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The Traveler's Journey

Mary C. Williams



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS AND THEATRE

THE TRAVELER'S JOURNEY

By

MARY CHRISTINE WILLIAMS

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Introduction:

Growing up in St. Petersburg, Florida an hour away from the Dali museum, the first artistic movement I was ever aware of was the Surrealist movement and the artist Salvador Dali. From an early age I was fascinated with the stories behind each piece as well as the processes used to create such images, such as the usage of automatic drawing and writing. My own art absorbing this influence, but as I continued to develop creatively I found myself diverging from their ideologies and finding myself including not only Surrealist imagery, but often exploring stories, religion, spirituality, and the nature of reality through my work.

The series that I have worked the past three months are a culmination of my attempt to intertwine this Surrealist influence with my interest in story telling and spirituality. I became fascinated with not only using dream like imagery in a purely Surrealist sense, as a way to explore hidden desires and taboo subjects. But also as a way explore my spiritual nature, my interest in non-linear narratives, and the way I relate to the world I live in.

The Story:

The inspiration for this series came from an experience that I had about a year ago in Tom Brown Park with my sister.

My sister and I are outdoorsy people, often taking an entire day off to go hiking as a way to quiet our minds and have some quality time with each other. We had chosen to

hike a bike path in Tom Brown Park, much to the chagrin of the two or three mountain bikers we came across. We had been hiking a solid hour and decided to take a break in one of the smaller sinkholes just off the path. Clambering over a low hill we found a fallen log that lay across a shallow sinkhole that did not look like it would cause us too much bodily damage if we fell from it. We sat on the log for a good hour, talking about life, death, and a myriad of other conversation topics until we finally decided to climb down from the tree and continue with our walk. To get out of the sinkhole and back to the bike trail we had to take a different route, this path taking us under the log and following a winding, dirt covered trail through the sinkhole, and right past an old cypress tree.

For some peculiar reason I just happened to look to in between the roots of the cypress and my eyes fell across a normal, old crumpled paper bag, sitting nonchalantly next to a King James Bible and brunt cigarette. The triumvirate was sopping wet because it had rained decently hard the day before, but I was overcome with the compulsion to pick up the sopping mess of brown paper and take it with me.

Picking up the paper bag I realized it was a mass of folded paper. I carefully peeled away the outer layer of paper bag to find pages upon pages of blank computer paper covered with sometimes discernible print, loopy cursive, and frantic scribbling; diagrams of Tallahassee, Jacksonville; several different languages, such as Japanese, and what appeared to be Sanskrit.

It was journal. A journal of what seemed to be one man's journey through madness, torment, and, in some cases, beef soups.

After a series of rather unfortunate instances the journal was released from my possession and thrown into the ocean. I retained a fair amount of what I saw, but the ocean holds the rest of it now.

The Concept:

I began this paper with this story for two reasons. One, this experience for me re-introduced me to my love for exploration. Ever since I was very little I was always out in the woods exploring and trying to find hidden nooks and crannies to hideaway in. Often putting myself into narratives where I was an explorer searching for treasure or to discover a new species. This love for exploration only grew as I got older and began to travel outside of the United States. Traveling to countries such as Spain, Austria, the United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic. I found myself experiencing that childlike innocence of exploring somewhere in the hopes of seeing or experiencing something new. This fascination with discovery and exploration also extended deeper into a fascination with exploring ideas and the subconscious, intertwining nicely with my background in Surrealism and Salvador Dali.

The other reason I began with this story is because it directly shows how I am fascinated with stories and what we can learn from them. To the core of my being I am a storyteller. My work often involves loose narratives that become clearer as time passes.

In the fine art world, illustration is often frowned upon and it is considered almost a kiss of death. There is a ridiculous concept that by including narratives inside pieces of art, somehow the piece lowers itself from “fine art” to simply “illustration”. My goal with

my work is to challenge that concept. The narrative quality to my work has often set me at odds with certain art critiques and for a while I attempted to shirk away from the introduction of stories into my work. I discovered though, that narratives were an essential part of who I was as an artist and that without them my work seemed empty.

Therefore, my goal became to seamlessly intertwine the two; to be both an illustrator and a “fine artist”. To create art that successfully toes the line between illustration and “fine art” and eventually blurs it so that one is not distinguishable from the other.

In all essence, the definitions of both “fine art” and “illustration” are often left up to critiques to define, not necessarily by the artists or by the mass audience. The idea that “art” is even definable by our limited vocabulary and concepts implies that it is an entity that does not constantly change and grow depending on the cultural influences surrounding its creation. Artists often work by interpreting and reacting to the different cultural and political climates at the time, their art becoming reflections of what they see or feel, and sometimes this work expresses itself in narrative form. Therefore, having art critiques state that “illustration” is not a “fine art” is immediately defining something that is indefinable due to the simple fact that it is in a constant state of flux, it cannot be defined by set rules or laws.

That is not to say that our current culture entirely frowns upon narrative art. Art movements such as Pop Surrealism and Visionary Art are both movements that draw heavily upon the usage of narratives and stories to feed their work. Pop Surrealism often gravitates towards the more macabre subject matter and Visionary art pulling from myths of creation, destruction, life, and death in different religions and cultures.

