A Classical Renaissance

An Exhibition of Paintings by Benjamin Patterson

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J.M.J.

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Above: Detail of *Apollo and Daphne*

INTRODUCTION

A Classical Renaissance presents a collection of paintings belonging not so much to the modern or postmodern art world as to an ancient tradition. Flouting the rule of the painter of modern life, of Édouard Manet and Honoré Daumier that an artist must be of his time, my paintings follow another rule of art which was taught in the old academies and held sway for hundreds of years before their demise in the early 20th century. Not to appear out of date, one of the recommendations that I received from the committee which reviewed my proposal for this exhibition was to include something more contemporary, to which I was tempted to reply that everything I do is timeless, though the committee member made a fair point. The significance of academic art is not self-explanatory to a contemporary audience, and so allow me to explain what it is that I do and why it matters.

The story behind this body of work began more than ten years ago in 2009, when I graduated from art school. I received my training in drawing and painting in the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance at a school in Florence called the Angel Academy, just blocks away from the original academy of painting and sculpture founded by Giorgio Vasari in 1563. The Angel Academy is part of the atelier movement, which also includes the Florence Academy, the Grand Central Atelier, and the Academy of Realist Art here in Boston, among many others. The ateliers have done a wonderful job of training a whole generation of painters in a skillset which for much of the 20th century was all but lost thanks to the repudiation of fine craftsmanship by modern and postmodern artists. Initially, the new academicism was called classical realism, which is a passable description of academic art, though this name has waned in popularity in recent years. My work is very classical, but most of the work being produced by other artists in the movement is not, and not all of it can be described as realism either. After a mere two decades, our work has already become too diverse to be easily classified as a particular school or style.

The academic tradition has always fostered a great diversity of styles, ranging from mannerism in the 16th century to Bolognese classicism and Caravaggism in the 17th century to the rococo and neoclassicism in the 18th century, to name just a few, though there was always a unifying thread connecting the diverse schools and styles of academic art. From the Accademia in Florence to the French Academy in Paris to the Royal Academy in London, there was a common idea of art, first articulated in antiquity and reiterated by theorists of the Renaissance. From the publication of the first Renaissance treatise *On Painting* by Leon Battista Alberti in 1435 until the arrival of Romanticism in the late 18th century, it was taken for granted that the art of painting had a certain nature which was succinctly expressed by simple theoretical principles and which was the same everywhere and for all times. Painting was an imitation of nature, and its end was beauty. This nature was given unique expression but not fundamentally changed by the idiosyncrasies of an artist's style or of a given school.

The idea that art should be beautiful and imitate nature, also known as classical mimesis, was common sense to ancient and medieval people alike, because it was taken for granted that nature is the definitive work of art, crafted by a divine craftsman. There was no debate about what art is, because the nature of art was believed to be manifest in the original act of creation. In Plato's account of the creation in the *Timaeus*, the divine craftsman creates by imitation of ideal forms, and He does so not for any instrumental purpose as if He had any need of it but for beauty's sake, as the

creation serves no other purpose but to manifest the goodness of its Creator.[1] By imitating nature beautifully, the artist emulates the divine craftsman and by improving upon nature in imitation of the ideal even enters into lively competition with Him, according to the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus.[2] Classical art was a self-conscious reenactment of the primordial act of creation, and so was the art of the Renaissance. Taking not only Plato's *Timaeus* but also the story of creation in Genesis as a prototype, the Renaissance painter improved upon classical art by separating the light from the darkness in chiaroscuro and by separating the heavens from the earth with an horizon line in linear perspective. With particular attention to the human form, the Renaissance painter reenacted the creation of man by making images of the image of God quite literally from the dust of the earth.

Of course, classical art would not have needed to be rediscovered in the Middle Ages had the doctrine of creation in which medieval Christians had always believed been sufficient to arrive at a classical conception of art. There is in fact another metaphysical belief which is just as important to classical art and happens to have been ascendent within scholastic philosophy at the very moment that the Italian Renaissance began ca. 1300, namely a belief in realism, the deceptively simple idea that things have a nature which can be known. Realism is the fundamental premise of classical mimesis, since it would obviously be impossible to imitate nature if nature were unknowable. One knows from ordinary experience that it is the nature of a stone to be hard, the nature of the sky to be blue, and the nature of a human being to walk on two legs. From the common-sense perspective of English empiricists like John Locke or Samuel Johnson, who refuted Bishop Berkeley's skepticism by kicking a stone, the fact that one has empirical knowledge of the nature of things is not even debatable, though from a properly metaphysical perspective a nature is not just a list of parts and effects but what St. Thomas Aquinas would call an *essence*.[3] What metaphysical realism proposes is that the *essential* nature of things can be known and represented. Were it impossible to know what things really are in themselves, nature could not be imitated beyond a soulless transcription of sense-impressions, and classical mimesis would succumb to Plato's critique of the soullessness of mimesis.[4] Plato famously doubted the ability of painting and sculpture to speak the truth, as a mere imitation of appearances two steps removed from the ultimate reality of the ideal forms. Plato's metaphysics aside, everyone will agree that if painting amounted to nothing more than handmade photography, it wouldn't amount to very much. The premise of classical art is that there is an answer to Plato's critique, a means by which to grasp the essence of things and reveal the soul inhering in the body. Good art hits the target by showing what things really are, to paraphrase the 18th century English painter Jonathan Richardson.[5]

Alberti remarks in his treatise *On Painting* that a painter must clearly understand what he is attempting to do, because he draws the bow in vain who has nowhere to point the arrow, which is a good description of the conundrum of contemporary art.[6] Even today, a painting is still made by an artist and composed of paint on a flat plane, though what is not so obvious anymore are the form and the purpose of painting. What Aristotle would term efficient and material causes can still be known, but formal and final causes have become mysteriously inscrutable.[7] No one can say what it is that makes a painting the kind of thing that it is or to what end a painter strives, because postmodern people do not believe in metaphysical realism, much less in the doctrine of creation. Once the march of the avant-garde reached its terminus in the early to mid-20th century, having discarded art's immemorial purpose as well as the skills needed to attain it, artists had no target left at which to aim. As the philosopher Boris Groys has observed, art became *non-teleological*, which is philosophical jargon for a basketball game without a hoop. Having become indifferent to beauty, the modern artist had no other objective with which to replace it. Taking leave of the imitation of nature,

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[1] Plato, *Timaeus* 29D-E: "Let us now state the Cause wherefore He that constructed it constructed Becoming and the All. He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy He desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself. This principle, then, we shall be wholly right in accepting from men of wisdom as being above all the supreme originating principle of Becoming and the Cosmos." Trans. W.R.M. Lamb.

[2] Plotinus, *Enneads* V.8.1.

[3] See Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*. The appeal to the stone comes from James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (London: J. Davis, 1820), p. 218.

[4] Plato's analysis of mimesis is found in books 3 and 10 of the *Republic*.

[5] "Painting not only shews us how Things appear but tells us what they are." Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1715), 24.

[6] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. J. R. Spencer (New Haven, 1966), section 1.51, p. 58.

[7] The efficient cause of a thing is its maker, the material cause is self-explanatory, the formal cause is what makes it the kind of thing that it is, and the final cause derived from the Latin *fine* is the end to which it is ordered.

modern art became formless and void, as in Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square*. For want of any Spirit of God hovering over the deep, the modern artist lost his prototype, and modern art became a representation of a sublime watery abyss, retelling the story of creation in the absence of a Creator. Hence, the thesis of postmodern art announced by Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* at the annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917 is that art does not have a general essence anymore. Duchamp's tongue-in-cheek exposition of an upside-down urinal was intended to turn each of Aristotle's four causes on its head. Duchamp presented a work which he did not make, and he signed it with a name that was not his own. He eschewed materials proper to painting and sculpture, made no attempt to imitate nature, and gave no thought to beauty, thereby deconstructing all that constitutes art's essential nature. There is no such thing as "art," proclaimed Marcel Duchamp, but only objects called by that name. Art is whatever the art world says it is.[8]

Of course, even as the postmodern art world has put anti-essentialism into practice by marketing self-consciously worthless rubbish for extraordinary prices and putting the same on display in our museums, the market for Old Masters has paradoxically continued to confirm the inexorable logic of realism. Consider for example the works of Rembrandt. No matter how convincing a 19th-century forgery of a Rembrandt might be, the forgery loses all value should it be found out, because it lacks something essential, namely the hand of the master. Even if a forgery perfectly replicates the style of the master, a challenging but not impossible feat, it will still lose all value should it be discovered under the microscope that anachronistic synthetic pigments have been used. Moreover, of those paintings that are autograph originals by Rembrandt, their value will vary considerably according to quality. The most valuable masterpiece is the one that most perfectly expresses the style of the master, constituting his most beautiful imitation of nature. The belief which everyone takes for granted that an original is more valuable than a forgery or that a masterpiece is more valuable than a sketch implies that the works of a master share a general essence, which the forgery lacks and the masterpiece most perfectly expresses. Being by the hand of Rembrandt, of materials that Rembrandt used, in the form of Rembrandt's style, and an undeniably beautiful imitation of nature, the works of Rembrandt have a nature which can be known and is determined by Aristotle's four causes.

By selectively applying the assumptions of metaphysical realism to the Old Masters but not to postmodern art, the art world acts as if Old Master paintings exist in a universe in which realism is true while postmodern art exists in another universe where realism is false. The advantage of being an open-minded postmodern neoliberal pluralist is that one doesn't have to believe in the law of non-contradiction. The market can accommodate as many different realities as postmodern culture can make up.

Unfortunately, anyone who recalcitrantly believes in the principles of logic cannot be so accommodating, which is why the atelier movement has generally assumed a militant tone toward the postmodern art world and gravitated toward reactionary conservatism following the lead of the Art Renewal Center, an organization which has brought the various schools together around competitions and scholarships. The founder of the ARC Fred Ross has been personally responsible for turning the atelier movement into a revival specifically of 19th-century French academicism and placing William Bouguereau on the seat of Michelangelo. Much as I admire Bouguereau's paintings, my only reservation about this reactionary conservatism is that it's not reactionary enough but has to all appearances conserved the revolutionary ideas which reduced fine art to its present condition. It cannot suffice merely to return to the 19th century, when the revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism were already prevalent in the 19th century and exerted an influence even over the most curmudgeonly academicians of that era.

Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic individualism changed the way that artists understood the nature of art by insidiously separating its form from its purpose. From the perspective of an Enlightenment rationalist, what mattered most was a rationalistic conception of form, consisting of whatever could be measured and precisely transcribed from direct observation, as illustrated perhaps by the works of Jean-Léon Gérôme or Ernest Meissonier, for example. The question of art's purpose scarcely entered into this rationalistic transcription of appearances, as a disinterested scientific enterprise. From the perspective of a Romantic like Eugène Delacroix by contrast, having a purpose mattered a great deal, quite irrespective of what purpose that happened to be. For the Romantic, what really

[8] This is known as the institutional definition of art, as proposed by George Dickie in 1974.

mattered was authenticity, a sincere commitment to an end of one's own choosing. In either case, the formal cause of the craft was separated from its final cause. The imitation of nature was divorced from beauty and entered into a custody-battle with it. Why should the imitation of nature be beautiful, asked Gustave Courbet, when nature is not always beautiful? Is ugliness not an equally meritorious goal, asked Francisco Goya? The craft was thus reduced to a box of soulless tools, which had no inner teleology and which promptly became obsolete.

Falling predictably either into the category of photographic transcriptive naturalism or Romantic self-expression, most of the work produced by the atelier movement is not of a kind which Giorgio Vasari would have recognized as belonging to the academic tradition which he founded. From long experience, I can attest that my peers do not feel the sting of this criticism, because nobody cares about fidelity to the tradition as such. Everyone blithely imposes his own purposes on the craft as if it had no intrinsic purpose, and in so doing we unwittingly confirm the thesis of postmodern art, myself included at one point in time. Anti-essentialism has become so natural as to be taken for granted. Thus, the difficulty of reviving the craft is not just a matter of recovering a skillset. The real challenge is that academic art both proceeds from and sets up a world which is not our own. It expresses a worldview which contemporary artists do not have. Academicism died in the early 20th century, because it did not express the way that modern people see reality.

When I arrived in Italy in 2006, I knew that there was something wrong with putting an upside-down urinal on display in a museum and calling it art, but I couldn't say what precisely. I had no idea of the philosophical premises of modern and postmodern art, much less did I realize to what extent I took the same erroneous beliefs for granted. All I knew was that I didn't care for the postmodern art world, and I was on the lookout for an alternative. Upon encountering Renaissance Italy, I found a world more to my liking, and so I decided to try it on for size. My education in Italy instilled a natural desire to do what artists of the Italian Renaissance had done, being the most natural use of the skills I had acquired. Finding Enlightenment rationalism absurd and Romantic individualism paralyzing, I looked to the tradition from which my skills derived to give me an ideal at which to aim. I wanted to paint the Holy Family and the Pietà, because Correggio had painted them. I wanted to paint Bacchus and Ariadne and Venus and Adonis, because Titian had done so before me. Nothing I might have contrived could rise to a higher standard of spiritual or historical seriousness than canonical subject-matter, and so I confined myself to the canon. It was all perfectly logical. The fact that I was not a medieval Catholic or a Renaissance humanist did not deter me, because I did not intend to impose my amorphous individuality on the tradition but to find my identity as an artist by embodying the tradition. I was not interested in expressing my own point of view but sought rather to understand how Renaissance artists saw reality, because I found their vision compelling.

It was only after turning to the primary sources beginning with Alberti's treatise *On Painting* that I discovered the deceptively simple objective of the craft, to show what things really are. Straightforward as this may sound, according to modern skeptics such as Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, the goal of classical mimesis is in fact impossible. Modern philosophers have almost all agreed that what things really are in themselves lies beyond the limits of representation, and even St. Thomas Aquinas once said that the efforts of human thought cannot so much as plumb the essence of a single gnat, yet the Renaissance painter nonetheless dared to paint that whereof Wittgenstein could not speak, the noumena beyond the reach of Kantian reason, the very thing in itself.[9] In effect, the goal of classical mimesis is to perform a miracle by opening the eyes of the blind. The cause of our blindness as philosophers have always recognized is that reality disappears behind a veil of appearances, and it is further obscured by familiarity and thoughtless instrumentality. In time, one ceases to see anything at all except what one already knows. Who needs eyes when one has knowledge? Who needs taste when reality has been predigested? Who needs ears to hear oneself speak? Fine art awakens dormant senses. By re-presenting reality on canvas or panel, a painting calls attention to all that one has learned to ignore. A painter studies what others take for granted. He looks, and then he looks again, not simply imposing his preconceptions upon nature but allowing nature to be a model of itself and abstracting out an intelligible form from it.

[9] For the quotation from Aquinas, see the Preface to Josef Pieper's *The Human Wisdom of St. Thomas: A Breviary of Philosophy from the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Drostan MacLaren (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2019).

To answer Plato's critique of the soullessness of mimesis, a painting must amount to something more than handmade photography. As Sir Joshua Reynolds explains in his *Discourses*, an artist must improve upon nature by means of an ideal form which he derives from nature.[10] A painting should be "more true than truth itself," as the French theorist Roger de Piles put it, by which he meant more true to the essential nature of things than the simple appearance of things.[11] To the credit of my teachers at the Angel Academy, the constant refrain which was pounded into my head when I was a student was precisely this, that our objective was to paint *form* and not just to copy what we saw. The naïve transcription of appearances has no volume, no depth, and no structure, and so a painter must learn to create such effects by following the principles of chiaroscuro, linear perspective, and anatomical construction for example. To make a painting look realistic, one must paint an *idea of form*, hence the title of Giovanni Bellori's seminal essay on the theory of art, "The Idea of the Painter, the Sculptor, and the Architect," which Bellori delivered in a lecture to the Academy of St. Luke in Rome in 1664. To paint an idea of form is already to begin to answer the charge of soullessness, because the soul is in fact defined as the form of the body. Hardly a mysterious homunculus located in the pineal gland as René Descartes apparently believed, the soul is what gives both shape and life to the body, making it the kind of thing that it is. The soul signifies the divided nature of a human being, as a lump of matter but of a strangely active, self-organizing kind.

