ABSTRACT

Mysterious Elements: A Studio Art Thesis

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The enigmatic nature of Gerhard Richter's black and white photorealist paintings with their blurred atmospheres is what originally inspired this project. The blur of the woman's face in his piece *Woman Descending a Staircase* provoked a psychological and sociological investigation that informed the first phase of my paintings. Referencing modern photographer Luca Desienna's blurred photographs, I created figurative paintings in which I erase features of the subjects as well as details of their surroundings with exaggerated blurs. Desienna uses the blur to hide disfigured faces, decaying walls, and general squalor: not because he finds them unsightly, but because he wants to draw attention to the humanity of his subjects rather than the conditions in which they live. The second phase of my paintings moved away from Desienna's images and their psychological implications to abstract compositions with a distinct set of challenges. The paintings of this phase are made with acrylic paint and oil-based wood stain which repel one another to create textural patterns resembling topological ridges.

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# MYSTERIOUS ELEMENTS: A STUDIO ART THESIS

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CONTENTS

FIGURES iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

Chapter One: Introduction: Technique of the Blur 1

Chapter Two: Tira's and Gunawan's Story 12

Chapter Three: Shifting Focus: *Of Lillies and Remains* Introduces a New Phase 24

Chapter Four: Conclusion: Second Phase of Paintings 37

APPENDIX: Images of Phase II Detail 47

WORKS CITED 49

FIGURES

1. Gerhard Richter, *Woman Descending the Staircase,* 1965 3

2. Sally Mann, *Eva (#22 Velvet Skin),* 2000 4

3. Sally Mann, *Eva (#21 Vase),* 2000 4

4. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, 1912 5

5. Eadweard Muybridge, *Woman Walking Downstairs,* 1887 6

6. Luca Desienna, Photograph of Tira and Gunawan 9

7. *Tira and Gunawan,* 2012 10

8. Luca Desienna, Photograph of Gunawan 16

9. *Gunawan,* 2012 21

10. Luca Desienna, Photograph I from *Of Lillies and Remains* 25

11. Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434 29

12. *Hidden Longings I,* 2012 32

13. Luca Desienna, Photograph II from *Of Lillies and Remains* 33

14. *Hidden Longings II,* 2012 35

15. *Topography I,* 2013 40

16. *Topography II,* 2013 41

17. Topography Study I, 2013 42

18. *Topography III,* 2013 43

19-21. Topography Studies II-IV, 2013 44

22-25. Details of *Topography II* and *Topography III* 48

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction: Technique of the Blur

This project consists of a studio art component as well as a written component that considers the psychological and sociological implications behind the imagery chosen. At the start of the project, I was greatly influenced by the use of the blur in art, specifically in Gerhard Richter's black and white photorealist paintings. Though technique was my initial interest, a growing interest in the human face and alterations thereof emerged. I united the two interests and used the technique of the blur to erase or alter a subject's facial features, thereby denying the viewer the ability to see the subject's face. The blur, I realized, could work on the behalf of the subject, and was an especially gracious technique to use when depicting marginalized or disfigured people. The use of the blur therefore, more than merely an artistic technique, became a tool to direct the viewer's eye and influence the viewer's perceptions of the subject depicted. Topics such as the psychology of human interaction with faces, the sociological effects of marginalization, the value of accepted gender norms, and the definition of beauty all influenced my work. Halfway through my project, I attended a lecture by Bruce Herman and Makoto Fujimura that provided me with insight that changed the nature of the paintings created subsequently. Herman in particular espoused the idea that a painting can exist in its own right, without a complicated significance behind it that required deciphering. Following this lecture, I freed my painting from the necessity of viewer interpretation. I became deeply interested in the interactions of oil-based wood stain and

acrylic paint. The interaction of these two mediums is very distinctive and marries spontaneity with artistic control. During the process of learning to use these mediums, I abandoned figurative imagery in favor of abstract compositions. The final set of pieces represents a progression from strictly figurative black and white photorealism to colorful abstractions of repellant mediums. There are similarities and differences in the two phases, which is natural and expected in the development of a series. It is illustrative of the many considerations regarding content and artistic principles that go into every creative endeavor.

As a consequence of the new direction my work took mid-way through the project, the paintings I produced fall under two distinct categories. The first category consists of four paintings, executed primarily in black and white. These paintings deal explicitly with the imagery from contemporary London based photographer Luca Desienna's two series, *My Dearest Javanese Concubine* and *Of Lillies [sic] and Remains.* All of them depict one or more human figures that are partially or entirely blurred, which is the factor that drew me to them. This phase of my work is as concerned with the psychological implications of the blur as it is in the artistic exercises of composition, lighting, and the effective application of materials.

Since the initial focus of this project was the artistic use of blur, the manner by which I was exposed to it bears mentioning. The first intentionally blurred images I ever saw were the black and white photorealist paintings of post-World War II German painter Gerhard Richter. Depicted as figure 1 is Richter's painting *Woman Descending the Staircase*, a stunning example of this technique.

Figure 1. Gerhard Richter, *Woman Descending the Staircase* (*Frau, die Treppe herabgehend*), The Art Institute of Chicago, 1965, Oil on canvas, 79 x 51 in.

It intrigued me that an earnest painter would, instead of discarding a blurred photograph, take it and painstakingly replicate it. Richter even took focused images and painted them as though they were blurred. In my experience, as in the experience of most amateur and recreational photographers, blurred photographs are the error of an unsteady hand, not intentional acts. I am quick to delete them and yet when faced with the image of *Woman Descending the Staircase*, I found none of the ugliness or imperfection one would expect

of a blurred image, which puzzled me.[1] Indeed, when I tried to imagine the same image rendered without the blur, I found it static and unappealing. All of the intrigue it carries in the blurred version disappears, and the imagined focused rendering is visually disappointing.

I set about discovering what exactly the role of the blur in Richter's images was, and why it added a sense of intrigue to them. Contemporary American photographer Sally Mann, known for her enigmatic black and white photographs, says that an effective image must contain an unidentifiable element which brings to the work its appeal: "If it doesn't have ambiguity, don't bother to take it. I love that, that aspect of photography—the mendacity of photography" ("Sally Mann: Dog Bone Prints"). This remark comes from an interview about Mann's series of dog bone prints, in which the bones are resurrected into a mysterious new life by virtue of almost tangibly rendered textures and atmospheric hazes that mix foreground with background. Mann enjoys tricking the viewer, but not with negative intentions (see figs. 2-3).

Figures 2-3: Sally Mann, *Eva (#22 Velvet Skin)* and *Eva (#21 Vase)*, Jackson Fine Art Gallery in Atlanta, 2000, Silver gelatin prints from collodian glass negatives, 10 x 8 in.

