

POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION:
MEMORIES, MORALS, AND OTHER COMBUSTIBLES

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

This practice-lead research and the resulting exhibition of paintings are the product of an investigation into personal experiences of cognitive dissonance caused by emotional conflict and traumatic events. Expressing these points of conflict in fine art paintings creates the opportunity to identify defense mechanisms, coping methods, and positive resolution potential. It serves as a model for bringing these emotional experiences from the unconscious into self-directed awareness.

Following the precedent of the Surrealists' who applied Psychoanalytic Theory to art, I applied psychoanalytic concepts and two additional contemporary psychological models to guide and interpret my painting practice. The Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) provided a model for viewing emotional conflict and neurosis as triggers for personal growth. The Vienna Integrated Model of Top-down and Bottom-up Processes in Art Perception (VIMAP) includes a similar scenario of personal growth from conflict that an art viewer may experience. Together these naturalistic, cognitive models allowed me to consciously examine, reflect upon, and translate mental states at the cusp of change.

Collage and automatic writing practices like that of the Surrealists provided an intuitive way to evoke emotional memories and explore source images that recall points of conflict and emotional states. In the painting process, I employed stylistic elements of Romantic landscapes, Neo-Expressionism, Pop Surrealism, and Magic Realism to communicate tension and to balance emotion with objectivity. This mix of styles creates flexibility in aesthetic distance within the paintings allowing the examination of emotional memories, defense mechanisms, and conflicting values and beliefs. Expressive mark-making, the psychology of landscape, metaphorical narratives, and traditional painting formats help communicate these difficult to describe mental

states. A viewer may experience these feelings through triggered memories or empathy with the mood and narrative.

Combining psychological models with fine art provides a relatively safe environment and perspective within which to view anxiety, depression, and other emotional tension caused by conflict and trauma as a positive means for personal growth and transformation. Viewing neurosis as a catalyst for positive change is relevant to overturning the stigma of mental “illness” and contributing to collective empowerment in response to pervasive feelings of personal, environmental, or other socio-cultural existential threats.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the emotionally conflicted, may they view their dissonance as a positive sign for change on the road to personal reintegration and social altruism.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Anxiety, depression, and other forms of neurosis associated with “negative” emotions carry a stigma of weakness and failure, but these phenomena are common and can indicate a need for situational change or reassessment of beliefs and values. Stigmatization suppresses the potential to recognize mental tension and conflict as a catalyst for positive change and growth. Applying therapeutic models of cognitive psychology and naturalized aesthetics to fine art practice emphasizes the positive role emotional conflict plays in personal growth. Cognitive models also describe mechanisms by which visual art can communicate this pivotal state of mind, providing a viewer with a similar context and experience.

My primary framework for interpreting experiences of emotional discord as points for learning and growth is The Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD), a model of personality development created by Kazimierz Dąbrowski (1902–1980). TPD uses many of the terms and concepts associated with Psychoanalytic Theory developed by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939); however, in TPD, anxiety, guilt, shame, despair, and depression provide learning opportunities and growth potential¹. A second model supporting the communication of these moods and concepts through art is the Vienna Integrated Model of Top-down and Bottom-up Processes in Art Perception (VIMAP), a comprehensive cognitive, aesthetic model that attempts to map the many ways people can respond to art. Its consideration of intuitive, emotional, and conscious evaluation of content and context includes a scenario in which an art observer can experience conflict that motivates a change in values and perspectives. Chapter II explains TPD and VIMAP in more detail.

¹ Jennifer Eisman, Heather Lai, and Chelsea Rushton, “Drawing out Understanding: Arts-Based Learning and Gifted Children,” *Gifted Education International* 33, no. 3 (September 1, 2017): 197–209, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261429415576992>.

Tension, trauma, and conflict can play a positive role in personal development, but coping strategies sometimes create resistance to change. Both models account for resistance to change, but they do not elaborate on its nature. I use the common Psychoanalytic Theory term “defense mechanisms” for the multiple ways people avoid confronting their emotional challenges, thus inhibiting change. Included are “modes of resolution” from the very similar Cognitive Dissonance Theory². Examples of defense mechanisms that can inhibit change when faced with strong emotions are avoidance, denial, intellectualization, projection, displacement, rationalization, compensation, and suppression. Defense mechanisms are less likely to be triggering when the context of fine art provides a safe environment to moderate aesthetic distance while experiencing and reflecting upon emotional conflict. In this context, examining the causes of distress allow the possibility of a positive resolution. The resulting changes in cognitive and behavioral patterns can promote a holistic integration of beliefs, values, emotions, and behaviors.

Automatic writing and collage, Surrealist techniques of accessing the subconscious, allowed me to recall experiences of conflict and translate them into visual images without intellectualizing the content. Stylistic elements of Neo-Expressionism, Pop Surrealism, and Magic Realism communicate the ambivalent, emotional content by combining realistic imagery, expression, and open metaphor. Principles of Prospect Refuge Theory contribute to the sense of anxiety and aesthetic distance in the scenes³. Prospect and refuge describe how a viewer reacts to the dangers and the opportunities for escape in a landscape vista. It includes a social component related to the sense of seeing versus being seen.

² Earl S. Hishinuma, “Psychoanalytic and Cognitive Dissonance Theories,” in *Annals of Theoretical Psychology*, ed. Arthur W. Staats and Leendert P. Mos, *Annals of Theoretical Psychology* (Boston, MA: Springer US, 1987), 157–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-6456-0_7.

³ Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, Rev. ed (Chichester ; New York: Wiley, 1996).

My process and paintings attempt to recreate, model, and capture a specific emotional state of mind, a state that could be subconsciously processed by engaging in various defense mechanisms or used to question the reasons behind the tension resulting in a positive change in values. By fixing a transitional point of emotion in an art object, the content can be evaluated with repeated reflections and interpretations. Using found images, landscapes, and environmental imagery in a public fine art venue allows personal experiences to extend to a cultural level where the exhibition can play a role in collective psychology and behavior.

CHAPTER II: POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

Personal Beginnings

My interest in psychology and art is directly related to my unstable childhood and adolescence. Over those formative years, my sisters and I lived with my mother and her various boyfriends and husbands. We moved frequently; I attended twelve different schools before graduating high school. Contradiction, disillusionment, conflict, uncertainty, changing emotional boundaries, and adapting to new social environments were frequent experiences. My sisters and I regularly visited and went on vacations with my father, who had remarried, had a stepfamily, stable career, and a stable home. He did what he could for us and made offers for us to live with him, but those were thwarted by my mother either legally or through emotional manipulation of us children.

In my later studies of psychology, I found an unofficial diagnosis for my mother, “histrionic personality disorder,” characterized in part by excessive emotionality, attention-seeking, theatricality, use of physical appearance to attract attention, and impressionistic speech without details⁴. She also had a strong defense mechanism of denial, which prevented her from acknowledging anything negative, a maladaptive defense mechanism that contributed to her year in federal prison for mail fraud, and her death from a treatable but neglected cancer.

