

Finding the Light

By

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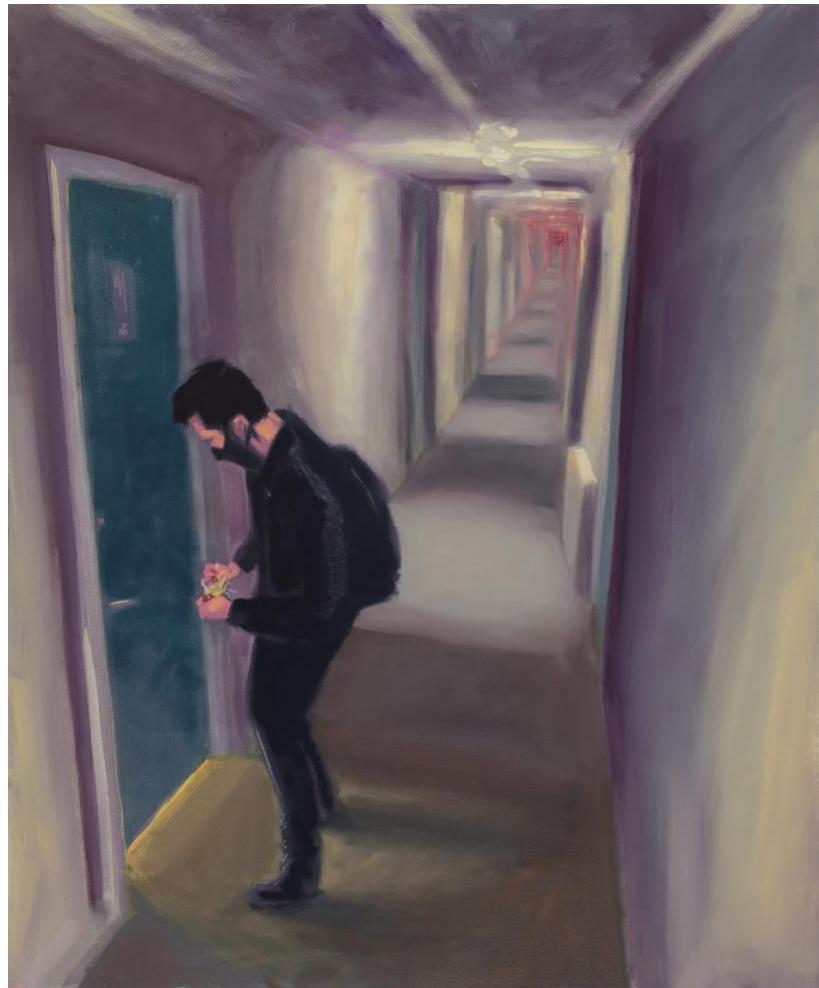
In Finding the Light, painting is a time-based media. It is a strategy of searching for meaning and hope in the rituals and memories of my daily life. Through the practice of painting, I examine and maintain connections to my chosen family even when space and time keeps us apart. The process of constructing these paintings involves the collection and collaging together of pictorial references from videos, photographs, drawings, and my own memory, all of which have varying degrees of clarity. I excavate these often blurred, dim, or dull images to find the light that is already there.

Introduction

I make large paintings of small everyday moments. These paintings tell stories and ask questions that structure my research and guide my practice. What does it mean to live together in a world that feels increasingly fragmented? How do we find value in our daily life in the face of constant change or threats of annihilation? How might we start to imagine a better future by training ourselves through slow looking? By depicting domestic scenes in saturated color, I wish to show that sentimentality and nostalgia, traits that conflict with common understandings of masculinity, can harbor strength and connect us to others. When my paintings of everyday routines reveal their construction by foregrounding the painting process, they begin to reflect the precarity of our present reality. I use painting to engage, understand, and appreciate the time and space in which I exist.

Flickering

In Elisa Gabbert's essay, *The Little Room (or the Unreality of Memory)*, she describes how our memory of a place, or an event is not fixed, rather, it changes depending on several factors that include distance, time, and the one doing the remembering. Memory is itself a construction and there are even moments when all versions of a given memory seem to be true. Gabbert writes: "You could say the story is about unreliable memory, the ultimate unknowability of the past, the impossibility of securing a single version of the truth. But it...belongs to two realities. You don't know which reality you're in until you open the door." (Gabbert, 111)



Searching for the key, oil on canvas, 36.5 x 30 inches, 2022-24

Searching for the key

A new apartment in a new town. Every door looks the same as mine. I started grad school while wearing a mask. I have always appreciated being home, but this is different. When I go home and remove my mask, only Harvey is there to see my face and he doesn't seem to mind if I am wearing a mask or not. He always knows it's me. This apartment is our sanctuary. But Harv will be ready to go outside.



Harv: time for smells, oil on canvas, 36.5 x 30 inches, 2022-24

Harv: time for smells

I remove my shoes once inside. Harv gives me a little space before his thorough inspection.

