

ANAMNESIS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Anamnesis investigates the phenomenon of recollected memories through the creation and presentation of abstracted paintings. This body of work is based on my own personal memories and emotions while it seeks to provoke emotional memories from my viewers. I embrace haziness and imperfection in my aesthetics and materials to evoke the notion of fragmented memories one is able to recollect at any time of her own personal history. Memories cannot be duplicated like a photograph. My paintings blur the subject matter, which is drawn from memory. Each time I revisit a memory, I encounter it from a different perspective, thus causing the lines to blur. These abstracted memories are produced on imperfect and warped wooden boards as well as previously used canvas and drawing boards. The idea of recycling materials, which others have put time and effort, even if discarded, mimics the idea of layered emotion and memory. Found objects that trigger specific events, or places, or people are an important part of my process. Each painting is a memory of my past and some are memories of people, some of places or events. Memories of people can scatter across decades of time, while events are more concrete. Occasionally people and events collide making the memory dually complex.

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Thank you to my family and friends for putting up with me through the rollercoaster of the last few years. I am lucky to be surrounded by so many good people.

To my parents, Mom and Dad, I would like to say how amazed I am at the love and backing you have and always will give. I am honored to be your daughter. Thank you for giving me such love and room to grow while supporting my decisions.

Most of all I would like to thank my grandmothers. To all the women who came before me, who gave the lineage along with talents and a strong will, a huge thank you.

APPROVED

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When I began my graduate research I started with what was known; ideas of painting scenes from my childhood memories in a realistic manner. I wanted to create work about the most influential memories of my life. The times spent reading one particular book with my grandmother were some of the most poignant memories of my childhood, and so I began recreating illustrations by Arthur Rackham in the book *Aesop's Fables*, 1912 edition. While working on these studies, I also attempted to create my own fables.

During this time I painted trees with faces, and wolves that had an anamorphic quality, however the ideas came straight out of the fables. I struggled with finding my artistic identity because I was imitating another. Even though that imagery was taken from the memories that birthed my later work, they were not uniquely mine. This initial idea was the beginning of a long road of trials and failures and few successes, until I found my way to abstraction. I know now that failure was the best thing for me to endure during this jumping off point as I searched for my own way of expression.

The fables paved the path for my current work to become about my personal memories, rather than stories told in a children's book. At this point, I began cataloguing imagery that I came across during my day to day routine, such as lost

gloves and single shoes found on the side of the road. These objects were important because they triggered emotions and memories. For example, an abandoned glove, embedded in asphalt, triggered feeling of being left behind. This in turn brought about an empathetic memory of my great-grandmother losing her husband and feeling left alone to face old age with out him.

Such a personal and emotional response from a single object led me to the notion that these items could be a powerful source of imagery for works of art. I created several paintings of objects including one of a shoe, one of a crushed can, a dead bird, and an abandoned cake. The painting of the cake represented the memory of my twenty-first birthday when I brought a cake to my party, but ended up tripping and smashing it in the parking lot. Though these painted objects represent a memory, they seemed too literal and held no mystery or depth. The objects triggered memories that were personal to me, but I wanted my viewer to analyze the work, and look deeper into the meaning, rather than just focus on the shoe or cake in front of them. These early works presented the image floating in a washy background and portrayed in a hazy or atmospheric manner to correlate with the idea that a memory is fuzzy and never crystal clear. However, I was not satisfied with the final outcome because it did not have enough layers or depth.

I wanted to to paint a memory. I wanted to present a tangible, encapsulated memory that held the emotion of a point in time. A painting that is a symbolic reproduction of the feelings endured while reliving a moment in our personal history. I left behind the objects that initiated my research, and began to meditate and focus on the person or object while painting in an abstract manner. This

meditation on the subject allowed my exploration to morph and embody the very essence of the memory.

