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## Poiesis

Susan Lee Harmon

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# POIESIS

by

SUSAN LEE HARMON

(Under the Direction of Patricia Walker)

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines mark-making techniques in my art and surveys the literary and musical works that inspired it. An historical examination of the role of mark-making in art will be undertaken, beginning with Paleolithic cave art, continuing with Native American petroglyphs and pictographs, and concluding with three contemporary visual artists whose marks have influenced my work: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cy Twombly, and Susan Rothenberg. Finally, my artistic process is explained through references to the materials and rituals used to create a body of art. This thesis researches the meaning behind artistic marks, and how marks are made in my paintings and in the work of other artists.

**INDEX WORDS:** Art, Artwork, Color, Drawing, Expressionistic Art, Marks, Mark-making, MFA Exhibition, MFA Thesis, Painting, Paleolithic, Pictographs, Poetry.

POIESIS

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ART

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## POIESIS

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December 2007

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis in memory of my loving father and mother. Also to my supportive husband, David, and children, James, Stephen, Daniel, and Michael.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Patricia Walker for her patience and immense assistance in the preparation of this thesis paper. Also to Dr. Bruce Little and Dr. Onyile Onyile for their valuable input and inspiring studio critiques.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Every poem begins with a lump in your throat.*

—Robert Frost

Stories inspire me to paint. Poetry and music fuel my passion to create. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a critical and historical analysis of the artwork presented in my master of fine arts thesis exhibition, which uses mark-making to express my emotional responses to a series of inspirational writings. Because of its importance to my work, mark-making in art will be examined in this thesis, beginning with the first marks of Paleolithic humans and continuing to Native American petroglyphs and pictographs. This thesis examines also three contemporary visual artists: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Susan Rothenberg and Cy Twombly, who have developed their own unique marks in their art. The content of my artwork is my own emotionally charged visual response to literary works that tell the stories of people whose lives were stolen from them. In retrospect I believe my strongly felt need to deal with this topic was triggered by my father's sudden and horrible death. Although I cannot ignore the physical and emotional horrors that befell these people, I choose to dwell on their spirit of hope, and on their unforgettable journeys.

In Chapter 1, I present the writings that served as seminal influences in my thesis artwork. Chapter 2 discusses the historical influences on my art, including cave art, Native American artists, and 20th-century artists. The chapter's survey begins with humankind's earliest forms of communication because our preliterate symbols and shapes serve as great inspirations, and they helped me develop my own visual language. Chapter

3 presents my artwork and the process I use to make each piece. Of particular salience is a description of the rituals I use in the act of painting. Such rituals are almost sacred, and sometimes seem more important than the final painting.

In creating this body of art, I have experienced a powerful emotional and intellectual journey, and I hope that these strong emotions are conveyed to the viewer through my images. The death of a loved one—and the resulting emotional turmoil—is universal. My father's death was a catalyst, the beginning of my interest in making marks about tragic losses, and it led me on a path of discovery that has revealed the strength with which people can face and survive even the most threatening, dangerous experiences. While I cannot erase the physical and emotional marks that loss makes on its survivors, through my art I hope to make the marks visible to the rest of the world.

CHAPTER 1  
INSPIRATIONAL WRITINGS

*A poem can change your life. In poems, we discover the words and images to understand and interpret the world. Whether writing birth songs or eulogies, love vows or political anthems, lyric outbursts or vast narratives, great poets throughout the ages transform ordinary experience, thought, and emotion into something memorable.*

—Dominique Raccah

Dominique Raccah's thoughts on poetry and its interpretive utility seeded my interest in painting about death or dying. In this thesis, literature is not the focus of interpretation, but rather is a catalyst for interpreting human experience, and in particular, my experiences as a painter and the daughter of someone who died a sudden, tragic death. These experiences found expression through my reading about the experiences of others. To this end, several passages from literature are presented in this chapter and paired with the artistic works they inspired. These artworks are neither illustrations nor instructive. They are meant instead to visually express my deepest and most private response to these poems, songs or stories, and in so doing, bring to full expression the feelings the written word helped clarify. In addition to the artworks and literary passages, a discussion of the formal elements of each artwork is given in order to emphasize the expressive utility of mark-making. I have scratched, torn, and clawed these canvases with my fingernails. I have smeared, pushed and built up paint with my hands in order to translate my innermost feelings upon my surfaces. In this chapter, I will show that mark-making is a uniquely valuable artistic technique for translating feelings and words to the visual realm.

Emotionally-charged subject matter is at the core of my work. Without emotion, I would have no story to paint. The literary stories which I visually restated in this thesis and in my art are about people who suffer and who share close relationships: father and son in *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy; six friends in *Left to Tell*, by Immacule Ilibagiza; and two sisters in *Rena's Promise*, by Heather Dune Macadam. These stories are about people who hope to survive, people whose faith is shaken but ultimately restored through their own efforts. Most of the writings that influence my work are also about death. Because of my own father's sudden and horrible passing, I relate to them, and in fact depended on and consciously set out to use them to qualify and express grief.

As a means of accessing and clarifying my extreme feelings—in effect, preparing my subconscious to generate meaningful art—I used a process including research, sketching, and writing key words on the walls where my blank canvases would hang. I asked myself what it was in these poems, songs, and books that guided and resonated with me. Often it was not their technical aspects like meter, phrasing, or construction of ideas, but instead something more subjective and personal; a truthful phrase or a few words put together in a unique way that created essential mental imagery. To paraphrase the Racciah epigram, poetry helps us interpret the world (or our subjective, personal “world”)—it gives language to moods, stimulates and guides the imagination, and can even call forth crucial wisdom about human personality and experience. Additionally, poetry has many layers of meaning, and through analysis and meditation, these layers reveal themselves. This introspective search for meaning is helpful for its own sake, even before we may reach a conclusion, a decision, or an emotional resolution.

This chapter discusses, in chronological order, artworks that were created to

document the poetry of my creative process while highlighting the commonalities between the works. After my father passed away I spent many months drawing and painting a series entitled *About Dying*. The final picture from this series needed to have a positive tone. This positive tone was important not just to convey hope to the audience, but so that I could remember my father in a good way. Ironically, it ended up being the only piece in my thesis exhibition not inspired by words. The words came afterwards, giving me a new perspective on the written word, namely, that it could help me find and refine meaning from existing sources as I worked. When I read a passage from *Hamlet*, I realized what the drawing was about. Shakespeare writes:

Do not for ever, with thy veiled lids  
 Seek for thy noble father in the dust:  
 Tho' know'st tis common; all that lives must die,  
 Passing through nature to eternity. (1.2.70-72)

The dead should be allowed to move on in peace; everyone dies and we cannot forever mourn. To die is part of a universal life cycle, a natural part of life. *Coda, The Final Phase of a Symphony* (figure 1.1) is the final drawing in my first series on my father's death, and it is the first of the drawings I examine in this thesis because it hails the beginning of my search for peace using a combination of mark-making and literary inspiration.

The first marks in this drawing flowed easily, guided by Rachmaninoff's *Symphony No. 2*, mimicking the soft music with organic, free forms that moved across the paper. I then built up overlapping layers using a combination of chalk pastel and acrylic paint. Pale yellow and flesh tones contrast different shades of blue, highlighted with tints of pink that peek out between hidden and half-hidden marks. The marks are



Figure 1.1. *Coda: The Final Phrase of a Symphony*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Mixed media on paper. Size: 80'' x 55''.

obscure, representing personal and private feelings towards my father. The variations on organic, circular shapes represent being pulled in and out of the dying process. While there are some built-up layers of paint in this picture, most of the color was applied in one strong layer to show some consistency of this universal theme of dying. The various hues of blue blend together as the dominant background color, creating a peaceful mood—even while representing the depression and sadness that accompany death. The few red marks at the top of the picture are thin and agitated lines, drawn quickly to represent the little bit of anger I still felt. The large, dominant pink marks around the center of the image represent the calmness and sweetness of my father. In this area of the

painting, it is almost as if the marks are dancing with the colors, in and out of peaceful consciousness.

