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Sp21 Residency Summary

From day one it was clear I had entered a foreign land full of brilliantly inquisitive thinkers with whom I would one day be a part of. Even in the short time encompassing the residency, my understanding of the visual language and how it correlates to my own artistic practice has grown tremendously. Each discussion with students and faculty brought with it a new challenge to my artistic process along with possible directions going forward.

Critical Theory 1 alone has laid a solid foundation for viewing works of art and new ways to analyze my own. I had brought preconceived notions as to what made a successful visual work of art, which were quickly disregarded while listening to discussions during our meetings. As each work was analyzed, Stuart made it very easy to generate personal connections within the class discourse. He even went as far as to form direct correlations to my own work with relation to some of the current obstacles facing contemporary painters.

My use of the visual language was challenged in a few critical areas:

1. Technically, my work shows the years of diligent attention to detail. However, there is little room left for the viewer to bring their own perceptions into the experience. The work should allow the viewer more time to take in the piece and give them the space to make their own judgements The painting becomes much more interesting when the viewer is permitted to have a unique experience with the work opposed to the experience chosen for them.
2. By playing to inherent wants of the general public I am essentially removing the possibilities of depth within the context of the work. Giving in to what popular culture wants is a great way to sell a work of art, but not for creating a work of art. I’d prefer the latter and begin to push general concepts and visual depictions further by engaging the viewer more and having them understand less. By presenting with less material in a more specific way, increasing depth may begin to exist within viewer interactions. Additionally, the visual images created must adhere to current social trends, stigmas, feelings, and understand how the final piece may be viewed by certain individuals.
3. The need to explore the world outside of my studio and without the confines of the camera was something stressed continuously during the residency. As a remedy, it has been suggested to begin works with an array of drawings while in the composition phase of the work. Documentation of all correspondence with subjects and the formulation of the ideas created during the initial phase could be a way of expanding upon the painting with other forms of media. Emails to and from the subjects, video recordings of conversations, and recordings of the day to day activities of the individual will be included in the artistic process. If I am to depict a subject fully, there needs to be a more in depth understanding of who they are, not just from the viewpoint of others, but how they see themselves.
4. The more successful works coming out of my studio contextualize aspects of my daily life. When I take overtly broad subject matters on, there becomes a disconnect within the piece. Staying within the confines of my life experiences gives the work familiarity which should translate to a more intimate connection with the viewer.

Three specific directions for my work were presented to me, each having its own opportunities for success. The first is to continue with what I’ve been doing and begin each work with an idea, take the photos, and paint directly from the image. The second is to draft the concept through drawings and other media using the photos as reference. The third, and the one I prefer, is to draft the idea through drawings from life, conversations, video, photographs, local news sources, and other forms of research. Next, compile the research material through varying forms of media where the painting becomes a way of expressing my findings. This will give me the best chance at not only representing the subject in a more personal way but will make the ‘art’ more about the process than the painting.

Apart from the visual work I’m creating, I must obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how painting has evolved through the years. I skipped the steps of historical and contemporary exploration and went to painting what I see through a camera. The academic side of art will be at the forefront of my studies with the visual creations following along. There are a few specific areas of focus for learning and further research. Art History, specifically painting is a necessary research topic. An understanding of the contemporary approach to figure portraiture, body language as a form of communication, and a dive into current views on masculinity/femininity are all necessary for the creation of a cohesive body of work. In addition to the readings, in person conversations with producers, writers and other visual professionals will give me first-hand accounts in their respective fields.

There is no question my practice requires an introduction to contemporary art. A few of the artists recommended as reference to begin the process are Andrew Wyeth, James Abbott McNeil Whistler, John Singer Sargent, Edward Hopper, Robert F Blum, William Low, Lucian Freud, Peter Doig, Margaret Bowland, Alex Katz, Nick Alm, Meleko Mokgosi, Frans Smit, and Amy Sherald. Along with researching artists I also believe it is in my best interest to reanalyze the history of art with my new perspective (big thank you to the faculty and students for that). Writings from John Berger, Brad Troemel, Peter Halley, Luce Iriagaray, Rosanlind Kraus, Margaret McCann and many others are on the list as academic materials. I see it as a necessity to obtain a broad sense of contemporary art in its many forms if I am to create my own visual language strategies.

The residency was an extremely eye-opening experience that has challenged me to reevaluate what art (specifically painting) means to me and how best to visually voice my findings. By keeping a focus on localized social and cultural themes the work will stay personal while also generating a consistent stream of ideas. Getting out of the studio should begin to open my color pallet and create a conceptual base for future projects. By keeping my studio practice focused on a consistent theme there will be plenty of opportunity to include multiple forms of media while still incorporating my detailed painting style.