Canada to see a major retrospective on the work of Emily Carr. This show titled “Emily Carr New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon” which ran from June 2006 to January 2008 at various Canadian venues. It was a massive show that ran the full spectrum of Emily Carr’s work. Carr has her closest ties to the Group of Seven art movement in Canada, which was a painting friendship that officially began in “May 1920 at its first exhibition.”² She was not interested in a trend towards Minimalism, but rather desired to convey her connection to the woods and people of her home in Vancouver Island. Carr is on the edges of the contemporary movements of her time since she painted in relative isolation for most of her career.

I was influenced by Carr’s bright glowing palette and her energetic descriptions of the forests. Emily Carr also felt a need to preserve things in paint. She began her work documenting the lives of the Native tribes of Vancouver and the surrounding areas in drawings and paintings. After a long break of time in her work she eventually traveled to NY City in 1939 to the World of Tomorrow fair. She realized at the fair that technology “this “sham” was a growing reality that could kill her beloved nature, “the real things, the flowers, bushes, trees, and shrubs””.³ Carr’s work that followed this discovery was housed in a separate gallery. It was that particular part of the show which seduced me with its brilliance. “It is not the earth but the pulsating, rich blue sky, thick swirling clouds, and radiant sunlight that dominate... the titles-with their not-so-subtle references to industrial presence-clearly acknowledge that there is more to these scenes than just an individual communing with the natural world “.⁴

1. Emily Carr, *Growing Pains: An Autobiography* (Allston: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited, 2004), 279

2. Murray, Joan. “Seeing the Light: The Group of Seven and Canadian Art.” In *The Best of The Group of Seven*, ed. Joan Murray. 7-23. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1984), 8.

3. Hunter, Andrew. “Emily Carr: Clear Cut.” In *Emily Carr New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon*, ed. Marnie Butvin and Denise Sirois, 200-247. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, Ltd., 2006), 202

4. Hunter, “Emily Carr: Clear Cut”, 202

My favorite of these titles is “*Scorned as Timber, Beloved of the Sky.*” In this painting a skinny spindly tree disappears and reappears as it climbs up to the blinding blue of the sky. A device I would emulate later when I was painting the falling owl painting. It stands as a single reminder of the great trees that had once fought it for light that now only remain as cut stumps below it.

The painting *Above the Gravel Pit* figure 1, by Carr exemplifies this style. It is a freedom of color and brushwork that I crave within my own paintings. I was struck by the sweeping descriptions and their simplicity paired with the complexity of color. The sky is moving and filled with energy. This influence translated into my own need to create a brush stroke filled sky within my work. I wanted to paint with the obvious exuberance of this work but found I had only part of Carr’s liberty.



Figure 1. Carr, Emily, *Above the Gravel Pit*, 1936. Oil on Canvas, 30 ¼ x 40 ¼ in. Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver (ARTstor digital library 3/10/2008).

“Some of the fields are green-very, very green-almost unbelievably green against the dark of the pine woods-and it is warm-the air feels warm and soft-and lovely...”
*Georgia O’Keeffe in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, 1916*⁵

Another show that was a major influence on my painting was “Georgia O’Keeffe Color and Conservation” that I went to in September, 2006 at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, NY. I was at first reluctant to go to O’Keeffe. She is a blockbuster artist that is well known by everyone and represented by endless reproductions. So before I went to the show I felt I had known O’Keeffe. I quickly discovered going through the show that I did not really know O’Keeffe and the soft organized movements of her brush strokes as they explored the surfaces of a flower or fruit. The colors were striking in their purity and they glowed off of the walls. I found this very satisfying and wanted very much at the time to break out of my own muddy blue palette. I loved the careful intensity of her gaze that explored space within the confines of an object. O’Keeffe was a true Modernist in her need for the simplification of the natural form.

O’Keeffe’s influence was a means of entering a more painterly space that was not limited exclusively to a description of a real object. I had been clumsily trying to represent a bird without painting the essence of what a bird is. O’Keeffe showed the spare essence of what she was describing and brought purity to the view, whether she was describing a landscape, articulating the curve of a calla lily or rendering the surfaces of a skull. I wanted to recreate that essential simplicity after seeing her work.

The show “Georgia O’Keeffe Color and Conservation” made me crave seeing more. So I traveled this past summer to her house in Abiquiu, New Mexico. It is hard to describe the remote sparseness of the place and the way the light hits edges of objects with such intensity. I did not really understand her work conceptually until I sat in her garden and watched the sun move over the adobe walls of her house. This gave me a stronger sense of the way she was subtly describing light by using values in her paintings. O’Keeffe was not adding what was not already present in her painted viewpoint, rather she was fine tuning the description so the viewer could catch the color and beauty as well. O’Keeffe was a translator, finding color and light in order to place it emphatically in her paintings with the soft movements of her brush strokes.

5. Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O’Keeffe Art and Letters* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company (Inc.), 1987). 150.



Figure 2. O'Keeffe, Georgia, *My Backyard*, 1937. Oil on canvas, 20 x 36in. New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana, The Image Gallery Collection (ARTstor digital library 3/10/2008).

Both Carr and O'Keeffe have the sense of centering in a place. O'Keeffe's descriptions of New Mexico are stunningly accurate as seen in figure 2, *My Backyard*.

"From experiences of one kind or another shapes and colors come to me very clearly-Sometimes I start in a very realistic fashion and as I go on from one painting after another of the same thing it becomes simplified till it can be nothing but abstract-but for me it is my reason for painting it I suppose.

At the moment I am very annoyed.-I have the shapes-on yellow scratch paper-in my mind for over a year-and I cannot see the color for them-Ive drawn them again-and again-it is from something I have heard again and again till I hear it in the wind-but I can not get the color for it-only shapes-None of this makes sense-but no matter" Georgia O'Keeffe in a letter to John I. H. Baur.⁶

In this description of her process O'Keeffe relates that subconscious need to express something that lies on the edges of her experience. It comes to her as shapes in her mind and in analyzing her work you can begin to see a purposeful search within the objects she chose to convey. It was a search for a shape, over and over that lead to such diverse expressions of form. When I was painting "*For G and A over New Mexico*" figure 4, I was also searching for that same kind of shape. I emphasized the spokes of the prominent wheel within the flower. If I took this further I would also be sent spinning towards abstraction if I let go of my tie to expressing the figurative world. The painting is a direct homage to O'Keeffe and her work. It was my need to feel the style of her work under my brush in a kinesthetic response to her paintings.

6. Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, *Georgia O'Keeffe Art and Letters*, 267.

“What feeling does space have? What shape is space? How does space relate to the body?” Emily Eveleth in a lecture at the Mass Art Summer Session, Bennington, Vermont.

Emily Eveleth is a contemporary painter who accepts the canon of painting and the pictorial tenets of Minimalism yet subverts the subject and becomes contemporary and Post-Modern. She borders on the edges of slightly Romantic revival in her need to convey the appeal of the everyday object and a popular culture image –the doughnut. She translates this mechanically produced object into “high art” and beauty.

Where I initially wanted to seduce the viewer into the beauty of the dead bird, she seduces her viewers into the lushness of the surfaces and oozing jelly of the doughnut. She pays attention to the smallest detail and describes it with effortless sweeps of her brush stroke. Emily Eveleth is a painters painter, using the old methods for oil painting and consulting the objects directly as she paints them. Her work conveys light and space with her use of chiaroscuro and formal composition. I was entranced by her ability to make me consider the objects on such a monumental scale and see them described with such beauty. You love them as paintings and then remember that they are paintings of doughnuts. It is a convention I seek to emulate.

During our sessions in the week of working together Emily Eveleth and I discussed the use of the camera to catch movement.

When she is working she freezes her figures by using a model in an active position. She is very interested in painting exclusively from life. We discussed the difficulty of catching the essence of falling from a static figure. My work was stuck because I was posing the bird as a still life and then try to convey movement in the rendering of the bird. I could not convey the movement of the bird without at first seeing the movement. So together through our discussions we both decided upon using the camera as a tool to catch the movement in midair.

Emily Eveleth set up the activity of painting space in a formal landscape painting class. Within that activity she encouraged me to describe both ascending and descending space. It was also the point at which I started to examine the relationship between color and space. I re-examined the lessons during my undergraduate work at the Cleveland Institute of Art, of my first painting teacher’s Julian Stanzack and his work in color field painting.

All three artists carried the theme of beauty subverted, or the reality of beautiful ugliness and the pure impurity of death. The doughnuts do not rot in Emily Eveleth’s paintings although they are preserved in a state of ripeness. O’Keeffe traveled into a transitory flower and often would pair its fresh beauty with a skull or bones. Carr painted the essence of a forest that had both the living tree and the remnants of the trees that have been cut down. All three painters deal with the need for connection to the audience as inherent in Romanticism, but also nod to Modernism’s purity of expression.

Summer- The Season of Growth

In the late summer of 2007, I began work on the painting *For G and A Over New Mexico*, figure 4. This painting was not included in my thesis show as it was separate in a sense from my figurative works but it was the birth of the idea of them. The painting is a celebration of one of the impulses of falling. I began the steps towards my future paintings buoyant on an ideal vision of falling in terms of a self-portrait of the sweet hopefulness of falling, as in falling in love. Falling began as a metaphor for change and transition.

This is the one of two paintings where the action of falling is suspended by the intervention of another. In the case of this painting it is the intervention of the male yellow warbler on the female. The female warbler hangs suspended from the male's foot and he holds her up against the wheel like Jimson Weed flower. He clings to its upper edge as they are balanced at an unnatural height above the landscape below them. The wind turbines below them are merely suggested forms below that are like road lines on the cut desert landscape. This painting was the dream of flying over the desert and the hope that someone would catch hold before I plummeted to earth. I wanted the flowers to be lovely and white against the yellow birds and to have a sense of the purity of the color. I infused a glow into them so that they were benign wheels although they do hold the secret of being in the *Datura* family (the same plant family as deadly nightshade) and are incredibly toxic. I liked the idea of pretty poison, as the birds clung to the idealized and immortal painted flowers precariously above the earth below them. The earth is altered and cut across by the landscape of man and although this was primarily to me a joyous painting, it still contains the subtle message of our alterations on the landscape we inhabit. The turbines are in themselves another version of hope despite their dismal records of cutting down migrating birds. They are a means for cleaner, more pure power like the white of the *Datura* flower, and its pretty malevolence.

Entering the beginning of this year, I had hope that my work would continue with this new juxtaposition of birds and flowers. I was very interested in the workings of wheels and how fate, time and the other preoccupations of mortality spin on the axis of life. I was thrilled with the metaphor of the giant turbine and its ability to save and destroy in one spin of its huge wing like blade. -I thought I was going in a direction of intellectual comparison of birds and the environment with a little personal metaphor thrown in.

Fall- The Season of Dying

I discovered Edwin Dickinson's work during a trip to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. They had a catalogue of *Dreams and Realities* a major retrospective that they hosted on his work in 2002. I was drawn to his figurative works and the mysterious juxtapositions of space within them. In his painting the "*The Fossil Hunters*" Figure 3, the people are within a curtained blue expanse of fabric. When your eye travels the painting it is at times drawn into the space, led by the lines of the drapery but it is also pushed back out by a sudden highlight or less developed area. I am at once attracted to this interplay of space and how the centered reclining figures feel solid in the almost chaotic push and pull. Compositionally it gives me a sense of spinning that the two centered heads meet as an axis point that thrusts out all other aspects of the painting to meld around them. His white and gray blanket is luminous in the dense otherwise unclear light of the work. The female figure fades into abstraction, a cubistic styled landscape behind her. The female faces in this work slide out of focus, the one on the lower right looking as if the brush obliterated the mouth.

Dickinson is masterful at defining the story of a painting. His figures draw you in and ask you to create a narrative. They are not didactic, they are suggestive and open. The discovery of Dickinson's work within the progress of my own painting came to me as a beacon of liberty. I had been forced in my process to always consider the focus of the camera lens. As I worked I emulated Dickinson's ability to leave some of the parts of the painting non-descript. I allowed the places in my paintings to not be necessarily representative of actual places but to have a surreal aspect to them. From looking at Dickinson I learned that color is devoid of expression if it does not work within the structure of light. I was influenced by Dickinson to create mystery in my paintings so that they also have that contradictory feel. I created a sense of humanity and empathy between the figures and the falling animals. A sweetness and bitterness mixed into one picture. Beauty and decay as so clearly present in Dickinson's painting.

