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Change Does Not Wait

Kristina B. Hall

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CHANGE DOES NOT WAIT

by

KRISTINA B. HALL

(Under the Direction of Patricia Walker)

ABSTRACT

The changes found in the growth patterns of trees, as they are impacted by their environment, can be seen as reflecting the journey that one progresses through over their own life. This thesis is the result of inner revelations that led the author to create a series of images that depict connections made between the movements found in trees that can be paralleled to the stresses in our own lives brought on by circumstance and experience. Correlations between human experience and nature are illuminated through the discussion of color usage, composition, historical art reference and development of personal artistic techniques.

INDEX WORDS: MFA, Thesis, College of Graduate Studies, Georgia Southern University, Betty Foy Sanders Department of Art, South East Georgia, Oil painting, Tree, Landscape, Color, Ossabaw, Change, Time, Regional art, Contemporary art

CHANGE DOES NOT WAIT

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Bachelor of Fine Art, Georgia Southwestern University, 2001

Masters of Fine Art, Georgia Southern University, 2011

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

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	6
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	7
2 DISCOVERING AN INSPIRATION.....	11
3 ARTISTIC INFLUENCE	20
The Influence of Albers and Itten on My Use of Color	21
The Influence of Rutenberg on My Use of Edge	27
4 FINDING MY MARK. TOOLS AND TEXTURES.....	31
5 CONCLUSION.....	40
ENDNOTES	42
REFERENCES	44

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Boxer</i> , 2011	14
Figure 2: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Twin</i> , 2010.....	17
Figure 3: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Tomorrow</i> , 2010.....	19
Figure 4: Joseph Albers, <i>Green Color Study</i> , 1940	21
Figure 5: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Echo</i> , 2011	22
Figure 6: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Fold</i> , 2010.....	24
Figure 7: William Turner, <i>The Slave Ship</i> , 1840	25
Figure 8: Kristina B. Hall, Detail of <i>Echo</i> , 2011	26
Figure 9: Brian Rutenberg, <i>Pine Lake 14</i> , 2009	27
Figure 10: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Grandfather</i> , 2010.....	28
Figure 11: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Midnight Dance</i> , 2009	32
Figure 12: Kristina B. Hall, detail of <i>Grandfather</i> , 2010	35
Figure 13: Kristina B. Hall, detail of <i>Fold</i> , 2010.....	36
Figure 14: Kristina B. Hall, <i>Steadfast</i> , 2011	38

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the parallels of change that are seen in life and nature discovered during my graduate work. While on a trip to Ossabaw Island, Georgia, I witnessed great oak trees uprooted and lying on the beach due to erosion. Also, I encountered trees that had been hit by lightning and broken by the falls of other trees. The maritime forest is also filled with unspoiled nature that has its own set of challenges. The changes that the trees have endured allow me to interpret their physical transformations over time. I realized that I could use the tree in an anthropomorphic way to depict universal experiences in life, such as victory and defeat. Change is a part of life that shapes us as humans; it is constant, and our personal challenges in life can be parallel to the ones seen in the trees on Ossabaw Island.

My thesis works focus mainly on Live Oak, which has expansive canopy limbs, and Bald Cypress trees, which grow knobby knees in the swamps around deeply grooved mother trees. The unique trunk and limb movements of these trees have provided a means to express human emotion through movement and growth patterns. The massive Live Oak portrays strength, while the Bald Cypress expresses a sense of mystery because its base is unseen, beneath the water. The cypress also has a rich range of textures from sinewy to rough surfaces and is typically covered with mosses, ranging from green to pink to orange.

I found that I could combine the texture of the tree forms with my love for color and light, in order to express the human capacity for change and transformation without using

a human figure. The texture of the tree forms give way to expressing a mood, such as tranquility. In my work, tree limbs gently hanging down into pools of water signify reflection and at times solitude. Through the physical process of painting, I realized that I was most interested in having my concept reinforced by the use of formal elements like color and form.

