

Painting as Liturgy

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Abstract

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There are a number of ways to find meaning, value, and purpose and I consider myself equally fortunate and cursed to have found painting as a means of seeing the world. Painting is as mysterious as it is blatant, healing as it is destructive, truthful as it is deceitful, and communal as it is individualized. These juxtaposing ideas offer me an unmatched degree of curiosity that keeps the engine of my soul fueled. Through this body of work, I am navigating a new identity of fatherhood and am documenting themes and/or symbols of domesticity as they correspond to this identity. The work posits an emphasis on time (the rate at which it passes by and is employed as a limitation), place (the specificity of home and notions of home), and light (a recurring

protagonist in the work). As the paintings are a personal account of my current phase of life, they are an outlet for contemplating my role as a father.

Painting is a deconstructive response to my rigid evangelical upbringing; a way for me to process the persuasions and often, toxic theology of the Church. Though my paintings do not deliberately address religious subject matter, it is important to note that the 'why' behind my visual lexicon is informed by an adolescence riddled with religious trauma. Consequently, the wiring of my brain finds inherent value in religious practices, but I've traded my inherited faith for a faith that proposes artmaking as a valid form of liturgy.



Quarantine, Day 34, Oil on Linen, 2020

“To be an artist, you don’t have to compose music or paint or be in the movies or write books. It’s just a way of living. It has to do with paying attention, remembering, filtering what you see and answering back, participating in life.”

-Viggo Mortensen

Painting as Seeing

Painting is a vehicle for seeing the world in very specific ways. The genesis of this body of work stems from becoming a father three years ago and committing to being the primary caretaker of my son while my partner worked fulltime. Being at home with an infant made me increasingly aware of the twenty-four hours in a day. The passing of time felt simultaneously expedited and painfully sluggish. Suddenly, our small apartment in Northeast Los Angeles began to feel like a prison. The combination of sleep deprivation and daily feeding routines led me to noticing things around my house like I never had before. I observed the way the evening light fell on a corner of a room at 4:00pm; I found rhythms in the patterns of wood grain on my floor; I would anthropomorphize the dining room chairs and their relationship to the dining table. I would snap a generous number of photos each day to capture these fleeting moments

and use the photos as research for paintings. Could painting these timestamps of fatherhood bring poetry to the banality of it?

Translating these moments to canvas became a vulnerable undertaking for the following reasons: First, everything American culture tells us about being new parents is oriented on a positive mythology; it is a magical, sacred, and elated time filled with newness and wonder. Yet I rarely felt any of those things as a new parent. Instead, I predominantly felt exhausted and depressed, as my autonomy and studio practice were stripped away. Secondly, I felt an internal urge to paint this season of my life but was uncertain if my notions of fatherhood were pictorially relatable, as the traditional gender roles were reversed in my house.

There is, however, a long tradition of figure painting that documents the intimacies of motherhood from Byzantine depictions of the Virgin Mary to Impressionists, Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt's sympathetic portrayals of maternity. Though Cassatt never married or conceived a child herself, her and Morisot's paintings gave new inspiration to me. I specifically remember resonating deeply with Morisot's *The Cradle* and Cassatt's *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair*, as both paintings evoke a level of intimacy and fatigue that I regularly experienced.

"I do not think about you when I paint. I paint for myself, to follow my interests — to satisfy my curiosity."