My memory isn't great. Before I embarked on this body of work, the doors of my memory were barely visible and when I would try to open them, the light would be out. I wanted to learn to remember. I wanted to remember everything, all the little moments. I wanted to fill in the gaps of my life. I wanted to be able to recall the way I spent my time in these spaces. So, I practiced giving my attention to the iterations and rituals already embedded in my everyday life. As the light of these memories started to flicker on, I started finding things I had forgotten. My remembered past took the form of stories I could tell others and use to understand myself.

I started making these paintings to help me maintain my connections with my chosen family (Mel, Hermione, Harvey) as Mel and I lived apart. I started this body of work while my partner, Mel, was getting her MFA at another school. While driving back and forth from Illinois to Ohio to visit her, I listened to Stephen King's, *On Writing*. King suggests writing for just one person, your "ideal reader." An ideal reader specifies the creative intention and gives the writer someone with whom they want to communicate. If my paintings together are one story, my primary audience (viewer) is Mel. The paintings hold memories I want to share, or have shared, with Mel, but even as I make paintings with her in mind, my hope is that others will be able to see value in them as well.

A painting of me dancing in my apartment. I knew it would be a little awkward, but I thought Mel would like to see me being vulnerable while she was not there. The painting could be something to show her of me outside the familiar, sitting-on-the-couch video-chat.



Havv: his evening routine, oil on canvas, 72 x 54 inches, 2022-24

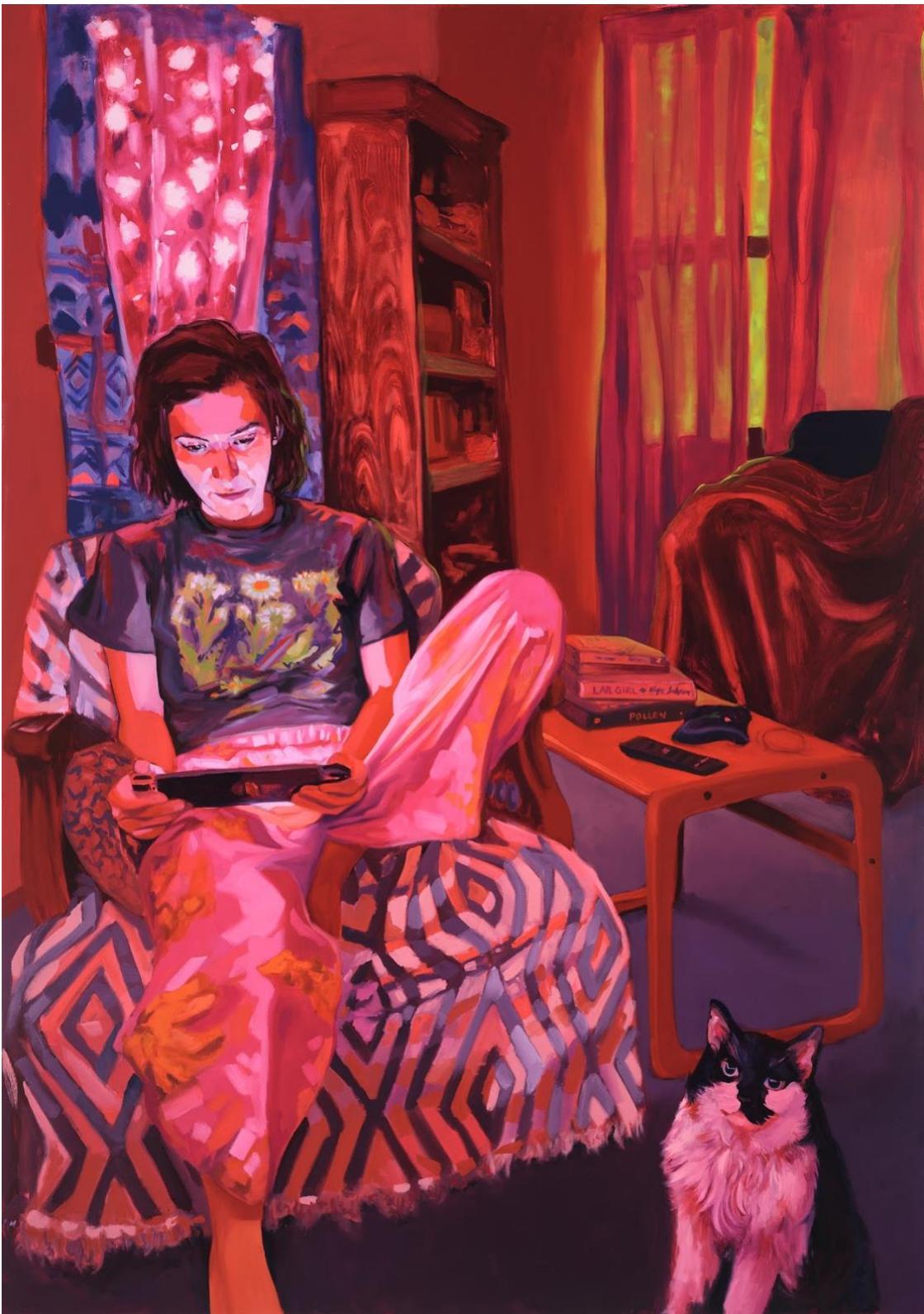
Harv: his evening routine

My second semester of grad school was not easy. To combat stress, depression, and anxiety, I started a daily routine of moving my body. I would go home, put on my headphones, turn on music and dance. Harvey would patiently sit on the floor and wait for me to exhaust myself. I could close my eyes, feel the music, and move, knowing he was there waiting for me. Harvey always understood that I needed to do this. He never interfered.