In addition to family turmoil and traumas, I was sensitive to the late twentieth century zeitgeist that continues today. I feared a global thermonuclear war and being drafted into the Vietnam War. At eight years old, I felt the tension of the Watergate scandal and the relief of President Nixon’s resignation, after which I ran outside, played on the swing with joy, telling the

⁴ Andrew M. Colman, “Histrionic Personality Disorder,” in *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199657681.001.0001/acref-9780199657681-e-3788>.

other kids the news, though they did not seem to care. Trying to make sense of this life, combined with the contradictory logic and confusion of religion, caused great stress and anxiety.

Coping with conflict, contradictions, and emotional turmoil is ingrained in my psyche. I could write two very different true accounts of my childhood. One about family vacations, country clubs, encouragement, nurturing, awards, schools for the gifted and talented, honors programs, and Boy Scouts. The other about fear, sexual abuse, violent schools, disillusionment, crime, vandalism, drugs, and juvenile detention. To understand, cope with, and attempt to control the swings between chaos and stability, I relied on my intellect and observation to adapt to situations, using logic and prediction to understand how and why things happen. I became good at reading and understanding other people's emotional states and motivations while detaching from my own emotions in order to protect myself from disappointment, vulnerability, and manipulation.

As an adult, these coping "skills" and the need to understand my insecurities and anxieties led to six years of work in psychology. I worked as a psychiatric technician and teacher at mental hospitals, a wilderness camp counselor for "delinquent" teenage boys, and a special education teacher for violent, emotionally-disturbed elementary school children. During this time, I read many patients' charts whose biographies were much worse than mine, took classes in abnormal psychology, and received various other training in behaviorism and trauma resolution. I benefited greatly from psychological practice, experience, training, and personal therapy, but working in the field also caused secondary trauma and reinforced my tendency to detach emotionally. Recognizing this, I transitioned to a career teaching computer science and digital media at a community college, a career that lasted 14 years.

My choice to quit my job and get a Master of Fine Arts degree was a decision prompted by a desire for a more rewarding work and life experience, one that would help me become a more integrated person. I began my second graduate degree and took an environmental job in my hometown of Corpus Christi. After being away for thirty years, I welcomed the likelihood that returning would trigger many memories, emotions, and thoughts to explore with my art.

A Phenomenological Expressive Approach

As a child, I was fascinated by a sculpture I saw in an art encyclopedia, *The Family* (Fig. 1), by Marisol Escobar's (1930–2016)⁵. It stirred emotions within me that I did not understand; now, I see how it resembled the conflicted, complicated family life I was living. Since then, fine art has puzzled me intellectually and challenged me emotionally. Art practice has become a vital component in my psychological development and a rewarding way to integrate emotion with thinking and communication.

I work from a pragmatic, naturalistic aesthetic perspective that agrees with many of the concepts in John Dewey's *Art as Experience*⁶. He rejects nature/spirit dualism and sees the art object as an expressive object that results from the author's experience of everyday life and the act of creation itself. Dewey's idea that aesthetic quality is emotional communication of experience influences my work. For Dewey, the viewer of an aesthetically perceived work also has a unique experience informed by the expressive object and any previously experienced information. His model fits with my concept of art as knowledge emerging from imagination fueled by experience and then emotionally expressed. Art can then create an experience for

⁵ Currier Museum, "#POTD of Artist Marisol Escobar's 'The Family.' View This Incredible Sculpture Today at the Currier.Pic.Twitter.Com/V9lt67h5Pt," Tweet, @CurrierMuseum (blog), July 31, 2016, <https://twitter.com/CurrierMuseum/status/759675271578578944>.

⁶ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Perigee trade pbk. ed, A Perigee Book (New York, NY: Perigee, 2005).

others on various levels through common biology, experiences, and knowledge. The cognitive psychological theories applied in my art practice correlates well to this concept of lived experience shaping self.

Accessing, understanding, expressing, and communicating emotion and subconscious cognition is a strength of the arts, as is manifest in the modern painting movements such as Symbolism, Romanticism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Neo-Expressionism. My paintings combine the Neo-Expressionist portrayal of emotional states through figuration, Magic Realism's objectivity, and the Surrealists' application of psychology.

Surrealism emerged from the psychological traumas of World War I as a reaction to the dissonance between positivistic modernism and the carnage of mechanized warfare. One of its primary aims was to explore the non-rational operations of the mind. The founder of Surrealism, poet André Breton (1896 – 1966), worked as a medical orderly in a psychiatric ward working with WWI soldiers with severe mental breakdowns⁷. The movement adopted the metaphors of Metaphysical art, referenced emotional landscapes of Romanticism, and explored states of mind by employing concepts in the psychological theories of Pierre Janet (1859–1947), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Carl Jung (1875–1961)⁸. Janet's therapy for psychological trauma provided the surrealists the tool of automatism to access unrestricted, unfiltered, stream of consciousness thought patterns through methods of painting and writing⁹. Freud constructed a model of the mind that includes a testable and accessible subconscious with desires and motivations below awareness. Surrealist painters used Freud's concept of the subconscious and emphasis on dream interpretation to paint dreams as manifestation of a state of mind beyond the

⁷ Tim Martin, *Essential Surrealists* (Bath, UK: Parragon Pub., 2000).

⁸ Willard Bohn, *The Rise of Surrealism : Cubism, Dada, and the Pursuit of the Marvelous* (Albany, NY : State University of New York Press, c2002., 2002).

⁹ Jennifer Gibson, "Surrealism before Freud: Dynamic Psychiatry's 'Simple Recording Instrument,'" *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (1987): 56–60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/776843>.

rational. Carl Jung moved psychoanalysis away from conflict and toward shared experience providing artists with the concepts of universal symbols expressing positive archetypes and collective mythology.

Since then, psychology has developed a variety of approaches to cognitive therapy and much stronger naturalistic models and descriptions of what happens during creativity and aesthetic experiences. Below I explain the integration of two psychological models to process emotional discord and communicate a similar experience to an art viewer. Both models emphasize the role that emotion plays in personal growth.

The Theory of Positive Disintegration

The founder of the Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD), Kazimierz Dąbrowski (1902–1980), was influenced by traumatic experiences during his youth and early adulthood. In Poland, he walked through the aftermath of a WWI battle, fascinated by the range of expressions frozen on the faces of dead soldiers. Between WWI and WWII, he went to university, where in response to a classmate’s unexpected suicide, he changed his major from music to medicine and behavior. There he studied from and met psychologists Janet and Freud. During WWII, he saw acts of the highest and lowest human character while working underground for the Polish resistance and being imprisoned by the Gestapo ¹⁰.

Dąbrowski's experiences led him to view “negative” emotions and trauma-induced neurosis as a positive catalyst for personality development. Personality in TPD is a learned and constructed system of authentic, autonomous, and altruistic values recognized by society over

¹⁰ Sal Mendaglio, ed., *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration* (Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press, 2008), 4–7.

time¹¹. This theory of development is different from others in that it is nonontogenetic, meaning it is not related to age or physical development.¹² Developmental potential is based in part on perceptual sensitivities. Dąbrowski's research found that many gifted and talented children, eminent people, and creative adults have multiple heightened sensitivities to psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, intellectual, or emotional stimulation. People with these "overexcitabilities" are prone to anxiety, guilt, depression, and other forms of neurosis because they react strongly to conflicts between "what is" and "what should be" and between the "existing self" and "ideal self."¹³ The significance of this finding prompted the titles of the *Positive Disintegration* triptych (fig.2), panel 1 is titled *Overexcitability* (fig.3).