Having seen the potential of literature-guided creation, I began a steady survey of potential inspirations. Pat Walker, the chair of my thesis committee, suggested that I meet with Eric Nelson, a professor of linguistics at Georgia Southern University, to discuss the idea of using his poetry to inspire my art, and indeed, there were exciting similarities between our creative processes. We liked each other's work so much that we continued to meet in my studio to discuss our visions. My next painting, *Words Floating and Falling*, was inspired by Eric Nelson's poem, "The Last Last Try."

Kisses were in the air, and rain,  
all around us wetness, slapping  
of whispers, of bad tread, our lips  
coming apart. Your fingerprints  
on the glass, tapping, the fountain  
in the park spouting, the water rising  
as if falling, weren't possible even  
as the rain fell in whispers, small drops  
with words inside, rain on our tongues  
with stay inside, with how. In the fountain  
the words floated in circles, wishes that  
wouldn't sink or come true.

(n.d., Online)

This poem is the beginning of the connecting theme of hope that runs throughout many of these inspirational writings, and many of the works they inspire. The picture does not illustrate the poem; instead, it emphasizes its emotionality—a general interpretive approach that I use throughout the body of my thesis work. In this case, the emotion is the sadness of wishes, shown in the shapes floating around the picture and which in the end do not come true. At first glance, *Words Floating and Falling* has a pleasant overtone, using directed and controlled circular marks throughout (figure 1.2).



However, some agitated dark pink lines and smears remind the viewer that not all words or wishes are good.

*Words Floating and Falling* is filled with organic and circular shapes of varying size. Some bright colors are used to represent the hope that these wishes do come true. The spatial relationships between forms are important, as well, giving the feeling of “the words floated all around” and “rain which fell in whispers.” Weightless, thin marks try to reach out to the circular (word) shapes, trying to connect them. The color palette has a wide range of colors, including greens, blues, pinks, purples, and yellows. The range expresses different kinds of words falling, the different kinds of rain falling, and the different kinds of dreams we dare to dream. Agitated scratch marks coupled with blurring and smearing marks create the mood of how rain and kisses may feel. Rain may fall quickly and hard, necessitating bolder colors; whispers are calm and soft, so quiet colors are used in a smooth, flat manner. The strong green color, used in the upper right hand corner expresses how an approaching storm makes one feel.

In this poem we are teased into thinking that the possibility of dreams coming true is in fact a guarantee. Dreams may come close to being realized (as shown in the shapes which fall quietly) and give us a taste of that reality (shown again in the colors used on these shapes), but in the end dreams do not come true and they do not die—they are just out there, as shown in the shapes which are suspended, nothing more or less than hopes and dreams not yet fulfilled. I am painting my own personal feelings of my father’s death and the hope of his survival.



Figure 1.2. *Words Floating and Falling*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Mixed media on canvas. Size: 80" x 55".

In addition to poetry, songs and myths intrigue me as I look for inspirational writings and myths for my work. The third drawing in this series is inspired by the Dreamcatcher of Chippewa mythology, whose purpose was to trap nightmares in a spider's web so that only good dreams would reach the sleeper. The myth is transcribed in Ake Hultkrantz's *The Religion of the American Indian*:

The dream net has been made  
 For many generations  
 Where spirit dreams have played  
 Hung above the cradle board,  
 Or in the lodge up high  
 The dream net catches bad dreams,  
 While good dreams slip on by.  
 Bad dreams become entangled  
 Among the sinew thread  
 Good dreams slip through the center hole,  
 While you dream upon your bed.  
 This is an ancient legend,  
 Since dreams will never cease,

Hang this dream net above your bed,  
 Dream on, and be at peace.

(1980 version, p. 59)

As in my previous thesis paintings, my process begins with the marks. The black lines of the large circle central to *Dreams Spilling Over* (figure 1.3) represent the safety net that holds all bad dreams. These bad dreams are expressed by drawn, smaller, oddly shaped circles that sit inside the larger one. Marks are subtly scribbled in light flesh tones under these bad dreams emphasizing the disturbing feelings that can come from them, while one thick scratch mark surrounds the group of small circles to show they are the safe and good dreams. Grey repetitive loop marks are drawn to the side of the picture to emphasize dark dreams are brewing. Long, black, charcoal lines are symbolic of the thread which may ensnare dreams as they try to escape the large circle. The good dreams, however, tumble to freedom and may bounce around for a while, but they do finally stabilize themselves on the bottom of the picture, where the shapes lie side by side, safely and together. The large white space is left as a void where even dreams have yet to begin. Marks made in patches of colors are smeared periodically around the entire painting, giving an emotional mood to the entire surface to express the feeling that the act of dreaming can be an emotional one.

The focus of this picture is on the center of the page, where the marks establish a rhythm of repetitive, circular forms, which continues in the patterned half-moon shapes. Although the forms in the center of the large circle remain still and huddled together to show they are being stopped and cannot fall out, one white shape is separated from the others and slowly begins to fall. Its purpose is to remind us that there may be a fine line

between good and bad dreams, and capturing and saving all the bad dreams is no simple task. The soft, quiet colors (pinks, grays, sand, and light violets) contrast with darker colors, expressing different types of dreams, and stormy, deep blues are used to



Figure 1.3. *Dreams Spilling Over*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Mixed media on paper. Size: 80" x 55".

emphasize the difference between bad and good dreams. Through dreaming, and remembering our dreams, we are made aware of our deepest fears and greatest hopes. This reality can be frightening, a fear expressed in the painting's many agitated scratch marks.

The next drawing is inspired by a passage from Elie Wiesel's *Night*. The book tells the story of a Jewish boy and his father imprisoned in Auschwitz, Germany during World War II. I created a series of drawings, using minimalistic marks to express the boy's dark feelings. *Nocturnal Silence #1* is inspired by this passage from *Night*:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things. (1982, p. 32)

There are seven drawings in the series, a choice inspired by “seven times cursed;” the series is one long picture composed of seven stand-alone images that join together and form one long night. *Nocturnal Silence #1* captures the essence of the series (figure 1.4). The importance of Wiesel’s passage is in the dense, ever-present smoke, a constant reminder of the dying children, mothers, fathers. Even at night, the time to sleep, one could not escape the smoke. The image stayed with me as I prepared paper for these drawings. Each is made on a prepared ground mixture of black acrylic paint with pumice; the paper was covered with the pumice mixture first and let to completely dry before putting any marks upon it. I first used oil pastel with chalk pastel to make strong, colored lines that represent the wires that surround the camps. The smoke is rendered with smudges and smear marks of pastel—white, rubbed marks swirl around, never stopping. Smaller, circular, reddish marks are caught in the constant smoke of death. Isolated and lonely marks of different colors represent the people who are alone, especially at night, when the silence comes. The horizontal fragmented red mark at the bottom right of the paper represents growing anger. It crosses the thicker blue-green vertical mark, which symbolizes constant sadness, together making a rectangle that holds the various organic, circular shapes inside their prison. The rubbed wide sweep of a mark beneath the clumped circles stands for their white light of hope. There are various thicknesses of

white contour lines outlining the circular shapes, reminding us that hope surrounds everyone, if even for a moment.



Figure 1.4. *Nocturnal Silence #1*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Mixed media on paper. Size: 22" x 30".