The deceptive nature that Mann attributes to photography could well be said of other mediums. In Richter's painting *Woman Descending the Staircase,* the blur is used to create the illusion of a moving person where there is only paint and canvas, and expert use of hue gives the painting a photographic quality. Therefore, Richter's photorealist style tricks the viewer in multiple ways, but all for the viewer's enjoyment.

Richter was not the first painter to attempt to depict motion. In fact, *Woman Descending the Staircase* is a play on the infamous cubist image of the 20th century French painter Marcel Duchamp entitled *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2),* which depicts a similarly fragmented woman in various moments of her descent of a staircase (see fig. 4).[2]

Figure 4. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1912, Oil on canvas, 57 7/8 x 35 1/8 in.

It is worth noting that Duchamp himself consulted photographic references. Inspired by the stop motion photography of Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge,

Duchamp drew from Muybridge's 1887 compendium of photographs entitled *Woman Walking Downstairs* to fashion his painting of a nude walking down stairs (see fig. 5). His painting does not capture a single moment, but several disjointed moments presented at once. This is one way in which it is distinct from Richter's image, which depicts consecutive motion. The most notable difference, however, is that Duchamp's painting does not allude to its photographic references, whereas the undeniable photographic resemblance of Richter's painting forces one to consider photography when viewing it.

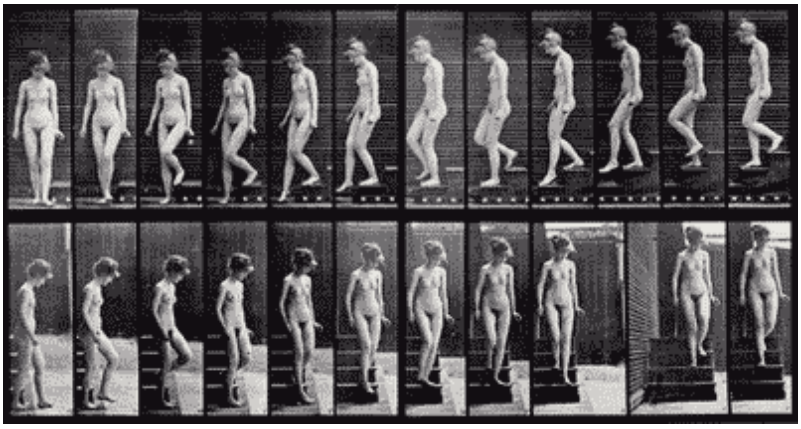

Figure 5. Eadweard Muybridge, *Woman Walking Downstairs (Eine Treppe herabsteigend),* Location unavailable, 1887, Digital stills from a video file.

I began to consider why it was that blurred photographs are typically unsettling, but are poetic and beautiful in Richter's paintings. When looking at *Woman Descending a Staircase* with fresh eyes several days after first seeing it, it struck me that the enjoyment I felt when looking at the folds of her gown and the motion of her arms dissipated, even turned into overt discomfort when looking at her face. This realization led to the psychological and sociological investigations which informed the first phase of my paintings.[3]

It is generally agreed upon that a representation of a person is "realistic" insofar as it accurately captures his or her features in a given moment in time. However, we do not interact with static faces, but talking, laughing, and eating faces: faces in motion. Even at their stillest there is the motion of blinking eyes and swallowing mouths. Yet we have come to expect frozen expressions from photographs, disregarding those that fail to achieve this when in reality it is precisely these "failures" which better express the likeness of a person by showing the familiar motion of his or her face.

As part of my research on faces, I consulted a group of TED Talks, one of which addressed the problems presented by a static face.[4] This talk entitled "Saving Faces," delivered by facial surgeon Iain Hutchison, cited a study done by a Princeton University psychologist named Alexander Todorov which found that people make judgments on a face in a mere 1/10 of a second.[5] To illustrate his point, Hutchison flashed an image on the screen of a hooded figure with only part of his face showing, and then inquired of the audience what their reactions to it were. Though the image was only displayed for mere fractions of a second, the audience agreed with Hutchison that they felt a distrust, and even fear, of that person. The original study conducted by Todorov and his student researcher Janine Willis provided participants with even more controlled images than the hooded figure with which Hutchison presented his audience. Each person wore a gray T-shirt and posed with a neutral expression. They were not allowed to have beards, mustaches, earrings, eyeglasses, or visible makeup: all of which may have affected the viewers' judgment of them. Despite the minimal amount of information the viewers had, Todorov's study found that judgments made after a 100 millisecond time exposure greatly corresponded with those made with no time constraints in all five of the

categories of attractiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, competence, and aggressiveness. He therefore concluded that we make inferences based on people's faces within the first tenth of a second that we are exposed to them.

What in-focus photography does is present the viewer with a representation of the first tenth second encounter with a face; but without supplemental information or the ability to interact with the person in the picture, the rational mind has no arsenal with which to combat whatever judgment is formed. Though blurred photography by no means solves this problem, it does complicate the viewer's ability to judge prematurely and may therefore delay judgment or at least cast doubt upon judgments made. In a world where looks play an increasing role in a person's success, any method to defer the critical eye is appreciated.

The use of the blur in contemporary photographer Luca Desienna's series *My Dearest Javanese Concubine* allows the viewer to step back and not focus on the subjects' features or surroundings. The images from this series immediately strike the viewer as beautiful, both for their formal qualities and for their ability to paradoxically depict an anonymous couple in a highly relatable and human way. The first image I painted is of a couple in a poorly lit corner (see fig. 6). It is unclear what they are doing, though it is clear that they are in motion since the slow shutter speed that was used captured ghost images of their former movements. These echoes of past motion cause their bodies to pulsate and dance even as the eye watching them remains fixed. The indistinct shadows on the man and his surroundings blend him with the background and create the same mysterious illusion of unreal space found in Sally Mann's aforementioned dog bone prints.

Figure 6. Luca Desienna, Photograph of Tira and Gunawan from *My Dearest Javanese Concubine*, Precise location, year, and size unavailable.

The woman standing opposite the man is more fixed into the space by clear lines that give definition to her right hip and left leg, though she too carries a mysterious air, for her body is abuzz with indistinct flecks of caught light. The blur of both of their faces is even more exaggerated than that of the woman in Richter's *Woman Descending the Staircase*: so much so that it is difficult even to identify their facial features. In this way, the viewer is denied any power to judge them on any level based on the superficiality of their facial appearances, and is drawn instead to considerations of lighting, motion, and composition. Capturing these elements is what I focused on when working on my painted rendition of the image (see fig. 7).

Figure 7. *Tira and Gunawan*, 2012, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in.