There is a pitfall of which the idealizer must beware, because idealization can easily deteriorate into mannerism or worse still into a bland, generic form lacking any particular character. Acutely aware of this danger, the most idealizing of academic painters Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres never permitted himself merely to impose a more geometric order on the asymmetries of nature but availed himself of nature's eccentricities and at times even exaggerated them, for reasons that are best explained by the difference between Aristotle's metaphysics and Plato's. A Platonist would say that the essence of a human being is the human soul, *anima essentia est*, to which an Aristotelian would object that a human being is not just a soul but also a body. While the soul is what makes the body human, the body is what gives the soul its individuality. The ideal conceived merely as a distillation of what things of a kind share in common is not what is ultimately real, because real souls are individuated.[12] Hence, to paint things as they really are, the painter must capture both the universal and the particular at a single stroke of the brush, achieving an elusive union of appearances and the ideal which Roger de Piles dubbed the perfect truth.[13] An artist's idea of form must constantly be refreshed and refined by direct observation, for which reason Joshua Reynolds rebuked François Boucher's deplorable practice of painting purely from imagination (a practice which I must confess to have adopted myself for reasons of necessity).[14] The academic painter traditionally paints from life, because his purpose is to paint life. The soul being expressed above all by the movements of the body, no quality of form was more highly esteemed by the Renaissance connoisseur than movement. The best paintings depict the human body in lively, expressive action, with particular attention as stressed by the founder of the French Academy Charles Lebrun to such things as facial expressions and gestures, which brings us to the second corrective to mere transcriptive naturalism.[15]

Just as idealization is the formal solution to soullessness, the material solution consists of a certain kind of subject-matter, known as history painting. History painting is the usual if slightly misleading translation of the Italian name *istoria* used by Alberti to refer not only to history but to any story of great deeds which shows by example what it is to be human. Following Aristotle's instruction in the *Poetics*, the history painter imitates "the action of men," because man is the measure of all things, and what man really is is expressed by what he does.[16] In stark contrast to the wall of separation between painting and poetry later erected by the Enlightenment critic Gotthold Lessing, Alberti modeled his theory of painting on Ciceronian rhetoric and instructed painters to do what poets do by portraying great stories

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[10] Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. R. R. Wark (London and New Haven, 1975), p. 44.
[11] Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris, 1708), p. 22.
[12] There are as many forms of each general essence as there are individuals. Following Aristotle, Aquinas would say that the essence of things of a kind is specifically the same but numerically diverse.
[13] de Piles, p. 22.
[14] Reynolds, p. 224-25.
[15] Charles Lebrun is remembered for his series of prints on human physiognomy depicting diverse facial expressions, one for every emotion, which were used like a pattern-book by artists.
[16] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447a 18ff.

and interpreting them in a novel and ingenious way.[17] It was this appropriation of poetic invention, the first and most important canon of rhetoric, which elevated Renaissance painting from a mere handcraft to the status of a liberal art. Aping imitation of nature may succumb to Plato's critique, but creative imitation which follows the principles of invention does not. As the paradigmatic solution to the soullessness of mimesis, history painting stands at the top of the academic hierarchy of genres, while landscape and portraiture fall somewhere in the middle, and at the bottom of the hierarchy is still life, being paradigmatic of the mere transcription of appearances. The omission of still life from my exhibition as well as the descending scale of my history paintings, portraits, and landscapes have been calculated to communicate this hierarchy.

When the imitation of nature is properly understood as a means of showing what things really are, it is easy to see its integral relationship to beauty. Although the mere imitation of appearances is liable to be at odds with beauty, classical mimesis never is, because beauty *is* the revelation of what things really are.

According to Plato, a thing is beautiful when it conforms to the ideal form of its kind, thereby revealing what it really is. Even apart from Plato's theory of forms, the gist of Plato's definition is confirmed by how we use the word. When do we call a thing beautiful but when it shows itself for what it really is, as when a flower blossoms? When is a woman most beautiful but when she becomes a woman? When is the sun most beautiful but when it rises? When is a bird most beautiful but when it takes flight? When is a local color most beautiful but when it is clear and bright? Likewise, the work of art is most beautiful when it expresses what art really is by showing what things really are. To make this point as clearly as possible, my portraits and landscapes focus on the simplest, most paradigmatic examples of beauty, be it a sunrise or a young woman with a rose in her hair. Following the advice of Joshua Reynolds, I also use simple, bold local colors after the grand manner of the Florentine and Roman school of Renaissance painting, as opposed to the more complex local colors and subtle textures of the Venetian school.[18]

A beautiful sight is often described using words like captivating or enthralling, both metaphors of bondage, because beauty is an experience of subjection to a power outside oneself. To see a beautiful painting is to become subject to it. The object acts upon you, and it changes you. The object takes hold and conforms the soul to itself. Beauty is the action of an object disclosing itself to a subject, the action of one being revealing itself to another being, and therefore a revelation of the transcendental properties of being, of unity, goodness, and truth. As Leon Battista Alberti explains, a painter expresses these properties by means of drawing, composition, and color.[19] Even though there are no lines in nature, a painter expresses the unity of things by circumscribing each figure with contour lines to show its discrete, corporeal integrity. A painter then uses the rules of composition to unify a painting's diverse parts, weaving the lines seamlessly together, harmonizing the local colors, unifying the shadows, and massing similar tones. A painter expresses the property of goodness by hitting the mark. Good drawing accurately represents the proportions of things, and a good composition has a proportionality within itself. Each part fits in relation to the whole in lively symmetry. Some parts come forward and others recede, creating a hierarchy of emphasis. Lastly, a painter expresses the truth of things by capturing their characteristic form in a convincing likeness, and he also expresses the truth of art by crowning a painting with a resplendence analogous to the gilded background of a Byzantine icon but consisting instead of an overall clarity of form which makes a painting cohere at a glance. The objective properties of beauty are thus integrity, proportion, and clarity, as St. Thomas Aquinas surmised. Contrary to the teaching of the Enlightenment, which reduced beauty to a matter of subjective aesthetic pleasure, the beauty of a painting obviously depends as much upon the objective properties of the painting as upon the subjective faculties of the viewer.

Since metaphysical realism goes hand in hand with moral realism, modern and postmodern philosophers have been inclined to reject the objectivity not only of beauty but of values in general. The philosopher Plotinus had a

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[17] Lessing wrote an influential book entitled *Laocoön: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), in which he proposed that poetry concerns the temporal while painting concerns the spatial and that the blurring of this boundary produces art that is weak and ineffectual. The implication of Lessing's distinction was to reduce painting to a purely formal art by making subject-matter a mere occasion for the display of formal qualities, an idea which was picked up by aestheticizing artistic movements in the 19th century and finally taken to its logical conclusion in abstraction.

[18] Reynolds, p. 61.

[19] Alberti, 2.21-22, p. 67.

refutation of such skepticism which is almost as simple though not so fallacious as Samuel Johnson's *argumentum ad lapidem*. Consider a classical statue. Anyone can see that a classical statue is not just a chunk of marble or a lump of bronze, because there is something else inhering in it. That something else is the artist's idea of form.[20] To perceive the beauty of a classical statue is in fact *to see an idea*, a real immaterial principle inhering in the work of art. The intellectual apprehension of essences, and by implication of objective values, is a brute fact of human experience, which happens every time one encounters a thing of beauty, capable of captivating the eye and conforming the soul to itself. Of course, beauty results in pleasure rather than understanding, as Immanuel Kant might object. The beautiful is irreducible to any mental representation circumscribed by a concept, because what it reveals is an idea so sublime that it cannot be measured and mastered by rationalistic methods. Disclosing reality in a mystery, beauty holds one's gaze by refusing to be exhausted by it. One looks and looks again, and still there is more to see in a beautiful painting. The mystery of being can never be fathomed, not because reality is unintelligible but because it is infinitely intelligible and therefore infinitely exceeds the finitude of human thought. The strangely intellectual power of the sense of sight, upon which Aristotle remarks in the opening lines of the *Metaphysics*, is to see, and therefore to know, what words cannot express. Wittgenstein was mistaken when he wrote in the *Tractatus* that all he knew was what he had words for, because reality as it presents itself to the eyes of the intellect infinitely exceeds the limits of language. The almost supernatural power of beauty is to bypass the clumsy intermediaries of reason, of representation, and of language by addressing the rational soul directly.

Beauty is the goal of art and the final answer to the soullessness of mimesis. By revealing the form inhering in matter, beauty gives evidence of things unseen. Beauty is an unveiling, which does explain the paramount significance of the unveiling of the human body. The priority of the nude in classical art is not an arbitrary convention but serves an indispensable purpose. It is the beauty of the human body above all else which answers Plato's critique of the soullessness of mimesis, because the unveiling of the human body unveils something more than the body, namely the invisible and immaterial human soul, which revelation forestalls the appetitive inclination to objectify the body. The classical nude is surprisingly contemplative. Rather than excite the appetites, the classical nude mortifies them, as Arthur Schopenhauer observed. As a representation of the essential goodness of human nature, the classical nude is unfallen, and it invites one to experience the same prelapsarian innocence vicariously.

And so you see, the form, the function, and even the subject-matter of classical art are absolutely inseparable. Classical art is an imitation of nature, beauty is its object, and the human body in lively expressive action is its subject. But what of other traditions? Does *all* art imitate nature, as Seneca claimed, or do other traditions take other forms for other purposes?[21] Giorgio Vasari was certainly critical of less naturalistic traditions such as Gothic and Byzantine art, and ironically the usual justification for primitivism in the context of liturgical art confirms the logic of Vasari's criticism, if not necessarily his conclusion. The objective of a Byzantine icon is to make Christ or the saints present using a highly simplified, stylized idealization. Instead of grasping at reality, the primitive artist shows us a shadow of reality, a negative representation which does not presume to disclose what is hidden but instead stands in with all humility like a child's stick figure for a transcendence which cannot be contained within the borders of a frame. Byzantine art shows what things really are by veiling them. Renaissance art shows what things really are by unveiling them. Yet, this difference is only a matter of degree, as it is the nature of idealization both to reveal and to conceal the nature of things. Both Renaissance and Byzantine art have a claim on beauty, though calibrated to different contexts and different modes of engagement. The work of Renaissance art is an integral whole unto itself, and so nothing of the beauty of Renaissance art is lost when contemplated in isolation on the walls of an art museum. The Byzantine icon or mosaic by contrast is made to be part of a greater whole, and so it is transformed entirely when experienced in the liturgical space in which it belongs, serving its liturgical purpose. The beautiful architecture, ceremonies, and gilding surrounding the icon are the unveiling of a truth that the icon conceals behind an unprepossessing caricature.

All art is mimetic, predicated like the craft of Plato's divine craftsman upon the imitation of an idea of form. The premises of Renaissance art are truly universal. They are able to explain the logic of diverse traditions, and they are

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[20] Plotinus, *Enneads* V.8.1.

[21] "*Omnis ars naturae imitatio est*." Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, Epistle 65, 3.

able to provide a fully objective standard by which to judge the merits of diverse traditions. Some kinds of art really are better than others, because they do a better job of expressing of what art really is. To make good art, one doesn't necessarily have to be a medieval Catholic or a Renaissance humanist or even a classical academician, but one does have to be a realist. A good artist certainly cannot be an anti-essentialist, because anyone who denies that there is a target cannot possibly hit the target. One must believe that there is an objective reality not only of facts but also of values which can be known and to which one should conform oneself. There is no other attitude toward reality that works in practice. All else ends in folly and human misery.

We have only to look around at the art which has occupied our museums to see the folly of anti-essentialism on full display. As an aestheticized object of disinterested pleasure on the walls of a museum or art gallery, a painting is presented to the world both as a thing to be revered and as a thing to be judged. Like Pilate presenting Christ to the mob with the words *ecce homo*, "Behold the Man," the art gallery announces to the public with each exhibition *ecce pictura*, "Behold the painting." And so we look, and we pass judgment. Rather than expose oneself to public scrutiny, an artist may be tempted to keep his art to himself. It is not good to desire recognition, and any artist who has a proper sense of history should be able to see that his art probably does not merit recognition, and even if it did, good art is unlikely to receive very much in this day and age. The world's judgment is often mistaken. The world has even been known to put an innocent man to death and allow a murderous insurrectionist to go free, which is exactly what happened to art in the 20th century. "Art is dead," announced Andy Warhol in 1963, and the art world has washed its hands by claiming that there is no such thing as right and wrong or good and evil. Justice is whatever the Roman procurator says it is, and art is whatever the art world says it is. Just to prove the point, our museums put canned excrement on display, and if you don't like it, too bad, because might makes right. All there is is power. If you don't have any, tough luck. By exhibiting a banana taped to a wall or marketing a finger painting by Matisse for millions of dollars, the art world asks rhetorically, why does anything have value but because one values it? Does value not come from an evaluator? For one hundred years, art has been used to communicate the power of modern man to collapse objective reality into a flat plane on which to paint his own fictitious values like a Nietzschean *Übermensch*.

Without meaning to broach controversy, it is difficult for an artist to avoid controversy, because a painting is not just an object of disinterested pleasure, an instrument for making money, or paint on a flat plane. Art is not just a way of making things but a way of knowing things, which is bound to be controversial, because truth is an imposition. No less than science, art is a way of knowing reality and therefore a way of dispelling illusions. No less than technology, art is a way of constructing a human world on the solid ground of human nature. As the Renaissance humanist would say, nothing human is foreign to me, yet I am not at home in the world set up by modern and postmodern artists, because I find it inhuman. Rightly considered, this homelessness is no cause for misery but a calling to artists of the 21st century to set up another world. This may sound grandiose, but it needn't be, because one need not presume to create reality. An artist need do no more than what artists have always done. I just paint what artists used to paint. I think the way that artists used to think. I inhabit the very same world which Renaissance artists inhabited, and so it is only natural for me to paint like them. I have nothing more to give than what I have received. My pictorial inventions reflect my personal rediscovery of a reality which has never really left us, truths which have not changed because they cannot change. Art is not just a name. It is the origin of the work of art, to quote Martin Heidegger.[22] I do nothing more than return in all humility to the origin. Taking leave of Duchamp's upside-down urinal, I go to the true source and fountain, with confidence that art will rise again from the living waters.

[22] "Art – that is just a word to which nothing real any longer corresponds. It may serve as a collective notion under which we bring what alone of art is real: works and artists. Even if the word art is to signify more than a collective notion, what is meant by the word could only be based on the reality of works and artists. Or are matters the other way round? Do work and artist exist only insofar as art exists, exists, indeed, as their origin?" Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-2.

HISTORY PAINTINGS

Like nature, great art is distinguished by its formal immediacy. A Ph.D. may be required to figure out what's so wonderful about Pablo Picasso, but anyone can see the greatness of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling. It is the excellence of great art which motivates one to take the trouble to understand it, just as the beauty of nature provoked the discovery philosophy in a moment of wonder at the mystery of being. If a painting should fail to move and delight, it will also fail to instruct, because a halo of verbiage will not compensate for what a painting lacks in excellence. Assuming that I have not failed entirely, I offer an interpretation of my paintings.

At the core of the exhibition is a collection of history paintings, including nine of religious subjects and five of mythological subjects. Each of the mythological paintings focuses on a female protagonist, modeled after Titian's seminal mythological series painted during the 1550's and 60's known as the *poesie*, which by sheer coincidence were brought together for the first time in several hundred years in a groundbreaking exhibition at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum last year, in 2021. For those fortunate to have seen that exhibit, it will provide the perfect contextualization for my own.

Context is always key, because a painting does not interpret itself. A painting has to be read, and like any text it is liable to be misunderstood by those too far removed from the author's point of view. I was disappointed, if not entirely surprised, to find that Titian's paintings at the Gardner met with widespread incomprehension for this very reason. The critical response included a lot of handwringing and moralizing over Titian's subject-matter, and even the subtitle of the show, "Women, Myth, and Power," implied a postmodern analysis of the paintings, which were dutifully filtered by the commentariat through the meta-narrative of intersectionality. It is needless to say that Titian had no such narrative frame in mind.

Of course, it is not obligatory when interpreting a work of art to defer to the author's intention. A text can always be interpreted in many different ways, and if it can be improved upon by recontextualizing it, the best interpretation may not be what the author intended at all. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what Renaissance artists did with ancient mythology. The depiction of Greco-Roman myths by Titian and other artists of his generation would have been unthinkable absent a creative misreading of them, because Renaissance artists were not ancient pagans. In antiquity, myths were the propaganda of a pagan religion, but in the Italian Renaissance they were aestheticized and allegorized, the better to suit the purposes and sensibilities of the time.

Renaissance paintings naturally represent a medieval view of reality, because they were painted by medieval people. Wandering around Florence and spending most of my spare time in the museums and churches, it was obvious to me despite having no deep familiarity with Catholicism at the time that Renaissance art was a tradition of Catholic art. The first generation of Renaissance art was invented to adorn the walls of Franciscan and Dominican churches as I discovered firsthand touring Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella in Florence, and even as I delved into the works of Petrarch, the founder of Renaissance humanism, and read Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, I could not discover a trace of the 19th century's secular humanism which historians since Jacob Burckhardt have projected onto the Italian Renaissance. It was not long before I came to the conclusion that unorthodox currents of Renaissance thought which

were promoted by Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola exerted only a negligible influence over artists in comparison to Dominican and Franciscan theology, which consisted of a grand philosophical synthesis of the best that had been thought and said by both pagan and Christian authors and had been achieved already by the late 13th century, at the very moment that Giotto began to revive classical mimesis. The Renaissance was a Catholic appropriation of classical culture, which began when St. Thomas Aquinas figuratively baptized Aristotle. It is not incidental that Giorgio Vasari described the revival of classical art as a rebirth, using the imagery of the sacrament of baptism, and he was not the first to do so. The self-explanatory intention of the very first Renaissance painting of the female nude, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, was to baptize classical art by depicting a classical nude being born from the water. The appropriation of the classical nude and of pagan mythology entailed an invisible metamorphosis. As a metaphorical baptism, the Renaissance justified and sanctified the artifacts of pagan culture by effecting a transformation of their meaning.

