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My City Limits

By
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A thesis presented to the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
At Washington University in Saint Louis

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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Washington University in Saint Louis
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Abstract

Many have taken part in the act of *flanerie*,¹ however, many have fallen victim to the *flaneur*; “*the flaneur is the man who indulges in flanerie...*”². I am perpetually followed by the male gaze. I am a *flaneuse*, a surveyor of my surroundings at all times. “Outsider/insider is a border the flaneuse must skirmish on constantly, if only with herself.”³

This thesis is a first hand account of my negative experiences that are generated by the many *flaneurs* of sexualized culture and lustful society. It is an analysis of the paintings I have created as a result of these experiences. The paintings serve as visual records of the vulnerability, fear, anxiety, and psychological distress evoked from my encounters, the majority of which that take place within the city of Saint Louis.

Painting is a medium of retribution. I use it as retaliation and as a means to alleviate anxiety and anger brought on by my experience as a *flaneuse*. I narrate past and present incidents and my psychological reactions, by performance, followed by photography and painting, towards representation. This thesis is my attempt to discuss my role of perpetrator and victim, simultaneously, in my painting practice.

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When I am living in the city, I do not wander about gawking at this and that. I stammer about,

trying to find my way and my place in the chaos.

Introduction

My art practice began as a way to get people to look. The nude figure was not welcomed where I lived in the small community of Greenville, Illinois. It was considered shameful to look at paintings of the nude body, even at traditional nude figure painting, and some even called it pornography. Despite this, I continued to pursue the nude figure in my painting practice. My current work, exposes viewers to my daily experience of being watched, even stared at, within public space, as I am seen through the lens of my gender.

My process involves two main acts: peaceful painting and aggressive painting. The first is a method to escape reality and to coax my mind into a state of tranquility. The second, is a cathartic act of aggression in which I inflict destruction on and through the surface of the painting. I represent the narrative of the work through nude figures and self portraits.

This work is not merely painting, but a projection and displacement of harassment and corruption I encounter in Saint Louis. This corruption is not about dishonest practices of material bribery, but rather, about the corruption of character: perverted, wicked, and evil.⁴ I constantly struggle to move through space as a *non-objectified* and *non-weak* being. That constant struggle becomes representation and figuration in my work. I try to feel safe behind the locked doors of my apartment, but only after securing every window that may lend an opportunity for an intruder.

Though there are a number of issues with gender equality today, my work as an artist is centered around anxiety, inferiority, and forms of objectification that I experience as a woman. The majority of these experiences transpire in public places of the city where I live alone. As a result, my psychological state is burdened with anxiety and feelings of vulnerability. I paint to relieve this burden and I use it as a combative mechanism to fight against my fear of society.

My skin crawls as my body is visually probed by the eyes of bums and corrupted watchmen,

and I find that the dogs I pass on the streets have more chivalry than these men.

“We live notoriously harboured in familiarity with our past and actual surroundings, accustomed to our unshaken at-homeness in the world. However, sometimes it happens that we suddenly become painfully aware of the potential tension sedimented in us, tension between being on friendly terms with outer and inner reality and the strangeness which falls upon our conscience like the eagle for its prey.”⁵

I’m Not Home Anymore, I’m Being Watched

My fear and anxiety heightens with my feelings of homesickness. I have always been a home body. As a child, there were countless times I could not make it through the night when sleeping over at a friend’s house. I needed the comfort and safety of my home. My home, located in the quiet country, has been the structural constant in the stages of my life. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard describes this type of house:

“...we know perfectly that we feel calmer and more confident when in the old home, in the house we were born in, than we do in the houses on streets where we have only lived as transients.”⁶

Bachelard’s description is very familiar to me. During a storm my old house may be easily damaged, but in my imagination it is safer there than my brick apartment in the city. My apartment is too close to the street. My house, sits on a hill surrounded by six acres of soft, tall grass. That land is encircled by a fence, and is protected by my dog. On the inside, it is protected by my family, largely by my father. I was taught that the man is the head of the household. He was the one who took care of intrusions, almost always by wild animals. This all changed when he began to develop an addiction to alcohol. During eight years of struggle, my mother became the head of the house, and my protection. While the presence of my father was lacking, I often sought the attention of male partners. Throughout this period was the first time I truly felt the consequences of being objectified as a woman; my partners broke up with me because I wanted to wait with sexual intimacy. As this continued to happen, I felt that my body was the only part of my identity that possessed value. When I am looked at by men, they identify me by my body.