My next set of five drawings is inspired by Heather Dune Macadam's *Rena's Promise*. The autobiography centers on Rena and her younger sister, Danka, during their three and a half years in Nazi death camps. Rena promises Danka that if she is selected first for the gas chambers, Rena will hold her hand so they may die together. I was particularly moved a song sung by prisoners in the camps:

From the distance through the iron bars  
 Freedom is laughing at us....  
 But the sun's still not shining.

(1996, p. 199)

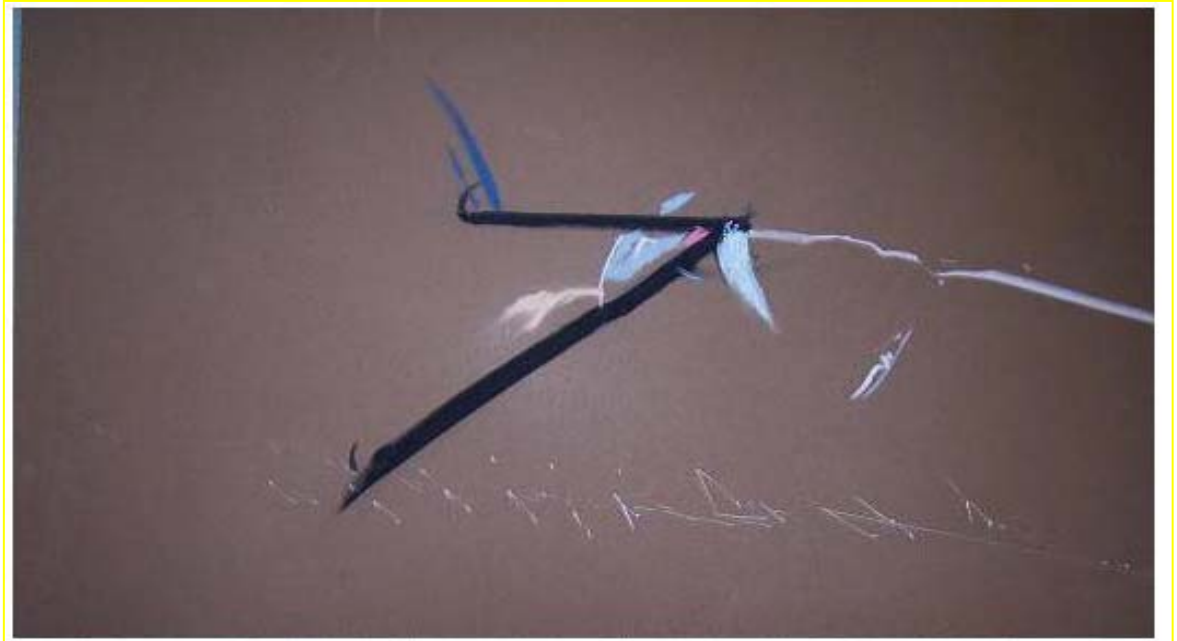


Figure 1.5. *Freedom is Gone #1*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Mixed media on paper. Size: 22" x 30".

*Freedom is Gone #1* is one of a series of five minimalistic drawings inspired by *Rena's Promise* (figure 1.5). A bold, black, angular mark draws the eye, so that the viewer then looks upward to the two blue smear marks of paint. The black mark is taken from the lines that make up a Star of David, and represents the religious belief standing strong even in prison. A mixture of brown-tan acrylic paint and pumice create a ground with a texture like sandpaper, which soaks up the chalk pastel, producing brilliant color. To express "being teased with freedom," I scratched uneven, arbitrary marks into the painted pumice texture at the bottom of the picture to symbolize the barbed wire, and left a large, rectangular space to represent a cage. The space also represents a window

through which prisoners gaze at freedom, and I left a vast empty space around the wires to show the irony of so much freedom being so close, yet untouchable. The light sweet bluish color symbolizes the taste of this peaceful freedom. These marks appear intuitive and simplistic, but they are nothing of the kind. In order to make the right mark—one that truly expresses the feelings of someone who has once known freedom and may never know it again—I made many sketches of barbed wire and then pulled one mark from them that would stand for all the barbed wire holding all these people prisoner.

This body of art, for my MFA thesis exhibition, was created in remembrance of those who struggled to survive in situations they didn't choose. There are so many powerful and emotional words, and choosing the most apt passages was difficult. My survey included books about the genocide in Rwanda, the Holocaust, and the Apocalypse; the poetry of William Shakespeare, Eric Nelson and Chippewa tribesmen; and music ranging from Finlandia to Bob Dylan to Judy Garland. It is my hope that through focusing on mark-making, I have created powerful and emotional images that express the strong feelings represented in these passages, and evoke emotion in the viewer.

In this first stage of my thesis work, I intentionally did not want to be influenced by other mark-making artists. I wanted to stay close to my still-not-fully expressed feelings of grief, and perceived a danger in being overexposed to artists and thinkers whose intellectual and creative interests are similar to mine. I wished to remain as pure as possible in my thoughts and feelings, and find an authentic, original starting point from which I could develop my own methods and means of expression, and then later develop a more consciously refined style. At the conclusion of this stage, I was satisfied with my



initial foray into literature-inspired mark-making, and eager to learn more about my form so I could expand my style.

## CHAPTER 2

## HISTORICAL AND ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

*The cave of Lascaux, a chance discovery by two boys in France in 1940 ... is the most striking insight we have ever had into the enigmatic world of the Old Stone Age. As glaciers made their last advance and retreat into Europe some 18,000 years ago, cavemen were painting in the underground galleries and chambers of Lascaux: It is now a sanctuary filled with evidence of the human spirit that we are only beginning to discern.*

—Norbert Aujoulat, geologist

Before the written word was developed, humans began their visual expression of daily life with simple, linear marks carved on the deepest walls of caves. In my process of creating a body of art based on literature, I too began making simple, linear marks: the marks were inspired by simpler poems and stories, and were necessarily more simple than those shown in Chapter 1. Perhaps I turned to cave art for metaphorical reasons, as well. My creative impulse reached into the darkest, most secluded parts of my mind, searching for artistic expression that was uncharted territory for me. As I read stories and poetry in a new way, for new reasons, I related to those dark caves where humankind learned to make its first marks. As the literary material became more complex, so did my need to develop a more complex personal visual language. When I read the Native American myths of the Dreamcatcher and How the Red Bird Got His Color, and the legends of the Northern Lights, I got a lump in my throat. By studying Native American petroglyphs and pictographs, I set out to make sense of the evolution of mark-making and language.

This chapter begins its examination of mark-making with the direct yet expressive

marks of Paleolithic man. It presents various techniques, materials, and possible motivations that the earliest human artists brought to their walls, and discusses how I chose to integrate these marks into my own art. Following these earliest expressions using marks, I will examine Native American petroglyphs and pictographs as a later instance of mark-making. My interest is in seeing what techniques (if any) have been added or adapted to clearly express the emotional realities of a more complex social and linguistic consciousness. Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cy Twombly and Susan Rothenberg are contemporary artists who have influenced my mark-making. Their work is presented with brief critical analyses, with an eye to informing my own artistic objectives.

The marks our forebears made on cave walls some 40,000 years ago still stir our emotions. Intuitively, this suggests to me that mark-making is a fundamental and direct expressive medium for human experience. Those first marks put down by human hands were made for many reasons. Although some of those reasons are utilitarian—tracking history, recording a successful hunt or battle as well as rituals for successful hunting and fertility—some of those first marks were “created for pure artistic reasons” (Clottes, 2003, p. 94). Of the thousands of images preserved on cave walls, many seem to be personal expressive marks. The variance of line weight, with some lines especially thick and dark, appear to be made deliberately to express a dark feeling. These intense marks contrast sharply with the beautiful, delicate, and subtle lines elsewhere on the walls. The images of most interest to me are the ones with deeply incised marks, which I interpret as anger or some other strong emotion. Equally intriguing are the images created by smearing paint with the palm of the hand, and irregular marks that form strange shapes.