In TPD, there is a continuum of five fluid levels an individual may move into, out of, or remain within. The first and last levels are stable modes of thinking based on integrated values and beliefs. The difference between them is the foundation of the value systems. "Primary Integration," Level I, is based on satisfying biological and social conformity needs, a mode of thinking where many people function contently. At Level V, "Secondary Integration," a person has developed and consistently acts from a stable system of values based on a self-determined, socially empathetic, and altruistic personality ideal.¹⁴ The three levels of disintegration between primary and secondary integration correspond to various cognitive processes I capture in my paintings.¹⁵ They represent memories of trauma, emotional turmoil, and pivotal points of change captured at a stage when defense mechanisms could engage, or conflicting values and beliefs could be questioned.

¹¹ Mendaglio, 18.

¹² Cheryl M. Ackerman, "The Essential Elements of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration and How They Are Connected," *Roepers Review* 31, no. 2 (March 27, 2009): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783190902737657>.

¹³ Ackerman, 10.

¹⁴ Mendaglio, *Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration*, 21–22.

¹⁵ Marie-Lise Schläppy, "Understanding Mental Health Through the Theory of Positive Disintegration: A Visual Aid," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01291>.

Level II is “Uni-Level Disintegration,” in which someone experiences inner-conflict that challenges their values and beliefs, but they have no conscious control over it. Uncontrolled liquefaction of rigid belief structures begins here due to the conflict.¹⁶ Because it is uncontrolled, remaining in a Level II state without resolving the conflict can result in “Negative Disintegration,” manifesting as chronic neurosis and even suicide. More likely, someone will revert to Level I through defense mechanisms or enter Level III. Liquefaction or the breaking down of rigid beliefs and value systems is a vital step toward personal growth; *Liquefaction* became the title of *Positive Disintegration* triptych panel 3 (fig. 4).

Level III is “Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration,” a state in which someone recognizes the conflict between “what is” and “what should be” and between the “existing self” and “ideal self.” “Positive Disintegration” begins, and a new developing emotional hierarchy of values guides behavior. Conscious decisions continue to disintegrate Level I values such as the need for social conformity and begin to replace them with self-directed values and aims. This transformation of motivations and values is the positive result of inner conflict.¹⁷

Level IV is “Organized Multilevel Disintegration,” where values are stable, conflict is lessened, and the “Third Factor” becomes dominant. The “first” and “second” factors are the influences of heredity and environment; the “Third Factor” is autotelic, intrinsic motivation for self-improvement. One becomes capable of conducting self-therapy by consciously evaluating conflicts in values and finding resolutions by adjusting values and beliefs based on the flexible new value hierarchy developed in Level III. *The Third Factor* is the title of *Positive Disintegration* triptych panel 2 (fig. 5).

¹⁶ Michael M. Piechowski, “Rethinking Dąbrowski’s Theory II: It’s Not All Flat Here,” *Roeper Review* 39, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2017.1289487>.

¹⁷ Amanda Harper et al., “Through the Dąbrowski Lens: A Fresh Examination of the Theory of Positive Disintegration,” *Roeper Review* 39, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 37–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2016.1247395>.

From the perspective of making the artworks, they are models of thought at Level III or IV because of my deliberate seeking, observing, and questioning the point at which experience, values, and beliefs conflict. Applying TPD to my practice helped me to explore, experience, and integrate emotional experiences, which I often suppressed by the defensive habit of intellectualization. Combining TPD and Surrealist techniques with painting practice to access and process strong emotions engaged my introspective psychology skills and raw emotionality to produce a meta-cognitively aware expressionistic body of paintings. Since my paintings capture this state of mind, they can be experienced differently over time and by different viewers with various levels of distance, knowledge, and awareness. A viewer might experience the paintings on a limited scale similarly to TPD Levels II, III, or IV, which parallel a similar model of art perception presented below.

The Vienna Integrated Model of Top-down and Bottom-up Processes in Art Perception

For understanding how painting technique and exhibition could communicate and evoke a response from a viewer, The Vienna Integrated Model of Top-down and Bottom-up Processes in Art Perception (VIMAP)¹⁸ served as a valuable supplement to TPD. VIMAP describes outcomes that are consistent with TPD, making it a microcosm model with the potential to bridge the exhibition's content with a viewer's experience. A brief explanation of TPD displayed in the gallery with artwork provides context to prompt sustained contemplation.

VIMAP is a comprehensive naturalistic model that attempts to map the many ways people can respond to art. Bottom-up processing refers to the direct visual art-derived stimuli and the

¹⁸ Matthew Pelowski et al., "Move Me, Astonish Me... Delight My Eyes and Brain: The Vienna Integrated Model of Top-down and Bottom-up Processes in Art Perception (VIMAP) and Corresponding Affective, Evaluative, and Neurophysiological Correlates," *Physics of Life Reviews* 21 (July 1, 2017): 80–125, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.plrev.2017.02.003>.

initial, near-instantaneous, processing of design, and formal aesthetic elements. Top-down describes how the viewer's personality, knowledge, training, and environmental context interact with the bottom-up responses. VIMAP also describes “secondary top-down/bottom-up integration,” where complex cognitive and perceptual negotiations allow the viewer to evolve or change with sustained interactions with the art.¹⁹

A viewer’s initial processing results in an attempt at cognitive mastery and evaluation of self-relevance based on perception of emotional reaction and bodily response. During further processing, the viewer may experience congruency or discrepancy with their existing psychological schema of values, beliefs, and self-identity. Depending on self-relevance, they will arrive at one of five different outcomes:

- 1) Facile, Default
- 2) Novelty, Insight (Sublime, appreciation of “negative” art)
- 3) Harmony, Emotional resonance (Flow, peak experience, chills, being moved)
- 4) Negative, Abort
- 5) Transformative

The transformative outcome conditions closely reflect the dissonance and self-relevance depicted in my paintings and are consistent with the positive disintegration process in TPD. Low belief and value congruency (high dissonance) + high self-relevance + high coping need scenarios can result in a transformative outcome²⁰. Emotional tension results in the resolution of the dissonance through a transformation of values, then the possibility of experiencing other outcomes such as emotional resonance with new values.

¹⁹ Pelowski et al.

²⁰ Pelowski et al., 95.

Emotional and cognitive distance is important for mediating the effect of defense mechanisms²¹. Art that is too personal may result in a negative, abort outcome where the viewer exits the interaction. At the other extreme, the lack of emotional involvement can result in an objective and formal evaluation with the default, facile outcome.

With awareness of VIMAP and TPD, my body of work becomes metacognitive art, capturing personal instances of “Positive Disintegration” and presenting them in a format that can parallel the VIMAP transformative scenario of high dissonance, high relevance, high coping need. Applying these models helped me objectively understand my cognitive processes, translate them into emotional paintings, and provide a context for viewers. A challenging part of my practice was evoking and expressing the emotional content in images that would be relevant to and experienced similarly by others. VIMAP helped evaluate the potential impact of combined formal and conceptual elements on a viewer.