Looking at Dickinson's work brought me to the conclusion that all things do not have to be equally developed in a painting and some areas can have an expressive freedom even though they are still descriptive of the area of the painting.

Death has come into the house
throw open the windows at its arrival
weep and pull your hair, cover your face in ash
and mourn the loss of a great generation
we stand as silent witness
milling around the viewed body, devoid of soul
all knowledge buried, the world has lost it's wealth
in close eyed slumber
goodbye, goodbye
the demons that ate at your body have won you
your soul has quietly slipped past
and takes the stairs two at a time

Melissa Mance-Coniglio

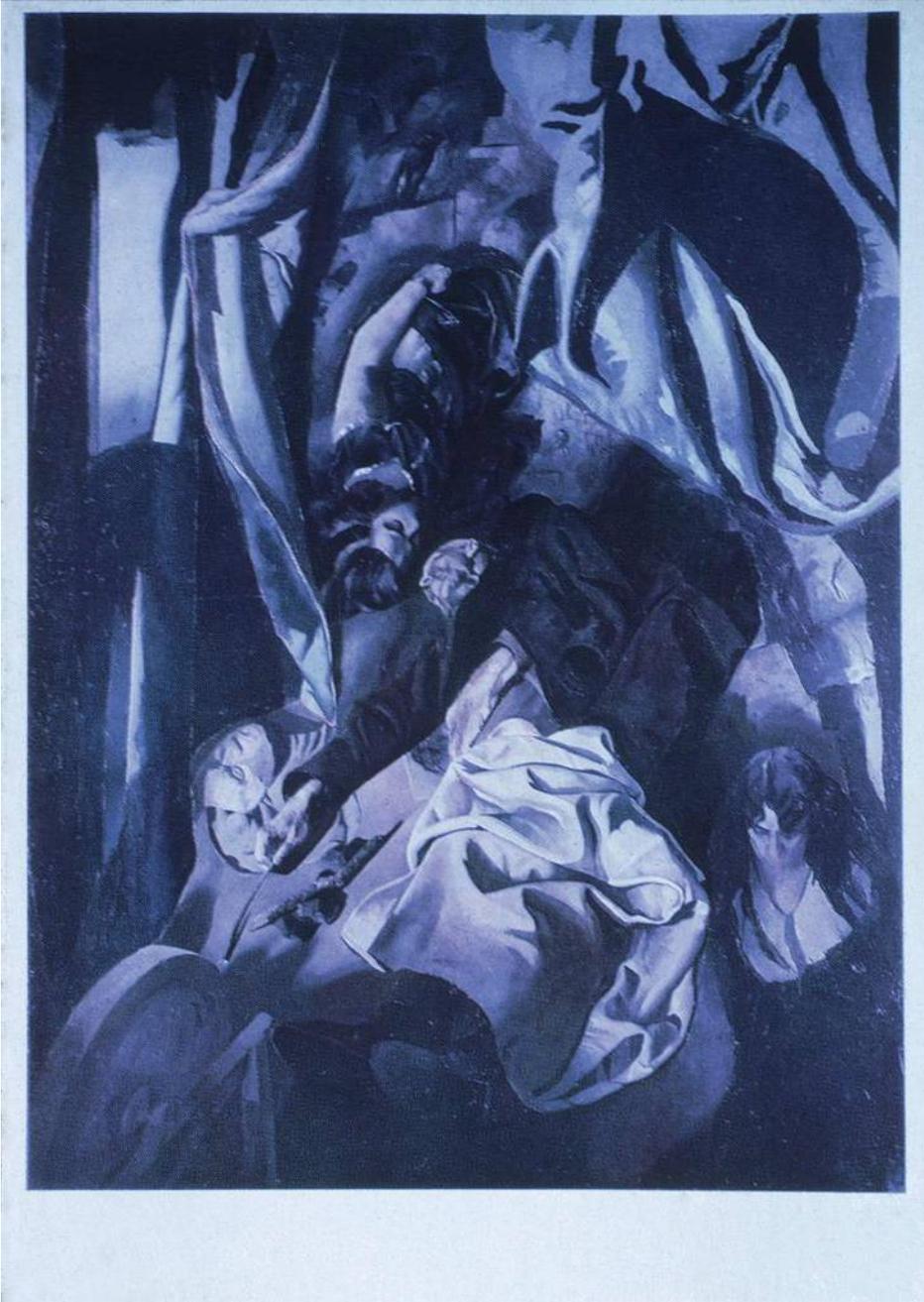


Figure 3. Dickinson, Edwin, *The Fossil Hunters*, 1926-8. Oil on canvas, 96 ½ x 73 ¾ in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Image Gallery Collection (ARTstor digital library 3/10/2008).

The Prints

In order to create a sense of movement in the falling birds, I began to throw them up in the air and photograph them in the action of falling. These pictures helped me to see the distorted images of them, blurred and out of scale. I began to explore these images in prints. I would draw from the photo and make sense of the form and anatomy of the birds and transfer this drawing onto a print plate. Then I began to combine the images by using the same scale of plate over and over. I used an etched wind farm map plate and then experimented with other means to get layers of images. I would use Mylar as a transfer medium by incorporating watercolor washes that I then printed underneath etched plates.

I enjoyed the free combinations in my explorations of forms. The birds could be juxtaposed in new ways with some of my core images. The birds fell over skies and over wind farms and over wheat fields. They became little portraits of decay and transience.

The impulse to use the images of falling birds started at Strong Hospital when my father was battling cancer. At the time we were uncertain if he would be able to fight it and live. I often found myself climbing the stairwells in the parking lot since I was spending most nights at the hospital visiting him. On the day of his surgery I was there early in the morning. I was told that we would either have hope of recovery or no hope at all depending on what they discovered when they operated on him. There was a dead kinglet in the stairwell on my way in the day of his surgery. It was lying on the cement at my feet with the red of its small cap flashing in the early morning light. I wondered how it had arrived in the glass stairwell.

