

## The Outing (Expulsion)

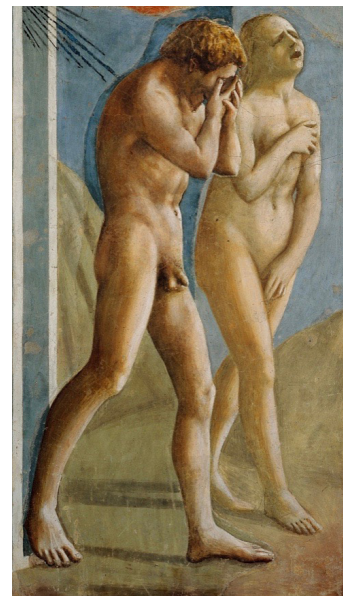
In the Early 1990's, as we fumbled through things like holidays, the AIDS epidemic was in full swing, with friends and lovers dying around us. I was trying, in the studio, to find my reason for being.

It being Halloween we covered my very sick friend Will with fake blood and spiderwebs, propping him up in a chair in the front doorway: a motionless, living ghoul. Tricker treaters came and went. Eventually, Will had to scratch his nose or something and a little girl screamed "I thought you were dead!"

"Not yet!", said Will, in his drawn out mid-western drawl. Such was our black humored fun.

Working in the studio—reexamining my life really—in order to find the strength needed to get thru the deluge of the epidemic, I pored through the art history books and found an echo: Adam and Eve's grief and despair in Masaccio's fresco of their expulsion from the garden of Eden. I could relate to these shame-filled wailing figures. They were a start.

A trip to Europe after high school had introduced me to the human figure as a vehicle for Emotion. I remember standing next to the line of Michelangelo's so-called slave figures as they ecstatically tried to free themselves from the marble. I was so completely beside myself with resonating emotion that I couldn't understand why everyone else was just walking by.



Masaccio, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, fresco, 1425

My opera-loving boyfriend in Yorkville had me painting divas, but the paintings were more Pop than Renaissance. Using Time Magazine covers as décor, reading Andy Warhol's diary, and spending Halloween in Cloverdale with the Cockettes contributed to their Pop-iness.

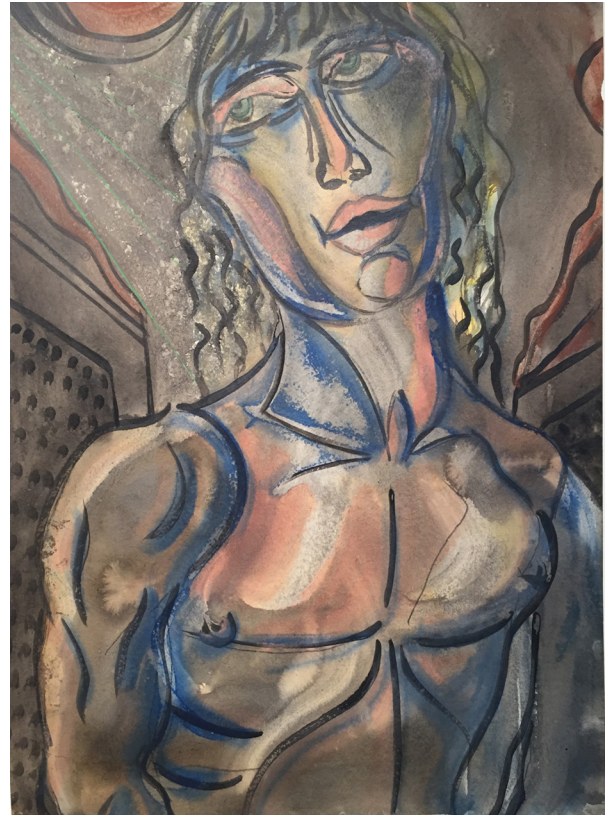


*Skulls, Queens, & Business Men*, 36" x 19", mixed media on paper, 1975

The half year living next to the San Raphael Mission, and my new boyfriend's short passion for Catholicism created a brief hunky Saint period.

So, being kicked out of Eden rang a familiar bell. After a brief sketch, I painted the two cast-out figures moving away from one another in disunity on the left- and right-hand sides of a 7'x10' canvas. In the center, that they were moving away from, was a mess of indecision. Painted and erased were the reaches for meaning: Abstractions of God.

But God didn't work anymore. No matter how obscured by abstraction it was, that reference that I now know was the problem. I didn't need a new, straight white male patriarchal figure to flee from. Dad = Psychiatrist = God.