*Endnotes*

1. It goes without saying that expanding the viewer's perceptions of reality and redefining "good" art have always been topics of interest to artists. As a result, there are many different artistic styles which the viewer may not necessarily deem as "good" at first, as was the case with Cubism and Surrealism, to name two that were particularly contentious upon their emergence in the art world. Therefore, Gerhard Richter is the inheritor of a rich history of predecessors who similarly sought to depict reality in new and "unreal" ways. This is not to undermine Richter's originality nor to discredit him as an artist, but rather to situate his work and my reaction to it in the scope of the history of art.

2. In fact, Richter was highly influenced by Duchamp and journaled in 1982 that he measured himself and all of his contemporaries against Duchamp (McDonough 90).

3. There is a certain irony in uniting Richter's photorealist style with psychological imagery, as the photorealist style for him was a means by which to avoid the psychological: "By making photos, Richter distanced himself from the gestural and expressive, the psychologically loaded. In the smooth, placid surfaces of the finished paintings, there is no actual gesture, but only the image of a gesture, only the *image* of texture" (Haxthausen 57).

4. TED Talks are presentations in various fields that are hosted by the nonprofit company TED. TED was created in 1984 with the purpose of uniting the realms of technology, entertainment, and design, though its scope has grown much since its founding.

5. Willis, Janine, and Alexander Todorov. "First Impressions: Making Up Your Mind After a 100-Ms Exposure to a Face." *Psychological Science* 17.7 (2006): 592-598. *Tlab.Princeton.Edu.* Web. 20 October 2013.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Tira's and Gunawan's Story

Though the photograph of the couple can be appreciated for its formal qualities, it gains additional value when one becomes familiar with the subject matter. The entire series *My Dearest Javanese Concubine* is devoted to portraying the relationship of two Indonesians in Yogyakarta: Gunawan and Tira. Gunawan is a jobless and homeless orphan, and his lover Tira is a transgender woman who has been severely disfigured by unsuccessful facial surgeries.[1] When presented with a focused image of Tira's face, the unnatural forms her features take immediately repel the eye before the rational mind has a chance to intercede. Desienna, in an article reflecting on his time spent with Tira and Gunawan, writes that Tira told him at one point: "Luca, people don't know what I am, and they don't want to know… they just stop at the entrance and stay there, staring… staring at the surface" ("Luca Desienna/My Dearest"). Todorov's aforementioned study posits one hypothesis to explain hasty judgments, and it is rooted in the very chemistry of the human brain. A quote taken from the study reads: "Functional neuroimaging studies show that detection of trustworthiness in a face may be a spontaneous, automatic process linked to activity in the amygdala" (Todorov 8). The amygdala is the area of the brain involved in the identification of potential danger. We rely heavily on the interpretation of faces to protect and inform us, but the veracity of the information gleaned is often highly questionable. Tira's unnatural facial features and their constrained range of motion, a sad consequence of her unsuccessful operations, can incite fear. This is an instinctual, even a

chemical reaction that we have to certain faces, however it has the potential to unjustly isolate people, as is the case with Tira.

Iain Hutchison, the facial surgeon who cited Todorov, illustrates the vast disconnect between the actual substance of people and what we visually infer about them with the story of a woman named Sue. Before undergoing facial surgery, Sue had a protruding bottom lip. While trivial in comparison to Tira's disfigurements, Sue noted that it elicited unwanted responses from people. Since people read a face with a protruding lower lip as in a pout, her mood was consistently misjudged. Teachers would berate her for her surly attitude, which led to a stressful school life, and when she entered the workforce her coworkers would avoid her or interact with her tentatively. She felt judged, underestimated, and marginalized, which prompted her to seek out Hutchison and undergo a facial surgery to "normalize" the appearance of her lower lip. When the operation was complete and she saw her face, she remarked, "My face now reflects my personality" (qtd. in Hutchison). This story exemplifies what Hutchison considers the greatest distinction between cosmetic and corrective surgery. Corrective surgery, he says, is used to harmonize the exterior form of a person with their character and substance, while cosmetic surgery changes a person. Sue chose to surgically diminish her bottom lip not because its protrusion was unsightly, but because the inferences others' drew from it about her being surly and unapproachable were incongruous with her lively and warm personality.

Believing they were born the wrong gender, transgender people may also seek corrective surgery for the same reason as Sue: that is, with the goal of altering a physicality that they insist is incompatible with who they truly are. The objective of

Tira's surgery was to soften her masculine features and give her a more feminine appearance. Unfortunately, her surgery was not as successful as Sue's, and it left her with disproportionate features and seemingly swollen skin. Desienna's images are remarkable in that they succeed in replacing all of the ugliness in Tira's and Gunawan's lives with beauty. They do not dwell on Tira's disfigurements, nor do they emphasize the poverty and marginalization that Tira and Gunawan must contend with daily. Instead, they quite literally blur over these with the use of slow shutter speeds and diffused lighting. Desienna is very conscious of what his imagery accomplishes. He writes concerning the series:

> Beauty is nothing more than a convention. An illusion established by an educative set of behaviours and models. We think something is beautiful just because there has been a precedent acknowledgement and formulation of it, which is then followed by its consequent acceptance. When something is unknown, or unaccepted it's very likely to be considered ugly. And Tira's face and body are no exception. They aren't habitual, her shapes are not within the accepted forms to which we are accustomed. Therefore the first reaction is that of disgust. Or fear. ("Luca Desienna: My Javanese")

Desienna found a profound beauty in the intense love of two societal outcasts: a beauty that he richly captures in his prints. By depicting their love as he does, he calls into question the traditional gender binary system of most societies and simultaneously casts doubt on the conventional definition of "beauty." Not only does he call the viewer's preconceptions into question, but he even causes the viewer to feel beauty in the images before the identity or history of the subjects is revealed.[2]

The black and white nature of the photographs plays no small part in their success. It eliminates concerns about coloration and with the help of diffused lighting, it draws the viewer directly to the images' charm. It is crucial that the viewer feels the beauty before knowing the subject matter precisely because knowledge of the subject

matter could prejudice the viewer against the image. If certain viewers who disapprove of the transgender lifestyle knew at first that the photographs depict a transgender woman, they may carry their prejudices against the lifestyle to the photographs and be unable to appreciate their beauty. Though the United States is comparatively more tolerant of liberal views on sexuality than other countries, even growing up in contemporary American society without encountering any resistance to the new "genderation" (11), as authors and gender theorists Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman call the current generation of youth that are more accepting of the "gender blending" and gender-bending populace, would be nearly impossible (32). Gwendolyn Ann Smith, one of the contributors to a book co-edited by Bornstein and Bergman, and a transgender herself, phrases the dilemma facing the current world thus: "In the end, we find ourselves with one of two choices: do we push others like us away, to best fit in? Or do we seek out our kin, for comfort and company? For that matter, if we are all someone's 'freak,' does this mean we are all each other's 'normal' too—and worthy of embrace?" (29). Smith devotes a large part of her essay to the consideration of the self-perpetuating force of marginalization, whereby each marginalized group marginalizes another, slowly resulting in the compartmentalization of humanity into isolated groups. She decries this pattern as destructive and favors instead the unity of all groups in a welcoming collective, aware and yet respectful of the differences that distinguish them.