After these dance sessions, Harv and I would sit on the couch together until Mel and I connected via Facetime; his fur sticking to my skin when I moved. If I find the right images, maybe a painting of this will happen in the future. He was the best model. I wish we could have collaborated more.

Punch-Drunk Color

When picking through my memories, representational images are insufficient. In trying to depict *how* something is remembered, rather than the content of the memory, I turn to color. Color is a phenomenon of light, and paint is color made into a physical and malleable material. As paint-as-color becomes pushed and pulled, as its rich hues saturate space in a representational image, it provides another pathway to the thoughts and feelings that are connected to a specific moment in time and how these moments are remembered.



Spring Break: the night we made contact, oil on canvas, 74 x 60 inches, 2022-24

Spring Break: the night we made contact

During my first Spring Break of grad school, Harvey and I drove to visit Mel and Hermione. It was nice existing outside of the stress. We were able to sit together in the same space without feeling the need to be doing anything. We had time. It was a safe space for all of us.

When the sun went down, Mel would turn on pink string lights and everything became even more beautiful: the light unifying the colors and patterns, shifting their temperatures and saturations. She would then sit down in an armchair to play her video game, the light from the screen illuminating her face. Hermione would watch and choose a lap to nap on depending on where we both were and what we were doing. Looking for the best opportunity for attention and comfort. When she chose me, she would rub her head into my beard, making a weird breathy noise that sounded kind of wet.

A soft, green light pushes through the window. Perhaps this is the color of the sky on this spring evening, it is also my fear of leaving this safe space.

The materiality of a painting can transmute a memory into something tangible, but I never seem to remember things exactly the way they happened. My feelings affect and change how and what I remember. In cinema, color becomes a material form for the purpose of generating an affective response, setting up an emotional space to help tell the story. In my paintings I utilize color schemes to tell the story of my memories. The framing is not still but moving. When color schemes are implemented, they become referential in the same way a “nocturne” can be understood in a musical piece. When I saturate my apartment with a colored light, I create an atmosphere, I set a scene that has an inherent emotional resonance through a shared experience of cinematic color relationships. By representing these shared experiences of color, my paintings can become nostalgic, triggering memories of past shared experiences, real or imagined.

Television and movies were a huge part of my life and my development as an artist. One particularly formative film is Paul Thomas Anderson's, *Punch-Drunk Love*. What I remember and love about this film is how at certain moments the screen is filled with an abstracted color field that pulses and moves with ambient, often discordant, music, the product of PT Anderson's collaborations with artist Jeremy Black and musician Jon Brion. Most of *Punk-Drunk Love* is set in empty spaces that are activated through sounds and colors that become an extension of the main characters and their feelings. Much of this is fast-paced and quite stressful until about halfway through the film when the two characters make it to Hawaii. As viewers of the film, we barely see the new setting. After a phone call on a crowded street, they meet at a hotel by the beach. When they see each other from a distance, no one else is around. As their silhouettes come together, they are surrounded by other silhouetted figures quickly walking through the frame. Those silhouettes eventually dissipate, and we are left with our main characters, silhouettes framed by architecture, with the coastline behind them.

When Mel and I were living apart, I wanted to close that distance between us. We were both singular silhouettes awaiting an embrace, but we both had work to do, so that run was more of a slow and deliberate walk. Living without her, I could not be myself in the same way I am myself with her. I started using the photos I took while we were together to imagine being with her. I could see her moving through her apartment, but there was a barrier in communicating with her. The communication was happening more internally than externally. In the same way *Punch-Drunk Love* communicates to the viewer the internal emotions of its characters, I used color as a tool to communicate my feelings externally.

After the iconic embrace in *Punch-Drunk Love*, we find the characters having dinner and talking about how this place really "looks like Hawaii," then they slowly walk through the halls to make it back to a hotel room. The importance of the new location was not the adventure of Hawaii or the outside world, but in the need to go somewhere that the two could be themselves. A place

where they could be anonymous while they fell in love. When Mel and I lived together, our home was a shared space where we could be comfortable being ourselves. While we lived apart, photos became a way to view and remember those spaces and times.