Make no mistake, the worldview of pre-Socratic pagan religions originally expressed by naked statues and pagan myths was very much contrary to classical theism. Unlike Platonism, ancient Judaism, and later Christianity, pagan religions were polytheistic, and the gods which they worshipped were not transcendent but forces of nature. Divinity was not believed to be from above but from below, nor was this ground of being believed to be eternal and unchanging as in monotheism but a watery abyss of nothingness, a fluid foundation of pure potency from which all things come. How exactly something is supposed to come from nothing is a question, which Parmenides was the first to pose.[23] Prior to the discovery of logic and ontology by classical philosophers, the prevailing polytheistic worldview was fundamentally irrational. Whereas the foundation of Aristotle's logic is an absolute distinction between being and non-being from which the principles of identity, the excluded middle, and non-contradiction follow, the implicit foundation of pagan logic (to say nothing of Hegel's) was the *identity* of being and non-being.[24] It was assumed that the ground of existence is nothing in itself, implying that there is no supreme good and therefore that human existence is defined by moral contradiction, there being no absolute standard of good and evil. From Agamemnon to Medea, the protagonists of Greek literature are shockingly amoral, pulled to and fro' by fateful commitments in irreconcilable conflict with one another, which is why Socrates didn't think very highly of the Homeric epics, and he thought even less of the tragedies of his own day. From Cronus devouring his own children to Zeus's sexual escapades, the gods as depicted in Greek mythology are rapacious fiends, motivated only by their lust for pleasure and power. When being is defined as potency and the gods are merely the powers of nature, the inescapable meaning of life is to wield power. Pagans revered their kings as gods, because lording power over others was their definition of godliness. Classical thinkers witnessed the deplorable implications of this ethos in practice. The central theme of Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War is the human misery caused by the Athenians' relativistic worldview, which motivated them to lord their power over their neighbors with impunity. It was Socrates' hope that a reformation of Athenian society could be accomplished by means of philosophical education, and it was for this purpose that Plato founded his Academy, though arguably to no avail. Classical philosophy failed to change the character of pagan society, which did not shed its idolatry or build a world in conformity with natural revelation. Notwithstanding Petrarch's idealized representation of the noble pagan Scipio Africanus or Christ's own expression of astonishment at the faith of the centurion mentioned in the Gospel, neither ancient Greece nor ancient Rome ever exemplified the ideals of its own philosophy.[25]

It was the Catholic Church which accomplished what philosophy alone could not, an achievement which is commemorated by two of Raphael's greatest masterpieces, located in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican. The two paintings now known by the spurious names of "The School of Athens" and "The Disputation" are in fact a

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[23] Parmenides was the pre-Socratic philosopher who invented ontology, the study of being properly conceived as eternal and unchanging, and famously claimed that the first principle of philosophy is that nothing comes from nothing, *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

[24] This is the explicit foundation of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, derived from the pre-Socratic philosophy of Heraclitus, to say nothing of Descartes. If being and nothingness were identical in themselves but opposed in thought, as Hegel claimed, then being would come into being as distinct from non-being only through the thought of a thinking subject. In the immortal words of René Descartes, *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." The thesis of idealism is that being and thought are one, meaning that the world is a projection of the human mind.

[25] Petrarch wrote an epic poem entitled *Africa* on the defeat of the Carthaginians by the Roman general Scipio Africanus, whom Petrarch portrays as the very incarnation of the cardinal virtues.

depiction of the fulfillment of philosophy by theology, the perfection of reason by faith, and the completion of natural revelation by divine revelation, in recognition of the fact that it was the Catholic Church which set up a world in which the principles of Aristotelian logic actually hold and which was governed in the best of times by philosopher kings, saintly popes and saintly monarchs who established justice in the temporal order and the mercy of God in the spiritual order. The healing balm which philosophical reason could not administer was Christian charity. To be, from the point of view of a medieval Catholic, was not to wield power but to love and be loved by God. There was nothing sentimental about this belief, as medieval Catholics also believed that the wages of failing to be charitable toward God and neighbor is an eternal privation of being, known as damnation. Wealthy patrons like the Medici supported great art and architecture not only for their own self-aggrandizement but to exercise the Christian virtues of magnificence and charity, because the salvation of their souls depended upon it. The wealthy had a grave obligation to use their wealth for the common good by building great churches and monasteries and hospitals and filling them with great art. The construction of a civic environment conducive to virtue was moreover the highest priority of Petrarchan humanism, and upon the final return of the papacy to Rome from its so-called Babylonian captivity in Avignon, the Church itself undertook to fulfill Petrarch's dream of a new Rome, equal to the splendor of antiquity. Under Pope Sixtus IV, the city began to be rebuilt to the glory of God and for the temporal happiness of the city. Popes began collecting classical art, and in 1506 Julius II opened the very first museum of art so that the public could enjoy that collection. At the same time, princes of the Church commissioned living artists to make paintings and sculptures of classical subject-matter. There was nothing scandalous about this, as artists and their patrons had only to map Christianity and classical metaphysics onto pagan myths to transform the vulgar stories of pagan gods into beautiful Christian allegories. A host of possibilities for new meaning presented itself. Apropos of the classical artist's need to answer the charge of soullessness, the female figure in particular became an allegorical representation of the human soul, *anima* being feminine in Latin. It is this convention which undoubtedly guided the design of Titian's later mythological paintings. Titian's *poesie* focus on the female nude, because they were presumably meant to tell an allegorical story about the life of the soul. The same tradition guided the design of my own mythological paintings.

In antiquity, the nude was originally reserved for gods and heroes, because the human body in its ideal form is truly described as godlike. For the purposes of the Italian Renaissance, it made for a fitting representation of human nature in its original glory unstained by original sin. The classical nude with its overtones of pagan immorality became in the hands of Renaissance artists a representation of prelapsarian innocence, to which state they believed the body would be restored at the general resurrection, an intention which is made quite explicit in Michelangelo's monumental painting of *The Last Judgment*, populated by some three hundred classical nudes being raised on the last day. The gratuitous proliferation of nude bodies in Catholic art during the Renaissance did meet with a certain amount of resistance and was tempered by the judicious censorship of the Council of Trent, but once the initial anxieties of the Counter-Reformation had eased, all suspicion of Renaissance art was set aside and the art of the Baroque was born in the service of the Counter-Reformation. The most Catholic art paradoxically became the most sensuous, such as the art of Peter Paul Rubens and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who celebrated the beauty of the flesh without reserve in recognition of the *imago Dei* stamped on it and of the Word made flesh. Moreover, the nude was used to express not only the dignity but also the humility of man, as it is from our nakedness that we discover that we are not gods, that we like other animals are in fact male and female, that we come into the world with nothing and go out of the world with nothing, that we come from an origin beyond ourselves and go to an end we would not choose, that we have an essential nature delimited by the body and determined by the soul, which can be thwarted but not altered.

Moreover, artists used the classical nude and ancient mythology not only to speak universal truths but also to comment on the historical moment, and my paintings have a similar intention. Titian's *poesie* address the historical context of the 16th century in fascinating ways, most notably perhaps the crown-jewel of the Gardner's collection, *The Rape of Europa*, which has the distinction of being the most significant Venetian masterpiece on display in the United States. This painting of Titian's represents not only a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* but inevitably alludes to John's Apocalypse as well, because the infamous whore of Babylon is in fact portrayed by St. John in the guise of Europa, riding on a beast. The central event prophesied in the Apocalypse is the great apostasy, a falling away en masse from the faith of formerly Catholic countries. Europe having been destined to become the heart of Christendom, St. John

Right: *The Rape of Europa* by Titian, 1562

represents the spiritual adultery of the apostate church in the form of a prostituted Europa. The falling away of Catholic countries into Protestantism was widely regarded by Catholics in the 16th century as the beginning of the great apostasy, as Pope Paul IV himself speculated, while Protestants for their part accused the pope of being the Antichrist and the Roman Church of being the whore of Babylon. Nearing the death of Paul IV in 1559, there was even fear among Catholics that this slander might come true, should a crypto-Protestant be elected to the papacy and institute the abomination of desolation by installing a Luther-table in the sanctuary of every Catholic church. To allay such fear, the ailing Pope Paul IV wrote the papal bull *Cum ex apostolatus officio*, declaring that no heretic even if otherwise lawfully elected can assume the office of the papacy or command the submission of the faithful. Considering that Titian painted *The Rape of Europa* between 1559-62, he could hardly have failed to address the apocalyptic anxiety of the times. Titian's Europa sports two colorful draperies of red and gold, not entirely unlike the whore of Babylon who wears purple and scarlet. Just as Europa's abduction is involuntary, most Catholics who suddenly found themselves in Protestant countries had no desire to separate themselves from the Church, but neither did they have the will to go into exile or suffer persecution for the faith. Hence, Titian's Europa holds onto her abductor, grasping the horn of the bull for fear of drowning. This is a particularly fitting image of the tragic fate of English Catholics, who in 1558 had suddenly found themselves once again oppressed by a Protestant government upon the death of Mary Tudor, the wife of Philip II, who commissioned the *poesie*.

Even if Titian had given no thought to such matters, which is inconceivable, it wouldn't matter in the least, because what determines the meaning of a painting is not the author's unknowable, idiosyncratic intention but the context which can be known and brought to bear. Very often a painter plays with iconography without any particular intention but in such a way as to allow it to generate meaning of itself. One finds the same in Dante's poetry, as everything Dante says has fourteen different sides to it. He couldn't possibly have intended every implication of his

words, but he didn't need to, because the power of a deep tradition is that it generates profundity all by itself. The painter is an avatar of his tradition. He makes art that transcends his own hand as well as his intentions, because he does not speak a private language but a language shared in common with others across time and space. Through him, the whole tradition speaks. I trust that the tradition speaks through my works as well.

In the descriptions that follow, I recount the stories that my paintings depict, reflect on their allegorical significance, and explain how my interpretation of each story informed the design of my paintings. I also present a source-analysis of my paintings, which is essential to understanding any work of art. Originality is always derivative, because no artist creates in a vacuum without reference to other works of art. To quote the art historian Norman Bryson, the meaning of a painting is always another painting.[26] In good Socratic style, academic art is a dialogue, in which one artist speaks, and another responds. Each work of art is designed like a work of rhetoric to make an argument by appeal to reason, authority, and emotion. Hence, academic artists have always eschewed capricious originality, preferring to cite authoritative works of art in an appeal to sound precedent. Whereas the Romantic's inventions appeal only to emotion and the Enlightenment rationalist's inventions appeal only to reason, the true academician appeals to all three. The academician recognizes the authority not only of nature but also of the Old Masters, and he emulates them, not only to give them honor but also to enter into lively competition with them. Only by appropriating the tradition in this way can an artist hope to stand atop it.

Lastly, the descriptions also include some information about technique. My methods are very traditional, though I do not confine myself to an historical palette or eschew modern materials when they have superior qualities. Most of my history paintings, for example, are painted on canvas mounted on aluminum panels. Even though this is a material that the Old Masters did not use, mounting my canvases on a metal substrate has the advantage of making my paintings much more impervious to the ravages of time. Structural problems like cracking which inevitably plague paintings on stretched canvas are all but eliminated by using a rigid substrate. To take another example, my palette consists primarily of traditional pigments such as lead white, natural umbers, siennas, and ochres, as well rarer pigments like Naples yellow, genuine vermilion, and rose madder, but I will avail myself of modern synthetic pigments to extend the traditional palette, including titanium white and cadmium red as well as a range of blues and greens. I also use modern mediums such as stand oil, which is superior to the traditional sun-thickened oils that the Old Masters used.

[26] Norman Bryson, *Tradition & Desire* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. xix.

Figure 1

1. *Apollo and Daphne*
   Oil on canvas mounted on honeycomb aluminum panel
   30" x 60"

The story of Apollo and Daphne is recounted by Ovid in Book One of the *Metamorphoses*. Of all the gods in the Greco-Roman pantheon, Apollo was the Renaissance man par excellence skilled in music, poetry, and sport. Striking the golden mean between the image of Bacchus, always looking slightly drunk and effeminate, and the Farnese Hercules, so muscular as to make a caricature of masculinity, Apollo was depicted as the ideal man of perfect proportions, carrying either a lyre or a bow and quiver, being a lyric poet and the consummate archer. Espying Cupid with his bow and arrow, Apollo mocked the infant god of love, saying, "What are you doing with such mighty weapons, better suited to our shoulders, which have killed the great Python with countless arrows?" For this insult, Cupid prepared two arrows, one of gold with which he shot Apollo to make him fall in love with the water nymph Daphne and the other of lead to make Daphne rebuff his advances. As a servant of the goddess Diana, Daphne had already consecrated her virginity and had rebuffed many lovers, despite the wishes of her father, the river god Peneus, that she should marry and have children. Unwilling to take no for an answer, Apollo followed Daphne relentlessly, but Daphne was swift of foot and evaded Apollo's advances until Cupid intervened to help Apollo catch her. Seeing that she could not escape, Daphne called upon her father Peneus for help, either to open the earth or to change her into another form to free her from this danger. Peneus reluctantly complied: "Torpor seized on all her body, and a thin bark closed around her gentle bosom, and her hair became as moving leaves; her arms were changed to waving branches, and her active feet as clinging roots were fastened to the ground—her face was hidden with encircling leaves." She had turned into a laurel tree. Notwithstanding the frustration of his desire, Apollo vowed to honor Daphne forever by rendering the laurel tree evergreen, saying that "as my youthful head is never shorn, so, also, shalt thou ever bear thy leaves unchanging to thy glory." Apollo also made wreaths of her leaves to wear as a crown: "Although thou canst not be my bride, thou shalt be called my chosen tree, and thy green leaves, O Laurel! shall forever crown my brows, be wreathed around my quiver and my lyre."[27]

The story of Apollo and Daphne first appeared in Renaissance art as early as the 1470's in a painting which is now in the National Gallery in London by Piero del Pollaiuolo, who was among the very first Renaissance painters to attempt subjects from classical mythology. The story found its definitive expression in the art of the Baroque, in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's incomparable sculpture from the early 1620's, housed in the Villa Borghese in Rome. My own interpretation of the story draws inspiration from these precursors as well as from the frescoes and mosaics of Apollo and Daphne which survive from antiquity. The billowing draperies in particular are derived from an ancient Roman fresco from Pompeii.

Bernini's influence is most evident in the figure of Daphne, which I designed using Bernini's statue as my model. The correlation is admittedly loose but close enough to bring the sculpture to mind. The figure of Apollo has a more interesting derivation. I decided to have Apollo kneel rather than running and grasping at Daphne as he does in most depictions of the subject in order to express Apollo's veneration of Daphne which Ovid describes at the end of the story. I struggled at first to find a suitable posture for Apollo's arms, but in the course of testing out different possibilities I noticed a striking correlation with the pose of Michelangelo's Christ in *The Last Judgment*. This correlation was especially fortuitous, because this particular depiction of Christ uses Apollonian iconography. The Second Coming of Christ is represented in Scripture as a sunrise, and so it made sense for Michelangelo to represent Christ in the trappings of Apollo as the Greco-Roman sun god.

Having found my pose for Apollo, I stumbled upon a happy coincidence. A common element in the iconography of river gods like Daphne's father, Peneus, is a cornucopia, a horn filled with the fruits of agriculture. By happenstance, I had designed the figures of Apollo and Daphne to intertwine in such a way as to resemble a cornucopia. Despite the frustration of Apollo's desire, this symbol of fruitfulness is entirely fitting. Apollo is not left bereft at the end of the story but enters into a chaste union with Daphne, as she becomes his crown and glory. I place

[27] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Brookes More (Boston: Cornhill Publishing Co., 1922), 1.452-566. The first quotation is paraphrased.

the head of Daphne directly above the head of Apollo to suggest this transformation of Daphne into Apollo's crown of laurels. Daphne's metamorphosis tames Apollo's animalistic passions and transforms his love into a purely contemplative recognition of her goodness. Apollo and Daphne are united not in the flesh but by a gaze, which does not objectify her but uplifts her into her essential nature. Her metamorphosis is not the destruction of her nature but the fulfillment of her femininity in a superabundant fecundity of evergreen foliage, which is why I render the foliage in brighter colors and sharper detail in the upper left, to represent the copious fruits pouring from the top of the cornucopia, and why I depict her in an attitude not of distress but of serenity. Apollo's love is her honor, and she is Apollo's glory. His love is the recognition of her excellence, and she is the manifestation of his excellence, because it is he who makes her evergreen.

To interpret the story of Apollo and Daphne Christologically, this observation recalls a verse from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he remarks that man is the glory of God and the glory of man is woman. At the level of nature, this is a puzzling statement, yet the Apostle is not just speaking naturalistically but of Christ as the Man and the human soul as the woman. In the Song of Songs, one reads of the love-affair between God and the human soul, of which romantic love is a dim reflection written into the order of nature. Not knowing God, the soul suspects Him of rapacity, of being a Zeus-like character, a patriarchal tyrant with an objectifying gaze, whose insatiable passion for justice like Zeus's insatiable lust impels Him to judge and to condemn the soul for her sins, but this is a pagan caricature. The Christian God does not subdue the soul by violence but chases the soul relentlessly to save her from defeating her reason for being. It is the nature of the soul to bear the spiritual fruits of virtue, as it is the nature of a woman to be fruitful by bearing children, which nature Daphne thwarts by consecrating herself to Diana. Daphne runs away from Apollo, and by implication away from the rising sun, because she does not want to be exposed to the light. The wood of Diana is a dark place, where the soul can hide its shame and nakedness from the light of justice, but like Adam and Eve in the Garden she cannot hide from God. The sun of justice will arise, as the prophet Malachias writes. Finding no escape, the soul finally implores God the Father either to swallow her up in the bowels of the earth or to change her into a form which will not be burned by the light. Daphne's metamorphosis is symbolic of the regeneration of the soul, re-created through the waters of baptism, and her evergreen leaves are symbolic of the fruits of the Holy Spirit which will never wither but crown the soul with everlasting honor.

Like Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, my depiction of the story of Apollo and Daphne is an image of rebirth, a Renaissance painting par excellence, which is why I have chosen to make this image my largest canvas and the centerpiece of the exhibition. The painting is also set apart by an unique frame in the Art Nouveau style, courtesy of Bryan Smith Frames, as opposed to the Renaissance style frames which I use for most of my history paintings. As a style which was popular from about 1890-1910, Art Nouveau brings one back to the final decades in the life of the craft-tradition just before the imitation of nature and beauty were decisively eclipsed by abstraction and conceptualism, my intention being to pick up where the tradition left off without interruption. The painting is not merely a window onto a now distant past but painted on the scale of a doorway, the better to serve as a portal through which the tradition may re-enter the contemporary world.