I identify with these awkward and emotive marks, all of which seem to me

conscious choices made by the hand of the Paleolithic artist. Dale Guthrie, author of *The Nature of Paleolithic Art*, supports the conclusion that Paleolithic man made art for personal expression. He calls the maker of these images *artists*, not only hunters, and points out that their renderings of animals and other unidentified marks are not only precursors to the written language but depict deeper and more meaningful ideas. He writes, “Paleolithic artist-hunters were keen students of natural history, they had to be. Their art is not an obtuse symbolic language but something very deep and very dear” (2005, p. 144). The most prominent marks in *Small Engraved and Painted Horses* (figure 2.1) are harsh, deeply incised lines. They are irregular and juxtaposed with delicate lines used for the horse's mane, hair, eyes, and feet with a simple, solid, painted body. The two horses are outlined with black charcoal, which is used subtly and sensitively, and their bodies are filled in with a rich, chocolate-brown color. This is a beautiful and naturalistic depiction of the horses, and in it, the artist captures a personal, expressive quality. Yet incised on the bodies are the agitated marks, overlapping and partially covering them, which serve to direct our focus to the horses’ heads. These lines appear to be deliberate in their execution, considering the repeated pattern of shorter, similar lines at the bottom of the drawing. One strong incised mark divides the two horses, and the longer slash marks may represent grass through which they are running. In any case, the impact of these marks on the viewer suggests emotional content in the drawing, and that early humans sought to visually express their feelings.

I created a series of ten drawings influenced by these prehistoric marks, from which I directly borrow some visual components and attempt to make them my own. The first of this series *Paleolithic Sanctuary #1* is on long brown wrapping paper,

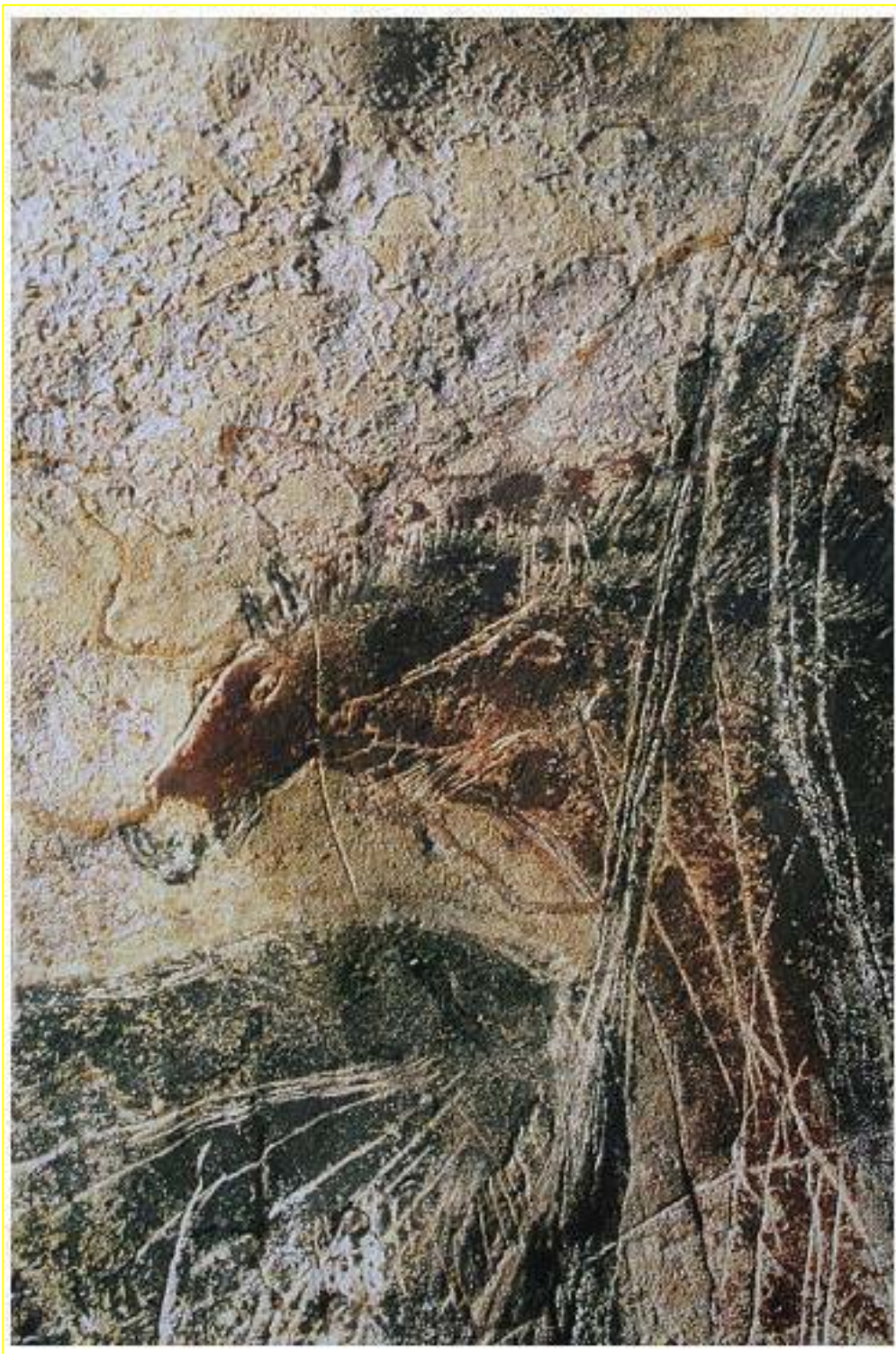


Figure 2.1. *Small Engraved and Painted Horses*. Lascaux Cave, Dordogne, France.

representing a sacred cave (figure 2.2). Broken shapes and forms symbolize human and animal bodies woven together. The marks used are minimalistic, and just as significantly, set down in a minimalistic manner, using oil paint sticks for intense color. Pastel marks are rubbed and smeared with the palms of my hands to create an atmosphere of a sacred and holy haven. One abstract, loopy, long mark connects the smallest of the human forms to the end of the cave, signifying where the safe world ends and world outside begins. The red, short, splattered marks are used minimally to represent some anger and physical pain—elements from this outside world that may seep into the sacred cave. The negative space is intentionally left to place focus on these emotional marks. Overall, I wanted to stress the importance of the sacred activity within these quiet dark walls.



Figure 2.2 *Paleolithic Sanctuary #1*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Mixed media on brown wrapping paper. Size: 80”x 30”.

Another example of emotional mark-making techniques that emphasize direct and immediate mark-making is found in *Large Panel of Red Dots* (figure 2.3), a Paleolithic image composed of numerous red forms similar in size, shape, and color. These marks were created by putting the palm of the hand, covered with color, on the wall and smearing the paint. The effect is expressive and emotional; one can almost feel the pain expressed by these early artists as they pressed their hands to these cave walls. Although most red color in the dots is intense and consistent, some are more faded and continue progressively upwards to the ceiling. Some faint finger marks are visible. Interpreting the

strange positioning of the red dots presents a difficulty—some appear close to one another, forming the main group of dots, but why does the main group contain all the dots? When viewing them as one image, it appears as if the whole image is of a single human hand. Is this accident or intention? Certainly, I use similar mark-making techniques in my work, hoping to coax the viewer to look beyond the obvious.