Some research suggests that the memories humans revisit the most are the moments that are most intense, like weddings, births, and deaths. These moments are full of emotions that provoke my brain to catalogue the sight, smell, and sounds around me during the event. Having a photographic memory allows me to revisit a time years previous. I can recall details of what someone was wearing and what we were talking about, and even what we ate that day. This sensibility allows me jump back into that moment and relive the emotions anew. This is the reason my research has evolved into more of a recovery of memories. Being able to recall an event, person, or place so intensely, allows me a point of departure for each emotion I want to convey while painting.

Anamnesis, or the recollection of memories, is the theme and the driving factor behind this body of work because each painting is a memory portrayed through abstraction. The definition of Anamnesis is “a recalling to mind.” The idea of recalling to the mind is more powerful and complex than just remembering. One must recall the person, place or thing, along with the emotional ties; bring them to the front of the mind and meditate on the whole experience, to relive that memory. This reliving of a memory through paintings is the premise of this research.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROCESS

The process that I have developed is a direct result of my research. The concept and process are very related and dependent on one another and therefore the following offers explanation of the process and execution of my artwork in terms of memories presented through visual abstractions. Each painting is a single memory, and while each is different or distinguished from the others, the process remains similar for the execution of each piece. As artists create a body of work, the process becomes a daily routine. We find a pattern that suits our desired outcome and choose to use that way of working while pushing the discipline as we progress. Each outcome proves beneficial in finding the best way to communicate the desired effect. Debbie Smyth says “ I feel exciting things happens when one pushes the limits of a discipline or material. If I can keep exciting myself by what I do, I hope that I can continue to excite others.” I read this, and felt kindred to Smyth as her work is also inspired by memories.

My exploration of using acrylic paint in thin watery layers as though it were watercolor began as experimentation. I worked with watercolor during my undergraduate degree and felt comfortable with this medium. However, I am now aware that this method is viewed by some as “passé” in the realm of modern paintings. I live in a region where watercolor flowers and landscapes were made

famous by Georgia O'Keeffe. To paint traditional watercolor for my Master degree could be viewed as overly influenced by the popularity of the past and. I had the desire to find new ways of expression, but being stubborn, I struggled with giving up watercolor. Acrylic paint made the most sense to begin experimenting with as it is versatile and is mixed with water as well. So, I decided to explore the thinning of acrylic paint with only water to achieve lightness variations. The layering process of the thinned acrylic became a metaphor of layered emotion in memory retrieval. Each layer of our memories are a single part of the whole past and they are layered together to wholly remember the moment or being. I began to work with acrylic as though it were watercolor, layering the paint and using the white of the canvas or background as the light variation in the painting rather than using any white paint. My investigation into what materials work best with such watered down acrylic paint was a long list of trials until I found what suited my intended outcome.

After working with purchased canvases, hand built canvases, watercolor paper, and anything I could find that would take acrylic and water, I found that it was the panels of wood and masonite left behind or discarded by others that worked best to add meaning to my process. The fact that these discarded boards and paintings had once been toiled over and cherished, echoes the idea of embedded memories. I covered the original with white gesso sealing it inside and added the layers. This emphasized the residual textures, showing the past lives of this board. This idea of residual or layered lives was an important part of the meaning of Anamnesis because the more layered the painting the more it coincided with remembering layers of the past. Several of the collected materials

were my own discarded paintings as well. I found the process of covering them up and creating a new surface became therapeutic. Finding, collecting, and sealing defines the beginning of my process.

The wooden panels and previously used or found materials provide a surface for my work and texture that added depth for my grounds. The next step in creating the work, after finding the boards and covering them with gesso, was to decide whether more texture was needed. I then would add dried paint chips and dried painting materials. I enjoy creating a heavy texture with paint that had already dried before it ever reached my panels. This was like taking a part of something left behind. The paint chips were symbolic of the many parts of our memories that make the whole. For example, a sweater that a loved one wore, when you think of them you think of that sweater, among other particular things that are left behind and cause us to dwell on the memory of a person or time. When adding in the dried paint material, I often meditate on the particular memory that the painting will evoke, which would dictate where the forms would live in the painting. If I had a memory of a male figure in mind, the quality of line and shape in the forms had to match a more masculine style, and the same for a feminine memory or physical place. The aesthetic should match the subject. Some of the paintings have no added dried paint texture, but the idea of emphasizing the elements of what was with in the board and could represent the memory was still very important.