To talk a little bit about matters of technique, a history painting such as this requires a great deal of preparatory work before one ever puts paint to canvas. There are hundreds of decisions that have to be made about the composition and the drawing, and most of them need to be settled before one begins to paint. One begins with thumbnail sketches to test out different poses and placements. With a basic concept in hand, the next step if one has the luxury of working from life is to do detailed studies of all of the figures and draperies and other assorted elements. Since I work mostly from imagination, using principles of constructive anatomy to create my figures, I usually skip this step and dive right into the cartoon. Derived from the Italian *cartone*, meaning a large sheet of paper, cartoon is a word which academic painters use to denote a line drawing done to scale for the purpose of transferring to the canvas. The cartoon for *Apollo and Daphne* took me about two months to finish, upon which I transferred the design by rubbing charcoal on the back and tracing the lines. The use of a cartoon originated in fresco painting, as an art form in which everything has to be figured out in advance, since fresco does not permit of correction. Oil painting is more flexible, and so oil painters always end up making further corrections even with the use of a cartoon, and there are as a matter of fact several so-called *pentimenti* which are visible on *Apollo and Daphne* if one looks closely.

Above Left: Detail of Christ from *The Last Judgment* by Michelangelo, 1541

Above Right: *Apollo and Daphne* by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1625

Left: Ancient Roman fresco of Apollo and Daphne recovered from the ruins of Pompeii

Figure 2

2. *Venus and Adonis*
   Oil on canvas
   27" x 38"

Venus and Adonis was the first history painting that I attempted, on and off between 2013 and 2015. As the subject of the first work published by William Shakespeare in 1593, it seemed a fitting way to begin my own body of work. Shakespeare's narrative poem elaborates on Ovid's much shorter account in Book Ten of the *Metamorphoses* and departs from that story in ways which were motivated by prints of paintings by Titian and especially by the Flemish mannerists, to whom I looked for inspiration as well.

In Shakespeare's version, Adonis is a mortal man of such beauty as to make the goddess of love herself fall in love, and yet Venus finds him indifferent to her advances, because Adonis's only love is for the hunt. She tries to coax him down from his horse to speak to her, but Adonis has no patience for conversing with women. Undeterred, Venus drags him down by force, lies down beside him, gazes into his eyes, and talks of love. She tries to coax a kiss from him, but still he wishes to depart. Adonis manages to get away but only to find his stallion galloping away with a mare, preventing him from going hunting. Again Venus approaches, and again she speaks of love, and again Adonis spurns her, upon which Venus dramatically faints away as if to die of unrequited love. For fear that he has killed her, Adonis kneels and caresses her, upon which Venus promptly recovers and completes the conquest. Venus is eager to see him again the following day, but Adonis resists, insisting that he has plans to hunt the wild boar, upon which Venus has a vision of his impending death and warns him that if he does he will not come back alive, but to no avail. After a fruitless wrestling match and a lecture from Adonis on the difference between love and lust, Adonis leaves, and Venus weeps. The following morning Venus goes in search of Adonis. She hears his dogs crying in the distance and hurries in their direction, only to find the dogs injured and Adonis dead, killed by the wild boar. Devastated, the goddess of love ordains that henceforth love shall be mingled with suspicion, fear, and grief, "fickle, false, and full of fraud."[28] From the soil soaked in Adonis's blood a white and purple flower grows, white being the color both of a cadaver and of purity, purple being the color of blood and of mourning. Venus departs to confine herself on the isle of Cyprus.

In Ovid's version of the story, Venus is a reluctant participant in Adonis's hunts, constantly fretting about her clothes and her complexion and fearful of dangerous wild animals. Shakespeare's Venus is herself a wild animal. She is not at all self-conscious but ruled entirely by her passions, and she goes about naked, having no more fear of the elements or shame of her nakedness than Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the better to turn the story of Venus and Adonis into an allegory of lost innocence, the

Right: *Venus and Adonis* by Titian, ca. 1560

[28] William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, line 1141.

fateful discovery of self-consciousness, shame, and death. In Shakespeare's poem, Venus is clearly intended to represent the human soul and Adonis the body, *anima* and *corpus* being masculine and feminine in Latin. Their union represents the hylomorphic union, as an Aristotelian would say, of body and soul in one substance, united by the primary passion of the soul, which is love. Venus's vision of Adonis's imminent demise represents the opening of the eyes of the intellect. Upon attaining the age of reason, the soul projects itself into the past, causing shame, and into the future, causing worry. The soul discovers that it is not what it could and should be, that its nakedness and abandonment to bodily passions is a shameful condition and moreover that it will be separated from the body, for although the soul may be immortal the body is fated to die. Fearful of death, Venus implores Adonis not to go, but go he must, because death is the defining fact of the human condition. Confining herself in mourning, the soul resigns herself to death by embracing the mortification of the flesh, symbolized by a flower of purity and of mourning.

The moment that I have depicted is that of Venus's last desperate entreaties to stop Adonis from going on the hunt, which is the same moment depicted by Titian. In Ovid's version of the story, Venus simply warns Adonis of his impending death after a night of love-making, and then leaves. Some decades before Shakespeare, Titian was the first to turn the scene around by depicting Adonis rushing off to the hunt and Venus desperately trying to stop him. The arrangement of my painting was inspired by the Flemish mannerist Bartholomeus Spranger, while the soft, atmospheric style, brown harmony, and unified local colors were adapted from Anthony van Dyck.

Turning again to matters of technique, it is worth addressing the role of geometry. There is a debate among contemporary academic painters about whether geometric grids, also known as compositional armatures, should be used to design a painting. Many artists are dismissive of this practice, while others insist that it is the secret to good design. I have found grids to be a useful tool in designing my own paintings, and I am also convinced that Renaissance painters made good use of them.

There are countless ways to subdivide a rectangle geometrically. Many are mathematically significant but not very useful for the purposes of design. What really counts in a painting are relations that can be seen with the naked eye, or at least sensed intuitively. In the most traditional grid used by Italian Renaissance painters, one begins with the simplest possible division of the rectangle in halves and along the diagonals. Further divisions build on this foundation by way of symmetry, parallelism, and perpendicularity. I tend to think in terms of two grids, one consisting of vertical and horizontal divisions, the other consisting of diagonals and orthogonals. Ideally, the canvas should have proportions which relate these two grids in a visually pleasing way, which only happens when based on a square root. The canvas for my painting of *Venus and Adonis* is based on the ratio of 1 to the square root of 2. This is a beautiful proportion, because the orthogonals coincide perfectly with the halves, so

Left: *Venus and Adonis* by Bartholomeus Spranger, 1597

that the two grids relate to each other in the simplest way possible, as can be seen in the diagram.

When it comes to designing the figures in relation to the grid, there must always be a hierarchy of emphasis. For example, the dominant lines in my painting of *Venus and Adonis* consist of the diagonal which runs through the figure of Venus and the orthogonal which passes along her shoulders and arm. The opposing diagonal and orthogonals are also stated but with less emphasis.

Figure 3

3. *Bacchus and Ariadne*
   Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
   45" x 34"

The story of Bacchus and Ariadne is found in Ovid's account of King Minos and the Minotaur, a monster born to his wife which was part man and part bull, from Book Eight of the *Metamorphoses*:

> Now the infamous reproach of Crete had grown, till it exposed the double-natured shame. So, Minos, moved to cover his disgrace, resolved to hide the monster in a prison, and he built with intricate design, by Daedalus contrived, an architect of wonderful ability, and famous. This he planned of mazey wanderings that deceived the eyes, and labyrinthic passages involved. So sports the clear Maeander, in the fields of Phrygia winding doubtful; back and forth it meets itself, until the wandering stream fatigued, impedes its wearied waters' flow; from source to sea, from sea to source involved. So Daedalus contrived innumerous paths, and windings vague, so intricate that he, the architect, hardly could retrace his steps. In this the Minotaur was long concealed, and there devoured Athenian victims sent three seasons, nine years each, till Theseus, son of Aegeus, slew him and retraced his way, finding the path by Ariadne's thread. Without delay the victor fled from Crete, together with the loving maid, and sailed for the Isle of Naxos, where he left the maid forlorn, abandoned. Her, in time, lamenting and deserted, Bacchus found and for his love immortalized her name. He set in the dark heavens the bright crown that rested on her brows. Through the soft air it whirled, while all the sparkling jewels changed to flashing fires, assuming in the sky between the Serpent-holder and the Kneeler the well-known shape of Ariadne's Crown.[29]

[29] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.152-182.

Left: *Bacchus and Midas* by Nicolas Poussin, 1630
Below: *Mary Magdalene in a Grotto* by Jules Lefebvre, 1876

These few sentences have furnished artists since the Renaissance with ample material for pictorial invention, the seminal version being Titian's painting of 1523 in the National Gallery in London. The design of my version was based on a composition by Nicolas Poussin of a related subject, *Bacchus and Midas*, painted ca. 1630 and now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. I placed the standing figure of Bacchus and the seated figure of Silenus in the same position with minor adjustments to their poses, and I transformed Poussin's reclining Bacchante in the foreground into the figure of Ariadne. My pose for Ariadne was further inspired by a Penitent Magdalene by the 19th-century academician Jules Lefebvre. Other quotations from William Bouguereau and Carlo Maratta are also scattered throughout. The billowing clouds and the Corona Borealis, Ariadne's Crown, recall Titian's version.

In my allegorical interpretation of the myth, the heroine once again represents the human soul, as she so often does. When is the soul forlorn but when her love is misplaced and the object of her love disappoints? As Petrarch reflects in his imagined dialogues with St. Augustine concerning Petrarch's inordinate attachment to the dearly departed Laura, the soul is tempted to seek its fulfillment in creatures rather than the Creator, in earthly goods instead of the supreme Good. Theseus represents the allurements of this world, which leave the soul bereft rather than fulfilled. Bacchus is a figure for Christ, who rescues the soul from her despair by presenting Himself as a more worthy lover. Bacchus being an effeminate figure, this Christological image does not look like the ideal man, quite the contrary, which is actually fitting, because Christ appears under the unprepossessing form of a creature. Just as Bacchus's masculinity is cloaked in a feminine bearing, Christ's divinity is cloaked by His humanity, and even His humanity appears only as bread and wine in the Eucharist. The wine and grapes of Bacchus are thus a figure for the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The wine is offered up to restore Ariadne from her spiritual malaise, because the life is in the blood. In my painting, Bacchus finds Ariadne lying on the ground as though dead, but under his gaze she begins to rise. She does not yet look at Bacchus but out at the viewer, because she does not know what is happening. She is only just beginning to come to, like a soul beginning to discover the truths of the faith and the grace of conversion. Hence, I depict her in the form of the Penitent Magdalene. By the gift of Bacchus as by the grace of God, Ariadne finds her place among the stars, as the penitent soul finds her place in the communion of saints. The nymphs and satyrs dance and play as the saints and angels in heaven rejoice over the penitent sinner, recalling the words of Christ: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."[30]

[30] Luke 15:7 (Douay-Rheims).

Figure 4

Right: *Shepherd and Shepherdess* by François Boucher, 1760

4. *Arcady*
   Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
   27" x 33"

Arcady is modeled after pastoral paintings by the rococo painter François Boucher. Although he was hardly a scholar, Boucher's pastoral fantasies have an allegorical significance. Not merely a sentimental misrepresentation of agricultural life, pastoral paintings belong to the tradition of Arcadian poetry.

The Arcadian theme is a venerable tradition of Renaissance art and poetry, beginning with Jacopo Sannazaro's pastoral romance *Arcadia*, which he wrote in the 1480's and published in 1504. Disappointed in love, the protagonist Sincero retreats from the city of Naples in search of an idealized pastoral existence among the shepherds, inspired by the Idylls of Theocritus. Amidst his day-dreaming, a frightful vision prompts him to go back to the city, upon which he discovers that his beloved has died. Her death represents the loss of Arcadia. The tone of the poem is melancholic, replete with elegiac descriptions of the lost world of Arcadia. Arcadia is always represented in paradoxical conjunction with death, as it is in Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, which depicts the tragic discovery of death and consequent invention of the art of painting by Arcadian shepherds. Another influential work of Renaissance poetry on the theme of Arcadia was Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, published in the 1580's. The main characters, as the title suggests, are all royal visitors of the countryside, a motif which would recur in rococo painting, especially in works by Jean-Antoine Watteau. The poetry most relevant to my own painting was *Arcadia, Prosas y Versos* by the Spanish playwright and poet Lope de Vega, published in 1598. I did my best to paint the following description:

> Does not the pleasantness of this place carry in itself sufficient reward for any time lost in it? Do you not see how all things conspire together to make this country a heavenly dwelling? Do you not see the grass, how in color they exceed the emerald, every one striving to pass his fellow, and yet they are all kept of an equal height? And do you not see the rest of these beautiful flowers, each of which would require a man's wit to know and his life to express? Do not these stately trees seem to maintain their flourishing old age with the only happiness of their feat, being clothed in perpetual spring, because no beauty here should ever fade? Doth not the air breathe health, which the birds, delightful both to ear and eye, do daily solemnize with the sweet harmony of their voices? Is not every Echo thereof a perfect music? And these fresh and delightful brooks how slowly they glide away, as loath to leave the company of so many things united in perfection? And with a sweet murmur they lament their forced departure? Certainly, certainly, cousin, it must needs be that some goddess inhabits this region, who is the soul of the soil: for neither is any less than a goddess worthy to be shrined in such a heap of pleasures, nor any less than a goddess could have made it so perfect a plat of the celestial dwellings.[31]

The action in *Arcady* centers on the young woman's gaze, fixed on a goldfinch in mid-flight. To ensure the visual

[31] Lope de Vega, *Arcadia, Prosas y Versos* (Barcelona: en Casa Sebastian de Cormellas, 1602), pp. 75-76.

Figure 5

significance of this glance, I have placed her eye at the center of the painting and the goldfinch at a significant point of intersection. Iconographically, the goldfinch has traditionally been used as a symbol of the Crucifixion, in works ranging from Raphael's *Madonna of the Goldfinch* in the Uffizi to the famous *Goldfinch* by Carol Fabritius in the Mauritshuis. According to pious legend, the bird acquired its red spot as it attempted to pull a thorn from Christ's brow, upon which it was splashed with a drop of Christ's Blood. The goldfinch thus represents the conjunction of death and Arcadia, while also purifying the Arcadian myth of its tragic implications. Death and suffering may rob one of worldly happiness, and yet it is by death that paradise is regained, in the first place by Christ's death and in the second by one's own, symbolized by baptism, hence the water. The painting is appropriately framed in a very high quality reproduction Louis XV frame.

5. *Truth Unveiled by Time*
   Oil on canvas
   14" x 21"

The subject of Truth Unveiled by Time is a popular allegory of a kind preferred by Giorgio Vasari, who was an allegorical painter par excellence. Some famous examples of Truth Unveiled include a statue by Bernini in the Villa Borghese, a painting by Tiepolo at the Boston MFA, and another by Annibale Carracci in the Royal Collection, to name just a few. Most depictions include a personification of Father Time as an old man sporting wings, who pulls back the veil of Truth, represented by a female nude. Together, they are typically shown trampling an allegorical figure of Deceit. Since my version is not a full-throated history painting but more like a portrait, leaving little room for Father Time, I had to find a more subtle way of expressing the idea. I decided to use two radiating lines converging on the lower left hand corner to suggest the two hands of a clock. One hand falls along the breast, the other along the top of the drapery. Imagining the hands moving clockwise, the figure is, as it were, being undraped by the hands of time. I thought it was a clever solution, though no one would ever pick up on it without explanation, which is a downside.

The painting is composed of stark but harmonious oppositions, with the division of light falling right down the middle of the face and the green background being complemented by a red drapery. These stark oppositions of light and color symbolize a metaphysical opposition, of which all things are a composite.

The truth that time unveils most directly is that one has a beginning and an end. There was a time when one was not, and there is a time when one will no longer be, because it is not in one's nature to be. There is a basic distinction in metaphysics between what a thing is and the fact that it is. There are infinitely many possible natures which do not actually exist. To become an actual substance as opposed to an abstract principle, an essence must be joined to existence. All that is is a composite of essence and existence.[32] Nothing comes from nothing, because effects cannot exceed their cause, and so an essence can only receive existence from existence itself. Beings receive their being from Him whose essence is existence. God alone is not composed of essence and existence but pure being, pure and simple. Granting the premises of metaphysical realism, the existence of God is a tautology like the analytic truths of mathematics. When God is defined as existence itself, the fact that anything exists suffices to prove that God does too, as the necessary source and ground of existence.

To say the same thing less abstractly, time reveals that life is a gift. As the color of blood, the red drapery speaks to this gift of life, and so does the green background, green being a color of fecundity. Above all, the female nude speaks to the gift of life, because her body is manifestly ordered to bearing and nurturing life. One of the truths that the classical nude reveals is the purposiveness of our bodily nature, which obviously includes the purpose of participating in the creation of other human beings. Our bodily nature makes us lower than the angels in the order of nature, and yet our bodies permit us to do something that angels cannot do. Incredibly, society has become so divorced from reality as to deny the difference between male and female, though this was perhaps to be expected from the first moment that we began to deny the purpose of this difference.