Inspired by Bill Viola's Artist's Talk on the Tate Channel, I began to research ideas on change.¹ While reading Jean-Paul Sartre, I came across an excerpt similar to what Viola was discussing. They were both talking about changes that we go through as humans. Sometimes, the changes are not caused by our own action, but the actions of others. We must make decisions and move forward in order to continue on. Then I came across *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* by Wassily Kandinsky. In his book, he speaks of the relationships within a composition. Like the relationships we have in life, the relationships of colored marks have complicated interactions with each other. Color is optically changed by the colors surrounding it; like humans, we do not stand alone. It takes a whole dynamic of positive and negative influences to navigate through our existence.

Change Does Not Wait examines the emotional remnants that accumulate as a result of the events that define our lives. By focusing on transformations that occur over time, I use tree forms to represent moments of emotional significance. I am compelled to paint landscapes that explore how environmental stresses manipulate growth. A tree's structure, through shape and development, describes the elements in which it has endured. By emphasizing the natural movement and texture of the trees, I draw a parallel

between the natural world and human society. The rich surfaces found in these paintings utilize the power of light and color to address the forces that shape all life.

Many artists have inspired me through their mark-making and color usage. By visiting museums and galleries, I came to realize that the surface of a painting can be used to describe an emotion. This produced a major change in my thinking. Previously, I would set my image up as someone would set up a still life. I would create a scene with a ground, sky, and a light source that were treated as filler in comparison to the predominant figures that I would depict. Attending exhibitions where I was able to see the actual marks painters were using to express moods or form allowed me to see a variety of solutions to formal and informal concerns.

J.M.W. Turners' work interests me because he uses formal elements, such as color and rhythm, to achieve an emotional response from the viewer. Rhythm can be used to reinforce a concept, such as seen in Turner's painting, "The Slave Ship" (Figure 7), in which he uses intense movements in his marks that swirl and explode across his canvas. The quick, aggressive movement of the marks creates a mood that sets the tone for his content. In this painting, it visually describes the impending doom of a storm and man's decision to speed the ship by throwing the dead and dying overboard.

The work of Brian Rutenberg, who also creates a mood in his paintings of the landscape, uses changes in texture and movements of color from soft variations to abrupt staccato marks. In *Pine Lakes 14* (Figure 11), the red hue in the top right portion of the painting moves through subtle shifts of value and creates spatial changes. Then, the color abruptly changes to hot pink in the top right of the image. The hot pinks advance in space, in comparison to the shades and tints that recede, which are found in the middle

and to the right of the painting. The movements in color and surface create a visceral response to the painting. The variety of mark and surface found in the work of both Turner and Rutenberg has inspired my exploration of the possibilities of the medium. The paintings I created before entering the M.F.A. program utilized the paint in only one way—flat and thin. Shortly after entering the graduate program, I altered my palette and began to use multiple ways to manipulate the paint like Turner and Rutenberg.

To develop an individual way to use the medium to convey emotion through mark, color, and surface, I practiced a variety of new tools and mediums. Previously, I had been using thinned oils and painting with small brushes in a way that made my paintings flat. In order to change this habit, I began to use a palette knife as a way to overcome my timidity with the medium of oil paint. By transforming my painting process, I have found that I am able to create a mood through multiple paint surfaces when using a combination of oil paint, safflower medium, paint brushes, palette knives, and rags.

Through the use of texture and movement paired with color and mark, I am able to create a mood in my work, based on the journey of human change, as seen in the manipulation of the tree and the landscape in which it resides. I am able to depict space and emotion in my work by using compositional and color relationships.