After adding in the texture, and often another layer of gesso, the board had to dry and then be laid on a flat surface, as apposed to an easel. I then

covered the entire surface with water. In the beginning of my investigations, I used a sponge or a cup with water, but later found that a spray bottle worked more efficiently and evenly dispersed the water. While the surface was still wet, I dropped in color using only the primaries either indirectly mixed or directly mixing on the panel. The importance of using only primary colors is that it resembles the way our brains catalog memories, and generally the primary events or most important part of the event is stored in the data bank of our brains. This use of primary colors to mix with water and settle in different layers is also representational of how memories are layers of our personal history.

The next step in my process takes the most amount of time and contemplation because it requires the layers of paint to dry one at a time before I continue with the next layer. I generally have three to four paintings in progress at one time so that I can move from one to another while they dry. This process also requires jumping from one meditative state to another, as each painting is its own memory, however, that repetitive revisiting of the same memory builds its stronghold in my brain. Each time I apply another thin water layer, I make sure not to cover up the previous one but only enhance and build on the better parts of what is underneath.

The final steps of this process require knowing when to stop layering, and finally focus on the contrast and movement of the piece. When shapes have taken form during the layering process, they may need to be emphasized by darkening their forms and also pushing the whites next to them for contrast. I look at the movement of the shapes and how the viewer's eye follows the forms

to see if I need to connect floating forms or pull the eye's attention in another direction.

When a painting is finished, I have at times added a layer of varnish to give an ethereal affect under the lights, but not every one has this last touch. When asked "why only a few of the paintings were varnished?" I replied, "Honestly, the ones that I felt needed to shine got the varnish." The finished works are not framed nor under glass because they are meant to be raw. Emotional, raw, weathered, antiquated, ethereal, hazy, warped... all these descriptive adjectives can be used of memories and descriptions for this body of work. My hope is that when they hang on the wall, the viewer will need to take some time visiting each memory.