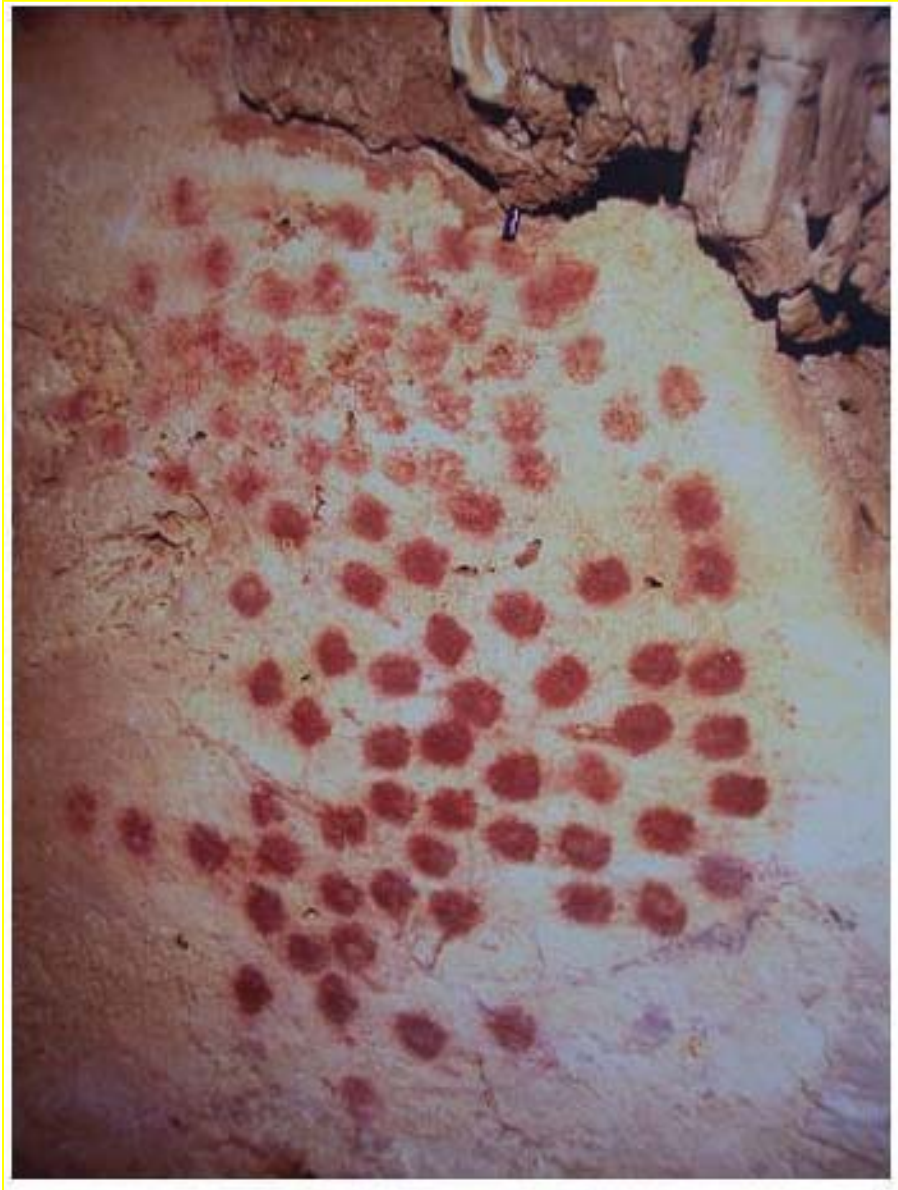


Figure 2.3. *Large Panel of Red Dots*. Entrance to the Alcove of yellow horses, Chauvet Cave, Rhone Valley, France.

Influenced by these simple and direct mark-making techniques, I created *Cave Marks #1* (figure 2.4). This image began with a coat of acrylic paint, a deep rich chocolate brown painted in a thick layer on heavyweight arches watercolor paper as a background, representing the sacred cave. I drew marks in the wet paint with my fingernail, creating agitated scratches to invoke an aggressive mood. Torn bits of blue, handmade paper are centered in a scratched geometric shape to represent body parts. The two forms rest off-balance on cut, geometric pieces of raw canvas, which acts as a stabilizing base for the forms, a safe place for them to stand. The scratched circular marks outlining the two forms connect them. Scraped finger marks in the thick brown paint (made to imitate the incised lines of the cave paintings) surround them, as if gently calling them out of their resting place. Streaked marks of paint are barely visible in the background and in close proximity to the dense brown paint. A faded red peeks through openings near the body parts; danger is close, lurking outside the sanctuary.

Native American tales like those of the Dreamcatcher, the Corn Mother, How the Red Bird Got His Color, the creation myth, stories and symbols are other important influences on this body of thesis work. By examining the marks of the earliest, cave-dwelling humans, I removed the contemporary, sophisticated consciousness from the system of marks; in turning to Native American rock art, I search for a middle ground in which to reintroduce language and advanced culture into artists' consciousness. What, if any, modifications are necessary to adequately express the full range of human consciousness? Eminent prehistorian Jean Clottes writes in *Chauvet Cave*, "American





Figure 2.4. *Cave Marks #1*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Mixed media on paper. Size: 18" x 24".

Indians had no word for art since creativity was part of the daily life. ... It is clear that the ancient symbols on rocks can be complex and powerful metaphors—much more than adornment” (2003, p. 84). Twentieth-century pragmatist John Dewey also stressed that artworks are made up of everyday experiences and the cultural life of its community (Holcombe, 2007). Experts speculated that petroglyphs and pictographs were made to mark territory, trails, and fresh water springs; make images of religious shamans for prayers or visions (typically expressed as very simple stick figures); and record successful hunts and battles. These everyday images were placed in remote and sacred areas, far removed from the public sphere, which suggests that they were more than mere recordkeeping. Often these images were made to communicate myths and stories from one generation to the next.

Native Americans created two kinds of rock art, petroglyphs and pictographs, which were also made by the native peoples of the Dominican Republic as recently as 2,000 years ago. Petroglyphs are carved into a dark surface (patina or rock varnish), an arduous act that yields a high degree of permanency. The images—or perhaps even mark-making itself—therefore merited the large amount of precious time required to create them. Pictographs are painted on the rock surface using pigments derived from the earth. White or yellow clays, charcoal, iron oxides and copper form the main body of colors used in Native American art, and therefore my color palette was chosen to mimic it. What is most important to note is that Native Americans developed signs and symbols for



Figure 2.5. *Death Rattle*, by Susan Harmon, 2006. Chalk pastel on paper. Size: 22" x 30".

words, a direct precursor to actual written language, and their visual storytelling of myths, names, and dreams was an important contribution to spiritual growth.

*Death Rattle* is drawn with chalk pastel on blue, textured paper (figure 2.5). I chose smeared, blurred marks that blended ochres, whites, and charcoal to create a mystery; the person dying cannot talk about what he or she is going through. Death is nearing and the breath turns raspy; the white short blurry marks suggest a light at the end. Blues evokes coldness. The thin long marks which cut through the middle of the page are taken from the lines of the barbed wire, representing the mortal coil that imprisons us. Life is being stolen.

Releasing our loved ones to death is part of everyday life, as Dewey conceives of it, and equally important, it reflects Tolstoy's theory that art needs to be expression of feelings that are actually felt. As an expressionist painter, I strive to reveal my deepest feelings through mark-making, and I hold the somewhat romantic hope that, as I touch my canvas or paper with my hands, I "infect" it with emotion that will be transferred to the viewer. But that isn't the case. As Dewey says, the viewer will interpret my painting using his or her own life experiences. Tolstoy warns us not to try to teach the viewer, to impose an intended outcome on an artwork. I want the viewer simply to feel deep emotion when viewing my art. *Death Rattle* expresses my private ideas about death and dying, formed and developed after my father's passing, and expresses how I myself felt as my father was dying—not about how he felt as he was taking his last breaths. This idea of using art to capture a memory is significant in the study of Native American rock art. In addition to Dewey's conception of art as an expression of culture, Linea Sundstrom describes in *Storied Stone* the importance of the trance state in Native American worship.