²¹ Pelowski et al., 103.

CHAPTER III: PROCESS AND PRACTICE

Emotional Activation

As expected, returning to my hometown of Corpus Christi, Texas, influenced my painting. Familiar places, cries of seagulls, and smells from ocean and industry recalled strong memories and emotions. Environmental imagery of oil fires and cars merged with memories of family turmoil to become metaphors and symbols of conflict and contradiction. Placing these in a landscape with figures blurred the boundary between the literal and psychological. Exploring this theme uncovered more imagery connecting memories, emotions, and personal experiences of dissonance.

Like my family history, my relationship with the environment is a source of contradiction and conflict. Growing up and living on the Texas Gulf Coast, birdwatching, aquarium keeping, camping, hiking, and fishing strongly shaped my naturalist identity. Acutely attuned to the environment and my place in it, I learned about the world and found solace from the chaos in my life by observing animal behavior and exploring nature. I also have anxious memories of washing tar from my between my toes at a plastic littered beach and witnessing a colossal fireball from a refinery explosion. This conflict between industry and environment is more poignant now with awareness of how the oil, gas, and plastics industries cause illness, death, ecological destruction, war, and political turmoil, yet financially supported my family, my wife's family, and most of our aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Earlier work that embodies this tension is a series of photographs that captured colorful spectrums of light refraction from parking lot oil slicks after a rain. Many resembled celestial nebulas; others included parking stripes and my reflection as in *Refraction No. 10* (fig. 6). That

rich oily source of color would eventually run off and pollute Corpus Christi Bay, representing the complex cognitive tension between needs, desires, and environment. During the period I was taking these photos, I began painting refinery flares and industrial fires. Capturing the turmoil and energy of dense, billowing smoke provided a creative challenge, but also a sense of conflict between the implied critique of the petroleum industry and my father's pride in his life's work as a chemist at a plastics refinery.

From various news sources, I collected images of petroleum oil fires, both historical and recent; there are many. Fires depicted in the paintings include some from Kuwait, Puerto Rico, Texas City, Houston, and Port Aransas. *Sinking of the Deepwater Horizon* (fig. 7), oil on panel, is based on a video frame that captures the moment that the burning ruins of the rig sank below the surface of the Gulf of Mexico. My wife's cousin, Jason Anderson (1974 – 2010), was killed in the Deepwater Horizon explosion. Though I did not know Jason, I often cry when I discuss this event and painting. It triggers in me a psychological nexus of many relationships and experiences in my life related to addiction, mental illness, suicide, loss, and other traumas. The many memories and associations trigger thought patterns that overwhelm my defenses and release an emotionality that is usually controlled. I embraced this trigger and used it to explore more emotional imagery.

Another series of images preceding and influencing this exhibition is a group of paintings on vintage aerial maps of the Corpus Christi Bay area. These were my first use of anonymous vintage photos as reference. The subjects are oil fires combined with figures posing with their cars painted directly on the maps. *Mother's Galaxie* (fig. 8), depicts a woman posing with a 1965 Ford Galaxie sedan, the model of our family car in the 1980s. The car, associated with many positive and negative experiences, combined with the fire, smoke, figure, and landscape, became

the personal psychological model for the body of work in this thesis. Smoke and fire function as external threats and metaphors for personal turmoil and dissonance.

I added thousands of anonymous, amateur family photos, and 35mm slides to my reference collection. Using anonymous photos eliminates imagery that triggers emotions by familiar faces, making it more likely that the images I respond to will translate to others' experiences. It also provided some emotional distance as I look for meaningful events, situations, and gestures.

To further access memories and emotions, I used the surrealist method of automatic writing. For 41 consecutive days approximately at the midpoint of creating this body of work, as soon as possible after waking, I wrote non-stop until filling three college ruled notebook pages. Much of the writings were random, conscious observations and responses to environmental stimuli. Others included personal issues, dreams, and memories of conflict and trauma, which influenced the artwork. In some sessions, I experienced a strange objective distance where I was observing my hand drawing ink across the page without being at all aware of the words that were filling the page with a dreamlike stream of consciousness. (Appendix A).

The writing practice helped create a similar state of flow while composing digital reference collages, in which I combined the evocative figures and scenes from photos with oil fire imagery to create psychological landscapes. These collages became the basis of the paintings in this exhibition. During the painting process, I would add and edit components, make color and rendering choices, and create expressive marks and textures to enhance the mood and feeling.

CHAPTER IV: CREATIVE WORKS AND ANALYSIS

Psychological Spaces

The earliest work in the exhibition is *Age of Displacement*, 48" x 72", 2019 (fig. 9). It shows remnants of a map theme imposed on the landscape, a carryover from *Mother's Galaxie* (fig. 8). Map elements on a perpendicular plane beneath elements in linear and aerial perspective, create a tension between opposing environmental points of view. Placing the child's face as a focal point eye-to-eye with the viewer emphasizes the precarious, vulnerable experience of the child, competing with the colorful chaos and symbolism in the rest of the painting. The car seems to be a character also looking out at the viewer and grinning while the other figures are distracted.

The largest work, *Middle Ground*, oil on canvas, 96" x 65", 2019 (fig. 10), features two smiling ladies dressed for the beach in sunglasses and bathing suits, posing for a camera behind a burning Safari station wagon. It seems to freeze a psychological point where multiple threats are present but seem outside of or blocked from the figures' awareness. The scale and point of view places the viewer firmly in the role of the photographer with full awareness of the scenario, a precarious physical position out over the sinkhole, which could evoke anxiety, empathy, or complicity, requiring some type of resolution to the anxiety.

First Fire, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2019 (fig. 11), is based on one of my earliest memories, witnessing a refinery explosion in the distance while watching a drive-in movie. It freezes time at a transitional point of awareness after the explosion but before the chaos and confusion of exodus from the drive-in theater. On the screen is the "dawn of man" scene from the movie

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), contributing to the concept of cognitive awakening, existential threat, and psychological tension²².

Grandma's Window, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2019 (fig. 12), is a scene with a child in greyscale looking out at the viewer while an elderly couple watches a colorful parade on a large screen. Oil fires burning in the desolate landscape beyond the window are metaphoric for psychological trauma while the child's black eye gives additional clues to a cause. As a psychological state of positive disintegration, the photographic quality again draws the viewer in as a participant or possibly the subject themselves. The blue curtains and the parade scene contribute to a sense of emotional distance and potential defense mechanisms.

Summer Fugue, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2019 (fig. 13), consists of a triangular composition with a slightly windblown female figure looking at a flaming Tropic of Cancer road sign as a truck approaches from the distance. The seeming lack of awareness or concern despite the fire being directly in the figure's gaze alludes to a state of mind like TPD Level II, Uni-level Disintegration, where one experiences conflict but has no control or awareness of what to do, a place if unresolved can lead to negative disintegration, chronic neurosis, or suicide.