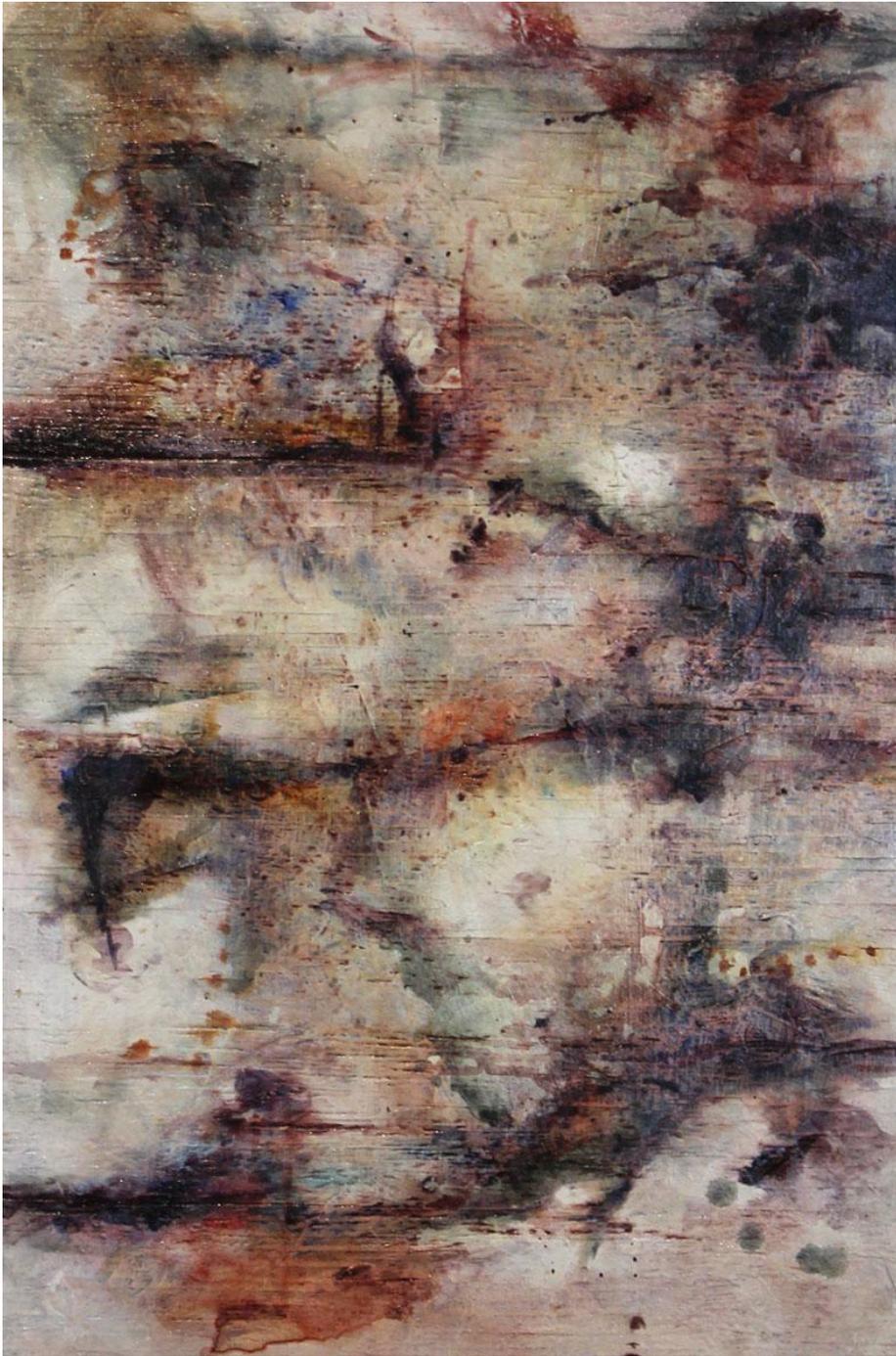
## CHAPTER 3

### THE WORK



**Anamnesis**  
Acrylic on Particleboard  
48 x 96

The definition of Anamnesis in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “a recalling to mind.” I felt that this word was perfect for the name of my thesis and for the cornerstone piece of my show. When I researched the origin of the word, I found my desire to call my show Anamnesis was reemphasized. When used in reference to Platonic philosophy, it is “the remembering of things from a supposed previous existence.” This idea touches on the reason why some memories cannot be explained. Perhaps they are memories of someone else’s past. Often, my dreams are vividly realistic and a few of the events that I have dreamed about were historically correct, but I could not possibly have been there to witness. I do not claim to know anything about past lives or reincarnation, however these dreams and memories are an interesting pondering point. This cornerstone piece is made from the backing of an old painting. It is fragile and crumbling and will not remain whole for much longer. The fact that this work will disintegrate furthers the notion of fragmented remembrance and mirrors the way our memories crumble over time. Parts of this work are detailed and vivid, while other sections have a hazy quality comparable to my dreams that are so vivid at times but still unexplainable. Anamnesis is the dreams, the memories, and hopes of my work.



**Mile 6 Past South Fork**  
Acrylic on wood panel  
31 x 21 ½

“Mile 6 Past South Fork” is a memory of the wind in the trees at my family cabin in Colorado. Many of my memories are about family and the familiar places that hold just as much importance in the memory as the people that are present. This particular memory came when I found the wood panel that had been forgotten in a closet. I pulled off paper that was frayed and tattered to reveal a knot in the wood that looked like a human eye. This has a trigger the memory of the trees that have eyes in Colorado, and how every summer I spent at the cabin I found faces and eyes in the forest around our land. The layers of darker color intentionally emphasize the wood grain. The colors are mimicking the Rocky Mountains against blue skies and the twinkling leaves in the breeze. The forms in this painting made by the exaggerated, darker areas are symbolic of the shadows in the forest and the shadows of the trees with eyes. While creating this painting I meditated on the memory of building shelters and hiding places within those trees. “Mile 6 Past South Fork” conveys a peaceful nostalgic feeling.