Later that day I would impulsively check every stairwell in a burst of pent up energy. I ran up and down them and found many small kinglets. Some of them had already collided with the glass in their frantic efforts to escape but I managed to catch the one or two of them that had survived. I felt so strange when I released them on the roof of the garage. The image is still extraordinarily clear to me, of my hands opening and a small burst of feathers shooting out into the open air. I felt as if I became the hand of fate itself and if I could somehow find the bird that represented the soul of my father and free it, he would not die. So every day I found them and every day I set some of them free always wondering if each of them was a reflection of the dead going away or the living continuing to live. I must have found the right one to free because my father lived and beat the cancer.

As I made these prints of hearts and birds falling I was reminded of this event. How can I not be when I am faced with so many other souls falling out of my life? It is a parallel of the glass stairwells and the vertigo of climbing them. The pulse of my heart as I ran through them and the feeling of elation at finding a small bird fluttering frantically against the glass defying the death that so easily made his companions plummet down the center of the stairs to lay at my feet. The dark silhouette against the bright daylight shining through the glass is a memory I keep returning to. As real sorrows have their heavy echoes that sometimes take so long to leave in their catharsis of flight.

I reach for you under my hands but you are not there
my back is heavy with all of this weight
as you look at me and I am endless
today is just a moment
when death stops in to come calling
I cannot lift my head
To spend another week on this routine of emptiness
when I ask who will catch me as I fall?

Melissa Mance-Coniglio

In October I had my first ever solo show in Batavia. It was well attended by my students and family. It felt good to have the work seen by my audience and I was influenced by the thoughts of making my work accessible to the people who surround me on a daily basis. The paintings were all birds, but I felt like the audience was not getting my translations. They did not see the human story in them but only saw them as beautiful objects. The audience was not building a relationship to the meanings within the images. The paintings I felt did not successfully pull in the viewer and discuss the ideas of mortality and transience that I wanted them to see. They remarked on the beauty of them but quickly moved away and sat satisfied with the apparent notion they surmised, but not finding the twist. The opening of that show was a great influence on me and I was completely deflated at its lack of success in my mind to reach my audience. It depressed me to think that I was not able to hold the viewer for long and that they were content with one answer. I also was dissatisfied with the work myself and found it lacking a true voice. It was suggestive but made no definitive statement. The exhaustion and sadness I felt at that show echoed for a long time into my new work. It made the struggle and hours of endless painting seem worthless in a way. My voice was not clear. So I knew I needed to find it and not be content with a simplistic idea for my thesis.

Themis Swing

I began to paint *Themis' Swing (In memory of J.Gionet and M. Gionet)* figure 5, while I was still interested in the aspects of the wheel and in thinking of the wheel I jumped to the relationship of the swing with the wheel. The swing is a half axis of a wheel, an undulation back and forth with a sense of weight and balance. It is a fall returned over and over but prevented by the grip of the ropes to the pole. The motion creates arcs over and over, similarly to the spin of the turbines I liked to watch. In the painting I wanted to be below the swing to create the same sense of overwhelming scale that you get as you stare up at a giant turbine and watch the blades come towards you. A part of me would always feel as if the blades could at any point be thrown off and fly free of the pole, just as a person on a swing set can leap off at the moment of the greatest velocity and fall free.

I knew I wanted to paint my smallest niece Hannah. It was my attempt to know her better and discover what she was becoming. I wanted to preserve her childhood and paint her enjoying the rocking of the swing before sorrow created paths into her life. I used the camera to capture the motion and her swinging in her backyard. All of my nieces and nephews came out to help in the late summer evening. They wanted to be painted as well and demanded my careful attention to their stories. I lay under the swing as she laughed and flew over me. She tilted her head back for the perfect moment and I caught a fleeting impression with the camera. For the painting I wanted everything to be akimbo and her shooting out of a regular static landscape.

The impulse was a combination of worlds. My own one full of responsibility, the awareness and presence of death and environmental decay, the necessity of order and formality, combined with her freedom, the endless possibility of her future, and the absolute joy in the fleeting moments of childhood. My palette warmed in this work for the first time. I limited my use of blues and pushed into violets to construct her form. I wanted her to have color and life infusing it into the transitions of her face and body which thrusts out to the viewer and leads you in. She is unaware of my landscape behind her, with the static ordered trees cutting across the canvas like teeth and the blue sky which is witness to the falling of blurred birds. They are counterbalancing her happiness and innocence. It is a conversation between a future that may not contain as much possibility for her as I had and her inability to yet understand the heaviness of knowing mortality and all that death can take from us. If I could paint her world differently I would and in it I would take away the weight of losing all that we love to time.

I named her *Themis Swing* because of the relationship of the Greek Goddess Themis to the scales of fate. As the viewer we do not know what holds the strings attached to the swing she sits on. They disappear upwards into air. I liked the idea of creating the possibility of leaving the viewer to wonder at this. Themis is described as “the incarnation of law or equity” and she is also the mother of the three fates “who determined the destiny of every human being”.⁷ Themis in her representation of law holds the scales of life in her hands. My niece swings in the hands of justice, will it give her access to an unpolluted and balanced earth? Her generation will sit in judgment of my own for what we have done or not done to create a place for her future.

Themis is also a Titan a forerunner to the gods that come later.⁸ This painting is also a forerunner and a beginning for the work that followed it. The inclusion of the figure was a new direction for the falling concept and a way to pull in my audience and begin to more fully tell a story with my work.

7. Beardsworth, Patricia. *Larousse World Mythology*. (New Jersey: Chartwell Books Inc. 1965) 110.

8. Beardsworth, 110.

Achilles Leap

The day of my Uncle's funeral was beautiful, warm, and breezy. The fall sunlight shone golden as we marched up the hill to the church to lay him to rest. The firemen paced beside us in rows with the whiteness of their hats reflecting against the stain covered pavement. On we walked up the hill to the red brick church. A group of kinglets flew over and a chickadee called as we walked down the streets of Alexandria Bay, NY. The wind rustled the few remaining leaves on the trees, catching some and tossing them delicately to the ground. We were all dressed in black as his casket was carried in front of us on an old 1920's fire truck. This was our solemn salute to my dear uncle, who was laid to rest on all Hallows Eve. The world has lost quite a man, quick with a laugh, always ready to fix my car, or just be there to help out. A contrast to the young life filled face of my nephew.