With my work sometimes the narratives are clear from the beginning and sometimes they are not. The beginning of my process is normally starts with a dream or vision that I have experienced. In some instances the meaning or story is clear, but those instances are very rare, and in most cases as I begin to develop the piece the meaning becomes clear. This process is similar to a process used by the Surrealists called Automatism but, unlike the Surrealists, I do not often create an incomprehensible drawing and stare at it in order to see recognizable figures within the lines, more often I will start with recognizable figures and attempt to interpret their meaning in context of my own perspective. The images I create do not stem from random lines and forms, but from snippets of incomprehensible dreams that are then sewn together into a composition, painted, and through this process, understood.

Being a storyteller, fine artist, and oil painter, my pieces end up telling stories, but my pieces do not have clear beginnings or ends. Often when creating these pieces the story reveals itself to me, and begins to incorporate characters that will lead into new pieces. Each piece is created as though it is a single snapshot of a story; the beginning and end meaning to be interpreted on part of the viewer.

In my work, I gravitate towards the usage of animals and dreamlike landscapes. The creatures that I use develop personalities and particular traits as they are painted or drawn, often getting names tagged along with them as they continue to develop. Once named these characters solidify to become concrete symbols that represent elements of my personal beliefs, experiences and spirituality. The animals normally chosen are those of a ferocious nature, often carnivores or large animals found on other continents. I find in these animals a raw, primal nature that while handling their imagery I imagine I

handling a raw form of pure essence and emotion. I believe that by using them I am getting closer to the essence of what I am trying to portray.

The Pieces:

In this series, I created three monumental works each measuring a little over five feet in width and a little less than eleven feet in height. They are intuitive pieces by nature; each piece contains imagery that is pulled from dreams.

Approaching this series I adopted a certain personae in order to paint from the perspective I wanted to emphasize. The personae I adopt is called the “Man in the Suit”. At the moment he lacks an “official” name and in many ways I believe him to always remain a nameless character. He is an empty shell, meaning to be adopted unconsciously whenever one of my paintings is viewed.

The suit itself is a representation of the ideologies and cultural ties that bind and confine us. When stepping into a new environment I have noticed that, as people, we tend to cling to the familiar, instead of attempting to embrace and understand the things we do not understand. I cannot say that I am completely free of this either because especially when I am in different countries or surrounded by new people, I find it hard to let go of previous biases and approach the situation with an open mind. I found this particularly difficult when I was staying with a woman in Valencia, Spain. Her lifestyle was so far from the cultural confines I had been raised within that I was not entirely sure how to handle some of the basic differences between her and I.

This mindset can cause friction because it prevents understanding between two people. Looking back on that experience now, I realize I should have been more open-

minded about the culture I was being immersed in. Learned to respect it for what it was, accept that it was not a permanent life change, but something temporary that should be appreciated for the experience and knowledge it gave me.

This idea of immersion played a part in the size and scale in this body of work. Each piece is monumental. This size was a conscious choice meant to challenge me technically, but also give the audience the feeling of an entire immersive environment. The paintings are not meant to just be viewed but to be *experienced*. They are part of the exploration and meant to mimic stepping into a new environment or culture and having to interpret it through the symbols and codes presented.

With the size I also tried to recreate that sense of overwhelming awe that one feels as a child when first seeing a mountain, the ocean, or a new country. As a child I would often have this experience when out in nature, as I got older I became overwhelmed with small, petty problems that would appear in day to day life, often forgetting the bigger picture in favor of more unimportant details. In these pieces I attempted to recreate that feeling of humility and awe. To create a space for the audience to step back and view these pieces with an overwhelming sense of wonder such as experienced in nature, so that when walking away from the piece they come away with a larger perspective of other situations that they come across.

Another important element about these moments was the experience I would have of being in a spot that was untouched by human activity. I find that even though having a connection with other people is important for personal and artistic growth, there is a benefit to being in a place that is free of human touch. There is a certain peaceful solitude



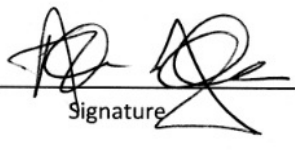
found in spots where human activity is not seen, I have found these spots calming and often places for great reflection.

Within each of these pieces I have depicted a large, predatory animal. Even as a child I would gravitate towards ferocious animals, lions and tigers being my two favorite animals. Each animal represents an extreme emotion that I have personally faced in a particular situation. I found within these animals this ability to get what to I believe a more primal and purer sense of being. Human elements in my work are subtle, if non-existent. I want the pieces and the energy associated with each animal to speak for them. These animals though, are often in passive positions either being harmed, faced away from the viewer, or in positions of weakness.

Conclusion:

In the end, my pieces are about exploration of the subconscious, the childlike wonder experienced in a new environment, and embracing of my old interest in narrative paintings. This body of work is an immersive reflection of myself, as well as a bridge meant to cross the gap between the familiar and the new, subconscious and conscious, Surrealism and Visionary to create something entirely new and, ultimately, uniquely my own.

The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Mary Williams defended on April, 17th.

Thesis Director:	<u>Zeliana Garcia-Roig</u>	<u>Fine Art</u>	
	Full Name	Department	Signature
2 nd Member:	<u>Keith Robertson</u>	<u>Fine Art</u>	
	Full Name	Department	Signature
Outside Member:	<u>Adam Tolles</u>	<u>Art History</u>	
	Full Name	Department	Signature