Catherine Murphy



Salle De Bain, Oil on Panel, 2021



Morning Feed, Oil on Canvas, 2019



Quarantined, Day 24, Oil on Linen, 2020



Solace, Oil on Canvas, 2020



Solace (No.2), Oil on Canvas, 2020



\$7 Pool, Oil on Linen, 2020

Chasing Light

When I moved to the Pacific Northwest my perception of daylight changed, as I was born and raised in Southern California, where I could rely on the sun for 330 days of the year. Conversely, Seattle experiences around 150 days of rain each year. I could not anticipate the toll this would take on my mental health and, subsequently, my work. The rarity of direct sunlight became the basis for which my work was shaped. I thought of light as a recurring character in the work, while I played the role of a steward, documenting what it arbitrarily chose to shine on. This idea fell in line with the

temporality of being home all the time with my son. In fact, chasing sunlight became a celebratory event I'd share in the mornings and late afternoons with him. I started thinking critically about Edward Hopper's geometric descriptions of interior light and Vilhelm Hammershøi's evocative and mysterious depictions of home. Hopper's *Morning Sun* employs the use of direct sunlight to highlight a sense of loneliness and isolation of the figure, while the physicality of Hammershøi's interiors assumes the role of the figure. Thus began my search for meaning within the fleeting illuminated spaces in my home.

"Great art is the outward expression of the inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world...The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm."

Edward Hopper



Censored, Oil on Linen, 2021



Vacant Dining Room, Oil on Canvas, 2021-22



Aftermath, Oil on Linen, 2022

"What do you express when you're making your paintings? What you express is unconscious. It is not something you planned. I think that plans are less interesting than the aura that comes off your painting."

