

BFA Thesis Proposal

“Intensity”

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Primary Concentration: Drawing

Secondary Concentration: Sculpture

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I. Introduction

Being a transgender man (born female but identifying as male), I have deep emotions that are difficult to express through words to someone who is not a transgender. After years of trying to explain how it feels to be a transgender, I have found that I would rather explain myself through art. I will create imagery that contrasts between the real and surreal, using the human body as my primary subject matter. It is my intent that the viewer of my art will have a deeper understanding of what a transgender person is and what they go through emotionally, by sharing my personal transgender, pretransition experience.

II.

Concept:

The idea behind my body of work is the visual exploration and presentation of the emotions I have experienced being trans. Many of these emotions, anger being a primary one, revolve around my personal body image. Using photos that I have taken of myself for reference, I will create surreal, distorted, self-portrait drawings that explore the emotional issues I've encountered being trans: feeling trapped in the wrong body, the need to augment my body to reflect how I feel it should be, depression, hatred of my body, anxiety about sexuality, confusion, and sadness. In contrast to these distortions, parts of the figure will be rendered with realism.

My work will be drawings created by using charcoal, charcoal pencil, stick-style pigment/charcoal, charcoal powder, pastel, and/or chalk on paper, applied in a variety of methods for different textures (e.g. hand smudging, brush, sponge).

In *Androgen* I first explored utilizing various charcoal applications, including mixing with water and ink and applying it with sponges (see figure 1). *Androgen* is seminal in this new body of work, because this was also the first time I explored my feelings about being transgender through art. I felt the often-irreversible nature of the medium forced me to be more expressive and less realistic. However, this

piece barely scratched the surface of where I would like to go with this concept and media. My thesis will delve much deeper into the emotionality and expressive nature of the work by not only depicting the emotionally distraught figure, as I did in *Androgen*, but further distorting it. I intend to juxtapose realistic figurative work with disturbing distortions that symbolize the difference between how I view my sex (physical body) and gender (masculine role), and how others view them not knowing the gender identity issues and emotions that lie therein. They often see that I am of the female sex, but underneath there is a man.

Constantly hearing ma'am, miss, ladies and girls (when in a group), and female pronouns when being addressed by others, makes it clear that I am not seen as a man in body or gender. Regardless of how many times people tell me that I should not assume what they think of me, I remind them that they are not in my place and don't hear the same things I hear everyday. I'm not making a statement that people hate me, hate my gender role, or hold negativity towards me because I'm transgender, only that they don't see me how I see myself.

This work is also a catharsis. Some people have the misconception that hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgeries will ultimately lead to a transformation where I will finally feel completely happy with my gender and my body. The reality, however, is that the surgeries offered for female to male trans people are sadly imperfect at best. They do not offer you any natural functionality, and medical journals will tell you that gender identity issues may continue after treatment. I don't want to go through the trauma of mutilating my body if there is a large risk I will still feel uncomfortable or possibly worse. The point being, there are often times where there is no light at the end of the tunnel for my dark feelings, and art is how I purge them from myself, even if it's temporary.

Background:

I'm inspired by many classical masters and contemporary artists. I am primarily drawn to the work of masters in the Baroque period, such as Caravaggio and Velazquez. Caravaggio's use of tenebrism that engulfs the figure in shadow with bright highlights, in works such as *The Calling of St. Mathew* (see

figure 2), has always appealed to me for how it makes his figures stand out. I also appreciate the fact that Caravaggio often presented his subject matter in an unconventional manner (e.g. he painted important religious figures as everyday people, without idealistic beauty). Velazquez stands out in my mind more for his choice of unusual subject matter and mysterious personal meaning in pieces like “Las Meninas (see figure 3).” At the time in which it was created it was unheard of for an artist to depict themselves in their work with their subject matter, as well as leaving so many hidden and unanswered questions behind the meaning of the piece. I also love the work of modern digital speed painters who incorporate color and texture in a quick manner, leaving parts of the piece undefined or made up of rough shapes and marks. Their overall result is similar to Impressionist painters yet their technique is a little more realistic with sharp edges. Jen Zee is a particular artist from this contemporary style that I enjoy (see figure 4). I would like to integrate elements of style and technique from each of the aforementioned artists in the development of my final pieces, as well as evolve and create my own style.