CHAPTER 2

DISCOVERING AN INSPIRATION

When I first began my MFA program, I was using the human figure to address ideas about change. By using a dominant figure that held all of the content of the image, I would treat the rest of the painting as an afterthought. I soon realized that my paintings were too direct in content and that I needed to find a way to express my ideas and still leave more to the imagination of the viewer. I found this transition to be very difficult. Breaking the habit of having a dominant subject took a full summer, faculty review, and the journey to Ossabaw Island to alter my method for communicating visually. I started my personal change of considering the whole rather than focusing on a primary element by taking any dominant subject matter out of my paintings until I decided I was able to introduce it back into the work, while maintaining full compositional consideration. I chose to work with the tree in the landscape. I found the means to convey concepts important to me by using the tree as a symbol of emotional transformations. The works exhibited in my MFA Thesis Exhibition are based on the idea that change is an inescapable part of life that transforms us as humans. Through change we grow mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Small changes happen every day, sometimes without notice. When major changes happen, they force us to look within ourselves, and to discover something new about our character. This idea was verbalized in a lecture by Bill Viola at the Tate Gallery. Viola discussed how change does not wait and that we are in a continuous state of change

throughout our life. Viola also addressed in his lecture how life is a series of falls. He explained that we are constantly falling through life. We may have people who help us, or we may be left to fall alone.² I have taken the idea of a constantly changing dynamic in life and made it the inspiration for my M.F.A. work. I use universal experiences as a basis for creating the content seen in the relationship of the tree in the landscape. Introducing the element of water into my imagery opened up a way for me to express inner reflection through the use of actual reflections of trees in the water. Some reflections are mirrors, while others only give glimmers of the life that is above and below the surface. The juxtaposition of the reflections of life and actual living things are interesting to me because of the different moods that can be derived from them, like introspection.

I am interested in depicting life changes because I have experienced many changes in my own life. These changes have brought me to where I am today. Because of having my own series of falls in life, I have been able to make decisions and change my life for the better, rather than doing nothing and succumbing to circumstance. Feeling as though I have already lived several lives, change is a constant thought because I know that when I graduate, my life will be changing again. By using the tree to represent change, my imagery is deepened, allowing viewers to place their own thoughts into their interpretation of the painting. Viewers are left to interpret my marks, colors, and the image itself, based on their own personal experiences.

During my MFA candidacy, while on Ossabaw Island, I found the tree forms that have come to embody the concepts with which I work. The Live Oak and Cypress trees I

witnessed there allow me to describe narratives of change and existence by exaggerating the natural movements and colors of the trees. To convey my ideas, I have emphasized changes in growth patterns, correlating life changes to the twisting and turning of tree limbs. Humans can hide their life challenges, but trees live with theirs like badges of honor. While on the island, I took my time to look at how the natural world around me was progressing, I saw that everything around me was on a quest for survival.

The depiction of transitions in life can be found in my painting *Boxer* (Figure 1). This image depicts the fight for survival. Like humans, nature is in constant struggle. Observing the tree pictured in this image while on Ossabaw Island, I responded to the fact that it had been toppled by another tree, yet it found the strength to continue its life in a new direction. I saw the tree's quest to carve out a path for survival to be similar to the strength that can be found within the human spirit. Like my depictions of trees, we are each carving out our own paths among all the other paths available. I began to discover that the relationship of painted tree forms within a composition point to the vast array of relationships we have, and in particular, to changes in our lives.

Because trees go through a life of unexpected changes, they are the perfect vehicle for composing images that describe life's journey. Winston Churchill said, "We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival."³ *Boxer* acts as an example of the strength that one can find within, to take a blow and keep going. This image is not about defeat, but the glory of overcoming obstacles and being able to grow anew, not in spite of them, but because of them.



Figure 1. Kristina B. Hall, *Boxer*, 2011

In his book, *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre discusses his ideas of existence: “In a general way, the coefficient of adversity and utility of complexes does not depend solely on my place, but on the particular potentiality of the instruments. Thus, as soon as I exist, I am thrown in the midst of existences different from me, for and against me.”⁴ Like Sartre, I believe that we do not exist singularly, with only our own actions to consider. People are affected by forces outside of themselves. We as individuals are surrounded by other individuals and by natural and unseen forces that have the potential to affect our lives. One evening, when pulling into my driveway, a heavy storm was brewing and a large tree fell directly behind my car. Had I been just a few seconds later getting home, I most certainly would have been crushed. It scared me terribly. As I helped my father clean up the downed tree from the road and the driveway, I realized how fortunate I was. It only takes a second for an event to happen that can change your life forever.