Desienna's images show a similarly welcoming attitude to differences. They coax even the bigoted mind to wonder whether the transgender lifestyle, or stigmatized lifestyles in general, cannot be beautiful. Even if people return to an intolerant state of mind once they learn that Tira is a transgender woman, there was a moment prior to their

discovery—however brief it might have been—wherein they thought the images were beautiful, and this is likely more acceptance than Tira and Gunawan have ever received from some people in their lifetimes. Therefore, it can be said that Desienna's series succeeds even when it fails.

I selected a second image from the *My Dearest Javanese Concubine* series for my next painting. The image depicts Gunawan by himself against a wall, holding his left hand up to his blurred face (see fig. 8).

Figure 8. Luca Desienna, Photograph of Gunawan from *My Dearest Javanese Concubine*, Precise location, year, and size unavailable.

I deliberately chose a picture of Gunawan alone because my interest in the series was not specifically in the marginalization of transgender people, but in marginalization in

general. Gunawan is marginalized due to his association with and acceptance of a transgender woman, but also due to his status as a poor orphan who was raised on the streets. Marginalization and the common man have always been attractive subjects to artists, in literature as in art. Briefly consider Spanish literature alone: in 1554 a novel entitled *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (*The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities*) was published anonymously in Spain. Central to the plot is the suffering of the poor, marginalized boy Lazarillo under a succession of cruel masters. Mid-way through the next century, the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega published "El castigo sin venganza" which empathized with the plight of marginalized women living in a patriarchal society. Finally, the books of contemporary author Rosa Montero prove that marginalization as a theme has endured in Spanish literature, as they protagonize poor blue-collar workers, immigrants and other modern equivalents of marginalized people. With such a long-standing tradition of marginalization as a theme of artistic endeavors, each new work of art with marginalization as its focus must stand out in some manner. Desienna's images do so due to their mysterious atmospheres and surprising intimacy, both of which are apparent in the second image that I decided to paint.

While my painting *Tira and Gunawan* was influenced by my appreciation of the use of blurred features to deter judgment, the choice of imagery for my next painting came about as a result of my interest in Desienna's ability to employ blur in order to show humanity and vulnerability. There is an African philosophy that emphasizes the commonality of man, and is an interesting philosophical counterpart to Desienna's visual work. The philosophy is based upon the African word "ubuntu," which expresses the

notion that an individual's humanity is contingent upon the humanity of all others. The philosophy of Ubuntu became particularly important to post-apartheid South Africa. Anglican bishop and renowned social rights activist Desmond Tutu defines it in the following manner:

> It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness, it speaks about compassion. A person with Ubuntu is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. Such people are open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of Ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them. ("Ubuntu- African Philosophy")

Desienna's own comments about Gunawan suggest that he has many of the qualities of a man with Ubuntu, and Gunawan's willingness to overlook Tira's disfigurement and love her in spite of it suggests as much. To marginalize such a man is to dehumanize him, for marginalization is the exclusion of a man from human company and understanding. It is to label him as different in a way that negatively distinguishes him from other men, as though he were not capable of the same thoughts and feelings as them.

Aimee Mullins, who presented a TED Talk in 2009 and who has enjoyed a successful career as an actress, model, and Paralympic track and field star, is nevertheless also personally familiar with the dehumanizing forces of marginalization. Her TED Talk focused on the challenges she has faced being a double leg amputee, and ended with this appeal to the audience: "I think that if we want to discover the full potential in our humanity, we need to celebrate those heartbreaking strengths and those glorious disabilities that we all have. I think of Shakespeare's *Shylock:* 'If you prick us, do we not

bleed? And if you tickle us, do we not laugh?' It is our humanity and all the potential within it that makes us beautiful" (Mullins). Only by embracing such an attitude can we overcome the long established destructive forces of marginalization.

It is important to note that Mullins associates humanity with beauty. In a like manner, Desienna's series depicts very commonplace scenes as sublime. The moments he captures are familiar to the viewer. In one image, Tira and Gunawan are sitting in a bus, and Gunawan is resting his head upon Tira's shoulder while she folds her arms comfortably over her purse and glances out of the corner of her eye at a child who is observing her. In another Tira is seated before a mirror combing her hair: her face partially reflected in the mirror before her and partially hidden by the position of her hands in the foreground. These scenes are very commonplace, which causes the viewer to recognize aspects of his or her own life in the lives of Tira and Gunawan. In these images we find the shared humanity that Tutu describes, and all the force of the heartbreaking strengths and glorious disabilities that Mullins says define our humanity.

I found the TED Talks on beauty to be an invaluable resource, since they represent a compendium of ideas from a vast range of people: each presenting their personal experience, whether in the form of research or personal stories. There could be no better source to consult that would speak so well to the primary objective of Desienna's series: that is, establishing a plane of understanding between people separated by incongruent backgrounds and beliefs. Designer Richard Seymour presented a TED Talk that raised a point about beauty which is very pertinent to Desienna's series: that beauty may be intrinsic or extrinsic. To illustrate the distinction between these two types, he employed the participation of the audience. He displayed a child's sketch of a

butterfly, and when he asked the audience whether they found the image beautiful, they stared at its shaky lines and asymmetrical wings and were generally unmoved. Then he told them that it was the last act of a five-year-old girl named Heidi before she died of spinal cancer. Again he asked if it was beautiful, this time with a much more notable emotional response from the audience. His point was that it is nearly impossible to find something that is beautiful to everyone without a certain amount of supplementary information. Often a very commonplace thing like a child's drawing can be elevated to the realm of beauty if qualified by certain information. The images of commonplace scenes from Tira's and Gunawan's lives operate in a similar manner.[3] Their hazy blurs and rich black and white tones have a worth of their own, but knowledge of the courage and resilience of Tira and Gunawan in the face of societal disapproval and even neglect brings further depth to the imagery by adding the supplementary information that Seymour notes is often necessary in the search for beauty.