Herm: View from my perch, oil on canvas, 60 x 95 inches, 2022

Herm: View from my perch

It was the end of the summer before my second year of grad school; I was in Ohio and Herm and I would often sit together on the couch against the window. She would perch herself on the back of the couch so that she could look outside. One night while we were sitting here, Mel turned off the kitchen lights and I noticed how three light sources emerged and overlapped with each other: the cool moonlight through the kitchen window, the warm light from the bedroom, and the streetlight coming in from the window behind us. Mel was silhouetted against the moonlight as she moved through the kitchen. The drop-ceiling became a grid of colors fading in

and out of each other. The lights created flat, crisp shapes of color that gave new dimensions to the furniture.

I often wonder what Hermione saw and thought of this event. I'm sure it happens often when the moon is bright. Did she enjoy this casual spectacle? Did she ever anticipate it?

This painting and its engagement with color and light is a depiction of what I remember of that specific experience, but it also functions as an attempt to get closer to those I love because when I am with them, I can be myself. According to a voice memo made during one of those trips to Athens, King said, "Life is not a support system for art, it's the other way around." When I started this body of work, I documented my time with Mel and Hermione (and Harvey) because I needed to remember what it felt like to be part of something bigger than myself, that even though we could not always be together, that I would see them again.

Shifting Focus

When I paint, I remember. I am forming and organizing specific memories of my domestic life. In Kathleen Stewart's book, *Ordinary Affects*, she tells stories that are both mundane and consequential. Ordinary affects are everyday things that often go unnoticed; entangled collections of specific moments that create meaning as they accumulate. They are underlying experiences that put one in a time and place but also in many at once. Through the repetition of common experiences, novel moments may seem to happen quickly and be just as quickly forgotten. By engaging slowly with an image, I expand my memories to include the fragments of memories that may be initially overlooked.

In my painting, capturing a memory is not about replicating a singular moment exactly as it occurred as much as it is about a collection of persons, objects, and events in the domestic spaces I have inhabited. Each painting depicts these rituals in a singular, yet shifting, frame of

time. The process of painting allows me to communicate with a flattened static surface to signify a reoccurrence, and passage of time. When I paint, I can maintain connections to those who are absent by triggering memories that tell a story of how life has changed and/or stayed the same. Something happens when I give attention to these repeating events. Time slows down and I start to see new details. My focus can shift; things can be clearer depending on what the story reveals. As I continue to engage with these stories, I form a better understanding of my present self.

The narratives that are paired with each painting are representations of this shifting focus. They are sentimental gestures that have helped me be a participant in my own life; someone who has feelings that change and grow. Too often being sentimental is tied to being overly emotional. It has become a derogatory mark on how one may live an ethical life. In Robert C. Solomon's article, "In Defense of Sentimentality", he defines sentimentality as "nothing more nor less than the 'appeal to tender feelings'" and that,

"Sentimentality is essential to both ethics and literature... [The] real worry is rather those many moralists who think and don't feel and, in literature, writers who sell and readers who buy pure narrative or entertainment devoid of tender feelings, as well as those avant-garde writers who plot the deconstruction of their own writing and leave us with nothing. The excessive manipulation of tender feelings is not the problem of sentimentality; the problem of sentimentality is the lack of them altogether" (Solomon, 310).

Sentimentality can be a sign of strength instead of weakness, my paintings invite the viewer to allow space for tender feelings and refute the dichotomy of masculinity and emotional engagement.

A Look Back

As a boy, I was taught to prepare for the future and therefore, I was always forgetting the past. Part of this was an engendered mentality to keep me from showing emotions. I was to always be looking ahead with a rational mindset. In doing so, my memories and sentiments had less value. Nothing really mattered because I could always move on, so I had less memories to recall and my life felt short. In her book, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, specifically the chapter titled, “Exercises in Attention,” Jenny Odell analyzes the works of different artists and how they utilize the act of slowing down and giving attention to one’s surroundings. She writes that,

“Practices of attention and curiosity are inherently open-ended, oriented toward something outside of ourselves. Through attention and curiosity, we can suspend our tendency toward instrumental understanding—seeing things or people one-dimensionally as the products of their functions—and instead sit with the unfathomable fact of their existence, which opens up toward us but can never be fully grasped or known” (Odell, 104).

By paying more attention to the world, the time I am alive has increased. I am actively looking at the quotidian moments in my life with the goal to remember and experience them. It is as if I have extended my life by training myself to remember the present as it is happening. I can tell the stories tied to those paintings with more clarity than I could before. When I am painting, I do not feel stuck in the past, I am connecting to it. I have time to organize my memories which solidifies my own present self. I see the potential that a moment holds, not just for a painting, but as a story that expands and enriches my experience of the world.