MERCFL, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2019 (fig. 14) derives its title from the license plate of the hunter's car. Here the fire bellows beyond the horizon while the hunter lights a cigarette and leans against his vehicle with multiple guns. Dead rabbits from the hunt lay in the grass in the foreground. The allusion to mercy and the satisfied posture of the hunter combine with the overarching smoke to evoke positive disintegration where values related to empathy and satisfaction of selfish desires are in conflict and subject to restructuring. The guns themselves are a potent

²² Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Science Fiction (United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp., 1968).

symbol that will interact with the psyche of viewers in many ways, depending on their experiences.

Three Sisters, oil on panel, 34" x 22", 2019 (fig. 15) is a symmetrical composition with three fires in the distant background, echoing the number three of the title. Two women pose on beach blankets, reading one sheet of funny papers between them. The title and objects in the scene suggest a missing third sister who could be the photographer, lost, ignored, or absent for some other reason. Three fires suggest a collective trauma or experience portrayed from two points of view, that of the cooperating pair on the blanket and from that of the missing third party.

In the painting, *Ambivalence*, oil on panel, 34" x 22", 2019 (fig. 16), three figures confront a monolithic fire and smoke cloud towering above. The waterline is pushing upon the shore past a solitary tree in the middle ground. Awareness and action create a sense of tentative control. A viewer is placed in line with the other figures and may feel the ambivalence of approaching like the other figures or retreating. Considered in the context of TPD, this presents a choice of taking control or turning away in defense.

Projection, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2019 (fig. 17) is a larger than life-size close-up of a fender, tire, and hub cap with a fire lane warning stripe in the lower foreground. A fire and landscape reflect from a distance behind the viewer, but the viewer is not in the reflection. Lack of a reflection is symbolic of lacking self-awareness and may cause uneasiness. The scene is left more open to personal interpretation than paintings containing figures, adding to the possibility of contemplation from a personal perspective. *Projection* is a reference to a defense mechanism where unwanted feelings within oneself are attributed to and perceived to be coming from others; in the painting scenario, there is no "other" upon which to project.

The last three panels created for this exhibition comprise a triptych titled *Positive Disintegration*, acrylic on canvas, 60” x 144”, 2019 (fig. 2). By this time in my research, I was more acquainted with the TPD and chose to create a more overtly psychological landscape to provide a stronger metaphorical context for all the instances of smoke and fire. *Positive Disintegration*, triptych, panel 1, *Overexcitability*, acrylic on canvas, 60” x 48”, 2019 (fig. 3), features a larger than life toddler subject to harsh light and contact with fire. A combination of innocence and ominousness alludes to the potential vulnerability and power of overexcitabilities, as defined by TPD. The possibility of uncontrollable disruption and the power to manage turmoil are both manifest in fire, posture, expression, and shoelaces of the figure.

Positive Disintegration, triptych panel 2, *The Third Factor*, acrylic on canvas, 60” x 48”, 2019 (fig. 5) features two figures of older children floating in a motorboat on a visually absent surface plane; an anchor serves as a focal point and symbol of control. “The Third Factor” in TPD is about conscious control and decision making with the intent of changing and acting on one’s value system. Since it is unclear whether the anchor is being lifted or lowered, the scene seems frozen and open to continuous evaluation. Two instances of fire and smoke at vastly different scales merge with the distant sky. Another floating boat suggests others, yet it is empty of figures, possibly representing the letting go of a need for social conformity and TPD Level I values.

Positive Disintegration, triptych panel 3, *Liquefaction*, acrylic on canvas, 60” x 48”, 2019 (fig. 4) shows an orca breaching a body of water enclosed by walls. The nose of the orca is approaching a flaming target held by a human figure on a lift extending from out of the frame. The orca has multiple meanings, representing nature, instinct, and intelligence. It serves as an objective surrogate for contemplating human consciousness. Like many of the images, it depicts

a scene that is nostalgic to some and repulsive to others, providing one example of changing cultural values. The confinement and training of these social animals depict real trauma and conflict or could act as a metaphor for human dissonance. The title, *Liquefaction*, references the state of disintegration where old Level I values are breaking down, and new self-determined values are forming.

Adults, Children, Cigarettes

Gesture, posture, and facial expression of the human figures serve as a bridge between my experiences and those of the viewer. The range of people in the paintings, from young to old and of different character and activities, provides many opportunities for identification. The ages also portray a range of maturity that could correlate to emotional or cognitive development. Multiple people in some of the scenes add rich potential to deduce family or social interactions and provide enough ambiguity to create a narrative or trigger personal memories.

This identification could contribute to high self-relevant assessment of the artwork, which is a condition of the VIMAP model's transformative outcome. This feeling of self-relevance in a context of dynamic tension represented by the smoke, fire, and other hazards is the cognitive state in which dissonance can motivate a change as described in TPD and VIMAP.

I quit smoking over 20 years ago. It gave me a sense of personal growth, triumph of conscious decision over physical indulgence, rationality over denial. Cigarettes happened to be in many of the photos I chose for my compositions. As in the images, smoking was common in my family, and some, including my mother, died from the consequences. The cigarettes in my paintings serve as a symbol of dissonance, providing a combination of existential reality and moody metaphor, a personal link between the small inhaled fire and the more massive oil fires

loaded with connotations. They are a point of contemplation, a decision point at the state of dissonance.

Metacognitive Expressionism

Metacognitive expressionism is my term to reflect the intentional application of automatic writing and naturalistic psychology in an intuitive, emotional practice. Metacognitive also applies to my approach to the MFA program itself. In order to overcome my intellectual overexcitability, defense mechanism of detachment, and experience with business communication modalities, I have had to consciously manage and sometimes suppress my analytic thinking while exploring emotional content.

One reason I chose painting was its rich history and potential as a tool for description, metaphor, and expression. Correlating with VIMP bottom-up formal elements and top-down processing of knowledge about art and art history, I used multiple stylistic techniques to express and communicate feelings of dissonance. The most influential styles on this body of work include Pop Surrealism, Neo-Expressionism, and Magic Realism. Some of the painters that influenced it are Mark Ryden, Eric Fischl, and Neo Rauch.

In some ways, my work falls within the Neo-Expressionist cannon. It is a very personal expression of my subjective experiences and reaction to the cultural zeitgeist of my lifetime. The movement was prominent in the 1970s and 1980s, the time I came of age and experienced many of the same cultural phenomena as the Neo-Expressionist painters of that time, such as the Vietnam War, Watergate, Cold War nuclear threat, the war on drugs, gang wars, rise of neoliberalism, the AIDS crisis, and the postmodern visual pastiche of MTV. Like them, I mined and expressed personal and cultural memories, then added current cultural tensions related to

climate change anxiety and global political conservatism. However, it was not my intent to offer a postmodern critique of the forces behind these issues. I use the experiences and issues as facts that cause personal dissonance, which I examine in a cognitive-developmental and perceptual history context. I may reflect the zeitgeist, but that is only a byproduct of my expression of conflict. The cultural context serves as a top-down source of relevance to a viewer's experience, and the Neo-Expressionistic brushwork and color contribute to the bottom-up processing that adds to emotional identification.