By viewing the world as an interacting whole, made of an infinite number of parts and forces, I have been able to embrace ideas about relationships in new and meaningful ways. Relationships occur not only in life, but also on the canvas. After reading Kandinsky’s book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, I began to consider my painted surface as a whole of interlocking elements. Before this, I was prone to rendering one dominant element. By contemplating Kandinsky’s thoughts on composition and reviewing his work, I was able to see the importance of considering the whole, but also the necessity of considering each component as a supporting factor in the network of marks made. For example, in *Echo* (Figure 8), every mark is actively related to all the marks around it. The blues and greens are supported by violets, oranges, and yellows;

together they create a whole. When I came to the MFA program, I was only concerned with portraying one idea as a subject with the rest of the painting as an afterthought. I have grown to realize the importance of every mark by applying the ideas of compositional relationships. Wassily Kandinsky discusses the composition as a whole when he states,

Pure artistic composition has two elements:

1. The composition of the whole picture.
2. The creation of the various forms which, by standing in different relationships to each other, decide the composition of the whole. Many objects have to be considered in the light of the whole, and so ordered as to suit this whole. Singly they will have little meaning, being of importance only in so far as they help the general effect. These single objects must be fashioned in one way only; and this, not because their own inner meaning demands that particular fashioning, but entirely because they have to serve as building material for the whole composition.⁵

Like Sartre, Kandinsky is considering an intricately designed world where independent forces are in relation to the elements surrounding them, creating a united whole of cause and effect, just as they occur in life. Insights on different types of relationships were continually popping up in my life, in nature, and now in painting. Reflecting on Kandinsky's words, I began to consider the relationships within my own work. I began to learn how I could improve them by looking at the basic structure of my paintings, such as mark and color. *Twin* (Figure 2) and *Tomorrow* (Figure 3) were among my first attempts at creating works in which I paid particular attention to every color mixed. Being aware of color relationships enables me to create a soft atmospheric perspective by using lighter, muted hues in the receding areas, and darker, more vibrant hues in the advancing sections.



Figure 2. Kristina B. Hall, Twin, 2010

As with the relationships of color, Sartre pushed me to consider the importance of relationships in life. I correlated this with the movement of the trees in their environment and pondered the life events they have encountered. The trees exist in relation to their environment, like my marks of paint lay in relation to one another on the canvas. Kandinsky led me to reconsider the connections found in the colored shapes that create my paintings. The colors differ optically depending on their proximity to other hues. Looking at the canvas as a whole, with each individual mark contributing to its success, the interlocking junction of color and mark is a means to depict human emotion in the large movements of trunks and tree limbs. Observing the visual effects of color led me to seek out different ideas about color interaction. I have more control over the final image when I consider the relationships of individual colors as a unified whole in the composition.

Discovering the correlation between the lives of trees and the lives of humans while on Ossabaw Island planted the conceptual seed for *Change Does Not Wait*. Ideas about change and the relationships that exist in nature, in human life, and in paintings produce the connections found in my work. By using the theories of Joseph Albers and Johannes Itten, I have been able to use color and its properties as a tool. This has heightened my ideas both formally and intuitively. In chapter three, I will discuss my influences in formal elements, including specific examples.