The second image I worked from unites all of the abovementioned concerns: it depicts Gunawan sensitively, and though it is of an unremarkable moment, there is nevertheless a sense of beauty and power due to the facts about Gunawan's life and character to which it alludes. The image shows Gunawan standing by a dirty wall, covering his naked body protectively with one arm. He is in the process of bringing his other arm to his face, as if to smooth his hair or scratch an itch. It is a moment hardly anyone would think to photograph, as are most of the other images in the series. Riding a bus, brushing our hair, walking around our house: these are not the images that make it into our photo albums, but they *are* those that compose the greater portion of our lives. Due to their honesty and relatability, they relay more to the viewer than any prepared

smile. There is a great sense of vulnerability in the photograph of Gunawan, made apparent by his modest stance as he curves his body forward and draws his hand to his inclined head. He is also naked and standing alone. The combination of these factors and the direct lighting give the viewer the feeling that he is exposed: a feeling that I tried to replicate in my painted rendering (see fig. 9). However, the image is neither crude nor voyeuristic. Gunawan's state of undress and his posture work jointly to humanize a marginalized man by stripping away any focus on materialism and replacing it with the simple honesty of a body.

Figure 9. *Gunawan*, 2012, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in.

Ironically, the blur of Gunawan's face helps to humanize him. While faces are highly individualized, the form of the body is comparatively less so and can be quite similar to others'. When one looks at the image of Gunawan with his focused body and blurred face, one sees the image of an "everyman" and is reminded of the unity of humanity. This is a concept often ignored by the modern mind, which tends to value individualization above all things. However, as Tutu's words point out and Desienna's photograph of Gunawan demonstrates, each person is connected to every other. Neither Tutu nor Desienna deny the value of individualization; their objective is instead to call attention to another aspect of personhood that is so often eclipsed by individualization. This aspect is commonality, and it extends beyond just our common form, although this is often used as a physical metaphor to remind us that we are similar in ways beyond the visible. Therein lies the beauty of the image of Gunawan: he is vulnerable as we are vulnerable, hesitant as we are hesitant, and human as we are human. In him we recognize ourselves: our own doubts and misgivings, our own humanity.

*Endnotes*

1. Though I use the present tense to refer to Tira and Gunawan, Tira passed away on May 31, 2011, after the series was shot. She confided in Desienna that she was HIV positive and had contracted the disease as a consequence of her work as a prostitute. An appended statement following Desienna's article on their time together explains that many transgender people in Yogyakarta resort to prostitution as a source of income: "Although Jogiakarta [sic] is known as a fairly tolerant city, the transgenders [sic] still have to face a great degree of problems and struggles, primarily for economic sustenance. The majority of them unfortunately end up working as prostitutes…. This causes a string of serious concerns, above all for HIV. In fact, it is customary that the punters demand no condoms and that the transgenders find themselves torn between losing a client and maintaining their personal health…. In the city of Jogiakarta there are 228 transgenders and most of them are Muslims, and 31 are registered as HIV positive" ("Luca Desienna/ My Dearest").

2. Notably, Gerhard Richter's aforementioned photorealist paintings similarly provoke doubt in the viewers' minds concerning their preconceptions of the subject matter. As Seattle Art Museum curator Catharina Manchanda writes "by estranging familiar objects and images, [Richter] disorients viewers, leaving it up to them to rethink his image worlds and to reconsider the visual construction of value systems" (12-14). However, though his presentation does provoke viewer reconsideration, his images are much more dispassionate than Desienna's. Art critic Arthur C. Danto observes that Richter has "adhered to this nihilist vision of grasped moments – capturing the ordinariness, rather than the beauty, of an object or setting" (7). While Richter emphasizes ordinariness over beauty, Desienna marries the two and captures the beauty of the ordinary.

3. Except, of course, to those who insist on maintaining their prejudice against transgender people, impoverished people, or marginalized people even after seeing the images. Their prejudice will forever blind them to the beauty of Ubuntu and of shared humanity.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Shifting Focus: *Of Lillies and Remains* Introduces a New Phase

For my subsequent two paintings, I focused solely on that which was most blurred in the image of Gunawan: the face. The power of the face, either to communicate or to misrepresent, was on my mind even as I painted Gunawan with his face blurred out. In the course of researching the face for *Tira and Gunawan*, I had found a wealth of information from shockingly disparate sources, which demonstrates the captivation that the study of the human face has over people from varying disciplines. Two sources bear mentioning on account of the effect that they had on my search for imagery off of which to work. The first was the work of social psychologist Dr. Zebrowitz, who has devoted nearly her entire life's work to determining the role of faces in human interactions. Even reading the titles of her studies speaks volumes: "First Impressions from Facial Appearance Cues," "Social Psychological Face Perception: Why Appearance Matters," and "The Contribution of Face Familiarity to Ingroup Favoritism and Stereotyping" are just three of many. The other source that influenced me was a children's book by author Donna M. Jackson that tells children how to interpret expressions and teaches them about diseases that can affect the ability of a face to form recognizable expressions. What I found particularly interesting in these two sources was the great possibility of error for which they allow. Zebrowitz's studies concede that facial cues can lead to favoritism, stereotyping, and miscommunication, and nearly half of Jackson's book is spent explaining the effect of certain diseases and disorders on the normal functioning of a

face. As a result of this research, I grew increasingly interested in the nuanced and manipulable nature of the face, which caused me to seek images of faces with unclear expressions for my next paintings.

By a fortuitous coincidence, Desienna has an in-progress series entitled *Of Lillies [sic] and Remains* that contains images of faces that do not have any readily identifiable expression. However, the resulting photographs are anything but neutral because the faces are dramatized by drastic angles of the head and neck. In one, the neck is thrust backward and to one side, pushing the mouth open and diffusing the gaze of the eyes, which appear embedded in their lower lids. This is the image I elected to paint for my third painting (see fig. 10). It relates very well to my research in that the subject's neutral expression leaves room for the misinterpretation that is so common in human interactions.

Figure 10. Luca Desienna, Photograph I from *Of Lillies and Remains*, Precise location, year, and size unavailable.

There is a decent amount of scholarship on the topic of facial misrepresentation. Author Daniel McNeill approaches the matter from a biological standpoint, noting that humans have very smooth and mostly hairless faces as compared to many animals, which makes human expressions much more noticeable and readable (17). Though this is very useful, McNeill points out that once we become cognizant of this fact, we learn to manipulate our features to mislead others or to hide what we do not want to show. He writes concerning facial communication: "We [read] a language we cannot articulate and may not consciously notice. Yet we regularly feign these cues. Deceit pervades animal communication, and even chimps can lie with their faces. The face is both ultimate truth and fata morgana" (8). McNeill makes an interesting point which is that we often do not consciously note what it is that we divine from a face. This observation seems to be in agreement with the aforementioned Todorov study of peoples' reactions to faces, wherein Todorov hypothesized that since judgments are made in as little as 1/10 of a second some reactions seem to be controlled by involuntary activity in the amygdala. However, McNeill states that although we do not always consciously know what we deduce from a face, we are highly aware of what it is that we project with our own faces. We sometimes use this knowledge in order to protect ourselves by withholding information, but we also use it to deceive others by sending false signals.