*St. Sebastian, 22" x 30", acrylic on paper, 1977*

Finally, I ripped the center out of the canvas: There was no center to hold onto.

What was left were the two life sized abstracted figures moving away from each other in despair. I could have left it there and called it parentally "The Divorce".



*Work in progress  
(The Divorce), 7' x 7',  
acrylic on canvas with  
photograph, 1995-2010*

Typically, I saw my failure at painting God as my own inadequacy, not as an internal struggle for meaning. Questions that were brought up by my studies with The Diamond Approach, and a newly expanding Buddhist library, had the big shaky question mark of me at the center. I rolled the figurative fragments up and threw them into the back canvas piles of the storage room.



A few years and many books, classes, writings, rituals and many, many deaths later... I unrolled and hung the fleeing figures again, this time facing each other, thus reopening the dialogue. In between them I pinned a tiny, in-scale pale pimply post-outing school photo of myself: Outed at thirteen... The wrong societal time and place, with no support or understanding.

In a meditation retreat a decade later (one of many), I relived the moments of my outing, moment by moment, word for word, and in every terrifying detail. But I found a calm clarity under my shame and humiliation. As my Father interrogated me about the sexual details, my twelve year old wisdom mind thought: You want me to put myself into this same society-regulated box of truncated self, of severed truth, the falsity of which has made you, and my mother, so miserable all these years.

I didn't get it. Why were we born wrong? Why should we live falsely?

These questions and more are what I was beginning to research and later embody thru intensive study and practice, something I continue today.

I rehung the panels, now facing away from each other in grief and shame, and re-pinned my suppressed self to the wall in stillness and suffocation. How to stealthily survive in this land of giants?

I tried to fit into the given conventions, but then would suddenly, subversively, break out against them, soon retreating, in fear of reprisal, back into my clamshell.

Heart open... Fear... Heart closed: Repeat. This was to remain a pattern.

As I was putting my photo up there, fallibly, in place of God, in the center of the world—trying to honor myself really—one of those “the universe is connecting” moments occurred.

I was listening to an interview with a deacon from Harvard, Peter Gomes, a conservative African-American Christian Republican. He had recently outed himself in response to anti-gay harassment of students on campus. He was saying that the wounded and marginalized (he mentioned homosexuals, women, and blacks—the list is huge today) are closer to the veil that separates this world from the next, that we are re-owning the mythology for ourselves.

Bingo: That we are re-owning the mythology for ourselves! That's what I was doing. I wasn't alone. This explosion of truth is what many artists are doing: re-balancing, re-seeing a history that includes ourselves, and our stories.

This moment of connection, of revelation, was still not enough to keep me from my overriding sense of unworthiness. Back into the closet the panels went. The “you-don't-deserve-to-be-here” lesson of my childhood again weakened my ability to bring this construct to completion.

Why? Who would care ? Or so said my ancient demons.

Heart closed.

It would take the purification process of many more retreats to allow myself to be fully seen, and then only in the safety my ongoing gay men's and Buddhist groups. To say that it's OK to be here... It's painful. The truth is painful. But when exposed fully to the light of day, it is incredibly fresh and freeing. On a retreat, after releasing decades of repression, I remember whooping to the forest "You mean it's not all my fault? It's not all about me?" I was giddy with the release.

Fall 2018: This month I again took out the two expulsion panels, while setting up the studio for some thinking about where/how/what to make next. I often hang the studio with narratives from my painted story to get me going, to message my mind back into "The Zone", where the flow from inside to out and back again occurs. It was a year since my operation for Parkinson's Disease, and time for some resolutions and beginnings. For the first time in years, I have some encouragement, some outside support. Someone is looking. Now, if I can bring this out without another collapse and withdrawal.

One of the storyline pieces I re-hung was a patterned panel concerning seeds and the phases of the moon: A harvest panel.

There were other drawings as well that narrated the rooted, seeded, and growing self. Hanging the expulsion figures over this panel, with the dynamics of the seed center exposed fit, it reconnected to the source, the seed, the creation of life.



*Harvest Panel, 53" x 90", acrylic on linen, 2002*



*Re-rooting Self, 11" x 15", prisma-color on paper, 2016*

I then re-pinned myself to the seed—the dynamic center. I am adding my story.



*The Outing (Expulsion), 7' x 7'; acrylic on canvas and linen with photograph, 1995–present*

It is a very difficult time—a brave time—to witness the painful truths, to admit them, and to embody them. To take them into the open heart, the open air, and accept them. This is about making room for everyone.

Scott Holloway,  
Oakland 2018