Men watch my body when I am walking down the sidewalk, and I feel myself being watched. I am "...the *flaneuse*—the female version of modernity's urban stroller."⁷ Men watch the way my clothes cling to my body. Men watch the language of my body. According to John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*, I watch myself being watched:

"...*men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The survey of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."⁸

Berger describes how a woman becomes an object through being looked at. I am self conscious when being looked at. I am told how to avoid unwanted attention by dressing conservatively, and how to carry myself in a "lady-like" way. Though I try to go out in public discretely under disguise, I cannot hide from the *flaneur*. I find that Berger's idea of men looking at women and women watching themselves correlates with Walter Benjamin's "dialectic of flanerie". He writes about the *flaneur* as both the viewer and the viewed:

"Dialectic of flanerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man."⁹

These attributes affect the way I am perceived, but they are secondary to my gender. Berger continues describing this issue and its psychological effect on women:

"This unequal relationship is so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women. They do to themselves what men do to them. They survey, like men, their own femininity."¹⁰

Like women, I believe men survey their own masculinity and experience the same vulnerability as women. I have encountered men making careful decisions based on what makes them seem more masculine. Many of my male partners were self conscious about their penis and muscle

size, and spent an appalling amount of time in the gym trying to maintain their masculinity.

Judith Butler describes a man's fear of losing his masculinity in *The Psychic Life of Power*:

“...in a man, the terror of homosexual desire may lead to a terror of being construed as feminine, feminized, of no longer being properly a man, of being a “failed” man, or being in some sense a figure of monstrosity or abjection.”¹¹

I find that Butler's essays on gender and subjection along with Berger's idea of women transitioning into objects through looking, are related to Louis Althusser's writings on subjectivity and subjugation. I am a subject in relation to other humans, therefore, I go through life knowing that other people are people who carry with them a very similar identity to mine. I know that I am not the only person with a family, and I am not alone in my experiences of vulnerability and societal fear. I recognize that what I am aware of when observing other people shapes my subjectivity. This shaping is based on expectations, or rather, ideologies. In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser writes that:

“Before its birth, the child is therefore always already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived.”¹²

Since birth, these ideological attributes determine specific outcomes in my life that are beyond my control. I cannot determine my own subjectivity in public spaces. It is constantly shaped through the eyes of lookers. According to Laura Mulvey, there are two ways of looking: scopophilic and narcissistic.¹³ These types of looking are complex and have a very negative effect on the subject. Mulvey's ideas are summarized in *The Invisible Flaneuse?*:

“...one [is] scopophilic, in that it supplies pleasurable looking by allowing the subject to take other people as objects by submitting them to a controlling gaze, the other narcissistic, in that it provides an ideal image of the subject that, in the mirror stage, substitutes for the otherwise insufficient, alienated self.”¹⁴

I am transformed from image to object through these lens. My body is an icon through the scopophilic male gaze.

To me, cities are foreign territories because I am accustomed to vast lands filled with bare fields that stretch between tree lines like warm blankets. The sights and sounds are primitive compared to that of the city. The howls of coyotes replace sirens, and vivid stars and full moons are the only lights for miles. There has always been a large presence of farm animals and pets in my life. These ranged from pot belly pigs, sheep, chickens, goats, geese, rabbits, horses, cows, dogs, and cats. Though my home is quite isolated from town, the presence of my animals wards off loneliness. After my family, they are the beings that serve as my councilors and comforters. If I had a bad day or got into a fight with my parents, I would run out to the barn and sit with my creatures. I feel safe around them, and they are the best listeners.