Figure 3. Kristina B. Hall, *Tomorrow*, 2010

CHAPTER 3

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Throughout my MFA candidacy, I have developed as an artist. My concepts are inspired by universal emotions that can be seen through the twisting and turning of tree limbs. Not only do I use the movement of individual tree limbs to portray certain emotions, I use the entire landscape. Having researched countless artists while being in the graduate program at GSU, I am most influenced by those artists who use movement and color to deliver their content, like Bonnard who uses color as an “emotional atmosphere” within his work.⁶ I started reading about color and the color theories of Joseph Albers and Johannes Itten. My goal in painting is to fully orchestrate relationships of color and texture, in combination with concept. A couple of artists I enjoy who use movement and color are JWH Turner and Brian Rutenberg. These artists are concerned with human emotion, the effects of color on the psyche, and technical prowess. When I came to the program, my work lacked depth of texture and color. Throughout my candidacy, I have been encouraged to use texture in my paintings, which has changed my application of paint.

Through trial and error, I came upon the tools that worked for me. I began a more textural approach to painting by using safflower oil and a mix of palette knives, brushes, and rags, When I started making richer marks on the canvas, I also began to think of ways to improve my color.

The Influence of Albers and Itten on My Use of Color

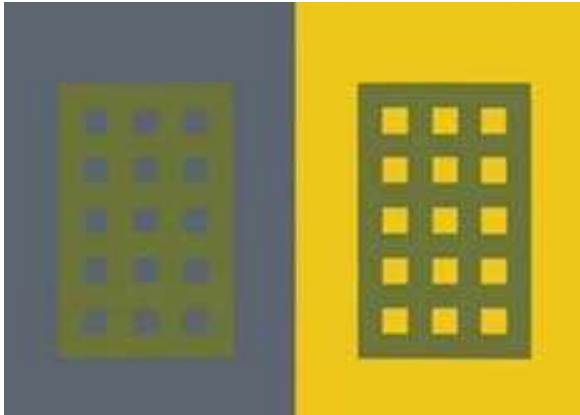


Figure 4. Joseph Albers, Green color study

Joseph Albers speaks of visual perception of color.⁷ One can see in Figure 4 that the colors of the grid patterns on the left and right look like different hues of green when in fact they are the same. This is an example of how our eyes perceive color in relation to the colors next to them. I have experienced this visual perception phenomenon in my studio. In *Echo* (Figure 5), I mixed a blue at my palette, but when I compared it to an area of the painting with more intense blues, it made the color I once thought was blue appear grey. Albers discusses this interesting color phenomenon in his book, *Interaction of Color*. He stated:

We are able to hear a single tone. But we almost never (that is, without special devices) see a single color unconnected and unrelated to other colors. Colors present themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to changing neighbors and changing conditions.⁸

Albers goes on to describe that when listening to music, we hear a note while anticipating the next. This is an aspect of time that lends itself to the creation of a musical

composition. One note or simultaneous and alternating notes are pushing forward to the next series of notes, while the last are being forgotten. Like notes in music, colors are supported by each other. I approach color, texture, and the shape in the landscape by blending my concept of anthropomorphism with my medium. When approaching color, I must regard all components of the painting, so that each mark is meaningful.



Figure 5. Kristina B. Hall, *Echo*, 2010

Creating color combinations that work to describe space interests me because I like to create depth of field in my work. In *Echo* (Figure 5), I was creating mixed blues and greens. In response to the hues of paint around them, I responded to color, enabling me to

make color choices that I otherwise would not have made. One example is the orange limb at the top of the painting that is very different from the greens in the majority of the other limbs. I have found that all of the colored shapes within the painting need to work together, in order to create a rich color experience. Johannes Itten spoke of the intuitive quality of painting when he said:

The optical, electromagnetic, and chemical processes initiated in the eye and brain are frequently paralleled by processes in the psychological realm. Such reverberations of the experience of color may be propagated to the inner most centers, thereby affecting principle areas of mental and emotional experience.⁹

The emotional qualities of color are interesting to me because of my own response to color. By using my emotional responses to a certain hue, I am able to describe a feeling through color variations that Bonnard described as an “emotional atmosphere.”¹⁰ When I allowed myself to give in to this psychological quality of paint through color, I found that mood could also be evoked based on variation in value, line weight, shape, and direction.