The author Simon Ings expands on this point and offers one reason for the misleading nature of expression. He divides facial signals into two categories: the expressive and the emotive. Some facial movements are used only to emphasize speech while others convey emotions. This division is sometimes problematic, he notes, as we

often cannot distinguish between the two categories when they are represented. Ings writes:

> Because the face is capable of expressing two things at once – how we feel, and what we mean – we should perhaps be reconciled to the false smiles, manufactured looks of interest, and all the other deceitful gestures of which our eyes and faces are capable. Deceit is often a necessary part of communication; we conceal what we feel to make room for what we mean. (152)

It is this concealment of feeling that seems to interest Desienna, for he writes that the objective of his series *Of Lillies and Remains* is to capture visual manifestations of "inner desires and suppressed longings.... Susurrations between the ordinary" ("Desienna_Bio"). Interestingly, he is successful despite the predominantly neutral expressions of the faces in his photographs. In fact, the neutrality of the faces is the grand deception of the images, and the subjects are betrayed by the sumptuous and mysterious backgrounds which allude to the passions and longings that they are hiding. They are bold and uninhibited and as near to visual manifestations of visually unrepresentable passions that one can get.

The first image that I painted from the *Of Lillies and Remains* series contains several elements that bear mentioning, one of which is Desienna's characteristic expert use of light. A single beam of light illuminates the image, but only falls on part of the face, two spots at the left edge of the neck, and the subject's shirt. Just as important as the light parts, however, are the parts covered in deep shadows. In this image, the dark background appears to occasionally overtake the foreground as deep shadows on the face, neck, and arms erase all definition. Indeed, at times it is difficult to tell which is the foreground and which the background, for though the brightness of the white tends to propel it to the foreground, the way the blackness cuts into and over it confuse this

boundary. This give and take—alternate revealing and concealing—is what makes the image an effective expression of Desienna's seemingly impossible goal of manifesting the suppressed interior of a person visually, for just as a person endeavoring to hide something inevitably reveals certain clues despite his efforts not to, so the image divulges hints of desire and unrest in spite of its effort at neutrality. Every aspect of the image is incorporated into the conflict between revealing and concealing: the expression is largely neutral but the eyes seem to be communicating; the light areas call for attention but the dark for anonymity; a line that begins clearly at the left shoulder is swept into a haze and throws the eye off of the figure without satisfying its search for definition of form.

For my painted rendering, I wanted to depart somewhat from the photographic source. When painting *Tira and Gunawan* and *Gunawan*, I was greatly concerned with learning to represent blurred motion convincingly with brushstrokes, but having become comfortable with this technique, I felt equipped to progress beyond simulacrum to something more interpretive. To this end, I incorporated a subdued shade of green into my painting. My choice of color was influenced by Desienna's intentions for the series to communicate the hidden interior of a person. The color green has a vast array of implications from its use in art and literature that relate it to what Desienna intends to express with his images. Take for example the fifteenth century painting *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck (see fig. 11). This painting has many symbolic elements, not the least of which is the vibrant green color chosen for the woman's dress. It is meant to show the woman's fertility, which is further emphasized by the exaggerated size of her stomach.

Figure 11. Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, National Gallery in London, 1434, Oil painting on oak panel, 32 2/5 x 23 3/5 in.

In addition to fertility, the color green would also come to symbolize lust. By van Eyck's time, green already had a rich history of use in conjunction with imagery associated with such things as nature, growth, youth and fertility; in medieval Christian iconography, for example, it appeared prominently in depictions of the Garden of Eden and speculative representations of the kingdom of God as the restored paradise prophesied by Isaiah. In the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries, a sect called the Adamites sought to recreate the lost paradise of the Garden of Eden themselves by "[seeking] nature in [its] ideal form: plenty

of green, abundance, communal property, nudity, and carefree sex" (Pleij 41). In the Adamites the positive implications of green including religiosity and nature were debased by its negative implications of lust and immorality, which they likewise embraced (causing them to be condemned as heretics by the Church).

As time progressed, the symbolic meaning of the color green was further nuanced. Whereas at one time it was used in literature to signify virility, strength, and godliness- such as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – later authors cloaked characters in green that have no resemblance to the Green Knight and who seem to in fact be antitheses to him. Particularly notable is the character from Miguel de Cervantes's infamous novel *Don Quijote* named "el Caballero del Verde Gabán" (the Knight of the Green Cloak), whose very name invokes the memory of the Green Knight. However, in contrast to the Green Knight who is truly righteous and honorable, the Knight of the Green Cloak is only superficially admirable. One scholar notes the following: "Pero últimamente el ingenio de los críticos ha descubierto rasgos alarmantes en el del Verde Gabán. El color que viste está asociado con aventuras eróticas," or in English, "But ultimately, critics astutely discovered alarming traits of the Knight of the Green Cloak. The color that he wears is associated with erotic liaisons" (Pope 209). This and various hints from the text itself suggest that the Knight of the Green Cloak is deceitful and untrustworthy, possibly even licentious. A study conducted by Dutch psychologist Dr. Benjamin J. Kouwer on people's reactions to colors found that people commonly associate the color with deceit, despite its positive role as the chosen color for imagery of the natural world:

> [The positive] interpretations of green are denied completely by another group strongly opposing [this] harmony: green as symbol of falseness and deceit. The latter can be explained by the interaction of blue and yellow as well. For the blue and yellow tendencies can also come into *conflict* and then disharmony and

> ambiguity may take the place of well-balanced centrifugal and centripetal forces. Green then becomes both seductive and aggressive, friendly with unfriendly intentions. Its outward freshness and openness only serves to conceal inward perverseness. (126)

The tie between the color green and licentiousness and depravity has endured to modern times and has even traversed to the realm of Spanish colloquialisms, appearing in the phrase "un viejo verde" (literally "the old green man"), which has the same connotation of sexual perversion as the English phrase "a dirty old man." That the color green has both positive and negative symbolism makes it all the more fitting for a work that intends to show the inner desires and longings of a person, which can be positive or negative themselves. It better encompasses the full range of desires that a person might have: from spiritual to earthly, from innocent to lustful.

I wanted my painting to capture the somewhat guarded expression of the subject as well as the sumptuous, active, and inscrutable background against which she appears. The background, more so than the face, communicates the idea of desires and longings by appearing as a visual metaphor for them. With this in mind, I exaggerated the role of the background. I created a patchwork of textural shapes that seem to appear in different planes: some hover on top of the subject, some recede behind it, and others weave themselves into it (see fig. 12). Their dual role as both foreground and background relates them to the prominent theme of the conflict between revealing and concealing. The placement of these shapes introduced a new set of compositional challenges. I had to carefully position them to recreate the sense of unbalance and muted discomfort found in the source photograph, while simultaneously avoiding symmetry and taking care not to permit too much uninterrupted black canvas, which has the danger of seeming static and uninteresting in comparison to the more active textural shapes.