[32] See Aquinas, *On Being and Essence.*

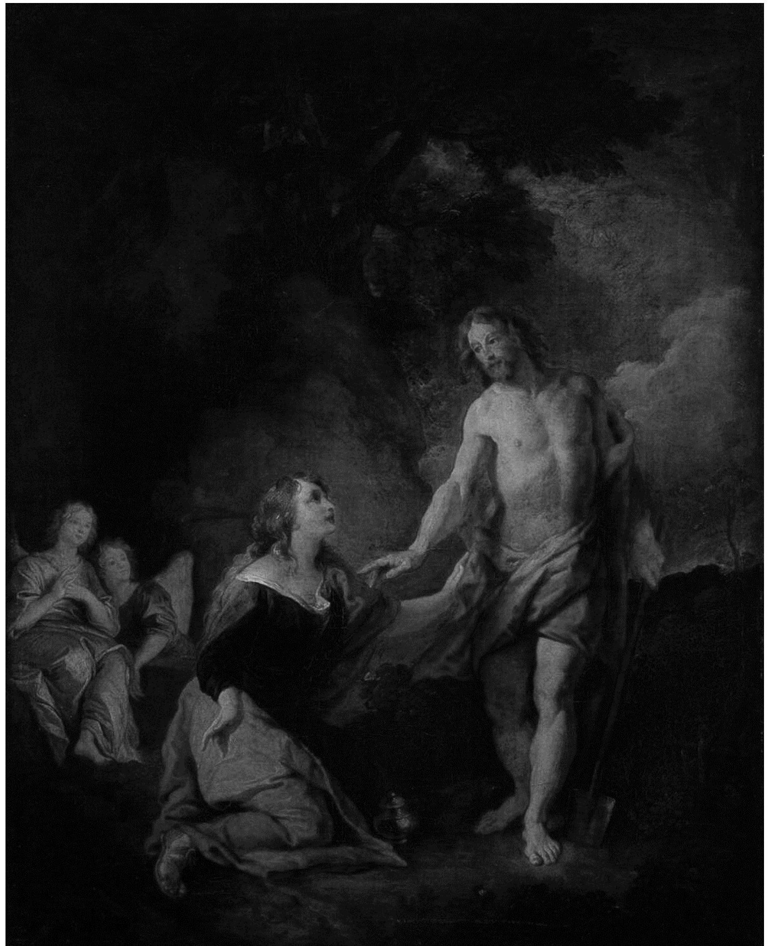
Figure 6

6. *Noli me tangere*
   Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
   15” x 20”

The first religious subject that I attempted between 2014 and 2015 was a scene from the end of the Gospel of John in which the Risen Christ appears to Mary Magdalene, a subject known as *Noli me tangere*, which means “Do not touch me,” the words spoken by Christ as the Magdalene was about to embrace him.

For this painting I adopted a strategy of invention recommended by Sir Joshua Reynolds, to copy and improve upon another composition designed by an Old Master. My chosen inspiration was a painting by the French colorist Charles de la Fosse, whose coloring I greatly admired but whose draftsmanship left room for improvement, following a more classical sensibility at least. Charles de la Fosse’s style is loose and painterly, whereas mine is very tight, which means that I sacrifice a degree of dynamism and depth for the sake of a more linear, classical beauty. I chose the very classical proportions of a 3x4 rectangle to contribute to a sense of stasis and serenity, a mood which I preferred for narrative reasons. At first, the Magdalene does not recognize Christ but mistakes Him for the gardener, which is why He is traditionally shown carrying a spade and without the Stigmata, the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. Upon recognizing the Risen Christ, the Magdalene’s natural reaction is to throw her arms around Him in joy, yet Christ bids the Magdalene not to touch Him, because He has yet to ascend to His Father. This puzzling story has been understood as an allegory about the Eucharist, for where else does the Bride of Christ touch Christ? Mary Magdalene is a type of the Church, and in this case specifically of the laity. At first, she is blind to who Christ is, just as one is blind to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and when she finally recognizes Him, the Magdalene does not understand the nature and significance of Christ’s Resurrection, which signifies something much more profound than resuscitation like the raising of Lazarus. Jesus commands her to remove her hands in pointed contrast to the story of Doubting Thomas, in which Christ invites Thomas to touch His wounds. The allegorical implication is that the laity whose hands are not consecrated are not to receive communion in the hand, because this action belies the nature of the Sacrament and the dignity of God Incarnate. Instead of reaching out toward Christ, as the Magdalene does in the painting by Charles de la Fosse, in my version she has already obeyed as she kneels, as if to receive the Sacrament with the reverence that Christ deserves.

Returning once again to the subject of technique, a painting is rarely finished in one layer *alla prima* but generally has to be built up in stages. There are many different ways of doing an underpainting. One way is known as the Flemish technique, invented by Netherlandish painters such as Jan van Eyck, which consists of doing the underpainting in grisaille (i.e. shades of gray) and applying the color in thin glazes. In my *Noli me tangere*, I used this technique for the figures, while underpainting the rest of the canvas in an umber wash over a midtone primer.



Right: *Noli me tangere* by Charles de La Fosse, ca. 1685

Figure 7

7. *The Holy Family*
   Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
   27" x 33"

The second religious painting which I began in 2015 but only managed to finish this year is of the Holy Family. It was inspired in the first place by Correggio's *Adoration of the Child*, which is one of my favorite paintings in the Uffizi's collection. I made a point of copying the proportions of Correggio's painting and repeating certain elements from his composition. The poses of the Virgin and Child were inspired by a drawing by Sigismondo Cavola, which I knew from the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as Michelangelo's painting of the Holy Family, the *Doni Tondo* in the Uffizi. My representation of the Virgin also recalls a famous painting of the Virgin and Child by Carlo Maratta. The figure of Joseph follows a standard posture, variations of which are found in many different images of the Holy Family.

The somewhat implausible assortment of architecture and scenery was selected for iconographic reasons. The marble column with its elaborate, colorful veins foreshadows the Flagellation. The yellow rose bush alludes to the Madonna of the Roses and the rosary, to say nothing of the Crown of Thorns. The pool of water alludes to the Baptism of Christ as well as to the story of Moses, who was drawn from the water by a daughter of Pharaoh, Christ being to the New Covenant what Moses was to the Old Covenant. The stones in the water anticipate the Temptation of Christ, when Satan would tempt Jesus to turn a stone into bread. The palm trees in the background allude to the Entry into Jerusalem, and the manger of course alludes to the Nativity. The sprig of cherries which Joseph holds is a common motif in paintings of the Madonna and Child, symbolizing the fruit of the tree of life, namely the Eucharist.

The unusual illumination of the Virgin's face, which is actually in shadow but illuminated by reflected light, is a motif picked up from another famous painting by Correggio of the Nativity, in which the light emanates from the Christ Child. Christ being the metaphorical sun and the Virgin the moon, His face is in light, while her light is a reflected light.

Above Left: *The Adoration of the Child* by Correggio, 1520. Above Right: *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* by Sigismondo Cavola, ca. 1700.

Figure 8

8. *The First Mourning*
   Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
   45" x 28"

The story of the death of Abel comes from the book of Genesis:

> And Adam knew Eve his wife: who conceived and brought forth Cain, saying: I have gotten a man through God. And again she brought forth his brother Abel. And Abel was a shepherd, and Cain a husbandman. And it came to pass after many days, that Cain offered, of the fruits of the earth, gifts to the Lord. Abel also offered of the firstlings of his flock, and of their fat: and the Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings he had no respect: and Cain was exceedingly angry, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said to him: Why art thou angry? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door? but the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it. And Cain said to Abel his brother: Let us go forth abroad. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him. And the Lord said to Cain: Where is thy brother Abel? And he answered, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And he said to him: What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me from the earth. (Gen. 4:1-10, Douay-Rheims)

In my painting, Adam and Even stand and kneel around the body of Abel, lying across the foot of an altar, while Cain has already fled the scene. The composition is based on an engraving which I found in the Metropolitan's collection from 1576 by a Flemish engraver named Johann Sadeler after a drawing by another Flemish artist Michiel Coxie. Even though the authors of this print are of no particular historical significance, 16th century prints of this kind were extremely influential, because they were used by artists as visual references. Turning to a more venerable authority, I designed the figure of Adam after Michelangelo's painting of Adam being expelled from Paradise, with a

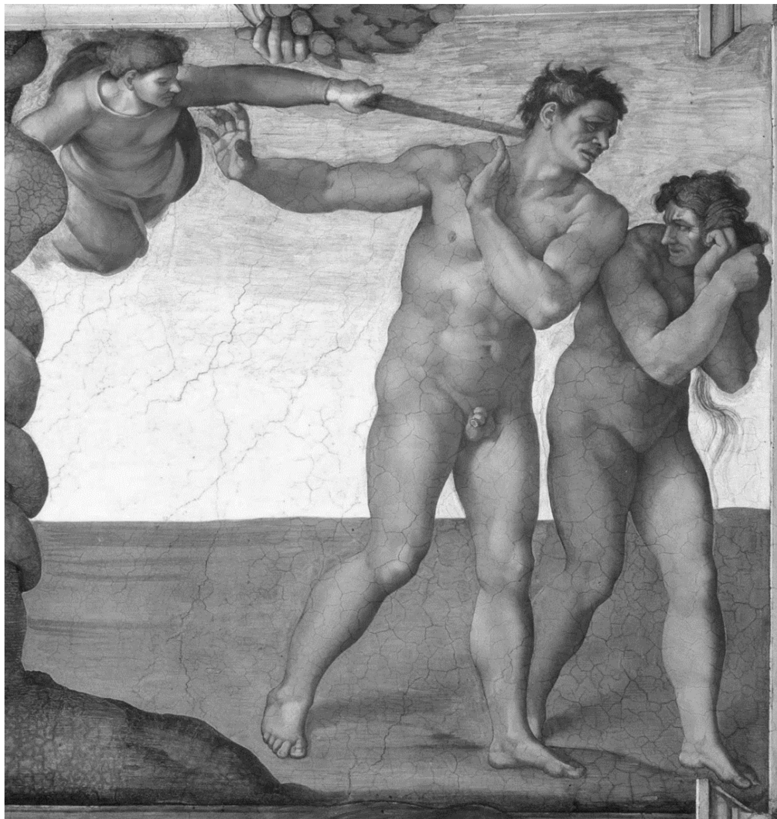
Right: *Adam and Eve Mourning the Death of Abel* (Plate 3 from *The Story of Cain and Abel*), engraved by Johann Sadeler, designed by Michiel Coxie, 1576

Below Left: *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve* by Michelangelo, 1508-1512

Below Right: *Crouching Venus*, 2nd Century AD Roman copy of Greek original

minor adjustment to the position of the arms, and I designed the figure of Eve in the pose of a Crouching Venus.

On the ground is the blood-stained murder weapon, the jawbone of a donkey, and all around are indications of Abel's animal husbandry, including his shepherd's staff, a ram, a goat, and a sheep dog. The goat with its back turned to us alludes to the scapegoat which was ritually driven into the wilderness carrying the people's sins, while the ram brings to mind the Passover lamb. Both are Christological images. The sheep dog brings to mind Isaiah's prophecy concerning the day when wolves will live at peace with lambs. The mountain prominently displayed in the background points to the Noahic covenant, which God makes with mankind after the Flood when Noah's ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat, and to the Mosaic covenant handed down from Mount Sinai, both of which anticipate the New and eternal Covenant sealed in Christ's Blood on Mount Calvary. The death of Abel is a type of the death of Christ, who like Abel was hated without cause and murdered by His own kin.



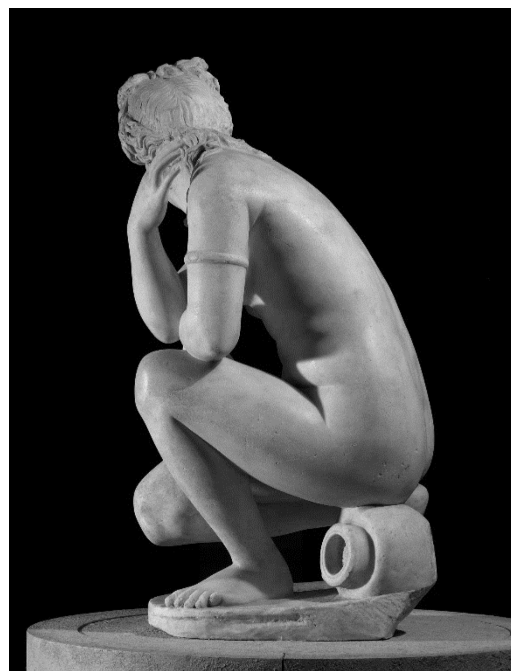


Figure 9

9. *Judith and Holofernes*
   Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
   32" x 45"

The story of Judith and Holofernes is an allegory from the Old Testament, which centers on a daring and beautiful widow who heroically slays the enemy of the Jews. It is possible that the story had some historical basis in events which occurred in the second century BC, but if so the author has veiled the facts by using overtly anachronistic names, speaking of the enemy as "the king of Assyria" and calling him by the name of "Nebuchadnezzar," and also using imaginary topography, such as the city of Bethulia, which literally means "The virgin of the LORD" and probably represents Jerusalem. In the story, Bethulia is besieged by the Assyrian army led by the general Holofernes over the strident objections of his subordinate Achior, whom Holofernes sends off in chains to Bethulia as his reward for taking the side of the Jews. Facing starvation, the people of the city begin to despair, but Judith will have none of it. Chiding her Jewish countrymen for not trusting in God to deliver them from their enemies, Judith goes with her loyal maid to the camp of the enemy general. She quickly ingratiates herself with Holofernes, promising to lead him through the streets of Bethulia. Captivated by her beauty, Holofernes drinks himself into a stupor in celebration and grants her access to his tent during the night, with amorous intentions. Having no desire to permit her purity to be violated, Judith cuts off his head with his own sword and silently flees the enemy camp with the decapitated head stuffed into a bag. She parades Holofernes through the streets as she had promised. When the Assyrians discover that Holofernes is slain, they disperse, and Israel is saved. Though courted by many, Judith remains unwed for the rest of her life. The book closes with a song of praise to God sung by Judith in celebration of her victory.

Judith has traditionally been interpreted as a type of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Judith's victory over the Assyrians represents the spiritual victory over the evil one, sin, and death accomplished at Calvary, in which the Virgin played a crucial role, because the success of Christ's mission depended upon His Mother's cooperation. The Virgin might have refused to become the Mother of God at the Annunciation, or she might have demanded that Jesus not suffer His Passion, in either case to the ruin of mankind, but she didn't do that. Being confirmed in grace from the moment of her conception, she could hardly have willed anything contrary to the will of God. Just as Judith used Holofernes' own sword to slay him, the Virgin slew the god of this world with the Cross on which Christ hung, a sadistic instrument of torture and death in the shape of a sword. Thus, the head of the serpent was crushed not only by "the seed of the woman" but also by the woman herself as one reads in the protoevangelium in Genesis, which is why images of the Immaculate Conception always depict her standing on the head of a serpent. As a matter of fact, the seed of the woman refers not only to Christ but also to the members of His mystical Body, as the children of the Blessed Virgin. The Church is Judith, called to slay Holofernes by bearing a cross of suffering and death. Judith's victory is a type not only of what happened two thousand years ago but also of the eschatological triumph of the Church over evil at the end of time. The design of my painting is based on passages in Scripture concerning this final victory. As John writes in Apocalypse 11:15-12:1 (Douay-Rheims):

> And the seventh angel sounded the trumpet: and there were great voices in heaven, saying: The kingdom of this world is become our Lord's and his Christ's, and he shall reign for ever and ever. Amen. And the four and twenty ancients, who sit on their seats in the sight of God, fell on their faces and adored God, saying: We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who art, and who wast, and who art to come: because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and thou hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest render reward to thy servants the prophets and the saints, and to them that fear thy name, little and great, and shouldest destroy them who have corrupted the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven: and the ark of his testament was seen in his temple, and there were lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake, and great hail. And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

Like the woman clothed in the sun, Judith is dressed in a brilliant, golden hue, while the drapery which falls from her shoulder is a deep blue, alluding to the veil which covered the Ark of the Covenant and the hammered gold in which the Ark was covered. The blue drapery is shown in the act of falling to signify the unveiling of the Ark. The

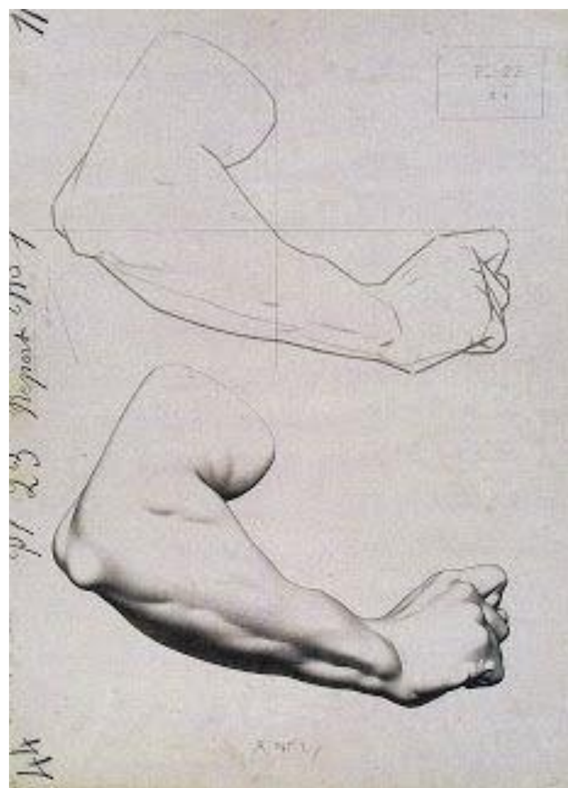
braid encircling the back of her head with twelve visible knots represents the crown of stars, while the storm-clouds looming overhead allude to the meteorological events which are said to accompany the unveiling of the Ark.

The waterfall in the background and the trees on either side are also taken from the Apocalypse. They are images of the river of the water of life and the tree of life, which represent the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary, since one eats of the life-giving fruit of her womb in the Eucharist. To quote from Apocalypse 22:1-5 (Douay-Rheims):

> And he shewed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face: and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more: and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

The sources for *Judith and Holofernes* include Cristofano Allori's magnificent painting of the same subject in the Palazzo Pitti, which was easily my favorite painting in the collection when I was a student in Florence. Unlike Caravaggio's version or Artemisia Gentileschi's, which is also in the Pitti, both of which were painted around the same time as Allori's at the turn of the 17th century and depict Judith in the gruesome act of slicing through Holofernes' neck, Allori's painting is not so dramatic. To Allori's credit, the immaculate elegance of his Judith, stained by neither sweat nor blood but dressed in the most sumptuous clothing totally unsuitable for the messy business of carrying out an execution, does reflect a better understanding of the typology. It is not by might nor by power but by a delicate woman assisted by the Spirit of God and unsullied by the deed that the spiritual enemies of God's kingdom are laid low. For this reason I wanted my own version to be more akin to Allori's than to Caravaggio's. The head and shoulders of my Judith were inspired by Frederic Leighton's *Pavonia*, and the arrangement of the background with a drapery and a wall opening onto a vista was inspired by the conventions of Venetian portraiture. Students of Charles

Above Left: *Pavonia* by Frederic Leighton, 1859. Above Right: *Judith and Holofernes* by Cristofano Allori, 1612.