My Triptych, *Positive Disintegration*, 60" x 144" (fig. 2), and the two largest canvases, *Age of Displacement*, 48" x 72" (fig. 9), and *Middle Ground*, 96" x 65" (fig. 10), combine texture, expressive brushwork with scale like that of the Neo-Expressionist which evoke the emotions of Romantic and History painting. Another parallel seen in the smaller works is the use of color and temperature contrast to evoke a discordant mood such as the dominant cool purple overcast next to the warm yellow tone in the foreground of *MERCFL* (fig. 14) and in the complementary colors and temperature contrast of the blue screen to the surrounding orange glow in *First Fire* (fig. 11).

The influence of Pop Surrealism manifests in the sense of dark humor where nostalgia and whimsical gestures are juxtaposed with the ominousness of a landscape in turmoil. I, however, am not interested solely in dark irony and shocking sensibilities but view the contradictions as defense mechanisms or points in time when awareness is absent or avoided.

The smaller works in this show are more tightly rendered and composed in the style of Magic Realism. Unlike Surrealist paintings, Magic Realism avoids obscure personal symbols like those found in dreams and the subconscious.²³ My practice of using typical anonymous photographs

²³ "Magic Realism Movement Overview," The Art Story, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/magic-realism/>.

and news footage as source material allowed me to create scenes that are plausibly real yet imaginative and strangely moody. Realistic rendering across the canvases without much use of selective focus adds to the uncanny tension. Magic Realism was influenced by the German movement “Neue Sachlichkeit” (New Objectivity). Both movements were a transition away from subjectivity and expressionism²⁴. I find this significant in my works because my paintings straddle the boundary between objectivity and subjective expression. I, however, came to this place from the opposite direction, a move away from objectivity in pursuit of the emotional.

Combining these various but related painting styles presents multiple perceptual pathways for viewers to identify with the paintings. The mixture simultaneously presents the viewer with realistic and psychological space, allowing them to find a comfortable aesthetic distance to process any personally-relevant tension. This combination of styles is like that of the East German painter Neo Rauch (b. 1960), whose work influenced me during my studies. Rauch’s paintings are dream and Surrealist inspired, but he hesitates to call them Surrealist²⁵. Jerry Saltz says that Rauch, “lambastes so-called ‘zeitgeist painting’,” and Saltz does not consider Rauch a Neo-Expressionist even though his visual style resembles the movement²⁶. The nonprofit modern art education organization, *The Art Story: Modern Art Insight*, classifies Rauch’s work as Magic Realism²⁷. Many of Neo Rauch’s paintings have been interpreted as his expressions of the dissonance experienced as an artist reconciling the cultural chaos caused after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989²⁸.

²⁴ “Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) Overview,” The Art Story, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/new-objectivity/>.

²⁵ “Neo Rauch | Artnet,” accessed November 3, 2019, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/neo-rauch/>.

²⁶ “Artnet.Com Magazine Features - Reason Without Meaning,” accessed November 3, 2019, <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/jsaltz/saltz6-7-05.asp>.

²⁷ “Neo Rauch Paintings, Bio, Ideas,” The Art Story, accessed November 22, 2019, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/raush-neo/>.

²⁸ April A. Eisman, “Painting the East German Experience: Neo Rauch in the Late 1990s,” *Oxford Art Journal* 35, no. 2 (2012): 233–50.

My style and content also have similarities to that of Neo-Expressionist painter Eric Fischl (b. 1958), whose paintings depict scenes of potential disaster and anxiety-provoking taboos derived from his experience of a dysfunctional childhood²⁹. His expressionistic use of figures portrays a sense of social and psychological tension. It is this specific point in the process of working through internal conflict I present to the viewer with the opportunity for them to interpret as their own personal or social anxiety.

Fire, Landscape, Horizon, and Viewpoint

The variety of painting approaches are unified visually with several devices. The oil fires are present in all canvases and rendered realistically. A landscape and horizon provide a space and viewpoint that places the viewer as a participant in each scene. Smoke and fire are used in a variety of contexts providing a range of possible interpretations, such as existential threat, mythical force, traumatic event, or surrogate for a person from someone's past.

As described by VIMAP, landscape settings bring both top-down associations of Romantic landscapes and bottom-up immersive reactions to the scene. The evolutionary psychology-based Prospect Refuge Theory shows evidence that the degree of threat and number of places for refuge available in a pictorial vista provokes different complex bottom-up aesthetic responses.³⁰ Depending on a person's sensitivity to anxieties, prospects and refuges can enhance the perception of person-environment interaction³¹. I intentionally evoke this sense of anxiety, by including a variety of threats, contributing to my intention of portraying psychology tension. Fire

²⁹ "Eric Fischl Paintings, Bio, Ideas," The Art Story, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/fischl-eric/>.

³⁰ Mary Ann Fischer and Patrick E. Shrout, "Children's Liking of Landscape Paintings as a Function of Their Perceptions of Prospect, Refuge, and Hazard," *Environment and Behavior* 38, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 373–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916505280083>.

³¹ Leon van Rijswijk, Gerrit Rooks, and Antal Haans, "Safety in the Eye of the Beholder: Individual Susceptibility to Safety-Related Characteristics of Nocturnal Urban Scenes," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 45 (March 2016): 103–15, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2015.11.006>.

is the obvious threat, but water, people, confinement, and vehicles can also be threatening.

Vehicles first appear to be a refuge, a shelter, and comforting psychological nostalgia, but upon further processing of the scenes, the vehicle could be interpreted as a place of entrapment, or the source of the disorder and chaos.

I often made deliberate use of the horizon line to place the viewer above, below, or eye-to-eye with subjects in the paintings. In *Age of Displacement* (fig. 9), I placed the child's eyes on the horizon, looking directly out at the viewer. The viewer is also placed as a participant in many of the images as the picture taker. Canvas proportions that mimic the film and screen ratios that all generations are familiar with from cinema, television film, and cell phones enhance the sense of photographic participation. This indirect use of media format and the depiction of media like the movie screen in *First Fire* (fig. 11), and newspaper in *Three Sisters* (fig. 15) incorporate the influence of media on our mental states through means such as distraction, escapism, awareness, persuasion, and sensationalism. Media representations in the paintings can act as both literal influence and metaphor for cognitive defense mechanisms.

CHAPTER V: SYNTHESIS

Multiplicity of Dissonance

The experiences of personal dissonance I drew upon are interpersonal, emotional, psychosexual, economic, legal/political, cultural, existential, and environmental. Paintings in this exhibition function as a perceptual history of my dissonance, where the influence of these concerns are embedded in my art objects. As I worked, I was aware of the strong influence of environmentalism and existential angst in my symbols and landscapes. However, to stay true to my intentions of expressing emotional perception through intuitive practice, I avoided the conscious intent of illustrating my thoughts on these topics.