Distractions: Herm loved belly rubs, oil on canvas, 65 x 95 inches, 2021-2023

Distractions: Herm loved belly rubs

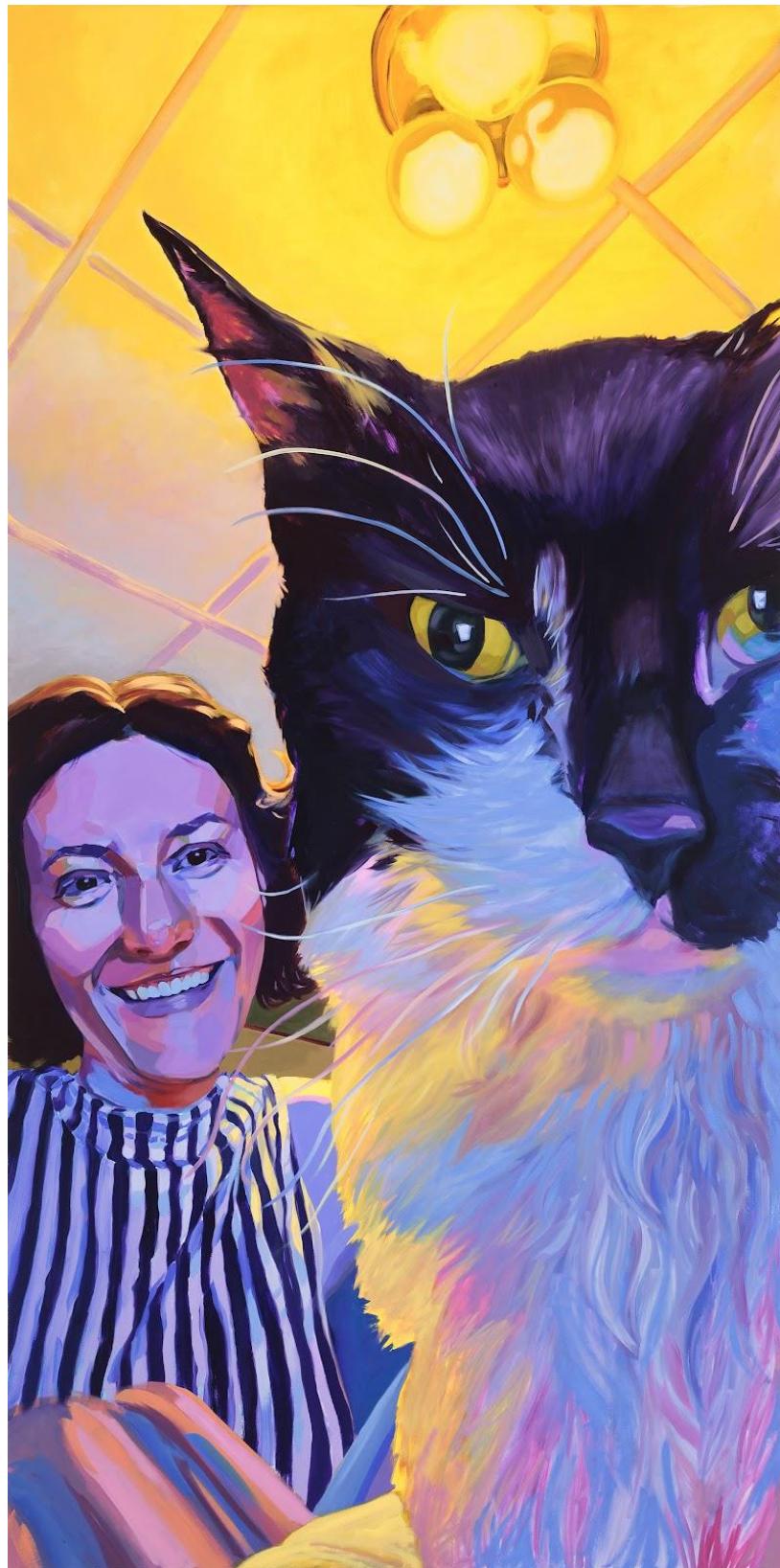
This is both one of my first paintings in this series, and one of the last. It started as a painting about being alive while the world is ending. Initially there were burning buildings that could be seen outside through windows. After Hermione died, I really didn't care about those buildings anymore. Though there are still remnants of them found in the painting hanging behind the figure.

I repainted Hermione, added (added back in) the lamp, and drew a picture of my hand scratching her belly in oil pastel. When Herm and I lived together, she was always interested in what I was doing. She greeted me when I got home. We would play and she would ask for belly rubs. When I ate dinner, she would eat dinner. At the end of the day (or the middle of the night) I would play video games and she would be captivated by the movements on the screen. I sometimes worried that she would swat at the screen, but she never did.

This painting reminds me of these shared moments. Sometimes I wish that I had given her more attention, but I also know that she was happy. I want to remember the joy of those times, instead of the pain of losing her.

I remember the way my fingers would always catch on one clump of hair, even after brushing her.

By acknowledging how my pets are both observers of and participants in my life, my curiosity of their experience of the world was sparked. Animals have the capacity to possess that which is familiar and yet unknowable. In John Berger's essay, "Why Look At Animals," he describes how pets live in parallel with their owners. He states that a "pet offers its owner a mirror to a part [of the owner] that is otherwise never reflected." Communication with a pet is mysterious because it is developed through repetition of acts. The way we, as humans, understand this communication is internal. We must impart something of ourselves onto the pet because we do not know what they understand about our relationship. It does not make sense to project emotions to an animal, but it also seems wrong to minimize their abilities to feel. All I know about my relationship with my pets is that I need them, and they need me, and without them, I am less...