These trance states are described visually in some of the rock images (Sundstrom, 2004, p. 90). It is thought that these abstract marks, found in many caves, may have been made to help the artists remember how it actually felt to be in an altered state of consciousness. Mark-making, then, can act as both an artistic technique and a mnemonic, a conduit between experience and expression.

When making many of my marks, I feel immersed in a kind of trance, channeling and translating my experience into a visual medium. A series of very small (10" x 10") paintings on masonite board, made for my thesis exhibition, emphasizes the idea of using a trance state as both artistic technique and emotional mnemonic, and emphasizes expressive and minimalistic marks. (This notion is discussed more completely in Chapter 3). *Two Souls* is the first of these, and focuses on simple, direct, immediate mark-making (figure 2.6). Imperfections were welcome in this image; I wanted a spontaneous effect. Oil paint sticks create a thick, uneven, black mark around two central forms, which were created by attaching torn paper bags to the board surface. Other marks resemble the sweeping and smooth lines of calligraphy, put down quickly to create an impression of confidence. A dull green color is smeared around the central segregated green shape to symbolize darkening emotion. In the wet paint I scraped and clawed with my nails, leaving incised marks to convey the emotion's intensity. A single oval shape floats in a sea of dark color as if being pulled into it. The importance of these many marks is to place emphasis on the two souls together, forever, yet separated from the solitary soul that will never belong with them. The significance of the scribbled words is that they are almost wiped out, like the separated form which eventually will be totally wiped out, and the two souls will remain together and as one.



Figure 2.6. *Two Souls*, by Susan Harmon, 2007. Mixed media on masonite board. Size: 10'' x 10''.

At this time, I began to solidify my feeling that mark-making should utilize techniques that maintain high standards while remaining true to personal expression. Although the quality of my lines remains very important to my art, spontaneous mark-making is utilized to achieve more intense emotional marks, free of self-consciousness. Spontaneous marks make for more intense emotional marks than preplanned ones because the thinking and planning process seems to stifle the expression of true, deep feelings. Therefore spontaneity and intuition began to play a bigger part in my artistic style, even while the formal elements of color and composition remained important. I

continued to search for more honest ways to make my marks, turning next to three twentieth-century artists.

Jean-Michel Basquiat was one of the most prolific artists of the twentieth century. He evolved precociously as an artist, creating unique pictures about his African and Caribbean roots; music was important to him, especially hip-hop and jazz. His raw and primitive marks often compose stick figures with exaggerated facial features, with emphasis placed on teeth and eyes through enlargement. Many of Basquiat's images feature oversimplified body parts elsewhere, especially his distorted hands and elongated strands of hair. Music was a large influence on Basquiat's work, and almost always, words, letters, or numbers show up in his works to emphasize a political message.

Many of his paintings are thought to be self-portraits, as is one of Basquiat's many black mask pictures, *In This Case* (figure 2.7). It has grossly distorted facial features like his other self-portraits, and short, repetitive marks outline a large, almond-shaped eye, placing focus there. The angular nose is surrounded by emotional slashes. The enlarged lips and oversimplified teeth are individually outlined with black marks. The intense use of irregular black lines connect the facial features to complete the face, appearing on an intense, red ground, ultimately creating the image's overall impression of an angry African mask. Geometric marks and patches of white paint float in the background.

Like Basquiat, I work quickly and produce large quantities of art, and often develop new forms by oversimplifying body parts and reinventing those forms as my own. While I utilize some similar formal elements in my work, the most important similarity is an emphasis on expression of personal feeling—a process requiring a direct, immediate, intuitive process. My images have evolved to enhance their emotional

meaning using torn materials, oversimplified primitive forms, distorted darkened outlines, and bolder color statements. Crude symbols begin to appear in my work to stress emotional content. My first attempt at incorporating three-dimensional materials into more traditional media like paint and pastel is in *Dead Silence*. The work is inspired by Alan Brennert's novel, *Moloka'i*. It is the story of six-year-old Rachel who is quarantined from her family upon contracting leprosy, and taken to an island of lepers, never to see



Figure 2.7. *In This Case*, by Jean-Michel Basquiat, 1983. Acrylic and oil paint stick on canvas. Size: 77" x 74".

her family again. Using Basquiat's oversimplification of body parts as a technique, I mimic broken and disfigured limbs in *Dead Silence* (figure 2.8), and use new media including torn pink paper, printed fabric, my discarded drawings, and wire. Oil and acrylic paint, chalk pastel and charcoal were used to create a tense atmosphere surrounding the three-dimensional forms. The shapes are torn apart and try to fit together as a whole, giving the picture a primitive, raw feel, enhanced by a flat picture plane and flat colors, as Basquiat does. Paint drips, fingernail scratches, and color smears heighten the expressivity.

In the quest to make my marks more sophisticated and controlled, yet still more intimate and bold, I turned to contemporary artist Cy Twombly. Richard Leeman, author of *Cy Twombly*, gives new insight into this expressive mark-maker, whose work greatly influenced this thesis exhibition. His marks are often made through direct physical contact with the canvas, working as if attacking the canvas, leaving behind scratched, agitated marks. Many of his marks are repetitive lines made with other, overlapping, aggressive marks. His shapes and symbols may seem rudimentary, but they are not. The thick, rich quality of his paint handling, often applied using his fingertips, creates a distinctive, assertive effect. Often Twombly blurs edges, washes out marks, and then brings them back again and again, leaving a faint ghost image. Leeman points out, "In October 1967, the Leo Castelli Gallery offered the New York public something other than what they were accustomed to from Twombly. No literary references, no allusive titles, no figures: nothing but very large, gray panels" (1994, p. 179). Ironically these paintings were labeled *Blackboards*, possibly because they resembled school blackboards marked with chalk. These marks were likened to children's handwriting, graffiti, and the



Palmer Method of teaching handwriting. It was believed that Twombly was saying he was sorry; that his punishment was to rewrite these similar marks over and over again. According to Leeman, the comparisons demonstrated the ignorance of the non-art world,



Figure 2.8. *Dead Silence*, by Susan Harmon, 2007. Mixed media on canvas. Size: 22" x 30".

which so readily and erroneously labeled these loopy, scribbling, repetitive marks.

Twombly's image, *Untitled*, is a detail of one of these *Blackboard* pieces (figure 2.9). It uses repetitive lines similar in size and intensity, with small variations within each line.

The constant movement of the lines, with their sweeping marks, presents an exciting rhythmic pattern. The overlapping lines seem to bounce around and across the flat picture plane. These expressive marks seem honest, raw, and unedited—a quality I seek in my own images. There seems to be no central focus; rather, emphasis is equalized across the entire picture. Although the picture appears flat, the lines create depth and pull the viewer in and out with their varying degrees of values, focus, and size. I admire the personal quality of these lines, which upon reflection, take on a life of their own.

After studying Twombly's work, I decided to eliminate simplified symbolic figurative shapes from my own, while still attempting to make my marks more sophisticated, my lines more complex, and my colors purer and less mixed. With this new focus on technique, a new series was born. *Untitled #1* is a drawing on raw canvas (figure 2.10). To create an atmosphere of unrest, I intentionally made these marks seem meaningless and unfinished. I consciously tried to activate the negative space by drawing similar repetitive marks in the empty space. Broken and erased lines in the background resemble Twombly's canvases. Large, loopy marks weave in and out between the background and foreground. Isolated areas of the painting surface are covered with layers of built-up paint, and then scratched out.