When my family comes to visit me in the city, they often bring my big dog (part Great Dane, part Boxer). I feel an extreme amount of comfort and security when I have my dog with me. He travels along my side quietly as a shadow of protection. When I walk my dog, the gaze is directed from me to him, and suddenly everyone becomes aware of him. They are either drawn to him because he is an attractive pet, or they are wary of him as a protector, a potential weapon. My dog is an unselfish and obedient creature. He provides an alarm system, a companion, a living thing waiting for me happily each time I arrive home. My dog plays many roles, he is my comfort, and he is an intimidation (*fig. 1 & 2*).

The city is not the *outside* to me. It blocks me in with its unmovable walls. I create windows and openings in my paintings that represent the *outside*. Windows serve as a two way openings. It opens one way to the outside, to the country where I feel safe, surrounded by the comfort of my animals. On the inside, it opens to my apartment where I am alone and vulnerable (*fig. 1*).



Fig. 1

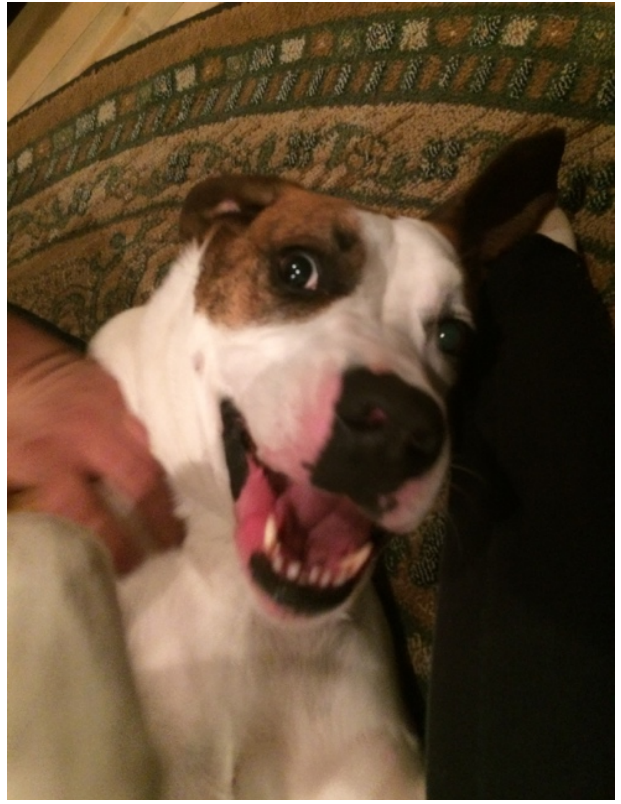


Fig. 2

I was frightened. Here was this very built figure of a man and I am alone in a dark lumber yard

with him.

Solving a Maze: Adaptive Walking

I must adjust accordingly, my position in relation to others. I do this out of consideration for others, however, I also do it as a means of prevention. Walking through the city is a game of solving the maze. In the introduction of *Walking in Cities*, Timothy Shortell writes:

“...walking reflects the systematic inequalities that order contemporary urban life. Walking has different meanings for different groups of people, in part because it reflects different motives and different mobility resources.”¹⁵

Like Shortell describes, walking has its own set of requirements for me. It is an elaborate system that surpasses the idea of traveling from point *A* to point *B*. I look before proceeding streets, sidewalks, storefronts, bridges, alleys, corners, benches, paths, parking lots, crossing lights, behind buildings, through gates, stairways, and entryways; I must survey all of these before I enter. This analytical system of walking is described by Shanshan Lan in chapter three of *Walking in Cities*:

“For the female graduate student ethnographer, urban walking can be a highly personal experience where special precautions need to be taken in order to avoid potentially dangerous situations.”¹⁶