**Avis, Lee, & Mary Jo**  
Acrylic on 3 wood panels  
48 x 24 each

The triptych, “Avis, Lee, & Mary Jo,” was one of the first works in this series, and the primary reason I chose to continue this exploration. The names of the three panels are the names of my great grandmother and her two sisters, so I fondly call this work “the sisters” in conversation. When I began painting one of the panels, it was my intention to only paint “Lee,” my great-grandmother, then I realized that I was using a board that had matching sister boards. At that moment, I decided to create a triptych. However, I was considering other figures of inspiration and had not considered my grandmother’s sisters. When I laid in the first layer of color on each board, I knew then that they must be my great-aunts.

There is an emotional association with each color pallet to each person. For example, “Avis” was a woman who I viewed from my child’s perspective as a more brooding and darker being, so her colors are darker blue hues, while my grandmother’s younger sister, “Mary Jo” seemed wild and bright in spirit, hence her pallet is lighter and more vivid. Mostly my perspective came from my grandmother’s stories of them as young women. My grandmother’s pallet is intentionally more neutral and earthy as she was the stability in my youth and an intermediate for her sisters. The design and color theory for each panel came from my desire to have them stand as a unit, but also each piece is capable of standing alone. Together, they are more representative of sibling relationships. The colors are different for each panel yet when placed side by side they compliment each other and work as a cohesive triptych. Visually, the three panels connect and mirror the connections between siblings.



**Fear of Dreaming**  
Acrylic on canvas board  
24 x 20

“Fear of Dreaming” is a representation of the unknown; my fear of unfulfilled dreams, future wishes, and fears of those events I cannot foresee. Approaching the end of my graduate degree has brought up the memories from the past three years in school. I believe that my subconscious fear of not being accepted or successful in the future has allowed me to literally create a painting about that fear. The unknown, however, can also lead to positive outcomes. For that reason, I chose not to make this painting frightening for the viewer. The colors and the exaggerated texture represent the beauty of the unknown that is richly unexplainable. This painting is aggressively textured and is symbolic of the shreds of hopes and dreams that I have piled before me and hope that I can iron out into pieces of reality. The variation in value resembles the darkest and lightest times in life. The unknown is all of these together, and to dream for things I have little control over is one of my greater fears.