Above Left: *Portrait of Doge Francesco Venier* by Titian, 1556. Above Right: *Drawing Course* Plate 1, 23 by Charles Bargue, 1860's.

Bargue's *Drawing Course*, which includes everyone in the atelier movement, will also recognize the source for her left hand, which holds the sword.

To revisit the topic of technique, the color blue has always presented a host of challenges and vexations for oil painters. For a long time, the only stable deep blue pigment was lapis lazuli, which when available at all was frightfully expensive, because it had to be imported from Afghanistan. Artists had various substitutes, such as smalt, which is a type of powdered glass and a primitive version of cobalt blue, but all of the alternatives tended to fade and were never a very pure blue to begin with. Yet, even artists who had ready access to lapis lazuli still found it a great challenge to apply the paint in a way that would not be discolored by the oil. As linseed oil oxidizes, it becomes yellower, which means that blue paint turns gray and green as it dries. There is a loss of chroma and a shift of hue. There are several ways to mitigate this problem. Oil painters know from experience that an impasto yellows worse than a glaze, particularly in mixtures of lead white. The reason for this has to do with the oil separating from the pigment and migrating to the surface of the paint film as it dries and discolors. Hence, blue would often be applied in thin glazes, which had the added benefit of reducing the amount of pigment needed. The downside of this solution is that glazes generate a rough texture, which is not always desirable. Another solution is to reduce the acidity of the oil. The essential ingredient in drying oil is called linoleic acid, which is what makes the oil oxidize. It is also the thing that turns yellow. Since walnut oil has less linoleic acid than linseed oil, it is paler and a preferable binder for cooler colors. The acidity of walnut oil can be diluted even further by mixing it with non-drying oils, like poppy oil.

Since the invention of ultramarine blue, which is a synthetic version of lapis lazuli, artists no longer have any difficulty finding blue pigment, but we still have to grapple with the same old problem of yellowing. Since I wanted the blue drapery in my painting of *Judith and Holofernes* to be as blue as possible, I ground my own ultramarine blue in walnut oil and mixed it with a white that I also ground myself, consisting of titanium and lead white in walnut oil. Titanium is a modern pigment, which is whiter and more opaque than lead white, and it also has cool undertones, which is ideal for mixing cool colors. The downside of titanium is that it does not dry, which is why I mixed it with lead. I also used sun-thickened walnut oil sparingly as a medium. Fortunately, my efforts were not in vain, as the blue drapery has remained clear and bright over time.

Figure 10

10. *Pietà*
    Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
    27" x 33"

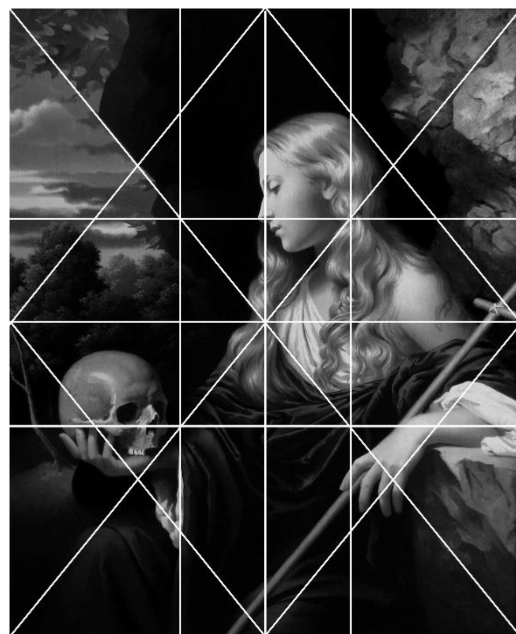
The subject of the Pietà naturally brings to mind Michelangelo's sculpture in St. Peter's Basilica, though he was not the first to attempt a Pietà, nor was he by any means the last. The subject of the Blessed Virgin holding the dead Christ originated in Germany around 1300, and although it was some years before it was imported to Italy, Michelangelo's sculpture was preceded by a painting by Domenico Ghirlandaio. After Michelangelo, the subject of the Pietà became wildly popular. Indeed, there are so many versions both painted and sculpted as to make it extremely difficult to invent a novel arrangement, the best ideas having already been taken. I first turned for inspiration to Baroque paintings by Annibale Carracci, Anthony van Dyck, and Charles Lebrun, as well as a few works which are less well-known by the Caravaggisti Daniele Crespi and Baciccio, though it was not until I came across a pen and ink drawing by Rubens of Venus mourning the dead Adonis that I discovered the kernel of an idea that I could build upon. By happenstance, the posture of Rubens' Adonis is almost the same as Michelangelo's Adam in the Creation of Man, flipped and rotated ninety degrees, a correlation which in my painting assumes a typological significance. Christ being the new Adam, I designed the limp arm to resemble Adam's, no doubt the most famous in art history. As for the Virgin and the cherubs, I found inspiration in paintings by William Bouguereau and Carlo Dolci. I chose to include two winged cherubs in order to allude to the cherubim atop of the Ark of the Covenant, a type of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the Ark of the New Covenant. This allusion is augmented by the coloring, the dominant notes being gold and blue, corresponding to the gilded surface and blue veil of the Ark.

Below Left: *Venus Mourning the Dead Adonis* by Peter Paul Rubens, 1612. Below Right: *Pietà* by Annibale Carracci, 1600

Figure 11

11. *Penitent Magdalene*
    Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel
    27" x 33"

My painting of the *Penitent Magdalene* was inspired by a portrait of a boy dressed as a shepherd by Sir Peter Lely, though my original intent had been to imitate Titian's superlative depiction of this subject in the Palazzo Pitti, a painting of ravishing locks of golden hair such as a painter can only dream of rivaling but with a surprisingly clumsy face, which could easily be improved upon. Titian depicts Mary Magdalene naked and in a barren wilderness recalling the Egyptian desert in which Mary of Egypt lived a life of penance, though there is another tradition, possibly historical, which places Mary Magdalene's monastic retreat in France. I decided to depict her in a state not quite so bereft in a plausibly French wilderness, with foliage and greenery on one side of the painting to balance the bare rocks on the right. Death's face is grouped with symbols of spring, because the Christian finds hope in death. Meanwhile, the cross leans against the rocks, as a symbol of the travails of this life.



Within a small margin of error, the proportions of 27" x 33" are identical to Titian's *Penitent Magdalene*, and as a matter of fact the same proportions occur in Correggio's *Adoration of the Child*, mentioned above. This was a standard size in Italian Renaissance painting, which I like to use in my own work. The ratio of 27 to 33 is about 1 to the square root of 1.5, a proportion which was preferred because it worked well with the compositional armature used by Italian Renaissance painters. For this painting, I used a simplified armature consisting of halves, thirds, and diagonals, as shown in the diagram.

Below Left: *A Boy as a Shepherd* by Sir Peter Lely, 1660
Below Right: *Penitent Magdalene* by Titian, 1533

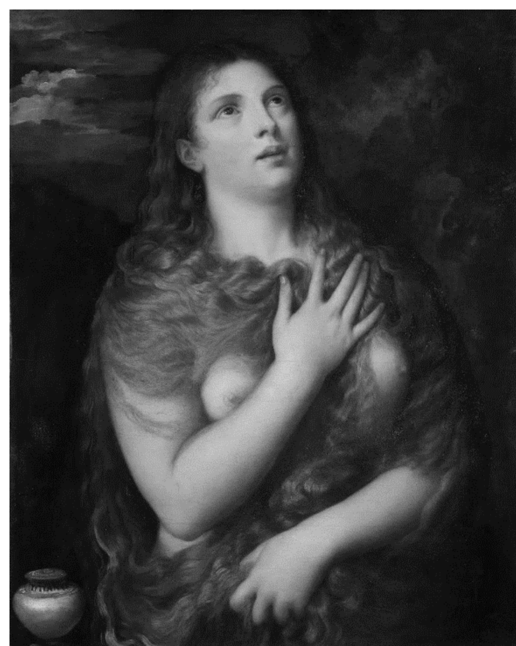
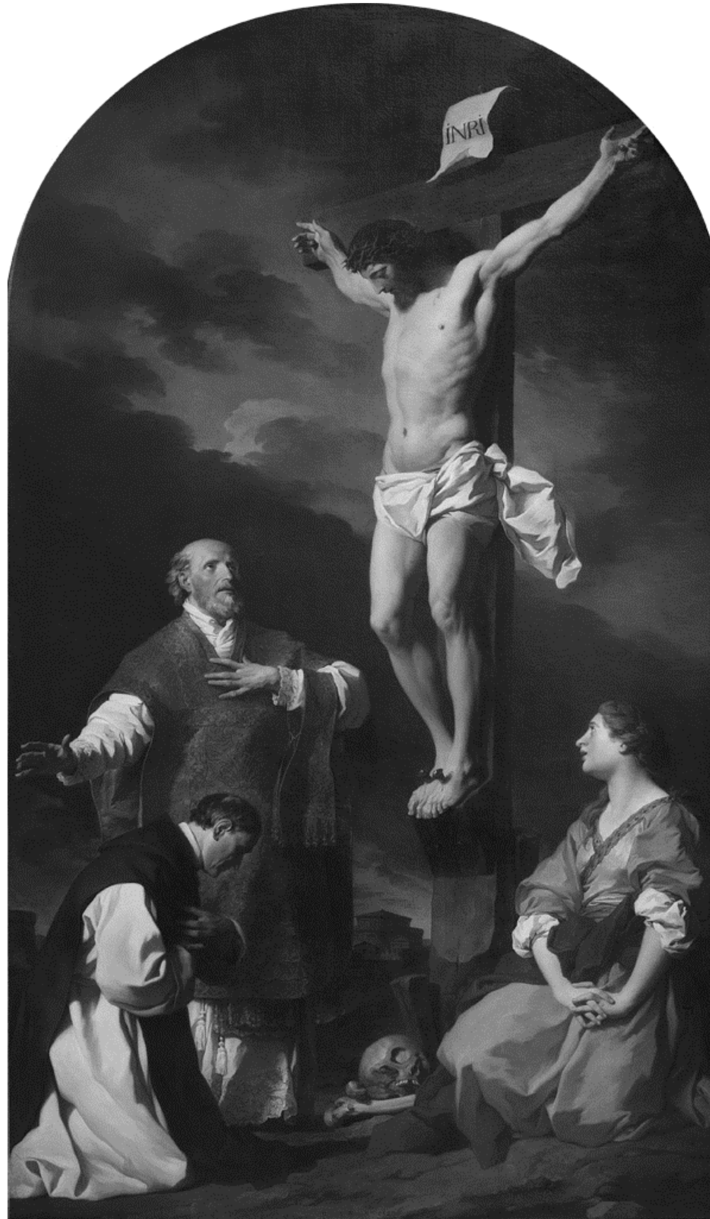


Figure 12

12. *The Crucifixion*
    Oil on canvas mounted on wood panel
    15" x 20"

The primary inspiration for my version of the Crucifixion was an altarpiece by the 18th century French painter and longtime denizen of Rome Pierre Subleyras, the *Crucifixion with St. Mary Magdalene, St. Eusebius, and St. Philip Neri*, which can be found in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan. I used a similar three-quarter view of Christ on the Cross while making a variety of changes to the design of the figure, mostly to make the anatomical construction more robust. My representation of the Magdalene also has certain obvious similarities to Subleyras's painting as do the clouds, while the figures of the Blessed Virgin and St. John derive from other, more obscure sources.



Above: *Crucifixion with St. Mary Magdalene, St. Eusebius, and St. Philip Neri* by Pierre Subleyras, 1744

Figure 13

13. *The Virgin and Child*
    Oil on panel
    11" x 14"

For *The Virgin and Child*, I turned for inspiration to works by Anthony van Dyck and Leonardo da Vinci. The pose of the Christ Child is similar to one recurrent in paintings by Leonardo and his studio, and the blue drapery across the Virgin's lap is also adapted from a famous drapery study by Leonardo. In other respects, the painting is modeled on *The Virgin and Child with St. Catherine of Alexandria* painted ca. 1630 by van Dyck in the Metropolitan.

Images of the Virgin and Child are often designed in dialogue with the Pietà. The Virgin not only holds the Christ Child but presents Him, as if to place Him upon the altar. She sits on a roughly hewn stone in a garden, as if at the tomb in which Christ's Body was laid. I have given both of them unnaturally pale skin, suggestive of Christ's death and of the purity of His sacrifice, like a spotless lamb.

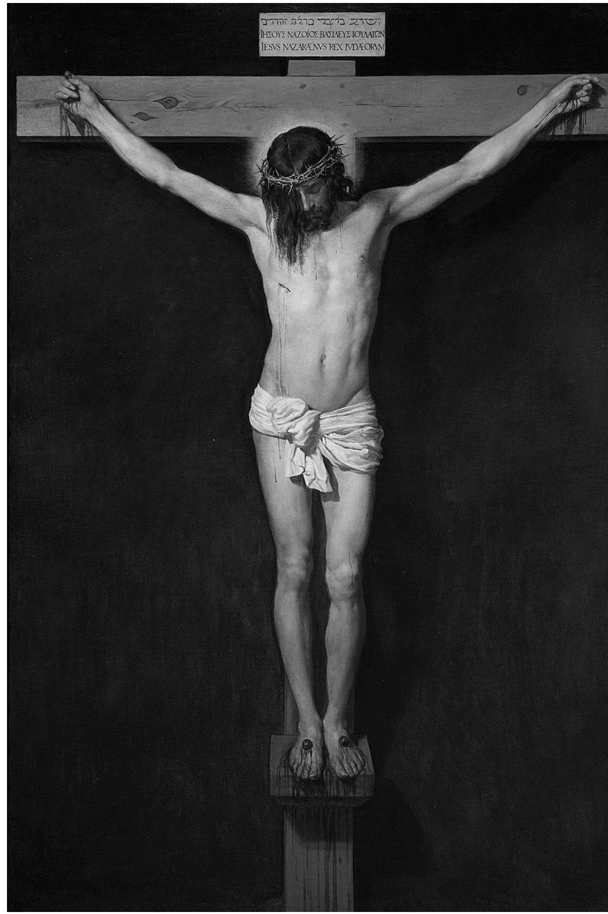
Left: *Virgin and Child with St. Catherine of Alexandria* by Anthony van Dyck, ca. 1630

Below Left: *Madonna Litta*, by Leonardo da Vinci, ca. 1490

Figure 14

14. *Christ Crucified*
    Oil on panel
    12" x 16"

The composition of *Christ Crucified* is based on Diego Velázquez's painting which goes by the same title of 1632 in the Prado, which has a simple black background and frontal view. Departing from Velázquez's version, I then turned to primitive paintings of the Crucifixion by Cimabue, introducing a significant contrapposto into Christ's pose and rendering the figure with less naturalistic, more idealized anatomy.



Left: *Christ Crucified* by Diego Velázquez, 1632

Below Left: *Crucifix* by Cimabue, ca. 1265

Figure 15

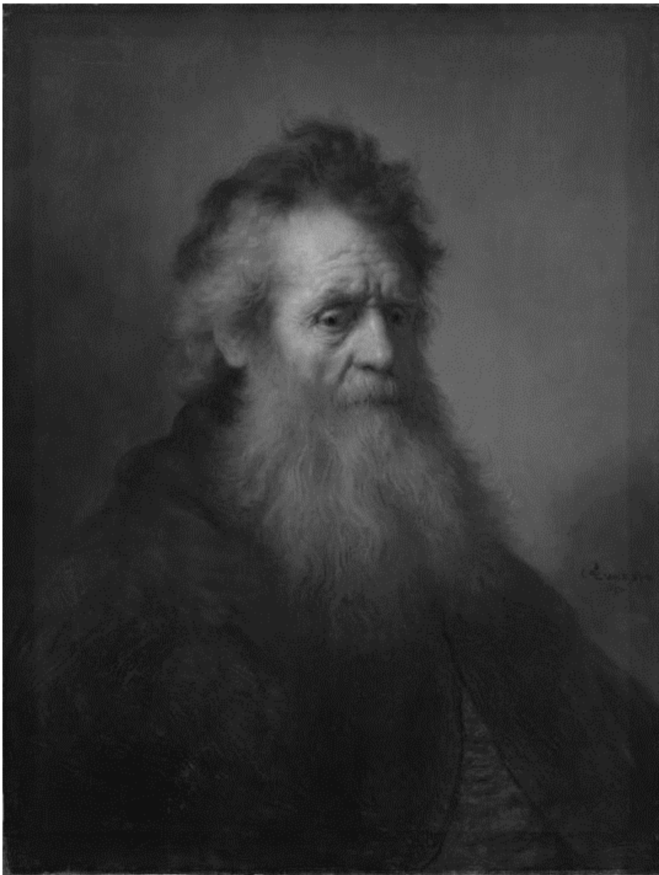
PORTRAITS

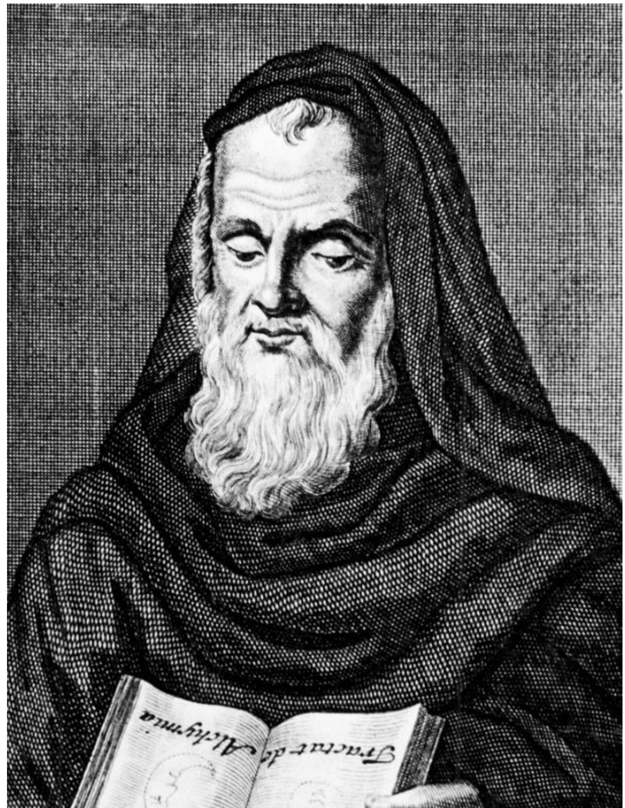
Most of the portraits included in this exhibition are what historians of the Dutch Golden Age might call a *tronie*, a character type painted from imagination. There is one formal portrait of an actual person, and there are also a couple which are painted from models, but the rest are idealized types. Most of my portraits are also based on famous examples of portraiture from art history, such as the *Mona Lisa* and Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* to say nothing of works by Titian and Rembrandt.