My brother's son Jacob bears an uncanny resemblance to the boy my brother was. He has the same moon shaped face and protruding teeth. I knew I had to paint him and catch not only his youth, but in catching him; remember the echo of my brother's and my own.

In Figure 6, the boy is charged with energy, dark against the blue sky. His hands and legs are akimbo as he leaps forward into the air. He cannot know he is at all mortal, nor does he understand the quickening span of days as they rush past. He leaps out trusting in the perfect balance of his body that has not ever failed him. We all have to wonder at his landing and the large vulture that hangs above him in a similar gesture. What does he represent, this cultural death bird, eater of carrion, as he flies with his wings in a lazy v? Achilles is unaware of him, although his heel is exposed as he leaps.

I did not know Alan Edwards extremely well but we had developed a virtual friendship. He and I would send each other email and we collaborated via the internet on putting one of my poems to music. Before he died I had a short email from him explaining that his record was on hold because he was not feeling well. It was a casual way of disguising his major battle with cancer. He stopped posting to his blog and emailing me but he returned at the very end of October and I think he knew then that he was dying. He was very witty; we would post back and forth on each other's blogs by making jokes in the comment section. It is the new world of knowing someone by how they choose to be known, by what pictures they post and quotes they find enough meaning with to share. Alan lost his battle with cancer at the end of January, 2008.

How do you grieve for someone that you never physically met? It was a difficult struggle to be in and is not easy to explain. I did not really tell anyone but I faced all of the same grief that you would have if you lost a friend. I had admired his literacy and enjoyed all of the writers and poets he would call my attention to on his blog. We had worked to create a song together, sharing our collective voices over the wires of the internet. There was an intimacy in our collaboration and I still miss knowing that he was in the world. Perhaps one day we would have met and shared ideas.

During my January review I tried to explain my need to give *Achilles Leap* more life. It was not reflecting the dual possibilities of the vulture as a subject. In the review it was mentioned that the vulture should be dropped from the painting and the figure should remain alone. I had a strong reaction to this later and decided that to not include a vulture would be like destroying the entire painting. I realized also that it was too late to give up on this work. I wanted to at that point, because I had not felt so strongly connected to the painting and felt like there were just too many unresolved issues in it to fix.

So after Alan Edward's death I went back to *Achilles Leap* to examine it further. In a strange way I wanted to have a conversation about the grief I was feeling but could not explain. I needed to connect with a painting whose voice I could not hear. The original vulture that was planned to accompany the painting was more awkward and stiff. It hung heavy over the figure and pushed against the edges of the frame of the painting. This constricted the movement of the bird. It was not leaping but it was stuck fast in its place.

Grief gave me a new bravery in my painting. I just threw the old vulture aside and began a new one. I started snatching more time on week nights after work. Painting after a long day made me loose and reckless. I had no time for doubt and worry so I painted it effortlessly. I knew the edges of the vulture and had an intimacy with it I cannot verbally describe. It was as if someone was standing over me and whispering directions in my ear. I could hear the forms; see the shapes and colors in a new way.

I would change something that did not feel right, and then look again to find what else was catching my eye. The places that were awkward had a different sound to them. Everything else in the melody would work and then I would look and the legs would have the wrong pitch. I became bold and worried less about destroying parts of the painting. I did not celebrate a beautifully painted area if it had to be taken out to find the right tones. The freedom to make such drastic alterations was liberating this late in the painting. It renewed the life of the work and taught me a great deal about myself as a painter.

The meaning of the vulture came late to me. I knew it had to be there but I could not readily define why. It was difficult to find ways to defend it in my reviews and I would sit mute as others would question its motive. It finally came to me as I read a children's book. "See, everyone has a death. It goes everywhere with 'em, all their life long, right close by... Your death taps you on the shoulder, or takes your hand, and says, 'Come along o' me, it's time.'"⁹

9. Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 740.

The vulture represents his death, not necessarily as a negative thing but always there just behind him. That is why the two so closely echo each other because they are both the same. Vultures are used in India to carry off the remnants of the physical body. They transfigure the flesh into the energy of their own body. Vultures are a physical link to the endless cycle of nature and how within nature things alter their shape but their energy never completely disappears. In the myths of Achilles he is immune to all attacks except for the one spot on his ankle. This gives him a sense of fearlessness and invincibility. Although he leaps he will not fall, or will he? Will his vulture catch him?

Atropos

“Originality summons originality; a work of art that contains the mind of freedom will call forth freedom in others. But originality also asks presence—the willingness to inhabit ourselves amid the uncertain transports and sufferings that are our fate. To feel, and to question feeling; to know and to agree to wander utterly lost in the dark, where every journey of the soul starts over.”¹⁰

Where does the work start? I find it in the snapshots before me, the ones I see but cannot shake. When my Great Uncle died we gathered together during the late summer day. The aging tree leaves above us rattling with their thirst for rain. Soon they would be on fire with the colors of fall. My cousin Mary wore white, a shocking color against the late summer green. She sat next to her mother whose face was lined with grief and the emptiness of true despair. My Great Aunt twisted her hands over and over in her lap. Her age etched her cheeks a deep pink with the flush of her sorrow. Her family stood all of them sharing the same face as they dropped flowers. They fell in a burst of blood rose red on the coffin, staining the wood. She would tell me later that she was at the end of her line. Her blood red rose line, like the veins in her hands. The same hands that had touched loved and carried him. She was fate at the end of its line. She is the last living link to her sister, my beloved grandmother whose stories will fall away with her. She holds the cords of these stories in her hand, feels them and decides where to make the fatal cut.

The owls fall above her as she grimaces into the sunlight. Their wisdom is spent and they silently fall, encased in the strings of other lives. How many endings has she been witness to? How many lines has she seen cut? As her own small death lies sleeping below her, wrapped in a lifetime of memory.

My great Aunt did not want me to paint her at first. She was embarrassed at the attention. I took her to see my painting of my mother and I asked her in front of that painting if she would model for my next work. She agreed reluctantly to sit for a photo session in the wing chair. She talked most of the time as I photographed her.

10. Jane Hirshfield, *Nine Gates Entering the Mind of Poetry* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers), 51.

Most people expect to smile when they are being photographed and my models tend to do this. I wait until their guard drops and catch them making a real expression. I knew I would find the trace of her grief if I waited because it kept appearing as we spoke. I call it a face fall, when the face for a second relaxes and the real mood comes out.