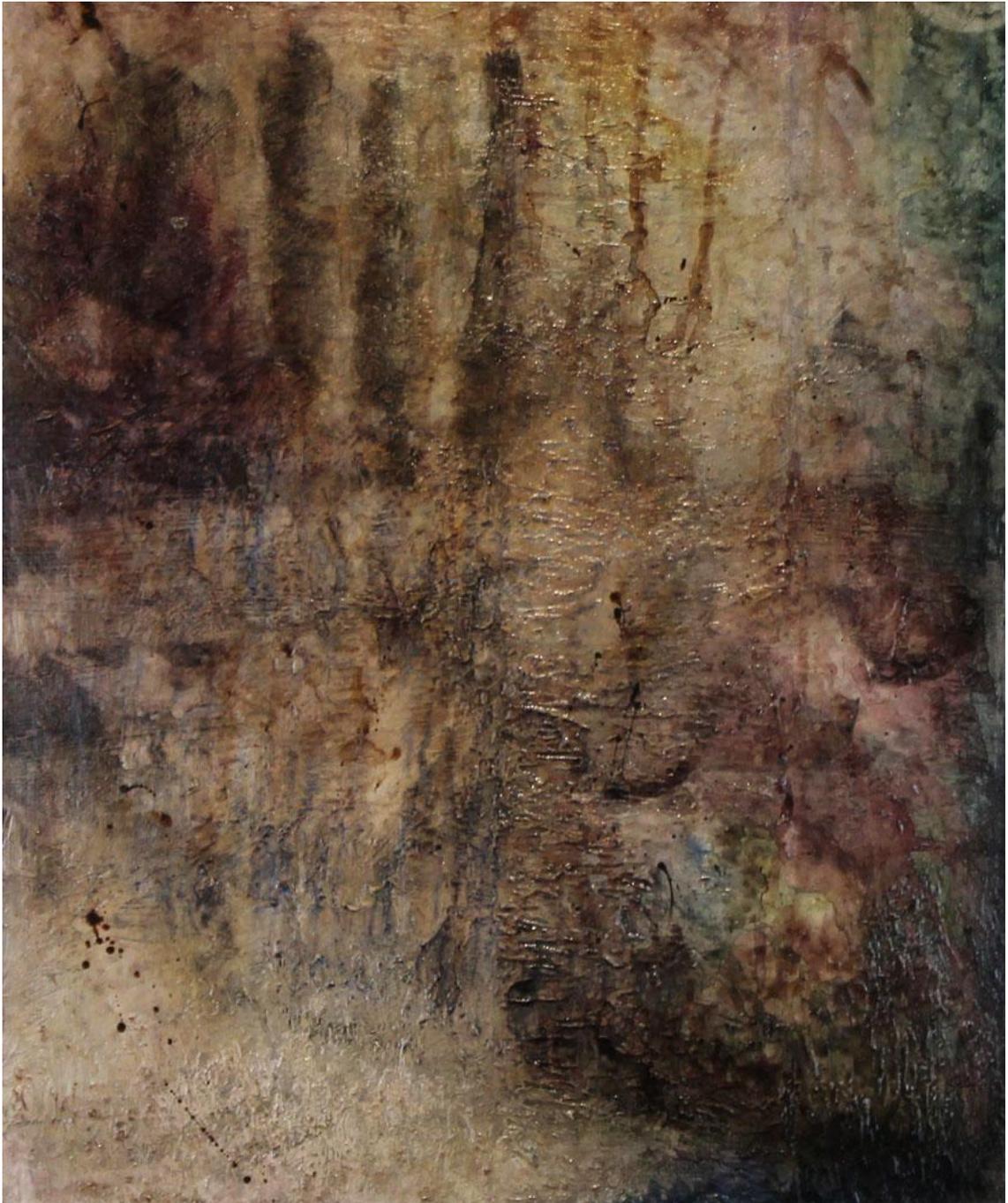
**Lost and Found**  
Acrylic on Wood panel  
30 x 60

“Lost and Found” is a painting that caused me to struggle for weeks, if not months. It represents the memories of how I came to love painting and the many reasons I chose to pursue a Master of Fine Art degree. The brighter color pallet of this work represents positive memories from high school art competitions and the love of learning. From this experience I learned to express through paint my thoughts and emotions what I could not say in words. The pallet and the more saturated colors remind me of my youthful sporadic tendencies to paint whatever my heart desired. Before I turned to abstraction, I expressed feelings with compositions of objects and actual things. I was freer to be more imaginative with color and exaggeration with those objects, during my early years, because of little formal training. No meditation, training, or research was developed to create those youth centered paintings, so the innocence of age allowed my early work to portray women with green faces and birds that were larger than the trees they perched upon. This lost love was found again when this painting was finished. Abstraction allowed me to express with forms and color the love of painting my reality with a twist.



**The Ides of September**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
20 x 16

The “Ides of September” is one of only two pieces in this body of work that was painted on canvas. This work is the result of one of my first experiments that I chose to cover up and paint over. This act of reworking my own paintings is important for the ideas presented in my thesis work because it is a layering of my experiences. One painting being covered up by another resembles the idea that sometimes when we look back on moments of our past, we may choose to remember the event or person or place differently than it actually was. The recovery of our memories is sometimes intercepted by our own desire to not relive a particular moment for whatever reason, good or bad. This particular painting was created in one afternoon when I was irrationally emotional and upset about past relationships in my life. Though the content of my work is very personal, I am an emotional painter, and the more intense the emotion the more easily the thought is conveyed. The middle of September seems to be a reoccurring time that I meet a love interest and end up disappointed. This painting has textures of quick strokes and heavy-handed pallet markings that portray the emotion of my frustrations in those moments. Beware the “Ides of September.”