Saying "Hello", oil on canvas, 96 x 48 inches, 2023

Saying “Hello”

Hermione’s death was rough. It happened shortly after I left to start the second semester of my final year. She had FIV, so when she needed her teeth out, she could not recover. No white blood cells. It didn’t help that the vets in Athens, Ohio had no ability or knowledge on how to help her. The first time we had to take her in, they started talking about putting her down as soon as they found out about the FIV. That first time she made a full recovery.

The last image I have of Herm was a photo from a Facetime session just days before she passed. In this picture she poked her head up in front of the camera (she did this a lot), the blue light of the screen bouncing off her body and face. Sometimes I think Ohio killed my cat; other times it was grad school. Maybe it was both. Mel buried her alone. She found a nice spot off a trail, next to a stream. When I did make it back, I helped secure the bricks that marked her grave. I managed to visit it a few times, but I don’t think I’ll be back for a while, if ever. I wonder how long the bricks will stay.

When I took the image of Hermione saying “hello,” I didn’t realize it was “goodbye.”

The reflection of myself found in my pets is a mirror of my personality. Through this bond they become the family I have chosen. The time they are alive is shorter than my own and, though when they pass it shakes the foundation of my identity, I am bound to them forever. Their lives become mile markers for my memory. As I remember my time with them, they continue to influence my life even when I am forced to go on without them. Every life has a beginning and an end, and, if I remember to look back, their stories will continue and mine will expand.



Replicant: Seeing his eyes instead of mine, 60 x 90 inches, 2022-24

Replicant: Seeing his eyes instead of mine

In the movie, Blade Runner, a replicant is a manufactured human. They are human in every way, but their eyes capture light like a cat.

When I look in a mirror and see my father's eyes, I don't feel like my own person. Sometimes when I look in the mirror, I try to smile in different ways so that I do not smile like he does.

The reflection I see when I look in a mirror is not the way others actually see me, it is the reverse. My own reflection is how I normally interact with my own face. This reflection is imperfect, but more familiar than a photograph. Photos are a distilled, outward look of reality. If I look at my

phone to take a “selfie,” I see myself mirrored, but after I take the photo, the image is flipped. This is standard for video calls as well. At the bottom of the screen, I see myself mirrored, but the image is flipped for the one I am communicating with. If I were to see myself flipped, but moving in real-time, there would be a strange doubling of self. That person who exists to everyone else, is not the person I normally see or interact with. It is something separate from me, but a part of those who I have a relationship with. For an animal, this version of me is paired solely with my interactions with them.



Long-Distance Rewatch, oil on canvas, 32 x 60 inches, 2023-24

Long-Distance Rewatch

It is strange to watch television with someone who is not physically in the room with you, but this is what Mel and I did many nights during the semesters apart. As Harvey got older, he was less inclined to jump up on the couch with me. There was distance between us because that space on the couch was less accessible to him. When Harvey wanted to sit with me, he now

needed to make it known. I would pick him up and put him back down when he was ready, trying to do so before he could jump down himself. While living in my studio apartment I had to start putting his food out on the carpet so that he would have better traction.

[Watching and waiting.]

Watching television with someone in person is much more enjoyable. The little ways of communicating must be made noticeable. There is a camera, but the sound is muted so that there is not an echo. To show excitement you must exaggerate movement and expressions. To make a comment you must wait for the right moment so that you don't talk over dialogue. This all requires for you and the person you are Facetiming to hit the play button in sync. One of you will be the designated count-downer. Then one, if not both of you, will have to tell the other person that your video is buffering, which causes you to pause, go back, and sync to a specific time or even restart completely. Don't worry, you get used to it.

[Longing for a time before, when you could just jump up on the couch when you wanted.]

Our technology can transmit light through screens to connect us from vast distances. It does its best to replicate an accurate visual and auditory experience, but in doing so it makes that distance more palpable. We now can always be in communication with one another, but only through this separation. Our screens show us what we cannot touch like a glowing memory mediated and framed by something external. The photos and videos of those we lose allow us to remember them. They are two sides of the same coin. Both proof of a life lived and a life lost.

As I give repeated attention to these images through the act of painting, I remember the times with my pets, when we were apart, and after I lost them. The memories appear all at once, and I find it difficult to separate them.



Harvey, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches, 2024

Harvey

My family got Harvey as a puppy. One side of his face was white, the other black. When we were deciding what to name him my mom asked me what Two-Face's name was. I answered, "Harvey!"

We had another shih tzu named Suzy (though I always wanted to write it 'Tzu zee'). She was a little older and already trained to use the doggy door. Harvey learned to go outside very quickly. I sat down next to the door with him and when Suzy walked through, I pushed him along after her. That was all it took.

When I left for college, mom told me that Harvey waited at the window every day for me. I made it back regularly the first year and then spent the summer home. The next year I came home less often. My third year of undergrad Harvey came to live with me and my roommate. Harvey took better care of me than I did of him. Then I spent a few weeks studying abroad in Rome. I would ask mom how Harvey was doing, and I got the same response as years before. Harvey spent the summer waiting for me.