Current environmental and existential fears are shared by many people. In the book *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement (Psychoanalytic Explorations)*, Renee Lertzman investigates psychological reactions to environmental threats, both chronic and acute. She uses a contemporary psychoanalytic approach, which, like TPD, views "...loss and ambivalence as psychosocial 'achievements' not to be avoided but integrated for more authentic modes of engagement with a dynamic uncertain world."³²

In the conceptual middle ground between Neo-Expressionism and Magic Realism, my fire and smoke imagery is open to interpretation as a metaphor for personal experiences and as a symbol of existential angst, evoking nuclear annihilation and climate change fears. Robert Lifton (b. 1926), a psychiatrist who studies cultural traumas such as war, and political violence, describes this "imagery of extinction" as arising from our awareness that we could destroy

³² Renee Lertzman, *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic Dimensions of Engagement* (Florence, UNITED KINGDOM: Routledge, 2015), 4, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tamucc/detail.action?docID=3569389>.

ourselves as a species with our technology³³. He discusses various reactions to this “ecological dissonance,” including psychic numbing and normalization. In a process that is like TPD, these defensive mechanisms are breaking down as more people experience the evidence of climate change. Rising ecological dissonance and the confrontation of “death anxiety” are leading to what he calls the “climate swerve.”³⁴ This cultural paradigm shift is moved by individual and collective changes in and restructuring of values toward a species concern. This change occurs through the symbolization of reality, which is a connecting point between evolution and history.³⁵ Lifton’s book reads like a cultural version of Positive Disintegration, where society is in a state of liquefaction due to environmental dissonance. My work symbolizes this personal condition and contributes to the collective understanding of values in conflict and provides a model for confronting problems with action.

Methodological Review

My intention going into this project was to recall, experience, and express feelings of personal cognitive dissonance through the process of planning and making paintings. I built a research-based practice that accomplished this and created the possibility of communicating these experiences and conflicts as critical points of cognitive change.

TPD provided a model for using anxiety and other neurosis as critical drivers of personality development and positive change in values and beliefs. VIMAP put this pivotal point of mental conflict in the perspective of a viewer’s experience of formal elements and higher cognitive processing based on knowledge and context. This model reflects the unique ability of art objects to bring with them the cultural history of the medium as a contextual component of secondary

³³ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Climate Swerve: Reflections on Mind, Hope, and Survival* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 17.

³⁴ Lifton, 102–4.

³⁵ Lifton, 151–52.

cognitive processing. I evoked elements of the history of painting through traditional easel painting on canvas, scale, figurative subjects, landscape, and linear perspective. VIMAP describes a viewer experience where all the elements can combine to cause a transformative outcome. This is a possible bridge to transfer the positive transformative effect of emotional discord from me to a viewer through the paintings.

These models provided guidance, perspectives, and rationale for fostering intuitive and formal aspects of my work, such as expressive brushwork, color, subject selection, and symbolism. My practice provided me with a way to reduce the intellectualization and emotional distancing I often use to cope with conflict. On a continuum of objectivity and emotional expression, my works fall in the middle, providing the right balance for my purpose of nuanced communication of a mental state that straddles awareness and the subconscious. Conceptually the paintings are metacognitive expressionism that resemble Magic Realism with a combination of moody objectivity.

Conclusions and Future Practice

The challenge of mastering painting is to use the tools in a personally authentic way that integrates historical and contemporary knowledge of the field to create expressive objects and metainformation that is relevant to others and their experiences. This body of work rises to this challenge by combining painting techniques and history with psychology, personal perceptual history, and open metaphor to create self-knowledge and a model for integration of environment, society, and self. Psychology of trauma presented in a fine art context gives the opportunity to adjust aesthetic distance and emotional responses to the psychological states and environmental situations expressed. “Negative” emotional experiences such as anxiety, guilt, despair, shame,

and depression can be recontextualized as positive forces resulting in aesthetic appreciation, personal growth, insight, metacognition, and actions.

Painting various feelings of personal cognitive dissonance overlapping with sociocultural anxieties could be further explored through emphasis on the shared mediascape of symbols and the influence of metainformation on art perception. From a painter's perspective, I would like to apply the Systems Model of Creativity, by sociologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (b. 1934), in which he considers how creativity is an interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context³⁶. Considering the cultural influence on the artist and the viewer may lead to new methods to communicate nonverbal experience. Other emerging neuroaesthetic models, such as predictive coding and visual indeterminacy, could expand my practice of intentionally engaging cognitive processes through formal visual elements ^{37 38}.

Painting is an effective way to explore and express my emotional and creative potential, balancing a strong tendency to rely on logical positivism. Automatic writing and collage worked well to suppress my analytic mind while recovering memories and moods for this exhibition. I will try other techniques such as painter Mark Tansey's (b. 1949) "color wheel" device that uses multiple rotating wheels of conceptual language to create novel conceptual combinations through chance³⁹. Another body of work could change the temporal focus from memory to images of possible futures.

³⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, 1st ed (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1996).

³⁷ Robert Pepperell, "Connecting Art and the Brain: An Artist's Perspective on Visual Indeterminacy," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 5 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2011.00084>.

³⁸ Ladislav Kesner, "The Predictive Mind and the Experience of Visual Art Work," *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01417>.

³⁹ Mark C. Taylor and Mark Tansey, *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the Ends of Representation* (Chicago, UNITED STATES: University of Chicago Press, 1999), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/tamucc/detail.action?docID=488108>.

Painting provides a rich historical heritage and shared context to use as a communication medium and model of thought, serving as a nexus of introspection and social participation. The willingness of creators to present authentic work for others to contemplate and experience provides the potential to create a new understanding of self and others. Integration with other disciplines can significantly expand art's potential, as was done here with psychology.

FIGURES



Figure 1, *The Family*, Marisol Escobar,

wood, metal, graphite, textiles, paint, plaster and accessories, 79.5 x 63 x 73 in, 1963



Figure 2, *Positive Disintegration*, triptych, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 144", 2019



Figure 3, *Overexcitability: Positive Disintegration*, triptych panel 1,
acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48", 2019



Figure 4, *Liquefaction: Positive Disintegration*, triptych panel 3,
acrylic on canvas, 60" x 48", 2019



Figure 5, *The Third Factor: Positive Disintegration*, triptych panel 2,
acrylic on canvas, 2019



Figure 6, *Refraction No. 10*, digital photograph giclée, 15" x 12", 2018



Figure 7, *Sinking of the Deepwater Horizon*, oil on board, 8" x 8", 2018



Figure 8, *Mother's Galaxie*, oil on board, 24" x 24", 2018



Figure 9, *Age of Displacement*, oil on canvas, 48" x 72", 2019



Figure 10, *Middle Ground*, 96" x 65", 2019



Figure 11, *First Fire*, 24" x 36", 2019



Figure 12, *Grandma's Window*, oil on canvas, 24" x 36",



Figure 13, Summer Fugue, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2019



Figure 14, *MERCFL*, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2019



Figure 15, *Three Sisters*, oil on canvas, 34" x 22", 2019



Figure 16, *Ambivalence*, oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2019

