

MFA Graduate Thesis Proposal

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My thesis exhibition will consist of six oil paintings. If space is available, I can include up to ten or so additional paintings. The works represent my most recent attempts to understand the principles that give rise to our experience of reality. That is, they are visualizations of how reality may be configured and the mind's role in configuring it. There are three interrelated themes: (1) the interdimensional nature of reality as suggested by subatomic physics, (2) the facets of the human mind and their role in the evolution of consciousness as described by Carl Jung, and (3) religious and cultural formulations of reality. Lately, I have been interested in shamanistic conceptions of reality, especially those of my pre-Christian ancestors. In my thesis paper, I will explore the connections between science, psychology, religion, and art.

My quest to understand reality began in childhood and has drawn me at different times to religion, philosophy, metaphysics, psychology, and physics. It has led me to explore my own unconscious. Most of the art that spoke to me during my journey of discovery looks beyond the mundane. It includes kitschy posters and psychedelic album covers, the sacred art of Renaissance and Baroque masters, and the symbolic landscapes of Symbolists and Surrealists. These influences have brought me to see myself as a visionary artist with a classical aesthetic. In my thesis paper, I will discuss the effects that specific artworks and artists have had on my art.

How my work relates to other contemporary art is a question that will require additional research to answer. Some of my paintings resemble fantasy art, but the resemblance seems superficial to me: Whereas fantasy art offers an escape from reality, my work seeks to reveal reality.<sup>1</sup> The contemporary artists I most admire excel at drawing and have mastered their medium. They tend to be of two types: figure and portrait artists (e.g., Jeremy Mann, Quang Ho, and Jeremy Lipking) and dystopian realists or quasi-realists (e.g., Justin Mortimer, Adrian Ghenie, and Alex Kanevsky). Jenny Saville, whose technical abilities I greatly admire, seems to bridge these categories. I have only come across a few contemporary artists who, like me, portray psychological realities that are *not* intentionally ugly, offensive, or nightmarish. Sol Halabi is one of them. (NOTE: If you know of any contemporary symbolists whose work parallels mine, please send me their names.)

I regard my process as in the Surrealist tradition, as it begins with eliciting images from my unconscious mind. Instead of using free association, I allow ideas to emerge as they will. Occasionally, I wake up seeing a painting. More often, images come to me from out of the blue, but almost always in response to something I've been pondering. Methods I use to flesh out ideas include doodling and juxtaposing pictures, either mentally or in Photoshop. When I'm working on a painting, I am mainly focused on the aesthetics of the design and the quality of the paint. Lately, I've been experimenting with tools that give the paint texture and a sculptural dimension.

While I am pleased with my progress, I believe that my best work is still ahead of me. In addition to getting my paintings seen, realizing my full potential as an artist is my primary goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, what people see in an artwork depends on what they bring to the viewing experience.

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