These “special precautions” are daily interruptions and contributors to my anxiety. I see a group of men around a corner and I take another route. I switch to the other side of the sidewalk to avoid harassment by a bum. The second I get in my car, I lock the doors. Before leaving my car to go to my apartment door, I get my key ready, and I quickly scan the area for lurkers. Frantically turning my key, I watch nervously through my peripheral vision. *What if they notice my long hair and my small stature? What if they come at me and rip my backpack off?* I imagine these scenarios through my paranoia. I cannot maneuver the city freely, and according to Shortell, it is controlled by men:

“The ability to move around the city was understood as an important aspect of being a free man or woman. (men and women experienced this freedom differently, to be sure. In

fact, one of the most visible manifestations of patriarchy is the control by men over the mobility of women).”¹⁷

As I feel men staring at me, I keep my head down and keep walking. I want to glare back, however, I do not want my looking to encourage them. I stall when entering my apartment when men are around. I walk past it, and wait for the area to clear.

As soon as I enter my apartment, the light comes on, I peer down the hall. I go to the kitchen, I check the pantry, behind the pantry door, I check my bedroom closet. I check behind my bathroom door and behind the shower curtain, I check my kitchen cove, and on occasion, I check under my bed. My blinds are always down. I am a shut in. I check the chair I have leaning up against the back door to make sure it hasn't moved. My chest tightens with anxiety, and every sound I hear in and outside of my apartment triggers flight or fight. Even the small sounds of my TV shutting down is significant. The edge of the blanket sticking out from a pile of pillows on the couch appears to be a foot. My coat rack stands as a figure in the dark, and I take my coat off of it so it will not appear as an intruder anymore.

I had just gotten dressed when I heard someone coming up the stairs outside my door. The next

sound was a key being turned in my lock. The door opened, caught by the chain, and I panicked.

Private vs. Public: Crowds in Transition

The public is a place where I feel psychologically or physically threatened, where people have access to me. I do not know who the surrounding people are, what they might say to me, or what they might do to me. It is a place far from my comfort zone because I must always be conscious of my actions. When in public, I am in disguise. I dress and act defensively. I experience privacy as a barrier or a place where I am alone but secure. Though my city apartment is secure and the blinds are closed, it is only a thin veiled box within the public. Landlords and maintenance men who have keys to my door are part of this public. The people living above me, below me, across from me, and the people who roll the garbage cans past my bedroom window at night are strangers surrounding my apartment. Michael Warner describes how strangers have an ominous existence in public:

“In modern society, a stranger is not as marvelously exotic as the wandering outsider would have been to an ancient, medieval, or early modern town. In that earlier social order, or in contemporary analogues, a stranger is mysterious, a disturbing presence requiring resolution.”¹⁸

I am interested in the ways of navigation through masses of people and structural layers of cities. To me, the flow of crowds is a system of navigation. I associate a crowd with being surrounded in a public space. I experience crowds differently than I experience crowding. When I experience crowding, I feel that I can be singled out, cornered, and easily approached. There is nowhere to hide. I am hyperaware of those who are physically larger than me. I survey those who are rude, who take note of my presence, and those who do not. I am overwhelmed by having to be in constant surveillance of my surroundings. Wherever I go, I risk being stopped, cornered, or harassed. I am a *flaneuse*.

I often feel similar to the actors and actresses in the work of Alex Prager. Her film “Face in the Crowd” reveals the extreme anxiety, uncertainty, and fast paced public sphere that have

become so commonplace among crowds¹⁹. She captures this through her video work in which she hires actors and actresses to play the role of the crowd (*fig. 3*). Prager draws from her personal experience within the bustle of cities, airports, and other heavily trafficked areas. Her work is focused on removing the conscious relationship between the crowds, each one becoming individualized:

“My work is based on wanting to show what it is to be in a crowd, and all of the different levels of emotion that go along with that, different layers of fear and anxiety, getting lost in a crowd...”²⁰



Fig. 3

My experience of a crowd such as the one in *figure 3* is different than Prager’s. When I entered the crowds of the street or subways in New York, I felt a sense of security. Instead of the crowd imposing on me, I joined in, or rather, blended in, and I no longer felt that I could be so easily singled out. I used the crowd as camouflage. I went where it went, ignored what it ignored. I was not alone anymore. The crowd provided security.