Figure 12. *Hidden Longings I*, 2012, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48 x 72 in.

These textural shapes began to overtake my interest in blurred imagery and though the two techniques relate to each other in terms of their role in creating motion and visual interest, introducing the textural shapes signified a change of focus in my painting, which would continue into the next piece.

Intrigued by the potential of the textural shapes but not wholly satisfied by their use in *Hidden Longings I*, I progressed to my fourth and final figuratively based painting. Though conceptually my fourth painting belongs to what I have categorized as the first group of psychologically influenced imagery, the growing concern over the compositional placement of the textural shapes heralds the thought processes behind the work that was to come. Upon the completion of *Hidden Longings I*, there were several

areas with which I was dissatisfied. A primary concern for me was the obscurity of the face, which seemed to be too eclipsed by the background.

For my fourth painting, I simplified the imagery and took compositional concerns even more seriously in order to draw attention back to the face. I elected an image that presented an even more drastically magnified face than the last, against an even more uniform background (see fig. 13).

Figure 13. Luca Desienna, Photograph II from *Of Lillies and Remains*, Precise location, year, and size unavailable.

Only two spots of light break up the dark background, and neither is as bright as the highlights on the face. They are also in locations that do not compete with the dominance of the face as a focal point; one is directly below the chin and the other is in the upper right-hand corner of the image. This composition creates three areas of focus with the

two light spots and the face arranged in a triangular fashion, which is known to establish a sense of balance and order in a work of art.

It is worth noting that there is a distinction between a piece that is “balanced” and one that is “static.” An artist balances a composition to create a solid technical framework against which the subject matter can be enjoyed. A balanced composition is organized in such a way so as to encourage the eye to move throughout the piece. A piece that fails to encourage such movement runs the risk of becoming static. The dichotomy between stasis and dynamism is a well-known concept among artists, but even the untrained eye is conscious of it, whether or not it is aware. It is the duty of the artist to master the use of visual devices and employ them in order to influence the feeling that a viewer has when viewing a piece.

In my fourth painting, I created a balanced composition to ground the eye, but also to recreate the feeling of imbalance found in the source photograph. This may at first sound contradictory, but there is a distinction to be made between an imbalanced composition and an imbalanced angle. My painting is intentionally imbalanced in angle while balanced in composition. This is to say I employed several techniques in order to make the eye feel comfortable with the composition of the piece (the eye will intuitively pick up on this whether the viewer is trained artistically or not), and then interrupted this feeling of comfort with unnatural angles and bold brushwork. As part of creating a successful, dynamic composition, I magnified Desienna’s image even further so that both the forehead and the ray of light in the upper right-hand corner break the top border of the canvas (see fig. 14).

Figure 14. *Hidden Longings II*, 2012, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 48 x 72 in.

Additionally, I arranged the textural shapes in such a way as to break the other three sides of the canvas. The breaking of borders forces the eye to follow marks off of and back onto the canvas, which augments the sense of movement. I also established the face as the focal point of the piece by making it the largest and brightest part of the image. As a final modification, I used a more neutralized version of the already muted green used in the last painting and also introduced a similarly subtle mauve tone. The introduction of a second color helped to create more visual interest and also aided in balancing the piece by providing the eye relief from the mono-tonality of the green. I did not choose the mauve color based off of literary associations as I did with the green tone from the last painting, but rather I chose it because of its relation to magenta, which is the complementary tone to green according to additive color theory. When a color is placed

next to its complementary tone, both colors stand out more. Since I used muted tones that only hint at magenta and green, neither color stands out drastically, but what the mauve does do is create more visual interest because its warmer tone offsets the cooler green. In this manner, I employed my knowledge of composition and color theory to create my final figurative painting.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Conclusion: Second Phase of Paintings

It is clear from the above description how different my approach and thought processes were during the painting of *Hidden Longings II* than during the painting of those before it. An extended break from painting over Christmas and a lecture by the painters Bruce Herman and Makoto Fujimura in January would provide the circumstances necessary for the imminent new direction my paintings would take: a change foreshadowed by the different set of concerns I focused on in my last figurative piece.[1] Upon returning from Christmas break and before having begun a new painting, I attended a lecture given by Herman and Fujimura about a joint exhibition of their work entitled *QU4RTETS* that was being shown at Baylor's Martin Museum. This exhibition was part of an artistic collaboration between Herman, Fujimura and the composer Christopher Theofanidis, who were all inspired to pay homage to T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* in their unique ways. During the gallery talk, Herman spoke about the theme of hidden messages as it applies to paintings. He said:

> There's this dynamism to materials…. It's a cooperative dance between your work and the surface of the painting, and the paint…. People think there's [sic] hidden messages in paintings and they think their main job is to understand a work of art; and I would argue that it is not as important to understand it as it is to *encounter* it. Not that those things are always separate, but the fact is, it's not like there's some code that you need to crack. (*Baylor: Martin Museum*)

Before delivering this lecture, Herman and Fujimura spoke to a group of painting students about our work. They were kind enough to critique my two most recent images at the time (see figs. 12 and 14). They mutually agreed that I may be trying to

prematurely devote myself to a style, and encouraged me to experiment with a greater range of materials, colors, and application methods. Fujimura, who is highly conscious of even minute variance in tones due to his own sensitively colored work, remarked that the black I had used as the background of the paintings may not have been the best choice. I used acrylic Mars Black which is not as deep a black as Ivory Black and which, being acrylic, dries to produce a more shallow surface than oil paint does. The shallow matte expanses created by the large areas of Mars Black fail to replicate the mysterious depths of the rich blacks found in Desienna's photographs. They reaffirm the two-dimensionality of the pieces where they should have suggested great depth. In terms of psychological implications of *Hidden Longings I* and *II* there was much to ponder, but this came, to a certain extent, at the expense of attention to artistic considerations. The connection that a viewer has to a piece of work comes from what Herman tenderly refers to in the abovementioned quote as "encountering" it. This verb choice subtly personifies the work and makes the viewing of it an intimate experience. To demand comprehension from a viewer is to engage his mind, but to allow for a viewer to encounter a work is to ask nothing of him other than his honest reaction.