15. *Friar Roger Bacon*
    Oil on panel
    18" x 24"

My portrait of Roger Bacon, a 13th century Franciscan theologian and philosopher, is based on a *tronie* by Rembrandt van Rijn on display at the Fogg Museum. The face is obviously different, but the composition is very similar. I chose to paint a Franciscan Friar, minus the tonsure, because the Franciscan habit is vaguely similar to the clothing in Rembrandt's painting, and I also wanted to make a painting specifically of Roger Bacon in recognition of the pivotal role which he and other Franciscans played in launching the Italian Renaissance. I did my best to reproduce Rembrandt's technique. The particular painting which I used as my guide was done in 1632 and so belongs to the beginning of Rembrandt's career, when his methods were still relatively conventional. Working on panel, I began with an umber wash drawing, and I used a limited palette of earth colors throughout, using the transparency and opacity of the paint to create variations of color, just as Rembrandt would. Raw umber accounts for about ninety percent of the picture, from the brilliant ruddy browns of the Franciscan habit, which are achieved by glazing raw umber, to the grayish browns in the background, achieved by scumbling a mixture of raw umber and lead white. A glaze is a semi-transparent application of darker paint over a lighter ground, while a scumble is a lighter mixture over a darker ground. Glazes extend the range of a limited palette by making the color brighter and warmer, while scumbles do the same by making the color grayer and cooler. I didn't manage to preserve as much transparency as Rembrandt's painting has, since I had to make too many corrections, and my style is a bit heavy-handed in comparison to the jaw-dropping virtuosity of an autograph Rembrandt, but the result is worthy of Rembrandt's studio, I think, be it the hand of Nicolaes Maes, Gerard Dou, or Ferdinand Bol.

Since we don't strictly know what Roger Bacon looked like, my painting is based on a widely circulated portrait of Roger Bacon dating to the 18th century. As early as the 1260's, Bacon was among the very first to propose that churches should be decorated with naturalistic art the better to communicate the mysteries of the faith. The patronage which Giotto subsequently received from the Franciscans and the Dominicans was intended to do what Bacon had recommended. The mendicant orders were the original patrons of Renaissance art.





Left: *Portrait of an Old Man* by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1632

Above: *Sir Roger Bacon*, engraved by Johann Daniel Tauber, 1725

Below: Portrait of a Man with a Glove by Titian, ca. 1520

16. *Bertrand*
    Oil on canvas
    20" x 25"

Bertrand is the earliest painting in the exhibition, dating all the way back to 2010. It was inspired by Titian's portraits in the Musée du Louvre. After finishing my studies in Florence, I spent a year in Paris, mostly for the purpose of studying the collections in the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay. More or less everyday was spent in one museum or another, taking notes on color and composition and so forth, doing the occasional sketch, and then heading back to my studio in Bagnolet, a suburb of Paris, to do some painting. This portrait is of a Frenchman whose name was Bertrand, who was generous enough to sit for me and the two other artists with whom I was sharing the studio. Being tremendously impressed by the subtle variations of tone in Titian's *Portrait of a Man with a Glove*, I tried to reproduce a similar tonal scheme in my portrait of Bertrand. There is a story about Titian, which my teacher John Angel liked to repeat, that a student once marveled at the variety of Titian's blacks and asked the master how he achieved such subtleties, to which Titian replied, "With

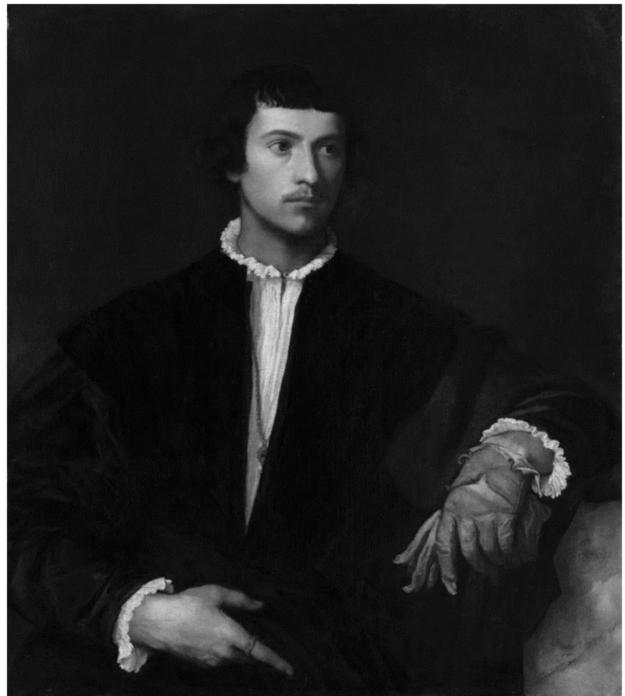


Figure 16

brains, my boy, with brains!" Judging from my own experience of painting *Bertrand*, I would have to say that it has just as much to do with elbow grease, because it was a laborious business modeling the dark background, the black clothing, and the hair properly within such a narrow value range. Unfortunately, none of this variation could be captured in the photograph. Unlike most of my paintings which are keyed for typical indoor lighting, *Bertrand* has to be seen under a bright natural light to bring out the variations in the darks.

Figure 17

17. *La Fiorentina*
    Oil on panel
    12" x 16"

La Fiorentina follows a type found in the works of Raphael and Andrea del Sarto based on Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Raphael and del Sarto adopted the pose of the *Mona Lisa* in several different paintings but in most cases replaced Leonardo's landscape with a dark background, and for Leonardo's murky coloring they substituted stark local colors in the usual Florentine manner. The color scheme of my painting is taken from del Sarto, who used a slightly purple blue backdrop against a pale red drape in several paintings of the Blessed Virgin Mary, including altarpieces of the Annunciation and the Assumption which are now in the Palazzo Pitti. The character of the face is particularly indebted to Raphael, while the deep shadows and sfumato are of course indebted to Leonardo.

The cropping of *La Fiorentina* is a little tight, because it was originally going to be a study for a larger, half-length painting including hands and torso following Leonardo's convention. I have not gotten around to doing this yet, but I will be returning to it in the future.

Left: *Portrait of a Woman* by Andrea del Sarto, 1514

Below Left: *Portrait of a Woman* by Raphael, 1507

Figure 18

18. *Portrait of a Woman with a Pearl Earring*
    Oil on canvas
    14" x 20"

This portrait is obviously a nod to Vermeer's famous *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. She wears similar clothing and of course the requisite pearl. The most conspicuous difference is that my portrait is in profile. Vermeer's use of the three-quarter portrait was the culmination of a tradition of female portraiture begun by Leonardo da Vinci. In the early Renaissance of the quattrocento, most portraits were painted in profile, but in search of a greater sense of life and movement, Leonardo began to paint portraits at an angle, and it was not long before the profile fell almost entirely out of the portraitist's repertoire. It was only in the 19th century that the profile portrait really came back into vogue, and so the style of my painting straddles three different eras, from the early Renaissance to the Dutch Golden Age to the 19th century.

Figure 19

19. *Portrait of a Woman*
    Oil on canvas
    14" x 20"

The inspiration behind this profile portrait is a striking *Portrait of a Girl* painted ca. 1880 by Frederic Leighton, which is similarly distinguished by a brilliant coif of ruddy blond hair. Leighton's deft, painterly handling of the hair puts my attempt at imitation to shame, but it is no great humiliation to fall somewhat short of so high a mark. Of the late 19th-century academicians, Leighton is easily my favorite, because his style is uniquely cosmopolitan. He trained first in Germany and then in Italy and finally in Paris. His work strongly reflects the influence of the Nazarene School in Germany, who invented a very elegant neo-Raphaelite style of painting. Eschewing the decadent virtuosity of the 18th century, the Nazarenes wanted to return to the simple purity of Renaissance painting, and for my money they succeeded. By the time that Leighton began his studies, many of the Nazarenes had become influential teachers in the

German academies. Although Leighton would not confine himself to religious subjects like the Nazarenes, the idealization of his form has all the hallmarks of the Nazarene school, augmented by other influences from Italy and France.

As a 19th-century-style painting, my *Portrait of a Young Woman* is complemented by an elegant 19th-century frame, from ca. 1875, which matches the picture perfectly.

Left: *A Portrait of a Girl* by Frederic Leighton, ca. 1880

Below: *The Soap Bubbles* by Charles Joshua Chaplin, 1881

20. *Portrait of a Young Woman*
    Oil on canvas
    16” x 20”

My third profile portrait was inspired by an 1881 portrait entitled *The Soap Bubbles* by Charles Joshua Chaplin, who specialized in decorative female portraits. I changed the cropping and reinvented the face, the hair, and the background while retaining the clothing and the pose from Chaplin’s painting. She is framed in a very delicate 19th-century American frame in beautiful condition, from ca. 1890.

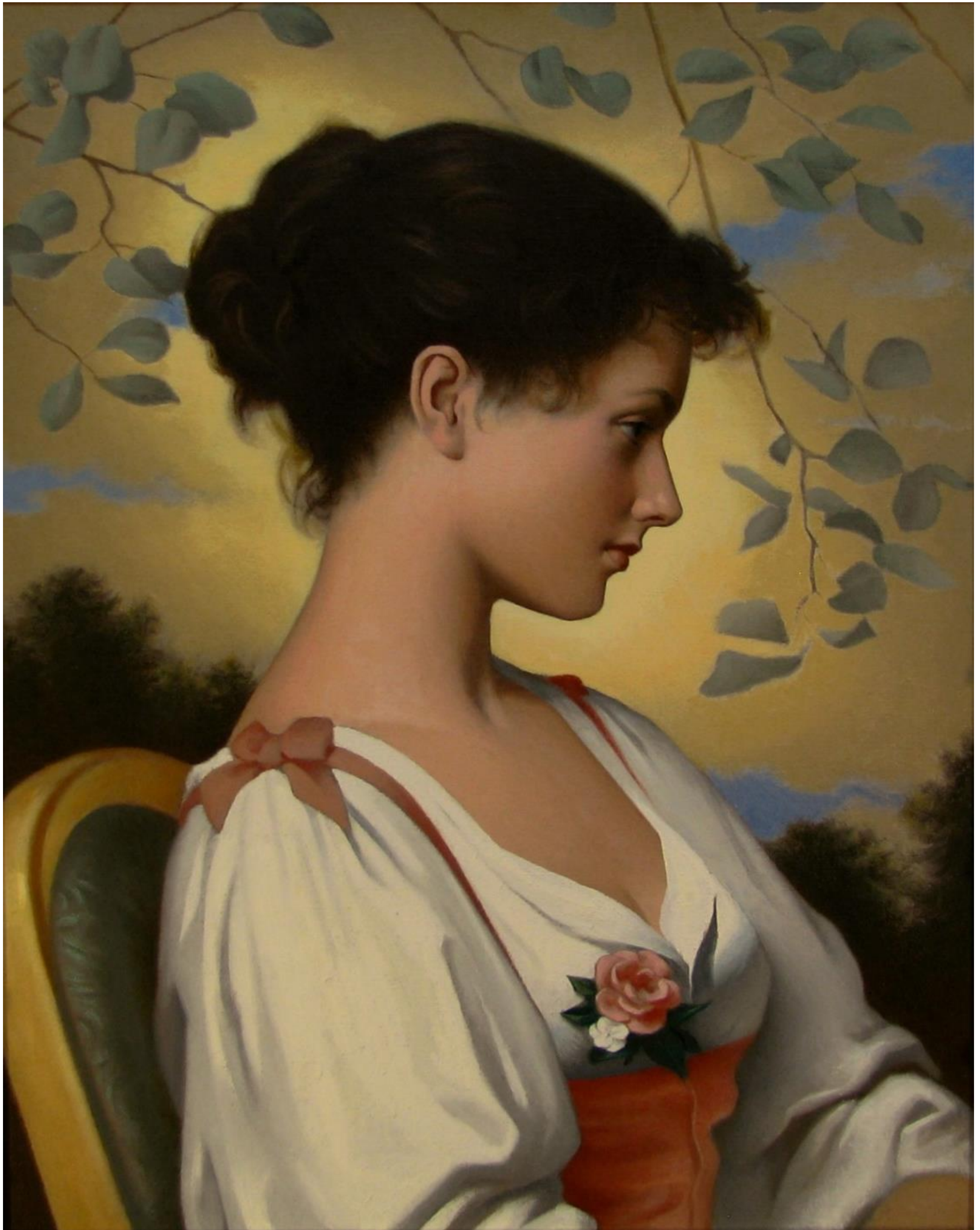


Figure 20

Figure 21

Right: *The White Hat* by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, ca. 1780

21. *The White Rose*
    Oil on canvas
    18" x 22"

The White Rose is based on a painting by Jean-Baptiste Greuze entitled *The White Hat*, ca. 1780, in the Boston MFA. The following is the description of *The White Hat* from the MFA's online catalogue:

> Although Greuze was commissioned to paint many portraits, it's unlikely that this painting depicts an actual person. The young woman, who appears at once innocent and seductive, is probably the product of the artist's imagination. Greuze has dressed her in the more natural, *déshabillé* ("undressed") fashion that was en vogue at the time. Queen Marie Antoinette began wearing white muslin dresses that did not require structural undergarments in the 1780s and after some initial scandal, this style became very popular.

My portrait is likewise painted from imagination, which was more challenging than it should have been. I started this painting all the way back in 2013, and after repainting it several times, I finally finished it this year. I initially copied the style of undress in Greuze's painting but ultimately decided against it. It's best to reserve gratuitous nudity for subjects that have some allegorical justification for it. The nudity in Greuze's painting works, because his style is not too realistic, and at first I tried to make my own painting look quite a bit more idealized, but the best solution in the end was to make her look like a real person. The painting is appropriately framed in an 18th-century French style, in a reproduction Louis XV frame with an oval liner.

Figure 22

22. *Urania*
    Oil on canvas
    15" x 20"

Urania draws on both Florentine and Venetian traditions. The pose and headdress were inspired by the *Garvagh Madonna* by Raphael in the National Gallery in London. The exposed shoulder and hair are an allusion to Titian's painting of *Flora* in the Uffizi Gallery. The painting is also inspired by 17th century Florentine paintings, for example by Francesco Furini, who painted similar decorative images of beautiful young women. This painting was intended to be more idealized and have the soft atmosphere of Furini's paintings, but unfortunately this did not work out. Like *The White Rose* I had to settle for a simpler, more naturalistic solution. The title *Urania* refers to the Muse of Astronomy, who typically wears blue and white and is often pointing to a globe and holding a compass. I decided not to include these accoutrements and instead used a glistening strand of pearls to suggest her connection to the celestial bodies.

Right: *Garvagh Madonna* by Raphael, 1511

Below Right: *Flora* by Titian, 1517

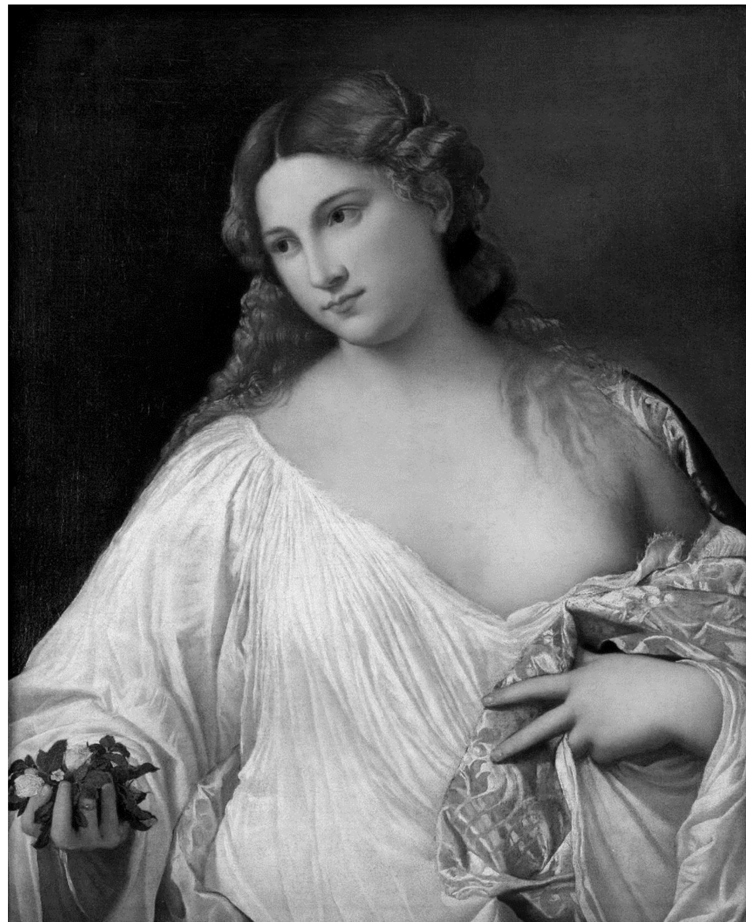


Figure 23

23. *Julianne*
    Oil on panel
    12" x 16"

Unlike most of my female portraits, *Julianne* is in fact of a real person, as opposed to an idealized type. I painted her as a study, with the intention of introducing her face into what is otherwise a copy of a painting by William Bouguereau. I think that my head-study turned out better than the copy, though both are a success.