The buildings of New York are not overwhelming blockades; they are towers of fortress. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau describes how the World Trade Center was a sanctuary above the crowds:

“One’s body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return...nor is it possessed...by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic. When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators.”²¹

Certeau describes the tower as a place of safety, where the chaos can be seen but the air is silent. The ground below the tower holds masses of people and complex energy. According to Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, the sidewalks, where pedestrians are to be kept out of the harm of traffic, are the real danger:

“If a city’s streets are safe from barbarism and fear, the city is thereby tolerably safe from barbarism and fear. When people say that a city, or a part of it, is dangerous or is a jungle what they mean primarily is that they do not feel safe on the sidewalks.”²²

For me to fully agree with Jacobs, the city would have to be made completely of sidewalks. Not only do I feel unsafe on the sidewalks, I feel unsafe everywhere the sidewalks lead, where they connect, and where they end.

I step outside for a jog. An older man is walking towards me. In a hoarse voice and with a lustful

smirk he says, "you look nice", and a wave of discomfort and disgust floods over me.

Camouflage and Paint: Concealing and Erasing Identity

When I am preparing to go outside, it is important for me to consider what I shall wear. At times I wonder what it would be like to have to cover myself completely, like Muslim women in chadors, but even that becomes an obvious indicator of the woman hidden underneath. Helen Scalway writes about the start of her walk throughout the city in her essay *The Contemporary Flaneuse*:

“The journey starts with clothes, because the first thing is to decide what to wear. It is always tricky because there will be moments when I shall want to be invisible, moments when I will be invisible whether I want it or not, and moments when I might want to be, never conspicuous, but at least present.”²³

Like Scalway, my wardrobe for the day is based on camouflage and invisibility. I cover myself, I change my body language in order to seem unapproachable. I keep my gaze towards to the ground. I try to give no attention to passersby, and I keep obsessively aware of my surroundings. No matter how I carry myself or how off putting my body language may seem, I am still an image. Laura Mulvey characterizes this struggle in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*:

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle...she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.”²⁴

What Mulvey is describing has not only played a role in cinema, it has played a haunting role in my former paintings. Until now, my paintings have always been nude depictions of my body in some form. Though I created the imagery through vulnerability and distress, I did not realize that other viewers might observe it as “arousing” or find pleasure in looking at my painted nude body.

I am drawn to work that is concerned with past trauma and physical exposure. I admire the painful work of Bracha Ettinger. Her work is created from images of victims photographed by the Nazis (*fig. 4 & 5*):

“Two dozen women, naked and huddled together in a line, stand at the bottom of a low grassy rise. In front of them, partly occluded from view, are two uniformed soldiers, and just beyond are strewn the clothes the women have just been ordered to remove. In the line are also children...[they] are lined up for execution in Mizocz in 1943.”²⁵

Ettinger removes the sexual identity of the figures in her paintings. In (*fig. 5*), you can see faint remnants of nude female figures. With features removed, viewers are given no opportunity to gaze upon them with sexual objectivity. These works not only reveal the unseen, but they reveal the lack of individual identity.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Combative Techniques: Strokes of Tenderness and Aggression

The city and the rapid activity that flows from the people, buildings, streets, and litter swarm around me as shrapnel. I represent this activity in the painting through erasure. I carve out chunks of paint, and miniature craters form as a result. I erase and cut at random. Together, the missing pieces create currents of decorative chaos around the figures. As I carve and scrape, I desire to reveal bright colors that appeal to me. Though I regret cutting through the painted flesh of the figures, the outcome is exonerating.