I sketched the face and gesture of this painting (figure 6) several times. It took many versions on the canvas before I felt satisfied with the expression of the face and figure. I wanted her to come out of the canvas at her knees bursting forward with a similar perspective distortion as *Themis' Swing*. I sought to convey her grief as she sat holding the yarn and staring up and outwards at the viewer. Behind her I created a slightly synthetic landscape to give the painting a space. I had to reconstruct the grass several times in order to get the right feel for it. In the original under painting I did not include the deep shadows of the chair on the ground. I had to work backwards because I did not at first consider the extent of the shadows. I was more concerned with the outlines and shapes of the forms.

I learned to go darker in this painting and sink the shadows. It was the echo of a lesson from my summer class where I practiced conveying space with just the color values placed up against each other. This exercise brought me to thinking about the nature of how different values of colors recede or come forward regardless of their basic hue. I reached into the reds and violets to intensify the shadows and allow them to cut across the forms in a way I had not previously allowed. I was not as tentative with them despite my eventual need to work backwards and place them in towards the end of the painting. In fact I enjoyed the liberty of cutting across the plane of a cheek or the chest with a dark value. The sinking in of the shadows helped put this painting in space, along with the thinning glazes of the highlights I added at the very end of constructing this painting. It was the beginning of my discovery of the voice of the brushstroke itself.

When Apollo Caught Her

Reason

Sweet Apollo
how I miss you today
as your light
from my window
traces a bow
across my cheek
I reach up
with branch arms
all my leaves
have fallen
bare in white
your light fingers

trace my breast
I only dream
of your thoughts
as you make your slow passage
away...
Melissa Mance-Coniglio

The Laurel

Like a ghost will it go?
This kiss of a life
The drying wetness of my lips
As they miss you

A rustle of brown leaves
Giving a still green glint glimmer
Of a once thriving sustenance
When it grew attached
To so great a tree

As separate as seasons
I fall unfixed into air
And dance my brush edge
On all colors of our meaning

Do your roots grow?
Just there under my remaining spine
Will your seed push upwards?
And create a merged life
In something new flowering?

Or will it rot there?
Encased in mud and weather
Ever close and ever decaying
Beyond the support of your once mighty frame
That in time will too fall
Piece by piece into my waiting earth.
-Melissa Mance-Coniglio

“In earth she stood, white thighs embraced by climbing
Bark, her white arms branches, her fair head swaying
In a cloud of leaves; all that was Daphne bowed
In the stirring of the wind, the glittering green
Leaf twined within her hair and she was laurel.

(Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*)¹¹

When I first started *When Apollo Caught Her*, I was not sure of the reason I was driven to create it. (figure 8)? Perhaps it is a love story, a longing, a craving for a real human connection. Or, is it a picture of what I cannot share, the loss that forever plagues me and makes me become those bees falling, rotten and dead?

In my initial desire to create it, I felt as if I was part of the ugliness in the world and there was no beauty in my view of myself. I was the one throwing the birds up and watching them fall. I had the sense that all the paintings I created did not fill those empty flat blue skies within them with any kind of hope. All the death around me had left me feeling empty as well.

The world of children can be free and endless yet my world contains the weight of gravity pulling me down. There is no poetry in my isolation, the place of the one who watches while others live. So I painted her stiff in his arm with her hands caught up in sinking into the dark blue sky. Is he catching her or pushing her? Does she feel the weight of his hands on her as she begins to fall forward? They stand in their mythic landscape where the evening light hits the trees, what she will become because of Apollo's grasp?

I painted her expression as inwardly reflective. The two figures interact but she is not looking at him as he carefully spots her. I wanted his catching of her to have a sort of tenderness to it, to counteract her stiff motion. She is painted in lighter tones and he is painted in darker tones. It is a contradiction to the myth of Apollo since he represents the light of the sun, but she carries his light.

This is the only painting I have created that contains two figures. It is as Eileen Feeney-Bushnell described “almost Romantic”. The original impulse was to catch cartwheels and paint them. I ran through many different scenarios for it and in fact started a completely different painting at first. I had the boy figure just standing in the background as the girl had her head down and performed a cartwheel. I wanted more interaction and that canvas was covered over.

So I settled on the image of him spotting her as she was about to fall forward. I liked the closeness of the two figures in combination with the stopped action. At first the second hand on the boy was not there. I had no arm and she was not as closely held as she is now. It was awkward and the figure needed a second arm.

11. Horace Gregory, trans, *The Metamorphoses by Ovid* (New York: New American Library, 1958), 46.

The color was also pitched at a new level of brightness. It was keyed up in a range I was not commonly used to bringing into the painting.

I started the work with a deep violet under painting and in reaction to *Atropos* painted the shadows first. I blocked them in to keep myself aware of them. In reaction to the violet I created a surge of fiery orange yellow leaves at the base of the painting. Eventually I had to tame them down because they were so active that they kept drawing the eye away from the rest of the painting.

This painting's dance was a series of bold moves like the orange and corrections to the moves to achieve an overall harmony in the painting. I was getting restless in the work and feeling as stiff as the figures, stuck in endless inertia. The painting was not allowed to speak and when I wouldn't listen I would make critical errors of judgment. Then in January I faced another death.

My Aunt Judy had lost her long battle with Diabetes. It had taken her joy, her legs, her fingers and finally her life. Her funeral was on a strangely windy day in January. It was the first funeral my nephews and nieces ever attended. My niece Hannah drew a story picture for me on the way home. She gave me a way to understand my own work by creating a picture that was trying to communicate the same connections as I was. It was a beautiful and moving synchronicity. I discovered that she was also a watcher and she had been carefully watching me. The wind of the day was threatening, slamming the doors of the funeral parlor and taking out the power. It ripped tiles off of the church roof and collapsed the candle at the altar. It threatened to break trees above us as we stood at the graveside hanging on to each other, my niece's small hand in my own. It made birds fly backwards.

After yet another traumatic event, I wanted to listen to this work again and rediscover the meaning of the painting. I was discouraged as I painted it and found myself constantly judging its progress. I needed to let go of my criticism and lack of belief in the painting's successful outcome in order to renew my original impulse for painting it. I had to infuse a sense of hope in the work. In order to break the visual tension of the figures I started to think about the light of the painting.

