

My compulsion to create art has always been just that; a compulsion. Infinitely nervous from birth, creating art began as a way to mitigate my never-ending worry. In drawing, I find control that I'm constantly searching for.

The 'Mask' series of drawings represents many questions that I've likely been looking to answer all my life. Charles Bargue and Jean-Léon Gérôme's drawing course holds the promise of attainable perfection over my head, and marks the beginning of this journey. The idea that one can learn to draw by following the drawing plates in sequential order is tantalizingly simple. The casts that the artists replicated in the plates hold a similar mystique. The plaster casts that Bargue illustrated 'paused' life for the benefit of the person studying them. Capturing a moment, pose, or simple gesture seems so straightforward, but there is something else there, too. After completing a handful of Bargue plates, narcissism and existential dread drove me to cast myself in plaster.

I've cast a version of myself that I can only liken to a photograph; I am wearing a mask similar to the one we show on social media. I've captured a facet of myself that has been unintentionally idealized— devoid of age, concern, or pain. The plaster version of Julia Cangiano is eternally 28 years old. Chin tilted up, eyes sealed shut, mouth relaxed, and expression neutral, plaster Julia is the picture of calm. If you re-read the introduction of my artist statement, you'll see that plaster Julia is the antithesis of living, breathing Julia. Are they that different? Is my likeness reduced to still life? Is my still life also a likeness? Can we make life all that still, anyway? I don't have the answers, but I suppose that's the point.