Previous layers of paint remain viscous, and it is therapeutic for me to release it with my razor blade. I feel it breath a sigh of relief, the dry surface layer suffocates the layers underneath. This relates to the suffocating feeling I get when I am living under fear, under the eyes of others, and under concrete and brick structures that suppress me further into the city, further into the grayness and dirt.

I use a range of tools, brushes, and blades to cut and scrape through the surface of the paint. The softness or sharpness does not limit the role of each tool. If the tool is soft, it does not mean that it is only used in areas where paint has been applied with tenderness. I use a flat, soft brush to paint vigorously across the canvas, and I use a sharp blade to remove layers of paint. My inflictions made with sharp blades are sometimes performed in a very tender way. Sanding by hand allows me to run my hands over the surface, and I feel the thickness of the paint underneath. Some tools have more capacity to administer damage, however, I use them as if I am performing a surgery. The lashes are caused by vigorous scrapping and hacking, or by tender scrapping. The cuts deceive the viewer; they do not reveal the tenderness in which they were created.

I use a palm sander for rigorous removal of the paint. The heat from the spinning sandpaper causes the layers of paint to amalgamate into veins that appear like estuaries from an aerial view. The pigment travels as the sand paper lifts and pushes it. The layers are painted on separately, however, the erasure causes them to appear as one. The colorful fragments are a collection. I use these bright colors because I do not desire to dig up colors that are unappealing to me, and I am satisfied with the way the nonlocal color contrasts with the flesh.

I experience the paint as dense material which I can control. I exert more physical effort when mixing large quantities. I shift my weight, I turn my hips, I move my wrists, and I move my arms side to side. I roll and fold the colors into each other. It feels similar to baking, like stirring icing or kneading dough. I bury the pigments to be discovered later. I go back and remove layers with my blade and sand paper. I excavate and inflict violence on and through the surfaces of the paintings. I discover each layer anew.

I reveal former ideas and the hours of labor I put into the painting. I manipulate the information of the work by intentionally deleting parts of it. It begins with a repetition of layering, which requires me to have extreme patience while each layer endures a drying period before the next is added. After accumulating depth in the surface, I begin a process of removal that in turn, reintroduces the former layers.

In my process, I do not restore the the painting; I restore its preceding surfaces. I do not control the entire outcome of the painting, ultimately, the painting decides when it is ready for transitions, inflictions, and completeness. I am interested in reconstructing the order of traditional painting methods. The give and take of this process allows for the sequential hierarchy of the painting (canvas to gesso, gesso to paint, abstract to representational, and representational to abstract) to be removed. At any moment, I may erase parts of the painting, or

I might add to it. When painting and scrapping, I find myself in a state of repetition; an idea becomes old and is painted over. I paint over ideas so that I can discover them later. I break down the mechanics of the painting's structure. I expose parts of the drawing and let the non local color replace natural skin tones. The choices I make have the potential to alter the entire outcome of the painting.

I paint to release my sad and anxious feelings. Some of my paintings are not literal depictions of my experiences, but are of my resulting psychological state. *Figure 6* is a depiction of my mental reaction after hearing about a rape not far from where I live. The dog serves as both a symbol of protection, and an adverse reaction to the phallus image next to it. I perform these actions as catharsis. I release my anger towards society through these actions. I create narratives through painting out of retribution to the public.



Fig. 6

I am interested in the restoration and conservation processes of paintings. Peeling pieces away to get to the first surface symbolically correlates to exposing historical and narrative aspects of the western painting tradition. During Renaissance, this type of exposure was usually accidental:

“...the last works of artists and their unfinished pictures...are more admired than those which they finished, because in them are seen the preliminary drawings left visible and the artists actual thoughts, and in the midst of approval’s beguilement we feel regret that the artist’s hand while engaged in work was removed by death.”²⁶

Interruptions such as this allow us to see the artist’s preliminary ideas and sketches. The restoration process does not always meet its goal of restoring a painting to a former state, over cleaning can occur, accidentally deleting parts of the surface image. The goal of my painting practice is not to restore the painting to its original state, but to restore the progressive stages. I paint over an image and find it later after the removal process. I become unsatisfied with a figure, and paint over it. When I compose a new image and sand through it, the previous figure emerges. (*Fig. 7*) shows the progression.