I am able to develop a mood by choosing color combinations relevant to my perception of color significance. Caspar David Friedrich once said, “Close your bodily eye, so that you can see your picture first with the spiritual eye. Then bring the light of day, that which you have seen in the darkness, so that it may react on others from the outside inwards.”¹¹ When the emotion desired starts to unfold, I lessen my grip on formal ideas and start to give in to the more expressive qualities in the painting. I am able to describe emotion by using colors suited for the mood of my painting, rather than using the same palette of colors for every painting. For example, in *Boxer* (Figure 1), the viewer’s eye can follow the splintered wood on the middle left of the image up and around the tree trunk to the tree’s new growth on the top left. The struggle of the tree’s

fight for life can be seen in its twisting movement to reach for light again. Bonnard said, “A more complex poetic equivalent in paint (can be used) for the ‘experience’ of witnessing in nature the changes in mood evoked by time, light, and weather.”¹² The renewal of *Boxer* is portrayed mainly in warm yellow-oranges as a contrast against a sky of mauve and dark blue. These colors fight for the viewer’s attention by creating visual interest through color opposition. The warm colors describe the spark of life within the tree in contrast with the darkened hues in the sky, signifying turmoil that is often encountered in life.



Figure 6. Kristina B. Hall, *Fold*, 2010

By depicting the various life journeys of trees in my paintings, I have tried to capture what I consider to be pivotal moments in life. I have felt that a part of me has been defeated, due to many events all taking place at once, and feeling the sting of the

recent housing crash in combination with other falls in life. While on Ossabaw Island, I saw the tree used in my painting, *Fold* (Figure 6), and I had to paint it. It looked like I felt on the inside.

In *Fold* (Figure 6), a Live Oak is on the path of decay. Its “head” is burned and scared and is lurching forward. Red hues are used to personify a once great tree in a vast forest that has succumbed to events out of its control. The main subject is described by using earthy reds juxtaposed against chromatically intense hues, creating a bark-like texture. The strong colors of the tree are to symbolize its strength. The hues moving down the “arm” start at an orange-pink color and descend to oranges and yellows, which then separate from the main tree. The limb then breaks and dark pinks and reds make up the scattered pieces, except for the large section of wood that is at the base of the tree. This last piece of wood is much lighter and duller, to signify the ultimate death of the tree.



Figure 7. William Turner, *The Slave Ship*, 1840

When looking at artists' works, I search for how they accomplish different optical variations within their paintings and how they create mood. The English Romantic Landscape painter, J.M.W. Turner, has influenced the use of movement in my work. In Turner's painting, *The Slave Ship*, the movement of the colored marks has been an inspiration while working on my compositions. Turner has created multiple paths of mark and color for our eyes to follow, giving the viewer more information to contemplate. Within his composition, Turner creates a whirl of dark reds at the bottom left of the painting that continue to spiral upwards and to the right where they break apart at the skyline. From there, they shoot across the canvas to the left and then explode up to the top left of the painting. I continually look to his work to learn from the complexities in movement that he seems to so effortlessly produce.



Figure 8. Kristina B. Hall, detail of *Echo*, 2011

In the detail of *Echo* (Figure 8), variations of dull and intense colors add to the movement of the work through the integration of positive and negative spaces. The forward and backward movements are created through changes in intensity. When changes in the color vibrancy are added to the actual movements of the paint strokes, rhythm is created in the painting. Like Turner, the marks in my image are used to create eye movement through directional devices. My marks are intended to lead the viewer from the skyline up to the orange branch and back to the left across the image. I am also using the same push and pull that Turner is producing in his work by exploring the effects of color brilliance applied throughout the composition. This visual tug of war adds to the creation of energy and mood in my work.