24. *Rêverie*
    Oil on panel
    18" x 24"

Figure 24

Most of this painting is copied directly from William Bouguereau's *Première rêverie* (First Reverie), also known as *Whisperings of Love*. Bouguereau's painting was completed in 1889 and can be found at the New Orleans Museum of Art, which I visited several years ago. Besides the cropping and the scale, the primary differences between my painting and Bouguereau's are the cupid, which I chose to discard, and the head, which I repainted entirely using my own portrait of Julianne as a model. I wanted to include at least one homage to Bouguereau in the exhibition, given his importance to the atelier movement.

25. *Lauren Chase Eastman*
    Oil on canvas
    25" x 30"

This portrait depicts one of the founders of the Lauren Rogers Museum in Laurel, Mississippi. He was the grandfather of the museum's namesake, Lauren Eastman Rogers, who died tragically in 1921 at the age of 23. In addition to endowing the museum, Eastman also donated his own private collection of 19th- and early 20th-century paintings, which still comprises the core of the museum's collection. I have a personal connection to the Lauren Rogers Museum, because my father's family hails from Jones County in Mississippi and my mother also happens to work there. The portrait is being donated to the museum. The accompanying photograph of Lauren Chase Eastman, which is in the public domain, is what I had to work from.

Figure 25

Lauren, as a young boy, with his grandfather, Lauren Chase Eastman, circa 1910

Figure 26

26. John Singleton Copley
    Oil on canvas
    13" x 14"

This is a copy of a self-portrait by John Singleton Copley, which can be found in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. I painted it on the occasion of a lecture that I gave on Copley's life in 2019 here at the Copley Society.

LANDSCAPES

My landscape paintings are done in two different styles. One style is modeled after Italianate landscape paintings by 17th century Dutch masters, while the other derives from the American tradition of landscape painting, particularly the Hudson River School.

The tradition of Italianate landscape painting dates back to the Renaissance but only fully blossomed as a genre in the 17th century in the works of Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin, who used classical myths and biblical stories as an occasion to paint elaborate idealized vistas of the Italian countryside. Dutch painters contemporary with Lorraine and Poussin were inspired to do the same and imported the tradition to Holland, whose flat terrain made the rolling hills of Italy an exotic sight to behold. Italianate landscape painting thus became a cosmopolitan genre par excellence, hailing from Italy, perfected by the French, and appropriated by the Dutch. My paintings look to the leading Dutch representatives of this tradition for inspiration, including Jan Both, Nicolaes Berchem, and Adam Pynacker among others. With one exception, my Italianate landscapes are original compositions, though all of the elements of which they are composed are direct quotations from other paintings, which I used as visual references. Since my purpose was to master a particular manner, I avoided reference to nature the better to imitate art. To complete the effect, my Italianate landscapes are suitably framed in a Dutch style, courtesy of Guido Frames.

American landscape painting is obviously a much more recent tradition, dating back to the 19th century. In the footsteps of John Constable and J.M.W. Turner who made of the English countryside what Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin had made of Italy's, painters of the Hudson River School from Thomas Cole to Thomas Moran transformed the American landscape into a subject to rival history painting by creating monumental canvases of majestic American vistas. My landscapes are of a much more modest scope than the standard fair of the Hudson River School, but they are in a related style and depict scenes from across the continental United States. From a sunrise over Plum Island to a stream off Mt. Chocorua, a country road in Blue Ridge, North Carolina, a Mississippi cotton field, the Rocky Mountains, and the Grand Canyon, my subject-matter is drawn from many of the same locations painted by great American landscape painters. I also include two views of the English Lake District. My method of composing these landscapes was quite different from my Italianate landscapes. Since the American tradition is much more naturalistic than the Dutch, I freely resorted to nature as well as to art, and with one or two exceptions I avoided direct quotations from other paintings. For my larger American landscapes, I selected some beautiful antique frames dating to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while my smaller American landscapes are in gilded frames which I am pleased to have made myself.

27. *Shepherdess Milking a Goat*
    Oil on canvas
    16" x 20"

This was the first Italianate Landscape that I attempted between 2014 and 2015. It was intended to be a study of a

Figure 27

beautiful painting of the same name by Nicolaes Berchem in the Louvre, which captured my attention from the first moment I saw it. Berchem's painting is quite a bit larger than my humble imitation at about a meter tall, and the proportions of it are more square. Berchem's original includes almost everything except for the figures and animals in the foreground, which I took from other sources, just to change up the composition.

Figure 28

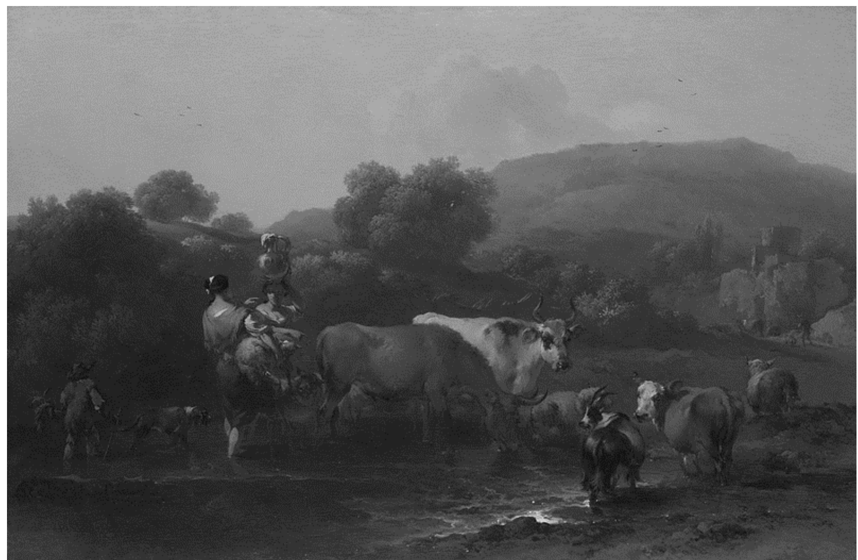
28. *The Flight to Egypt*
    Oil on canvas
    13" x 17"

Of my Italianate landscapes, *The Flight to Egypt* is perhaps the most original. The waterfall coursing through the rock was loosely drawn from a painting by Jan Both, as were the mountains in the distance, while the birch tree on the left was inspired by a famous painting by Adam Pynacker. The figures of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the distance on the road to Egypt allude to a painting by Giorgione.

Figure 29

29. *The Watering Hole*
    Oil on canvas
    17" x 12"

The Watering Hole is based on a painting by Nicolaes Berchem in the National Gallery in London, entitled *Peasants with Cattle Fording a Stream*. Using Berchem's painting as a foundation, I made substantial changes to the composition, increasing the movement of tone in the sky, adding trees on the left, and replacing almost all of the figures and animals. The central group of a woman sitting on a donkey and giving a treat to a dog I took from a popular print which was designed by Berchem.



Right: *Peasants with Cattle Fording a Stream* by Nicolaes Berchem, ca. 1670's

Figure 30

30. *Waterfall and Wending Road by a Riverbank*
    Oil on canvas
    20" x 16"

This is based on a painting by Adam Pynacker, entitled *An Italianate Landscape with a Traveler on a Path*. The cliff and waterfall as well as the trees in the center are adapted from Pynacker's painting, while the rest of the picture has been redesigned, including the road, the trees and vegetation on the left, the river, and the mountain in the distance. The color of the well-worn road is characteristic of Tuscany, whose clay soil is rich in yellow ochre, shades of which appear on almost all of the buildings.

Painting this picture reminded me of my time in Italy. As a student in Florence, I particularly enjoyed going for a jog along the Arno and into the countryside. It never took very long for the city to recede from view behind the hills, since medieval cities like Florence are built on a human scale and designed to meld seamlessly into the natural environment. At the same time, nothing of the Italian countryside feels entirely wild, the way that forests often do in the United States. All of Tuscany is a garden extending as far as the eye can see.

Figure 31

31. *Mountaintop Vista*
    Oil on canvas
    18" x 15"

Mountaintop Vista is a variation on a painting entitled *Mountain Landscape* by the French rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard. In the 1760's, Fragonard made a series of Italianate landscapes inspired much like my own by the works of Nicolaes Berchem in the Louvre. I copied Fragonard's composition with just a few alterations. I transformed the rocky outcropping in the middle ground into a medieval ruin, and I also adjusted the design of the trees to give them more shape as well as to interject a quotation from Berchem. The tree that hangs over the middle of the picture is very similar to one that appears prominently in one of Berchem's most important paintings in the Louvre, of which Fragonard incidentally made a master-copy.

Figure 32

32. *Stream off Mount Chocorua*
    Oil on panel
    16" x 20"

Mount Chocorua was a very popular subject of Hudson River School painters, especially Thomas Cole, who painted it several times. There are a few streams around the mountain, though this scene is made up from imagination, because I wanted the stream set in a more open field as it might have looked in the 19th century when the forests in New Hampshire were not quite so overgrown.

Figure 33

33. *A Pinyon Pine Overlooking the Grand Canyon*
    Oil on panel
    16" x 20"

This is an imaginary depiction of the Grand Canyon, inspired by Thomas Moran's pictures of the same subject. I also tried to draw on my own photographs and memories of the park, which I visited when I was a child. Hiking down into the Canyon in the middle of July was a memorable experience and one of many life-threatening adventures that I've had with my father.

Figure 34

34. *Lake George*
    Oil on panel
    20" x 16"

Lake George in Upstate New York was another popular subject of Hudson River School painters, including John Frederick Kensett and Jasper Cropsey. My composition is based on a couple paintings by Cropsey, as well as photographic references. Cropsey did a similar picture of Lake Greenwood but on a smaller scale and with more elongated proportions, as well as cattle in the foreground. I am delighted to have found a beautiful period frame for this painting, from ca. 1880, which is in almost perfect condition.

Above: *Greenwood Lake* by Jasper Cropsey, 1873

Figure 35

35. *Sunrise over Plum Island*
    Oil on panel
    20" x 16"

Growing up as I did here in Massachusetts, one of my fonder memories from childhood is of bicycling early in the morning along the coast near Newburyport and watching the sunrise over Plum Island. This painting is my best attempt at reconstructing this memory, with a little help from some American seascape paintings in the Boston MFA and photographs of clouds.

Figure 36

36. *Pilot Mountain*
Oil on canvas
20" x 16"

Above: View of Pilot Mountain

Pilot Mountain is located about 20 miles northwest of Winston-Salem in North Carolina. This particular painting has a familial connection, since my mother grew up in the vicinity, in Greensboro, and my great-grandparents also had a home in Winston-Salem. The stream that I've painted is an imaginary scene base d on my mother's memories of a park where her family used to have picnics.

Figure 37

37. *Lake Windermere*
    Oil on panel
    20" x 16"

This painting was made with reference to photographs of Lake Windermere, the largest lake in England and the heart of the Lake District, home to the Lake Poets, including William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. Wordsworth wrote a number of poems about Windermere, including one entitled Winander (Windermere being an abbreviation of Winander Mere):

MIDWAY on long Winander's eastern shore,
Within the crescent of a pleasant bay,
A tavern stood; no homely-featured house,
Primeval like its neighboring cottages,
But 't was a splendid place, the door beset
With chaises, grooms, and liveries, and within
Decanters, glasses, and the blood-red wine.
In ancient times, and ere the hall was built
On the large island, had this dwelling been
More worthy of a poet's love, a hut,
Proud of its own bright fire and sycamore shade.
But, though the rhymes were gone that once inscribed
The threshold, and large golden characters,
Spread o'er the spangled sign-board, had dislodged
The old Lion and usurped his place, in slight
And mockery of the rustic painter's hand,
Yet, to this hour, the spot to me is dear,
With all its foolish pomp. The garden lay
Upon a slope surmounted by a plain
Of a small bowling-green; beneath us stood

Figure 38

A grove, with gleams of water through the trees
And over the tree-tops; nor did we want
Refreshment, strawberries and mellow cream.
There, while through half an afternoon we played
On the smooth platform, whether skill prevailed
Or happy blunder triumphed, bursts of glee
Made all the mountains ring. But ere nightfall,
When in our pinnace we returned at leisure
Over the shadowy lake, and to the beach
Of some small island steered our course with one,
The minstrel of the troop, and left him there,
And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute
Alone upon the rock,—O, then the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream!

38. *Country Road in the Blue Ridge Mountains*
Oil on panel
16" x 12"

This autumn scene set in Appalachia was painted from imagination, with some help from photographic references of trees. In this painting as in all of my landscapes done in an American style, there are no animals or people to liven up the space. Though unconventional, my decision to make these landscapes barren of all animal life was motivated by a couple considerations. I didn't want any people in them, because antiquated clothing would look artificial and modern clothing would upset the timelessness of these scenes. As for animal life, I seriously considered including some deer

Figure 39

and birds and so forth, but I found that the contemplative mood I was going for was better served by their absence. There is a thought-provoking stillness in these paintings. The frenetic movement of life is brought to a halt, and the noise is silenced, which never happens without reason. What has stopped the birds from singing? What keeps the groundhog in his hole? Is there a storm approaching? Could it be a predator, lurking on the periphery? An earthquake? A fire, perhaps? No, I can detect no imminent calamity in these landscapes. There is just the still small voice of the wind.

39. *Mississippi Cotton Field*
    Oil on panel
    16" x 12"

My father's family being from Mississippi, I could hardly fail to do a painting of the deep South, of which nothing could be more representative than a cotton field. This is what a cotton field would look like around early November.

Figure 40

40. *Sunset over Lone Cone, Colorado*
    Oil on panel
    16" x 12"

Although the mountain in this painting doesn't have exactly the same shape as Lone Cone, it is intended to be a picture of the Rockies. Lone Cone is one peak in the Rockies which happens to stand alone and is also surrounded by meadows, not unlike what I have invented in my painting.

Right: Meadows at Lone Cone Mountain, Colorado

Figure 41

41. *Cobblestone Road, the English Lake District*
    Oil on panel
    16" x 12"

For this painting I actually had a good photographic reference for once, which I augmented by inventing a cobblestone road and making the clouds a bit more dynamic. The ruddy brown patches on the ground are ferns, which are all over the Lake District and turn red in winter. Speaking of the ferns that grow in the Lake District, Wordsworth wrote in his poem *Point Rash Judgment* from *Poems on the Naming of Places* published in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800):

> Many such there are,
> Fair Ferns and Flowers, and chiefly that tall Fern
> So stately, of the Queen Osmunda named;
> Plant lovelier, in its own retired abode,
> On Grasmere's beach, than Naiad by the side
> Of Grecian brook, or Lady of the Mere,
> Sole-sitting by the shores of old romance.

In July of 1800, Coleridge likewise observed in one of his notebooks, "An eminently beautiful Object is Fern, on a hill side, scattered thick but growing single – and all shaking themselves in the wind."

Figure 42

42. *The Ridgeway*
    Oil on panel
    16" x 12"

This is an imaginary view from one of the oldest existing roads in England, the Ridgeway, which dates back 5,000 years. The view from Ivinghoe Beacon, where the Ridgeway begins, is very similar to this, though there are not so many trees there anymore. In antiquity, roads tended to pass along the tops of ridges and low lying hills, where weathering made the ground naturally hard and unlikely to collect water.

Above: View from Ivinghoe Beacon

Figure 43

ACADEMIC STUDIES

The exhibition concludes with two drawings which I did as a student at the Angel Academy and which represent the bread and butter of academic training. One is a figure drawing done from life, and the other is a cast drawing. In Alberti's treatise *On Painting*, only two subjects are recommended to the student who would learn how to draw, either nature herself or statues in the round, and academic training has always followed this advice to the letter. Drawing from life became so closely associated with the academies that drawings of the nude figure came to be known as *académies* in French, and even today cast drawings have become a distinguishing feature of the new ateliers.

43. *Académie d'Homme*
    Graphite on paper
    10" x 20"

44. *Cast Drawing of Michelangelo's Giuliano de' Medici*
    Charcoal on paper
    22" x 32"

Figure 44

Self-Portrait of the Artist, 2010

ABOUT THE ARTIST

I grew up on the North Shore in Boxford, Massachusetts. I had an interest in the fine arts from a very young age, but I didn't imagine that I would become an artist, since I wasn't aware at the time of any schools that offered a classical education in drawing and painting. So, I went to the University of Chicago and got myself a degree in another childhood interest, namely in Egyptology. It was in the course of my studies at Chicago that I discovered the Angel Academy, and at the first opportunity I headed across the pond to Italy to study with John Angel and Jared Woznicki. Although I had a lot to learn in a very short period of time, their instruction was sufficient to make all of the work that I've done since then possible.