**Carlsbad**  
Acrylic on Wood Panel  
23 X 19

“Carlsbad” is a peculiar memory, named for a family vacation to the caves in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Though I remember little from this trip, I do remember that my little brother was very young and I felt protective of him. The entire time we were walking down the winding trail into the deep caverns, I remember feeling nervous that we would lose him somewhere in the dark. The emotional feeling of this memory is desperation and prevention of loss. He is now over six feet tall and hard to miss, it’s funny to remember him as such a tiny child that I believed would disappear. Now that we are adults and he did not get lost in that great cave, I see how the work transcends and becomes the memory of what might have been.

This painting mimics the darkness of the cavern walls that seemed so foreboding at that time. The vertical lines of dark brown in the left top corner also mimic the shapes of stalactites and stalagmites. “Carlsbad” is also one of the first paintings produced in this series, and though it has no added texture like some of the later paintings, the visual texture from layered paint adds to the cavern aesthetic.



**D. L. Reeder**  
Acrylic on Drawing Board  
24 X 24

This painting is in honor and remembrance of D. L. Reeder. It is a piece that holds a memory particularly bitter sweet for me, and important to the theme of my thesis. When I think about what my work represents, I want the memories to exist as a physical embodiment of moments that make up the human existence. D. L. Reader was my great grandfather. At ten years old, I held him while he died of lung cancer. I have a memory of a reddish marbled tissue box next to his bed, and when I would sit with him for long hours, I often stared at this box. Next to it was his watch, his wedding ring, and spare change. These small things were not great contributors to what made this man tall in my eyes, but they are all I have left of him that can be tangibly held. The small artifacts are the trigger objects for the memory of sitting with my grandfather, and the painting is the embodiment of the memory of him and how much I loved him. The box's design inspired this painting's color and aesthetic. I chose a more masculine line quality with my brush strokes because the painting needs to represent the man that I remember. He was a great piece of my past; therefore this painting was made to honor him for his influence on my life.



**What Remains**  
Acrylic on Wood Panel  
48 X 31 ½

“What Remains” is one of the paintings that began as one memory and evolved into additional memories. This particular work is about celebrating what is left behind after loss and grief. When I begin meditation over a painting, I don’t wish to always remember the loss or the grief of the past, but those are generally the strongest memories. Celebrating the fact that I have come through loss and can see that what I have left to give and achieve is another factor of the recollected memories and emotions of my history. There is strength and learning that comes from having gone through trials. Sometimes after working on a painting for so long, the original memories merge into others and new perceptions evolve. After spending so much time wrestling with these ideas, this painting is the embodiment of what remains. What is left may not seem as beautiful after being scarred, but it is precious in its own right.



**Linger**  
Acrylic on Wood Panel  
45 X 15 ½

“Linger” was the final painting in this body of work. When I think about memories and how they are composed of fragmented feelings and hazy pictures of people and places, I feel as though I am lingering in another time. The memory of begging my grandmother to stay with me after she died also came to the front of my mind while creating this painting. During the two years after her death, I often asked her if she was lingering with me. It appeared evident as I walked into a cloud of her perfume or heard her laugh in the next room. The idea of souls staying with their loved ones after death is not an argument I’m making. I am investigating the phenomenon of how the human brain can make a memory seem so real. So real, that I could smell her perfume a year after she had died. This painting was created with parts of dried paint found during a years worth of collecting scraps. The scraps were placed strategically on the elongated board to give the illusion of a suspended form lingering in the space.