The violence I inflict on the figure is not the initial act of the painting process. The first is to treat the body as my own. At first, my actions are patient, attentive, and rather loving in the way the paint is applied. If I applied the same violent treatment when painting the skin and body of the figures as I do the surrounding area, cuts and scrapes would not contrast violently against the softness of the flesh. When I hack out parts of a painting that have been labored over, I initially feel regret for erasing hours of work, however, in turn, I bring back previous hours of work from underneath. Erasure does not leave less to to the painting, it leaves even more exposed.



Fig. 7

She went drinking with friends one night. They left her unconscious in the car. They came back.

She was gone. They went looking for her and found her being carried away by a strange man.

This is My Performance: Victim to Aggressor

I am interested in the work of artists that involves role playing. The actors and actresses of Alex Prager's work *act* as the crowd and the individual consumed by it. Artist Sam Taylor-Johnson hires actors and plays herself as well. In her film *Self Pieta*, she plays the role of Mary, while Robert Downey Jr. plays Christ (*fig. 8*). The film is only two minutes long, which is the maximum time she was able to support his body. I have a similar experience to Johnson when my body is burdened while supporting the weight of a body larger than my own.



Fig. 8

My goal is to play the role of the aggressor, as well as to experience it and feel empowered. I feel empowered in a similar way that I feel when I look at the paintings of strong women by

Artemisia Gentileschi (*fig. 9*):

“In the early modern period, when the only female agency that signified was located in the womb, it is not surprising that some female artists, as if to compensate, depicted female characters with unusually strong forearms and firm hands, whose agility and grip express the women’s power to act upon the world.” “It is through their hands that Artemisia’s women take on the world and confront adversity.”²⁷

The two women working together in Gentileschi’s painting remind me of the relationship I have with my mother. People have always commented on the similarities of appearance between my mother and I. They often assume we are sisters, and are not surprised to learn our relation. This similarity is important when I depict myself in a painting.



Fig. 9

Now I will play the role of the abductor, while a grown man is passed out, face dragging on the

floor.

When I experience feelings of vulnerability in society, I paint myself as the victim.

Figure 10, however, depicts the first time in which I have truly switched roles. The characters of the story are impersonations. I paint myself as my mother. She carries the man who once carried her. The male figure represents both the perpetrator and the victim. In one scenario I play the perpetrator, and I carry and drag him to his subsequent demise. In another, I carry and drag him out of my apartment.

Each piece begins as a performance. I pretend to be evil, abduct and play the criminal while I drag the body of a naked man. The bodies of the male figure are stand-ins for the bodies of the sexualized culture and society that cannot keep their hands and eyes to themselves. I play the role of the aggressor, yet I am actually the victim. *Figure 10* is a representation of a performance in which I carry a nearly 200 pound man on my back. I carry the man over my shoulder in the “fireman’s carry” position.²⁸ I drag him across the floor with all my might. I heave and drip with sweat. The next day my muscles are sore and tired. My efforts to move him on the ground are futile. I walk a few steps while carrying him on my back, but soon my legs begin to shake. I forcibly drag and carry him out of my territory. My futile efforts to physically move this man are the same futile efforts I experience when I try to live without fear and anxiety (*fig. 10*).

My skin crawls as my body is visually probed by the eyes of bums and corrupted watchmen



Fig. 10

and I feel that the dogs I pass on the streets have more chivalry than these men.



Conclusion

Through painting, I analyze my experiences as the *flaneuse*. Each laceration, each exposed part of my paintings represent my attempt to fight back. The figures stare back at the many *flaneurs* who stare at me; it is my uninhibited performance. Together, the work and I undergo transformations of exposure and concealment. The work is an organized chaos of the psychological effects I endure. It is not a linear story from start to finish; it is a collection of psychological and narrative layers.