I also began to consider the painting as a balance of elements. If one aspect of the work was overly dominant for example the amount of earth or air in the painting; I would balance that element with another opposing element such as water. Working this way helped the painting to develop a new balance. In all the overwhelming experiences of my life I had no feeling of control and could only find a sense of peace by allowing myself a place of freedom within this work. It was the only way I could be present in the work and create this image successfully.

When painting, I made the discovery that in order to find the right gesture I had to let go of my need to force it. I had to trust my skills and let go of the weight of trying so hard to make things perfect. I began to allow the accident, the lazy brush slip that had more possibility in it than my imagined drive for perfection.

So I listened and remembered to keep an eye on the values of the colors. I softened and corrected her face to make her more like my niece. I added more details into the jacket and pushed the leaves back down onto the ground. I changed her shoes to be darker to make the viewer come back up to the faces.

The bees fall around the figures in high contrast so they pop out from the background. They are once again a representation of me falling, since my name means honeybee. Bees are also disappearing and have to be shipped into farms. This is a great and disturbing decline of something that was once so fundamental. Bees have always been doing their work and giving us the food we live on. To have them disappear is a scary possibility of some new and ominous world.

When Apollo finally catches Daphne she is transformed by his touch. At first the story seems horrific, to lose the flesh of humanness and to become something voiceless. Then the metaphor is reached, that through her transformation she becomes something more. Her voice is not lost but reborn into a lasting archetype of a tree a symbol of victory and thus her flesh is immortalized.

J's Bags

She said it was like the sound of popping bags. Her eyes were such a bright clear blue as she described the scene of her mother getting beaten by her father. She told me that she was up on the stairs listening through the railing with her sisters and brother. I put my arm around her, desolate that I could not somehow protect her from hearing that sound again. I could not get her words out of my mind. I was also in a place of desperation and sorrow. I too was emotionally beaten down and not sure if I could be a source of comfort for her. All I could do was give her glue and glitter to make a card for her mother.

I wanted to paint her, but could not. So I decided to paint her bags popping (figure 9). They are falling from the winter sky empty except for the dead birds sealed in them. I chose orange for the under color and it glitters up through. Even in dense sorrow there is anger and I wanted the heat of that color to contradict the ice cool blue I coated it with. The bags hold these falling souls. They are contained in the frame, frozen and unable to break it. It is a place of deadness, plastic sucking out all air, and of the cold weight of the birds as they completely contrast with the living. There is no mystery that these birds are dead, wrapped and thrown away. They are forgotten and tossed out as trash. This painting is the mourning of loss and the knowledge of what gets left behind. It was a place of absolute solitude and complete hopeless darkness.

My pace of creating this painting was driven and deliberate. At no time did I lose my confidence in constructing it. I did not second guess my intentions or skills and I painted it with a completely quiet mind. I turned inward and had a strong vision for how it would look. I had a strong sense of the weight and shape of the bags and how they both revealed and covered the birds. I placed the bags on the canvas a few different times to find the correct feeling of balance.

This painting borders on abstraction and finds the edges of paring down the subject to its basic core. That methodology of beginning with more and slowly breaking all of the images down into a simple conclusion has always been a part of the process of creating my art. The painting begins to speak more exclusively about the life of the paint itself. It held the conversation between my hand and the brush and the allowance of the paint to be its own form and not have to mold to realism.

This developing dialogue that has deepened my understanding of the matter and substance of paint became more evident to me when I created this painting. I had more of a sense of the physical act of the painting process. The pared down image increased my awareness of the subtle changes in the weight, viscosity, and the primal matter of the paint. As I worked I had more intention behind where I was adding gloss or transparency in order to fully render the feel of the plastic bag. It was a controlled use of the oil media that had occurred in a much more haphazard way before this work.

By The Roadside

Their pictures should have been shown for a wedding, a graduation, anything but this. Her little face which never had time to grow into the lean lines of adulthood. Her Barbie doll lying on the table with a small silver crown she liked to wear. His drawing was against the wall, he was always so proud and satisfied when he worked on them. His classmates would gather around him as if he were a magician when he drew a car or the Titanic. Tonight there were just some pictures and matchbox cars to tell the story of a life. I found it hard to breathe as I waited in the line at the wake and kept staring at the flowers that were so vivid and fresh in this room that closed its walls on me as I moved through the line. I hugged their mother tight, what could I say except give her hope in a hug, her children are gone forever. We all loved them so much.

Julia's little dark eyes followed me as I went around the room. She came over to me and I wanted to pick her up and hold her close more than anything. How can you say you are sorry to a seven year old girl who has lost her closest friend? Julia and her friends come into my room almost every day. She sits next to me and we make pictures to try to find some sense to this. My students wanted to know that I was painting something to remember them by, so I did. I grieved as they were, by trying to remember by creating images. It was for them that I hung that picture in my show. They needed to know it was there and that Chris and Tori were remembered. I would not have it any other way. My work is about what is real to me and I cannot divide it from that. It is my greatest strength and my greatest weakness. This process has taught me to accept who I

am as a painter. I do not grieve that I am romantic, sentimental, and prone to feeling in my work. I work tirelessly to be the best painter I can be, but for me the content must have meaning, a story.

I had to paint them (figure 10). The bears and flowers sitting by the roadside would eventually rot away. It was my last and smallest painting. Sitting next to the anthology of my other work, its story is simple and not complex. It was not a battle and a long process of doing or seeing, it just was. The butterflies came from a dream and the flyer at the funeral. They are falling in the sky, the best sky I have painted, stormy and with a life to it. They are impossible in this cold landscape, the same landscape that held their last breaths. I am sure I will find their echo later in my future work.

Winter – the Process of Waiting

“Everywhere we look, the theme appears: wisdom, at least in the West, is obtained through transgression and paid for in suffering. The journey into maturity, whether seen in Odysseus or Aeneas or the joined figures of Persephone and Demeter, must pass through the underworld realms of uncertainty, fear, and death, before the green and peaceful life the hero longs for can be restored- and both world and self are irrevocably changed by that immersion.”¹²

I think to a certain extent we have to be blind to our own work. This process of the thesis makes me reach all of these forced assumptions but really the work I am involved in starts as a compulsion. To be so aware of all that it reveals in a sense both deadens its process and leads it to a singular conclusion. Why not allow it to breathe in its interpretation? I am continually translating dense mythological allegories that may have a simple “read”, that I am not entirely aware of. I do not seek an exclusive voice or a one-line painting. I want a flip-flop of view as a great poem that takes you in and leaves you somewhere you did not at first expect.