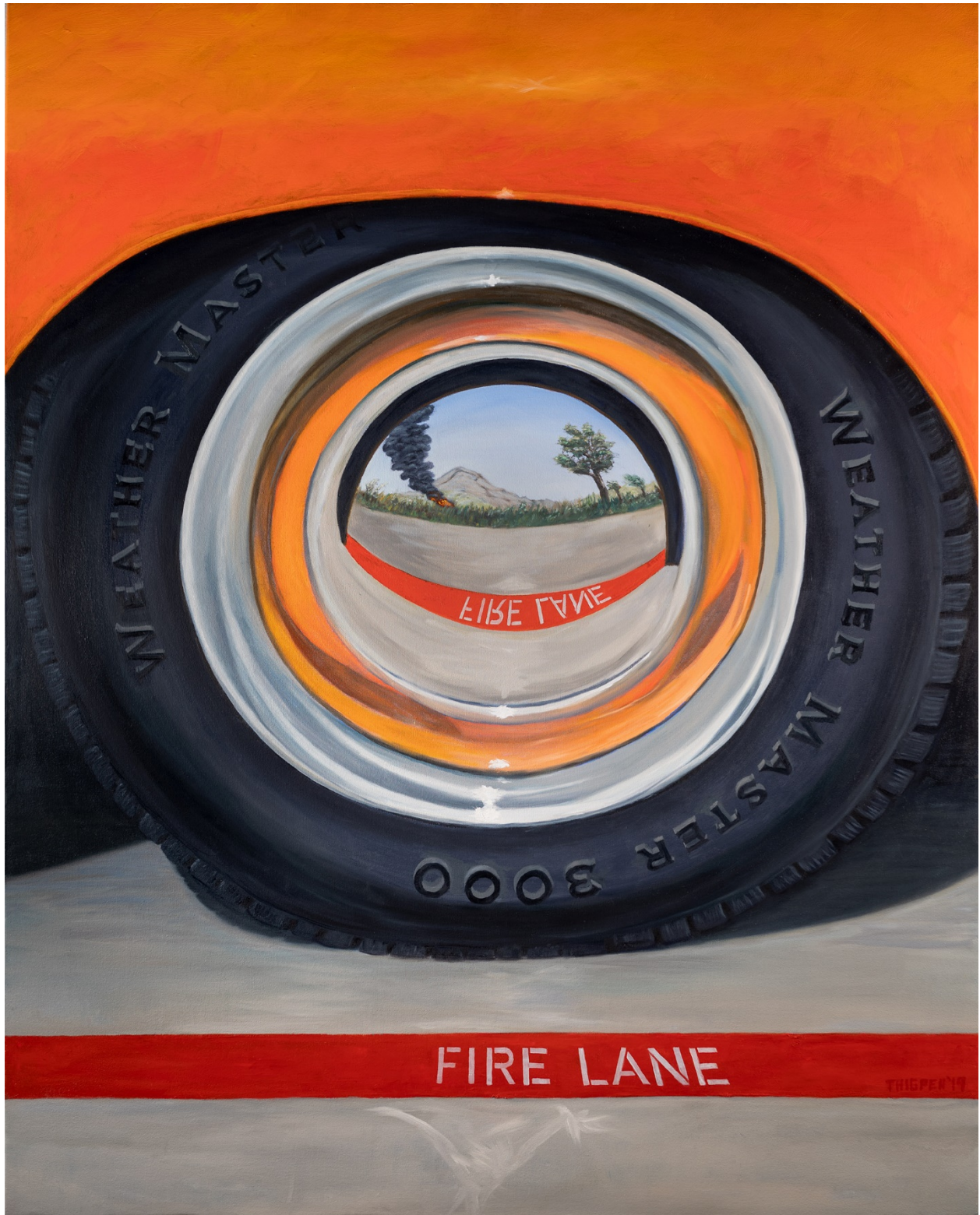


Figure 17, *Projection*, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", 2019

APPENDIX A

Transcript of automatic handwriting of June 10, 2019

Can I write and visualize at the same time? De Chirico bust classical female ants and blood distance shore shades of blue Ruined columns Modern ruin porn symbols of poetic leaves of grass the golden book why wasn't it read? Gold twine on strange starburst coffee table from Mexico with brass center plastic grapes of Morocco The Brass doesn't fit Blue and purple curtains flowers of green orange 70's sun made of macramé macabre ear piercing long haired suicide red shorts on the daughter at the dentist I didn't believe the penny It was lucky "I don't believe in luck. Atheist acknowledgment. My first philosophical question a penny two side the same reflect to see or many only showing one side Heads Roman bust Lincoln with a mind of "D" Denver mountain lakes that drain down the slopes a flooded valley the Rio Grande shanties built of signs muddy shitty water dropping catalog pages down the Loo. Where did Loo come from just an efficient way to write? w/o long word heard Loo toilet seat on AGT contortionist odd ball anorexic visual outcast the detection of something "wrong." Fear of the abnormal where do we acknowledge the biological 3-legged frogs mutants of green X-ray pastiche beautiful bazaar Flea market on blankets How to survive. The effort is more than the take. Stolen bike High handle Bars banana seat jumping the ramp and a glittered skateboard on the concrete court. Combination locked mailboxes in the cabana by the concrete filled pool gardenias and Natal plumbs. White flowers and window screens children in the bushes. Baked beans pork and beans chunks of fat hard and cold Toast with tuna chili potatoes nachos in the oven with jalapenos and whole fish feed the cat Kozzy Kitten fish bones and marijuana in the microwave moldy leaves in a fish food can purple curtains and a waterbed No doors baby fish in a pit. Cool escape at the pet store and avoided memories I think something happened but I don't remember snow cones at

little league 5 gal aquarium u curved walls at the apartments and Guatemala climb the wall w the yellow spider the chickens think its funny Blue jeans turned up legs like the children in the photo Do the kids remember suicide in Rockport séances and shotguns Light as a feather slap fights and a belt so you'll know it was wrong. Explanations by the piano debates and abandonment. Crochet sliding doors sand and sticker burrs Travel trailers and airplane fuselage rivets like the blue goose shoot The cockroach w/ a BB gun in the dark wood interior Dachshunds and wire hair terriers Black and red Weiner dogs Boston terrier I only remember from photos. Mustang grapes and nettle sand or snow cowboy boots hugging the dog decanters that play music about Drunkenness and Bandy only from the photo and the memory of Papaw talking about it WD40 smells awful and is ubiquitous w/ pipe tobacco Magritte Wild hogs The Morgan Building of which he was so proud Rusty wrenches cinder block house the big tree and snake in bicycle sprocket and chain striking memory and visual. The old cemetery. Bastian in the sand Duck blinds and pavement along the bay. Piers and cinder block cottages painted pastel windswept oaks leaves on the road channels an airport with half limp windsock. The man with thick glassed that lived on the bay The hidden treasures boutique with a pit of pillows in which to play concrete pelicans gift shops w/ shells in resin. Starfish HEB Dairy Queen in a 2 story hex on Padre island goose island No Bird island fishing for scallops in bread sacks Rainbow bread salty lips. bare feet in the moss scattered fish as I shuffle catamaran Not ours like a trampoline wooden fence with black powder burned eyebrows and flesh of my hand. shower and fear of being caught Dental surgery and masturbation startled and ashamed curtain rings liner psycho and the blood drain. Hurricanes and Danish baklava flaking with sugar. Grease stained napkins and the belch of old oil after a doughnut. Cinnamon sugar dark and dusty pucker of a cakehole.

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