Instead of allowing for a reaction from the viewer, my pieces were laden with the burden of interpretation that I had hitherto not recognized as a burden. Herman's insistence that a painting need not have a code to crack made me realize just how far my approach to painting was from the one he espoused. This is not to say that I abandoned my philosophy because it was not in accordance with Herman's, but that I considered his philosophy and found great truth in what he said. It is as the painter John F. Carlson said: "We must not imitate the externals of nature with so much fidelity that the picture fails to

evoke that wonderful teasing recurrence of emotion that marks the contemplation of a work of art" (qtd. in Genn). It was not that I was imitating nature too strictly, but that I was approaching my paintings with a restrictive, predetermined sense of form and structure that did not allow for the freshness of unplanned marks. Occupied as I was by the ideas behind the pieces, I did not spend time thinking about how to allow for an emotional response from the viewer. I subjugated the emotional response to the intellectual, not realizing that it is precisely a piece's ability to evoke an emotional response that gives it timelessness. In accordance with my newfound approach toward painting, I directed my efforts towards working on permitting emotional responses from the viewer while also using fresh mark-making. The psychological concerns from my first phase of imagery were not entirely abandoned: they merely moved out of the realm of content and into the realm of viewer interaction with my work.

Following Herman's and Fujimura's visit, I tried unsuccessfully several times to discover anew the "dynamism of materials" to which Herman referred. Fujimura had suggested to experiment with different applicators as well as application techniques, so I used palette knives, large brushes, sticks, scrapers, and wooden blocks to apply and spread paint. One day, after having begun and abandoned more than a few paintings I applied wood stain to the painting I was working on at the time. I put it on top of a still-wet layer of acrylic paint and instantly the two reacted: the wood stain pooled into organic shapes that the web-like acrylic paint weaved itself around. The edges where the wood stain and acrylic met bled slightly into each other and formed intricate, small patterns where the two mediums alternately laced together and fought each other for visual dominance.

Figures 15-17 show three paintings that I worked on simultaneously as I tried to discover the balance between allowing for the interesting interactions caused by the antipathy of the oil-based wood stain and the water-based acrylic paint, and controlling said reactions to a certain extent in order to create a successful piece. I painted over *Topography I* and *Topography II* several times each before I was able to create the final pieces pictured.[2]

Figure 15. *Topography I*, 2013, Acrylic and wood stain on canvas, 36 x 36 in.

Figure 16. *Topography II*, 2013, Acrylic and wood stain on canvas, 36 x 36 in.

The interaction of the wood stain and acrylic paint, though very interesting, had the danger of becoming overwhelming if too many different colors were used. For this reason I established a clear sense of foreground and background, as in *Topography I* and *II*; or severely limited the colors used, as in Topography Study I (see fig. 17).

Figure 17. Topography study I, 2013, Acrylic and wood stain on canvas, 16 x 20 in.

While working on these three paintings, I discovered many different ways to apply and manipulate the materials. The intensity of the wood stain could be diminished by the addition of paint thinner or its color could be altered by the addition of oil paints; dried acrylic painted over wood stain could be scratched off to reveal the wood stain below as in *Topography II*; and the acrylic paint could be watered down into washes which react differently to the wood stain due to higher water content. Even adding pure water on top of the wood stain created patterning within the wood stain without introducing another color or medium. In *Topography III* I brought the problem to a larger canvas size and traded the Colonial Maple wood stain for a Red Mahogany (see fig. 18). I intended *Topography III* to evoke a more peaceful mood than that of either figure *Topography I* or *II*, whose bold coloring and aggressive mark making imbued them with a greater sense of liveliness and energy.

Figure 18. *Topography III*, 2013, Acrylic and wood stain on canvas, 48 x 72 in.

The three paintings that conclude my second phase return to a smaller canvas size and in them I deal very much with issues of coloration and composition (see figs. 19-21). Even in these paintings I learned new ways to use the materials that I had not discovered in earlier paintings. In Topography Study II, the large brown circle is the oxygenated skin from the top of the Colonial Maple wood stain can, which I adhered to the canvas and surrounded by Red Mahogany wood stain. I also discovered while painting Topography Studies II-IV that brighter acrylic tones could pick up the echo of the color of the wood stain by buffing the painted acrylic portions with a paper towel dabbed in the wood stain.

Figures 19-21. Topography studies II-IV, 2013, Acrylic and wood stain on canvas, 16 x 20 in.

At first glance, the paintings from the second phase of my work may seem completely incompatible with those of the first phase, but if one looks at the paintings in the order in which they were painted, the gap between the two becomes less drastic. In *Gunawan,* I was already using texture, and then I gradually began to add color and greater amounts of texture until my pieces abandoned the figurative element to focus solely on color, texture, composition and material. The psychological focus that was heavily apparent in the first phase of images is not apparent in the content of the second phase. However, I took the relationship of the eye to color and form, which is in itself a psychological phenomenon, into much greater consideration in the second phase. Therefore, the theme of psychology did not subside in the second phase of my paintings. The grand difference between the two phases is that the first group of paintings was meant to engage the mind of the viewer whereas the second group was meant to allow for varied viewer reactions, whether intellectual or emotional. It may be said that though the work is not united thematically, it is nevertheless related, though by progression rather than unification.

*Endnotes*

1. Bruce Herman and Makoto Fujimura are friends and successful painters who are enjoying much international recognition in their careers. Herman studied under renowned painter Philip Guston and now serves as the Lothlórien Distinguished Chair in the Art Department of Gordon College. Fujimura studied both in the United States and in Japan, and in addition to working on his distinctive mineral based paintings he serves as Creative Director of the International Arts Movement which he himself founded in 1991.

2. The works are so named because of the topographical ridges and valleys created by the wood stain and acrylic paint pushing each other away. When I realized that the forms produced were reminiscent of organic and natural imagery: topography, cells, veins, etc., I consulted a book of photomicrographs (photographs taken through a microscope) that was prefaced by this explanation of the compatibility of art and science: "So much banal wonder and written nonsense have been provoked by the correspondences between images of art and science that it is an area where a babble of clichés holds sway. This may disguise the problem but does not remove it. There is an amusing form of interdisciplinary social climbing inherent in the comparison: science seeks an aesthetic cachet; art seeks from science the authority of which science deprived it. As Wylie Sypher makes clear, art, while opposing science, has appropriated much of its language and methods. Such sibling rivalry, however, is subsumed in the full implications of the organic metaphor" (Brian O'Doherty qtd. in Wolberg xviii). Much of the language and methods of scientific experimentation are apparent in my art. Therefore, as a nod to the role of science in my artwork, I named the pieces after topography, as the 3-D nature of the divots and ridges most reminded me of topographical maps.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Images of Phase II Detail

Figures 22-25. Details of *Topography II* (left column) and *Topography III* (right column) that demonstrates the techniques employed and the intricacies produced by the antipathy of wood stain to acrylic paint.

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