Rackstraw Downes



Balloon Gang, Oil on Canvas, 2022

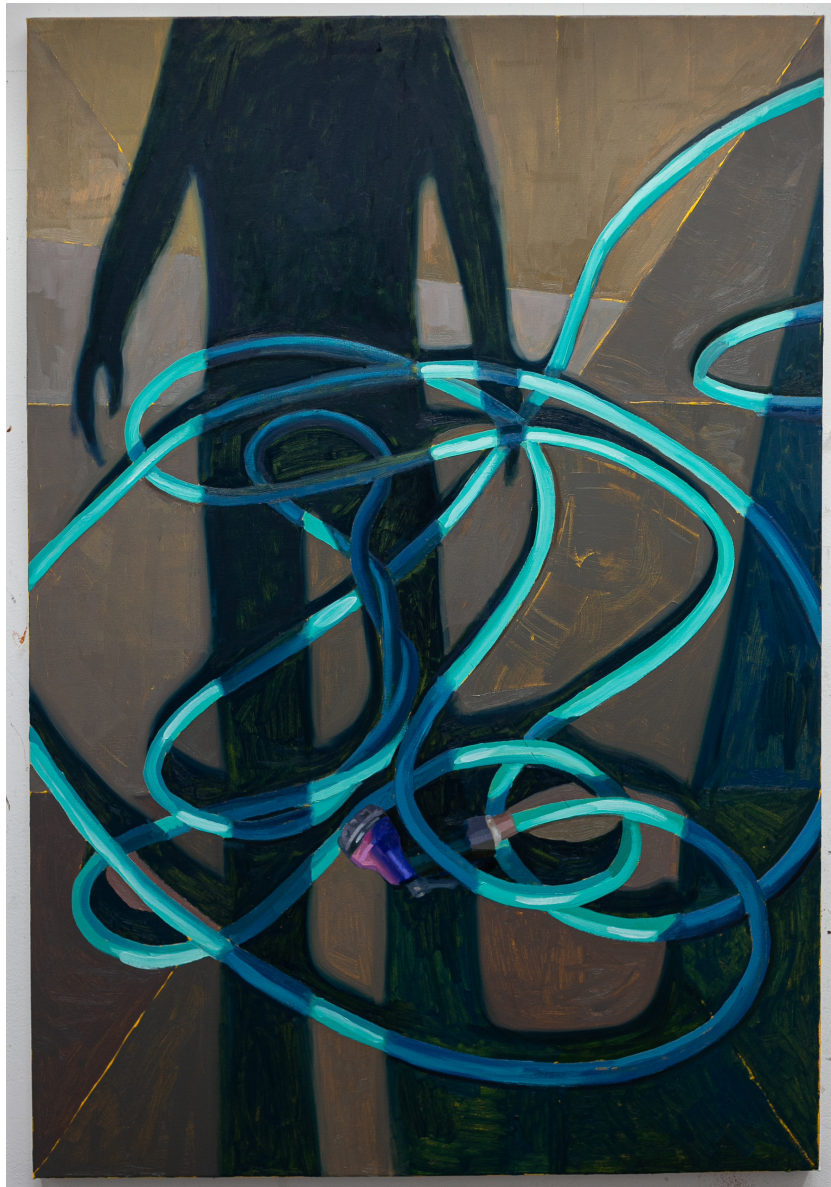
8-Hour Workday

My studio practice is regimented into a strict time block each day: on a good day, I get four-to-five hours of working time before I need to pick up my son from daycare. I wanted to figure out a way to use this time limitation to my advantage. After some brainstorming, I thought about what America has deemed to be the standard measure of time you should work each day: eight hours. I wondered what I could produce in eight hours and what an eight-hour painting would look like. What pictorial or technical sacrifices would have to be made? How would I address scale, subject matter, composition, etc. In Jane Munro's, *Degas: A Passion for Perfection*, Edgar Degas speaks to the nuance of conversation and questions a parallel to painting, which, in some ways greenlit the eight-hour time limitation. Degas speculates:

“Conversation in real life is full of half-finished sentences and overlapping talk. Why shouldn't painting be too?”

Eight hours gave me about two studio days to complete a painting (four hours each day). The first painting I made in eight hours was a painting of a tangled hose in my backyard. Like most of my subject matter, the concept of the hose painting began from chasing the daylight and observing my surroundings while my son played in the yard. After some quick compositional studies, I settled on compositions that would expose the form of the hose and its cast shadow (figure) but would ultimately question the viewer's vantage point (ground). The time restriction forced me to spend very little time painting the space surrounding the hose as made evident by the watered-down, translucent brush strokes—that I would normally plan on going back into—and instead,

focus solely on the hose itself. My goal for these painting was to acknowledge the nature of an ordinary household item and describe the item seductively (Wayne Thiebaud's cake paintings come to mind) by piling on opaque pigments over the translucent ground to articulate the form, volume, and linear nature of the hose. This eight-hour time limit would set the precedent for a stimulating mode of working that mirrored my regimented routine at home.



8-Hour Workday (2), Oil on Canvas, 2022



8-Hour Workday (1), Oil on Canvas, 2022



8-Hour Workday (3), Oil on Canvas, 2022

Painting as Liturgy

I grew up in a conservative evangelical home where I was told I was going to hell when I died if I didn't accept Jesus Christ into my heart and live by His biblical teachings. My father was a pastor, so I was always at church—often multiple times per week. Church felt like a safe place at the time but, in actuality, the constant fearmongering, pastoral bullying, and emotional abuse I experienced there left a permanent effect on me. So, deconstructing my inherited faith plays a critical role in my painting practice. Existential questions like, 'what does it mean to be human?' and 'is there a deeper meaning to *this*?' are inquisitions that keep me up at night. I am certain these questions are directly correlated to my guilt-ridden religious upbringing.

During a lecture about her work, painter and color theorist, Marie Thibeault described her theory on why artists create:

"The urge to create is compensatory; you are either creating to compensate for childhood trauma, something lost, something you never had (but always wanted), or real anxieties about the world."

Hearing those words as an optimistic undergraduate resonated with me profoundly. My life had literally checked every box of that statement: familial abuse in the church (childhood trauma), losing my eldest brother to suicide (something lost), a disinterested father (something I never had), and a General Anxiety Disorder diagnosis at age 26, for which painting was recommended by my therapist to manage. Fittingly, I now understand my studio practice as an adopted liturgy. I show up every day, in good faith, and believe that a contemplative painting process has the power to redeem,

transform, and heal. Painting gives me a visual vocabulary of the world that no other medium has given me and ultimately, gives my life meaning, value, and purpose.



All in a Day's Work, Oil on Canvas, 2022

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