Agitated scribbles are covered with smears of black acrylic paint and overlapping black charcoal marks. Pieces of raw canvas are attached, and their more aggressive edges give the work a fragmented look. As with *Two Souls*, I decided to try to limit my editing in order to produce a more direct picture. This was a success in terms of creating an



Figure 2.9. *Untitled* (detail), by Cy Twombly, 1970. Oil pastel and industrial paint on paper. Size: 27" x 39".

image that is more intuitive and less cluttered with unnecessary symbols and marks. The goal is let spontaneity free my subconscious of established forms and marks, thus producing a unique and personal emotional statement.

At this point, I felt satisfied with the inclusion of three-dimensional attributes into my work. Having gone through four fruitful and experimental phases in my artistic process in which I used any material I found appropriate, it was now time to develop and strengthen my expressive use of the paint medium. I had come full circle with my search



Figure 2.10. *Untitled #1*, by Susan Harmon, 2007. Mixed media on canvas. Size: 30" x 40".

for new ways to make expressive marks, and was ready to create the next series of art for this thesis exhibition. I looked to the next artist to provide guidance in that task. Susan Rothenberg's pictures are forceful and often have a fragmented feel. Her rigorous paint marks are both aggressive and expressive. Sandy Brooke, author of *Drawing as Expression*, writes, "For Susan Rothenberg, the significance is the very finding of a new formal device, the thickened line, which she describes as neither line nor shape but rather a 'band'" (2007, p. 11). She explored new techniques, unafraid to experiment. I applaud those qualities and hope to incorporate her confidence into my exploration of mark-making techniques. Her marks are about creating a surface of built-up layers of thick paint marks, which describes exactly where I wanted to go with my work, that is, creating a surface of built-up layers of paint.

Rothenberg's canvases are rich with exotic and sensual marks that capture an intense, raw, untamed spirit, one that helps me see how to express my own inner states. Her images use recognizable animal and human body parts, though usually abstracted and altered. Often these distorted images are painted with strange, frenzied marks, and are dreamlike, floating, often without ground. A moodiness prevails in most of her work.

Joan Simon, author of *Susan Rothenberg*, says:

Susan Rothenberg has had the audacity to make paintings that are inscrutably private as they are publicly accessible, as formal as they are magically expressive, as figurative as they are abstract. ... [She] has merged painterly issues with autobiographical concerns... [H]er own intuitive search for image, content and surface handling has matched her consistent desires to catch a moment, the moment to exemplify an emotion. (1991, p. 103)

*The Monk* (figure 2.11) is an exemplar of Rothenberg's superior paint handling, and her agitated and aggressive marks that create an emotionally expressive image.

*The Monk* demonstrates extreme movement. Agitated marks cover the background while the figure in the foreground seems calmer. There is no need for individual facial features with such emotional marks to define the face. The loose but sensitive gestural marks for the arms and hands are expressive. A dark moodiness and a sense of mystery prevails. Despite the energy fields around and within the image, the position of the monk suggests calmness and serenity.



Figure 2.11. *The Monk*, by Susan Rothenberg, 1983. Oil on canvas. Size: 5'9" x 8'9".

Yet it is the emotion expressed in the paint strokes which grabs my attention; those thick and jumpy paint marks are full of energy and emotion that I can learn from and use. My images use large and continual, sweeping paint marks combined with smearing and rubbing of materials to attain a desired effect. After studying Rothenberg's images I began work on the final series of this thesis exhibition, which consists of three large paintings on raw canvas. *Finlandia #1* exemplifies the type of expression I sought

in my own work (figure 2.12). Instead of painting the written word, I now wanted to paint the sounds. By not focusing consciously on content, my mind was freed to focus on pure abstraction of form and color. Restricting myself to acrylic, oil paint, and chalk pastel, I used easily flowing, passionate marks. I allowed myself to lay down paint with unusual instruments such as cooking spatulas, brooms, and sticks. The short repetitive paint marks in the center of this image are completely spontaneous. I allowed paint to drip without controlling it. While the black marks remained, they felt less contrived and planned. While some human facial features may seem to appear in the center of the main image, they are not intentional. I simply wanted the marks to interact with each other as if performing a symphony together: It is a complex symphony of color, full of engaging, beautiful sounds. Figure 2.12 is a successful image of emotional mark-making through spontaneous and intuitive procedure.

The marks used by an expressionistic artist, whether made by early Paleolithic man, early American, or contemporary artist, have the same purpose: to use the marks to express one's most personal feelings. In *Drawing as Expression*, Sandy Brooke quotes Phillip Guston, an Abstract Expressionist painter in the 1950s; "I wanted to make drawing more like painting, without contour. These are drawings with masses from accumulated strokes" (2007, p. 54). Brooke describes Guston's work as focused on a rigorous structuring of space and the "articulation of the painted mark." He continues, "His marks were directed, not accidental. He didn't just toss a mark upon the paper—rather, he had a purpose and a direction in mind, thus the articulation of the painter's mark" (p. 54). Once those marks become a physical reality—once they are put down on that canvas for the world to see—whatever emotional potential exists becomes,

at that moment, a reality. Scribbling, smearing, scratching surfaces to express oneself, often in a frenzied way, can be part of a painful yet a necessary process. If a painter is courageous enough to allow herself to reach deep in the soul, and find a true voice, authentic intimate marks will come. While a primary component of my work, these marks are inextricably tied together with other formal attributes, creating the synergy necessary to create an image that is both formally and emotionally complete.

The expressionistic artist goes through this process in order to leave the most honest mark upon a canvas, and the effort is rewarded when viewers are able to share the passion. Through experimentation with materials and processes, and by allowing historical and artistic voices to influence my art, I have been successful in producing a body of art that champions emotional mark-making as an expressive technique.





Figure 2.12. *Finlandia #1*, by Susan Harmon, 2007. Oil, acrylic, and pastel on canvas. Size: 6' x 4'.

## CHAPTER 3

## ARTISTIC PROCESS AND TECHNIQUES

*I think that for myself, feeling and making the image happen are essentially the same thing. Perhaps the most important thing the artist brings to the image-making act cannot be expressed in words—it's that je ne sais quoi that hopefully produces beautiful art.*

—Helen Frankenthaler

This chapter describes my artistic process and its significance. Though I change my subject matter from piece to piece, each approach to the canvas is a passionate experience—one in which I immerse myself totally in physical, vigorous, emotional drawing and painting. This process remains the same each time, because the process is often more important than the final picture.

The process of eliciting the right marks begins by immersing myself in my subject. The research phase is one of frenzied reading and constant note-taking, after which I transcribe the most poignant words or phrases from those notes onto the walls in my studio. The blank canvases already hang in their place, waiting for me to touch them. As I prepare to work on those surfaces, I copiously produce sketches. Whether drawing with ballpoint pen on napkins during the late night hours, or by painting with thin color on paper, I let myself become obsessed with the art that is about to happen; my subconscious is preparing to paint. Vincent Van Gogh said, “The only time I feel alive is when I'm painting.” This is how I feel, and sometimes I can barely set out for the studio without wanting to run as fast as possible. When I finally enter the studio I become transformed with feelings of happiness, anxiety, and excitement all at the same time. My artworks usually begin with the application of heavy, black compressed charcoal. I try

not to control my thinking while beginning a composition. This skeleton of the linear picture is the most important part, for it is on this that the whole picture will be fleshed out.