I do not want to paint in monochromatic ideas. I want to have a stance in alternative directions the sort of real married to the expressive real. A painting is not merely representing the real if it does its job, but gives the viewer a sense of some inner connection to the humanity of the painter. A painting like a poem represents the moment of awareness of inspiration and the journey of visual means, becoming concrete in pigment. It becomes a descriptive translation of that moment. To render it as exclusively real does the moment a disservice because it gives the viewer nothing to bump up against metaphorically. Paint is paint but it is also a complicated language in itself that can convey the humanness and transience of being.

The painting, a simple singular moment becomes the metaphor for all other such moments in the viewer and the creator. Yet it is spending time in that space for both the artist and the audience. Is it a tense place, full of anxiety or is the moment fluid and beautiful? Is it a stagnate thought that is surrounded by movement? Are the visual signs only signifiers in a sense to those who can recognize their long history?

12. Hirshfield, 155.

I realize that I have been trying to reign in my technique to convey what is there realistically and in doing so I was fighting my own need to translate what is really happening in those moments.

I found it necessary to simplify some areas to heighten the response to others. If I built up the entire surface evenly I would not be true to the compulsion of the inspiration. I paint the way I paint, it relates to my idiosyncratic way of seeing. I cannot force it to be otherwise but I can be present in my way of seeing.

This realization comes in part from Alan Singer's statement that "painting is such a personal journey." A journey of the self that is necessary in order to communicate that self or being to others. I feel that good paintings are good human translations. They give insight to the moment of humanness in a work, the flip of awareness, the grasping of attention and the passing of the hand.

In that spirit of humanness or the hand of the creator there has to be a moment of letting go of the drive to make the perfect representation of the mechanical source. As an artist I have to begin to grant myself this liberty from a mechanical way of seeing. I have given myself room for the necessary translation.

At one glance this body of work is about family or a portrait but, if the viewer starts to peel back the overt layers to delve into the covert innuendo, the allegories and meanings become more apparent.

In my work I do not want to know everything. To walk around with the confidence of mastery concludes that everything is known and all discoveries have been made and catalogued. As a painter I want to remain active in my search to find what I am expressing and to willingly foray into the unknown. This has been my process through my thesis study. I am driven by the idea of something and willing to follow it despite the new languages of paint it forces me to learn. I am more inclined to follow the intangible threads of an idea and see what discoveries it will lead to.

It is a type of gestalt, a synchronicity of the entire painting where all things are critical to the overall expression. Nothing can be taken away or added without completely altering the work.

It was not a journey of hopelessness and despair, despite all of the difficulties during this process. Each tragedy forced me to take notice of what I was creating in a new framework. I reveled in the creation of my images, since they gave me a voice and a place to go within myself. The absolute joy I felt in the creation of my paintings moved me onwards past the sadness and helped me clarify my voice. Even when I was exhausted from a long day of work, I would find my way to my studio and paint. I could think of no other way to mark this time and recharge myself for the next tragedy.

It may seem like a contradiction to have so many heartbreaking events occur and then to point out in conclusion that I ultimately was ok. I did not allow these events to silence me, but rather enrich what I was trying to say. The beauty in death is the way it

makes you remember and focus on what was there, the greatness of what is now gone but somehow eternally part of you. I allowed myself to be reshaped by the losses around me and in that shifting changed and deepened my approach and understanding of painting. Death confirmed what I was saying and took out what was unnecessary in the conversation.

Spring-The Season of Re-growth

Through this reflection I have discovered my own mythology of painting, both in my beliefs and practice. In moving on towards my next work I am leaving this grief behind. I have a renewed sense of my original desire which has not been fully expressed and that is a need to create images that reflects the pace of the destruction of the natural world.

Within my mythos of painting I believe that art can be a vehicle of transformation, in both the artist and the viewer. To me a great artwork alters your perceptions of the world after you view it. Perhaps you see color differently, hear a new story or voice, or think of some concept in a new way. To keep painting as a viable art form in this world of moving media, it must be so; or else culture will close the door on it and let it gather dust.

The artist is the voice of the community. I work within the frame of those who surround me and I try to translate the connections. Success is striking the cords of the soul of the other who walks in the door and sees themselves in your experience.

I cannot know what I will paint tomorrow, but I can know how it has been so completely transformed by the deepening of my experiences over these past years. I have had the good fortune to have been guided by the steady care of my teachers who have been with me on this difficult path. Perhaps I too have been transformed, like the butterfly who finds itself winged after being at first earthbound.

In a sense all of this dying and loss has brought me much closer to the beauty I am destined to express. It has intensified my relationship with being a creator of images. I know I will not stop listening to the paintings and hearing the voices from my critiques to steady my hand and open my eyes to the possibilities of more for each work I do. It is within all of this dying that I have learned what it means to live.



Figure 4. Mance-Coniglio, Melissa, *For G and A, Over New Mexico*, 2007. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48in. Collection of the artist.



Figure 5. Mance-Coniglio, Melissa, *Themis's Swing*(In Memory of J. Gionet and S. Gionet), 2007. Oil on canvas, 36 x 60in. Collection of the artist.



Figure 6. Mance-Coniglio, Melissa, Achilles Leap (In Memory of A. Edwards), 2008. Oil on canvas, 72 x 72in. Collection of the artist.



Figure 7. Mance-Coniglio, Melissa, *Atropos (In Memory of b. Shultz)*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 93 x 118 in. Collection of the artist.



Figure 8. Mance-Coniglio, Melissa, When Apollo Caught Her (In Memory of Chris and Tori), 2008. Oil on canvas, 36in x 60in. Collection of the artist.



Figure 9. Mance-Coniglio, Melissa, *J's Bags*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48in. Collection of the artist.



Figure 10. Mance-Coniglio, Melissa *By the Roadside (Falling Butterflies)*, 2008. Oil on clay board, 18 x 24in. Collection of Laurie and Eric Claus.

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