The next two years Harvey kept waiting for me, but in smaller intervals. I was trying to finish school. Trying to make the best paintings I could. Sometimes I would fall asleep in the senior studio and the janitor thought I was homeless. He almost called the cops on me before the department head reprimanded him. I brought Harvey to campus some nights. Once we had to hide from the janitor in a large box another student had outfitted for napping and reading.

After I graduated, Harvey stayed with my brother for a couple months while I was at a residency. The residency where I met Mel. I was ready to leave Arkansas and move to Buffalo, but without living there no one trusted me to be a real person enough to give me a chance to rent a room. The only place I found was a slum house. They didn't allow animals (probably for the

best) but I only intended to stay there until I could find a better place and a job. I did within a month. The only problem was that on my drive to Buffalo I ran over something in the road and blew my engine. So, no car meant no way to get back to Fayetteville for Harv.

Once the school year was over, Mel drove me down to Arkansas and we were all together. The next few years were the best of his life. Especially once his teeth were removed. We went on walks every day. Hiked up mountains. Played in the snow. I would let him walk off leash way too much. He got so comfortable running down the stairs and out the door that sometimes he would start the walk without me. I would run around looking for him, but if he was smelling something (which he always was) he would completely ignore everything else. One time I thought I had lost him for good, but then an hour or two later he came walking to the house on a leash with the person who found him. She said that she brought him inside but after he was done hanging out, he wanted to leave. So, she let him lead her home.

These years it was Mel, Harvey, Hermione, and I. Mel left to go to a post-bacc program and then it was just me and the animals. Before she could finish the year, Mel came back home. We were in lockdown.

Best year for our family. We were all together and had no obligations. We went to the studio, but no more 40-hour work week. Harvey got so much attention; went on so many walks. He was never waiting.

Moving Through Space and Time

All my paintings utilize some form of collage—a collection and assembling of many images into a singular composition. Collage was a way of making the specific images I wanted to make, revealing this hidden process in later paintings allowed me to engage the construction of time and space more deliberately.

As Mel and I were beginning to merge our living spaces and our lives in the same place, the aspect of collage became more intentional. By making a physical collage and representing the physicality of the collage process, I was able to see the accumulation of changes happening. It was as if the space was able to exist in multiple times at once. The act and object of making a painting began to function similarly to how I construct and review memories. The amorphous structure of the memories tied to a specific space would shift as I took control of the narratives. Time was compressed so that I could see both the connections and gaps all at once.



Studio Reflections: crunch-time, oil on canvas, 66 x 96 inches, 2023-24

Studio Reflections: crunch-time

I visited Mel during her final semester of grad school; I was anticipating my final year. Much of that time I spent with her in her studio. Sitting there together in silence or with her phone playing music. Mel focused on a task, her back facing me. The mirrors gave me a view of her from multiple angles. At this point in time, the space was getting crowded with work. I felt like I was taking up a lot of space, but when I looked at the photos, the space was larger than I remember. My memory of the place doesn't match the photographs.

Collaging the images allowed me to cut out the space that I felt should not be there. This left fragments and holes. To create the images I want to see, I started piecing photos together digitally, then I would edit through the process of painting so that it was one believably representational image. By putting fragments of images together made an incomplete, complete whole. There were gaps and inconsistencies. This led me to make physical collages instead of digital ones. I wanted to reveal the process. Slowly expose the inconsistencies.

This way of crafting an image takes care, engagement, and commitment. It is not an easy process; I must make decisions and understand what I want to achieve. I must give something of myself to make a painting. Through the process of making, I remember things that I am leaving out; things from different spaces or times that feel relevant. I look at how comic books developed visual devices to show how a character can move through an action by using only one background. When describing cinemas' influence on comic books in his book, *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives*, Robert S. Petersen describes how,

“the effect is not exactly cinematic because as the images of a character multiply, their reader is made increasingly aware of the whole sequence on the page. These effects are more akin to synoptic narratives where the repeated characters in action are framed by a single continuous scene. Just as in a synoptic narrative, once an action is parsed into

incremental moments it becomes a defined repeatable gesture describing an encapsulated moment of ‘being in action’” (Petersen, 151).

This is similar to how the artist Zoey Frank constructs a painting, but instead of using duplication of subjects to form narrative, she uses it as a force for abstraction. Her paintings are filled with fragments of subjects that are layered and connected to create an architecture for a cohesive composition. Each painting feels complete as a painting, but not as a singular moment. Whether her figures are fractured or solidified, they are tied to specific spaces. The architecture of the event is most prominent, while the solidity of subjects is allowed to break, dissolve, and overlap. In doing so, she is showing her process of working in the final results of the painting. These paintings are not just representations; they are accumulations of marks that layer in response to each other. In them, I see paintings that are questions instead of answers. Frank’s paintings slow me down to wonder what is being obscured by the process and why.