Chiefly, my creative process is one in which the artist must trust herself and prepare her subconscious before ever setting a tool to the canvas. Each painting in my MFA thesis exhibition began with marks, which remained visible after the painting was complete. While these lines vary in length, size, shape, and thickness, they always represent boundaries and obstacles. In one sense, they are the wires and bars which keep their prisoners (both literal and figurative) from freedom. In another, the lines symbolize the characters' religious beliefs, and how their belief in God falters before later being renewed. In yet another sense, the lines are the connecting, winding roads these people travel, which, although very dangerous at times, become safe in the end. From first and last, mark-making established itself during the preparation phase of my thesis project as a crucial vehicle for emotion and creative interpretation.

Only after the drawing develops and the composition is completed will I begin to paint. This is where frenzy and fury take over, as if I cannot get the marks and color on the canvas fast enough. Playing music in the background sets the mood for me; it is as important to my process as research and sketching. Whether the music is Ozzy Osborne with his eerie, dark voice, or Finlandia with its pure and beautiful symphony of sound, or just silence, the marks that I may be searching for reveal themselves more readily while music is playing. However, my work is not a translation or interpretation of the sound. Once I begin working I am so absorbed by my painting that I hear nothing.

After the composition is drawn and the first layer of paint applied (which usually

includes many mixed colors) it is time to sit and contemplate the image; time to decide where to put lines, forms, or a specific color. For some pieces, I apply color in thin layers, layer upon thin layer; for others, I apply thick paint and use my fingers to smear and rub the surface of the canvas or paper. Once the colored marks are put down, I may scratch the surface, and take out and put in shapes, colors, and lines. Sometimes handmade papers or torn-up drawings and other discarded pieces are applied at this stage. In order to evaluate the development of the image, I turn the paper or canvas upside down, take it off the wall, hang it alone, or move it to a different spot. I may stand on stools or sit on the floor to change my view as I work. Often I will stand far back in the hallway to look at the piece from a distance. I have even put my works in progress in my driveway at home, and drive up the street to see the image from a different perspective. Daily, I take digital photographs and review the work on the smaller screen of the computer, which aids the editing process. Sometimes my painted canvases and the papers used for drawings are torn apart and reassembled. Sometimes they remain whole. As the artist, I am the only person who can truly say when the painting is fully realized, and the most difficult and time-consuming part of my process is completing the last five percent of the artwork.

Many of the works in this series began as one very long raw canvas on the wall, and went through months of iterations. The marks and additional materials were painstakingly planned out beforehand in sketches—part of preparing my subconscious for painting—only to be abandoned as I let the paintings themselves guide me. Jean Dubuffet said, “A painter must be honest! No veils! No ruses! Everything has to be naked; presented at its worst,” a statement with which I wholeheartedly agree. After months of clawing, scratching and molding these shapes—tearing, cutting and ripping the parts off,

only to put them back, moving pieces like a puzzle which needed to fit together in an exact way—finally an image may be complete.

Each drawing and painting in this MFA thesis exhibition has its own character, tone, and aspect. Although they are each separate from one another, a strong connection does exist. The process I go through to prepare myself for making intense, emotional marks is a vital one. The rituals of making sketches, listening to music, and clearing my mind all serve to free the subconscious of clutter nonessential to art, and coax out the true feelings that can then be translated to direct marks on a canvas. By using the direct touch of my hand, passionately tearing the materials and reattaching them, my intent was that my deep feelings will transfer as if by osmosis to my artwork, and hence to the viewer. Unorthodox techniques (adding torn papers, applying paint with non traditional methods, leaving entire areas of a picture empty, combining variance of line on raw canvas) are motivated by a desire to allow my subconscious to take over, ultimately advance my artistic development, and communicate emotional content to the viewer. Without an exploration into new methods and materials, as well as the processes of historical and contemporary artists, there would not have been a powerful, emotional body of art in this exhibition. The search for new ways to interpret and express my feelings toward inspirational writings—and by proxy, my own emotions—was crucial to the final outcome.

## CHAPTER 4

## CONCLUSION

*The Abstract Expressionists and the critics who defended them ... insisted that the successful Abstract Expressionist paintings had content, and they pointed out the danger and drama involved in the painter's rescuing the welter of strokes, drippings, and splatters from the edge of chaos. Attributing content to these paintings ... meant that inevitably [the viewer] would find in the arrangement of the nonobjective forms, references to or reminders of events or feelings or experiences in his own life. That such references are not willed by the painter but come out of their own accord does not detract from their importance.*

—Abraham Davidson

I proposed to create a body of art inspired by poetry, emphasizing mark-making as the vehicle for expression, while conducting research on mark-making to expand and develop my style. Without inspirational writings there would be no intense personal marks for me to make. Reading about journeys of survival, both actual and fictional—from sisters surviving the Holocaust to a father and son who walk cross-country during the Apocalypse—empowered me to make a large body of expressive artworks. I succeeded in creating powerful images about people whose lives as they once knew them had ended. By tapping into my personal feelings of grief over my father's death, I could empathize enough to take on the challenge of visually expressing raw and honest feelings.

Of secondary but vital importance was my research. Paleolithic cave art revealed insight into those first marks made by man—their possible significance and techniques. Native American pictographs and petroglyphs illuminated something of the evolution of expressive mark-making; especially what purposes it served in a more complex social and linguistic consciousness, for instance, an emotional mnemonic for what the artists

experienced while in a trance state. Among contemporary Western artists, the work of the Outsider artists showed how mark-making continues to serve an important function of direct, honest, visual expression and of placing the value of the creative, emotional mark-making *process* on the same level as the work itself. While allowing these insights to give me confidence in my style, I also expanded my process by taking inspiration from Jean-Michel Basquiat's brilliant color marks and his subjects' exaggerated facial features, Cy Twombly's sophisticated line-making, and Susan Rothenberg's aggressive paint handling. Through constant experimentation with materials and art processes I acquired many new methods with which to create expressive paintings, and discovered concepts and techniques to connect the individual works in this body of art.

Through both research, reading, and personal effort, I sought to prepare my subconscious for mark-making—quieting my mind to receive the emotional content of my literary sources, and to ultimately increase my trust in myself as an artist. Without trust, I would not feel free to make bold, honest, emotional marks. Jackson Pollock talked of literally being in the painting. I obsessively tried to put myself, physically and mentally, into my paintings. As I scratched and clawed at the surfaces of these canvases, smeared and smudged paint marks with my hands, drew bold lines, rubbed marks in and out, dripped paint over torn old drawings and canvases, added layer over layer, all to try to achieve emotional images, I felt myself slowly accepting and gaining confidence in both the means and ends of emotional mark-making. The result is, I hope, rich in surface, texture, color, and human spirit.

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## APPENDIX

**Author:** Harmon, Susan Lee.

**Title:** Poiesis [electronic resource] / by Susan Lee Harmon.

**Publisher:** 2007

**Description:** 61 p.: 17 ill.

**Notes:** Thesis (M.F.A.)—Georgia Southern University, 2007. Includes bibliographical references (p. 79). Author's abstract: This thesis examines mark-making techniques in my art and surveys the literary and musical works that inspired it. A historical examination of the role of mark-making in art will be undertaken, beginning with Paleolithic cave art, continuing with Native American petroglyphs and pictographs, and concluding with three contemporary visual artists whose marks have influenced my work: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cy Twombly, and Susan Rothenberg. Finally, my artistic process is explained through references to the materials and rituals used to create a body of art. This thesis researches the meaning behind artistic marks, and how marks are made in my paintings and in the work of other artists.

System requirements: PC, World Wide Web browser and PDF reader.  
Available online.

**Subject(s):** Georgia Southern University—Dissertations.  
Poetry and art—Exhibitions.

**Linked Resource:** marks, painting, drawing, pictographs, paleolithic, mark-making, artwork, expressionistic art, Betty Foy Sanders Art Department.

**Location:** Available online

**Call Number:**