Contextually there is a long history of bending gender roles in art from Caravaggio to Andy Warhol. Julia T. Wood is a modern feminist writer whose book *Gendered Lives* explores gender in depth and how it affects our society. She inspires me because I would also like to help educate people. Another inspiration of mine is Loren Cameron’s portrait work from *Body Alchemy*. I find him very inspiring particularly because he is a transman like myself and expresses transgender themes with raw honesty in his photography. I would like to have the same feeling of bearing all and hiding nothing about the subject in my work. Similarly the photography of Katie Koti is much in the same vein. Her series gender grid is composed of varying candid portraits of different gendered people from cisgendered (those who have a gender identity that matches the sex they were born with) to transgender individuals. The transgender images do not hide gender reassignment scars leaving the viewer to possibly want to have a deeper understanding of what they are looking at. This is an important aspect to my work as well, because I wish to leave the viewer wanting to understand more about transgender people.

Being transgender, my work is very personal. The subject matter is something that will have interest to those new to the subject of trans individuals, those looking for further understanding, and those who are going through similar personal issues. Other trans people may not have come to terms with their feelings or don't have the courage to express their gender identity issues. My work could possibly help them by having another person's experience to relate to. This work is a deeper exploration into my trans experience. Whether it leaves people feeling confused, enlightened, disgusted, or intrigued, they will have gained knowledge about the subject. I hope to invoke strong emotions in the viewer and, in a way, share that emotion with them through my work as well as educate them.

III. Exhibition

The display of my thesis work will be shown at the Kimura Gallery at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, in the Arts Building during the BFA Group Show in the spring semester of 2013. There will be five framed drawings hung on the gallery wall based on available space approximately 22" x 30" to 30" x 42".

IV. Summary

This work is about sharing what I feel is a profound human experience that not everyone goes through or knows about. It is not about forcing a point of view or agenda. My hope is to help enlighten others on the subject as well as expose them to something possibly foreign and unfamiliar through an intense visual experience.



(Figure 1)

Androgen, 2011

Iram Roberts

Charcoal, Watercolor on Paper

Approx: 5' x 3 ½'



(Figure 2)

The Calling of Saint Matthew, 1599

Caravaggio

San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome

Oil on Canvas



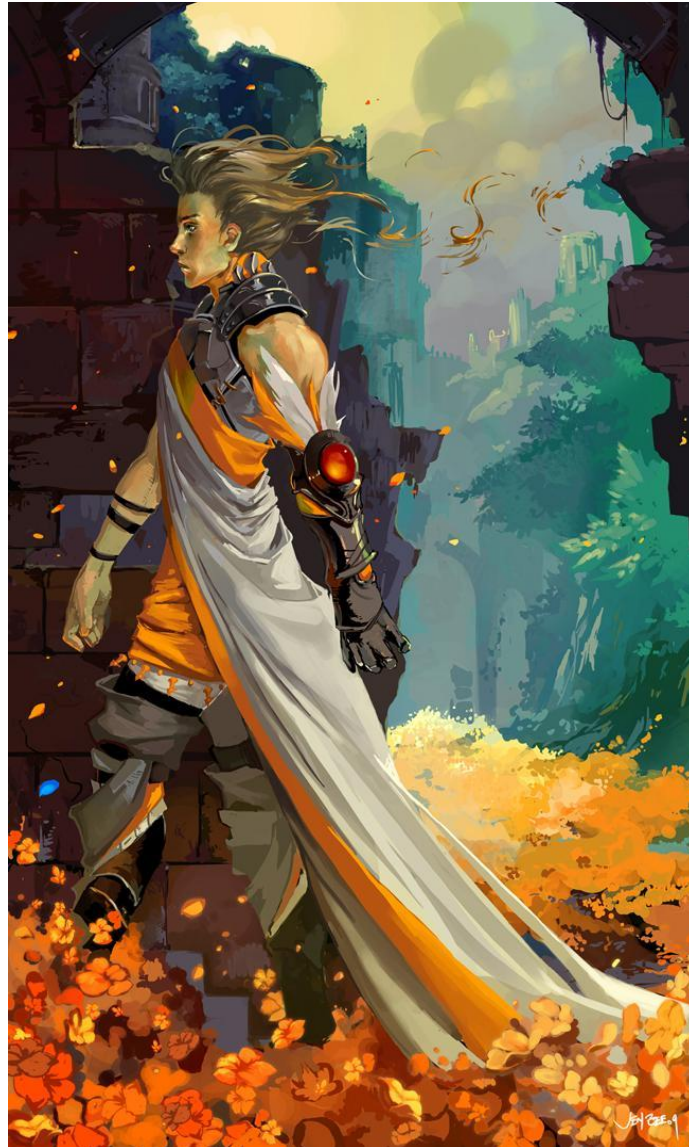
(Figure 3)

Las Meninas, 1656-1657

Diego Velázquez

Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain

Oil on Canvas



(Figure 4)

Fremere's Guard Evo5, 2009

Jen Zee

www.deviantart.com

Digital Medium Painting - Photoshop