There are many ways to make a painting. The alchemy of painting lies in its reliance on intentionality: choices and considerations that make a painting more than a mimetic act or signification. We live in a time when digital images are quickly generated and discarded. Now that images are instantly generated by utilizing AI, digital images have less meaning. There is a disconnect from the maker. Words become images through a mediator. That mediator decides on what the maker communicates. Limiting creativity can be a useful tool in making, but, through their expediency, these images become a part of a large pile of similarly limited images. The only way for these images to become more creative, is through synthesizing the visuals of other maker’s images, and not in the processes that it takes to make them.

I hope to connect to the process of creation by showing the layers of work it takes to make an image. Through its materiality and physical scale, a large painting can not only be something to see, but also to experience. The paint itself communicates, through texture, value, and

saturation, sensory understandings. I want my paintings to envelop the viewer's senses, giving them a way to feel what I have felt. With painting I can consider and slow down and then invite the viewer to do the same. I can choose to show the seams of the original collages in the final paintings. I remember but stay focused on extending a small moment into a network of moments. Instead of choreographing or exaggerating an action I slow down and remember the connected stories. These singular moments can be enough because I know there is more.



the spaces in between, oil on canvas, 96 x 84 inches, 2024

the spaces in between

The summer before my final year was Mel's first summer after grad school. She had started feeding a stray kitten that was living on the roof across from the porch of her apartment. With Hermione's death so recent we had not considered getting another cat, but with Ohio's inability to help animals we had no one to call or take her. So, when the time came for Mel to move to Illinois, the kitten moved with us. Her name is Rudy.

Moving into the new house was the first time Mel and I had shared a space since Buffalo, four years earlier. We had lived together over summers, but that's not the same as living and working around each other. It took some time for us to figure out our schedules, but once we did, things were better. It is so much easier to care for the ones you love when you are physically together instead of communicating via screen.

Harvey was between 14 or 15 years old when Hermione died. It was around this time he started having seizures. They didn't last long, and they didn't happen often, but that summer they got much worse. After one episode lasted longer than normal, he stopped moving. I don't know if he stopped breathing or if I just couldn't tell that he was, but I gave him CPR and he woke up. The seizures happened a lot more frequently after that. I held him when the vet put him to sleep.

It's hard to see the good things when you know the time to say goodbye is approaching. Harvey was an active old dog. People often thought he was a puppy when I took him on walks because he was so mobile. I still have the urge to head home early from teaching to feed and walk him. It was nice to have the routine. I miss all the normal things we did together. I miss the time spent together doing nothing.

I am thankful that Mel and I did not have to grieve the loss of another pet alone. I am also thankful that Rudy found us at a time when we all needed each other. She started out as a bony

kitten with fleas and a very thin coat. Now she bounces around the house, bringing us her toys to play and even fetches. We have been creating new routines.

Routines

The film *Paterson*, by Jim Jarmusch is set over the course of a week. Day by day we follow a bus driver named Paterson, from Paterson, NJ. When Paterson is alone, he writes poems. His favorite author is William Carlos Williams, who wrote the epic poem, *Paterson*. Much like Stewart's essays in *Ordinary Affects* are set in familiar situations, the stories of each day are set within Paterson's daily routines. There are many scenes that start out the same but end differently. There are multiple sets of twins featured as side characters. There are lines that seem unique to one moment, only to be used by a different character later. The characters have stories that they tell themselves. Things that hold potential, but they will likely never act on. Life gets in the way.

Paterson and Laura's relationship, along with their dog Marvin, is based on understanding that people may repeatedly get in their own way, but the potential for growth is always there. While each day follows a similar pattern, every scene in this film is unique. After watching a couple days, I could expect certain things to happen, and notice the changes. When something that feels inevitable happens, one character doesn't respond with an "I told you so". It is met with an understanding because the characters can relate their own experience without needing to express it verbally. As a viewer, I could anticipate things that happened in the film, but when they happened, I did not feel that they should not have. I felt that in happening, they gave potential for the characters to grow outside the bounds of the film. I took the hope of those characters with me after the credits rolled.



Epilogue, oil on canvas, 84 x 96 inches, 2024

Epilogue

The light is blinding. The light is cold. Everything is warm. The coffee tastes a bit like dark chocolate.

Waking up early in the morning is difficult for Mel, so when she began commuting to teach at EIU I started waking up first to get started on coffee, bagels, and lunch. If there is time, we drink the coffee and eat the bagels together. If I don't open the blinds for Rudy, she will put her paws up on the side of my leg and meow her raspy meow. Sometimes her claws get stuck.

During the winter, the window is closed, and Rudy must rest her front paws on the windowsill while standing on a chair meant for a bar. She looks strangely human stretched out this way. If I remember to open the blinds before she requests, she will run at full speed up onto the chair; making an abrupt stop that doesn't seem possible.

If it has snowed, the light will bounce off the ground and through the windows. These mornings, I do not need to turn on any lights. Bumping the heat helps Mel get out of bed. Much of this routine is quiet until the coffee has been made. We both drink it black, no sugar.

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