**Dregs**  
Acrylic on Drawing Board  
24 X 24

“Dregs” comes from a memory in my life that was both unpleasant, but important in the process of learning who I am and of what I am capable. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in photography, I set out to become a commercial photographer in a large city. My naive 22 years of life experience told me that my dreams would absolutely materialize. When I lost that job, and my apartment, my pet, my car, and quite a bit of my pride, I felt like the dregs of society, worthless and meaningless. I allowed that feeling to take hold and burry my creative nature. I allowed my self-pity and disappointment to stifle the talent that was still there, but hidden. When I made the decision to return to school for a master’s degree, the self-pity began to melt away. Today I look back on this time, and I know that it was important for me to fail. This is important, because I now know that I can pick myself back up. No one is immune to the pain and embarrassment of life, and that it will happen again, but I can get through it. The painting is made with the dregs of an old bucket of primer. The shredded, torn, and dried paint applied to the previously discarded board, exemplifies the feelings of worthlessness. The colors are meant to be dirty and almost sickly or similar to bruising. Dregs represents the memory of that younger, broken me.



**Estes**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
24 x 20

This canvas has been recycled many times now, as I began a painting on this during high school, and used it again years later as a teaching tool for a private art lesson. Now this painting is the second of only two on canvas in this body of work, and is called “Estes.” The memory for “Estes” is lighter than most of the correlating memories for my work. This painting was made on a recent family vacation to Estes Park Colorado. After walking through the mountains and picking wild flowers, I made a floral arrangement for our rented cabin. This arrangement inspired me to pull out the old canvas and paint. The rustic cabin and the mountain’s wild flowers drew a nostalgic memory of painting flowers at a park when I was very young, and the yellows and reds in the arrangement reminded me of the playground that day. The use of a canvas in this instance as apposed to wood panel seemed also appropriate for this piece because this particular memory was about traditional painting on canvas of the common theme of flowers.



**Fragments 1**  
Mixed media  
24 x 24



**Fragments 2**  
Mixed Media  
24 x 24

“Fragments 1” was created as a side painting that kept me motivated. To maintain momentum was important when it came to the physical laying down paint and investigations of what worked well. This painting evolved and changed over the year because I came back to it every time I started a new painting. The sister painting, “Fragments 2” was born much the same way. The two paintings can stand alone, and are not purposely a set, but the functionality of the paintings is the same. They are the in between memories, the twilight of my mind. After spending so much energy on focused memories in my other work, these paintings helped my brain rest, yet stay attentive. I chose the name “Fragments” for them because the broken pieces of tools, paint chips, and other mixed media that are embedded in these two paintings, represent the fragments of my time. Every painting is created in fragmented time spans and broken weeks or days.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Coming to the end of this road, having spent so much time meditating and reviewing past moments, almost living in my past, I am grateful that I can share these moments through art and they can now live on by themselves. I can let each one have its own life. The haunting has lessened. An unintentional therapy of sorts seems to be another part about this work that I had not anticipated. Laying down layers of both burdens and joys lightens the internal intensity of these memories while also giving birth to the tangible moment in time.

This body of work is a journey through my personal history and I began creating it without realizing how much I needed to let go of some of the intense memories that I allow to haunt my mind every day. Though the content is very personal, the paintings are abstract and intentionally do not outright tell the stories which they are about, because my hope is that my use of color and design will spark an emotional response from the viewer that is their own. The decisions made for each piece came from both my research and study of abstract art as well as design elements and color theory, but also a deep internal desire to make art that is relatable. I remember a discussion in the earliest part of my time at WTAMU with a professor about making art that reaches out and connects with the viewer. He asked “why make impersonal art that sits coldly not wanting to communicate?” I often thought of

lessons such as this one while painting these memories, and set my goals to make artwork that talks to the viewer.

To say that this series is completed would be incorrect. I will never stop needing to laydown the memories through layered paint. The color pallet may change over time, and the mark making will always change with each memory, however the desire to unburden will always remain. Even looking at work such as *Guernica* by Picasso, one can see that an artists' desire to communicate the emotion inside is most important. The painting, *Guernica*, was commissioned by the Spanish Republican government, but "Picasso seems genuinely outraged at the slaughter of Basque civilians" and portrays his emotion through the work. I am not comparing my work in any way to Picasso, simply arguing that no matter the style, medium, time, or gender of the artist, it is the internal expression to be portrayed, that is the desire. My desire for this particular show is to encapsulate a memory of my personal history through abstract paintings and show the world.