The process of the work shifts from nonviolent to violent. It is the mechanism for which I project my internalized reactions. The work is more than painting. It is exposure of my fears and feelings of vulnerability in the city. Not only does the work represent my personal experiences of dealing with the gazes of the *flaneur*, it represents the daily struggles of women who endure the role of the *flaneuse*.

I carry the physical body out and I force the gaze away. In both instances the male figure lacks facial features in order to leave the man devoid of the ability to use those features. There are no eyes gazing upon me. There are no mouths calling out to me with lustful taunts. The animals gaze with adversity to the exposed figure. I carry with me a collection of gazes and words that are not my own, but are inscribed in my psyche. The work represents this collection.

Endnotes

- ¹ *The Flaneur*. Edited by Keith Tester: New York, NY: Routledge, 1994. 1
- ² *Ibid*, 7.
- ³ Helen Scalway, “The Contemporary Flaneuse”, in *The Invisible Flaneuse?: Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth Century Paris*, ed. Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough. (Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2006), 165.
- ⁴ Corruption as: debased in character; depraved; perverted; wicked; evil. *The American College Dictionary*, (New York: Random House, Inc. 1948).
- ⁵ Stefan Morawski. “The Hopeless Game of Flanerie” *The Flaneur*. Edited by Keith Tester, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 181.
- ⁶ Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated from the French by Maria Jolas. With a new Foreword by John R. Stilgoe. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), 43.
- ⁷ Janet Wolff, “Gender and the haunting of cities (or, the retirement of the flaneur),” in *The Invisible Flaneuse?: Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth Century Paris*, eds. Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough, (Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2006), 18.
- ⁸ John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 46.
- ⁹ Walter Benjamin. “The Flaneur”, *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann. (Cambridge, MA, and London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 420.
- ¹⁰ John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 63.
- ¹¹ Judith Butler. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 136.
- ¹² Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation) in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated from the French by Ben Brewster, transcribed by Andy Blunden, (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 31.
- ¹³ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 16-18.
- ¹⁴ *The Invisible Flaneuse?: Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth Century Paris*, eds. Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough. (Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2006), 10.
- ¹⁵ *Walking in Cities, Quotidian Mobility as Urban Theory, Method, and Practice*. Edited by Evrick Brown and timothy Shortell. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2016), 3.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, 49.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid* 1.
- ¹⁸ Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics (abbreviated version),” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 88, No.4, (2002): 417.
- ¹⁹ Alex Prager, “Alex Prager-Face in the Crowd Directed by Chris Keener, Photographed by Nathan Golon. The Corcoran Gallery. Vimeo: GoodFight Media, 2013. <https://vimeo.com/87684387>.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*.
- ²¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984,1988), 92.

²² Jane Jacobs, “The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety”, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House Inc. 1961), 29-30.

²³ Helen Scalway, “The Contemporary Flaneuse”, in *The Invisible Flaneuse?: Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth Century Paris*, ed. Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough. (Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2006), 164.

²⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 19.

²⁵ Michael Bernard-Donals. *Forgetful Memory: representation and Remembrance in the Wake of the Holocaust*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 77.

²⁶ Andrea Bayer. *Renaissance Views of the Unfinished*, 19. Pliny the elder, “Natural History,” 35. 145, translated by H[arris]. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938-63), vol. 9, pp. 366-67.

²⁷ *The Artemisia Files, Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*. Edited by Mieke Bal. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

²⁸ The fireman’s carry is “a method of carrying a person over one’s shoulders, originally (and typically) used by firefighters in rescuing injured or unconscious people. It also has a second definition: “a move in which a wrestler lifts an opponent over his or her shoulders before bringing the opponent to the ground.” “English Oxford Living Dictionaries”, Oxford University Press, 2017. Accessed April 25, 2017, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fireman's_carry

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