The Influence of Rutenberg on My Use of Edge



Figure 9. Brian Rutenberg, *Pine Lakes 14*, 2009

Contemporary landscape artist, Brian Rutenberg, creates a rich experience in color through the use of edge in his paintings. In his work, *Pine Lakes 14*, I find myself having varied emotional responses to different sections of the painting, due to interactions, such

as the sharp-edged hot pink against bright blue in the top right corner. This abruptness in color is created by hard edges, giving the work an energetic feeling, while the muted, soft edged greens and violets on the bottom left generate a relaxed sensation. “Rutenberg can deliver the spatial feeling and ricochet of light we expect in a landscape and then yank a picture into abstraction the moment one’s attention to image slackens.” said writer Kenneth Baker.¹³ The hard-edge placement of colors, such as the pink and earthy yellow at the top left of the painting, advances and flattens the image by putting the area in the same visual space. The hard-edge characteristics are very different from the soft, disappearing edges and subtle value shifts found in the center right area of the painting that cause the image to recede and advance gradually.



Figure 10. Kristina B. Hall, *Grandfather*, 2010

Rutenberg’s work is a resource I use to inform myself about complex color and edge interactions. Utilizing the relationships between edge and color can give paintings

atmosphere and depth. I have used this compositional idea in my work, such as in *Echo* (Figure 5), where the sky and the trees in the distance are more about color and movement than they are about representing an image. The trees at the skyline are all soft-edged and break apart into the sky. This creates space in the painting because I also use quick, sharp-edge changes in the foreground to advance the limbs in the image, as if one were focusing one's eyes on the cypress trees in the foreground.

In the thesis painting, *Grandfather* (Figure 10), I used transitions in value and intensity to create an atmospheric quality. Like Rutenberg, I move space forward by using intense colors with crisp edges. These marks are placed on top of darkened values juxtaposed to receding dull light colors. The five tree forms that occupy the foreground of the image are middle values and have vibrant hues with sharp edges. The dark values and vibrant hues advance in contrast to the light and soft-edged hues used around them. The bark has hard edges that also aids in pushing the trunks forward. This optical illusion happens because the ground colors are similar in hue and soft-edged, causing them to recede juxtaposed against the darker values, brighter colors, and crisper edges that push marks forward. I create this space to express a personal realm where a group of trees exist surrounding an older tree with a huge scar. I called this painting *Grandfather* because I was thinking about how our elders have lived through so much and we have an incredible amount to learn from them.

In summation, understanding what color theorists Albers and Itten teach has aided me in my color mixing. The depth of space that I desire is achieved by developing color relationships in my image. Through researching artists' work, I have realized that I am attracted to the infinite possibilities of color, movement, and emotional content that can

be used within a work. By examining the work of Turner and Rutenberg, I have also learned how I can apply the research of Albers and Itten in my own work. By looking at these artists, I have begun to comprehend the technical aspects of using color to achieve a depth of emotional range of which, before my candidacy, I was unaware. I have been able to broaden my color mixing and paint application during the past two and half years of my studies by learning the relationships that color and surface or edge can have within a composition. In chapter four, I reveal how my technical process came into being through trial and error.

CHAPTER 4
FINDING MY MARK:
TOOLS AND TEXTURE

During my MFA candidacy, I came to realize that I was not fully utilizing the oil painting medium to create surface variations in my paintings. I made the decision to use and explore various paint media, allowing me to determine the possibilities of each. During this exploration of media, I also began to experiment with using larger brushes, rags, and palette knives. The palette knives give me the freedom to quickly lay marks down on the canvas. As I practiced this technique, I realized that by creating surface textures, such as smooth and rough, I could create subtle implications of a mood in my image. In my final year at Georgia Southern University before attaining my Master of Fine Arts degree, I began to marry my explorations with color, movement, and texture to create a body of work through the use of different media and tools.

In the beginning of my graduate studies, my paintings were relatively flat and painted with small brushes. My paint was thinned with linseed oil to give my paint a low viscosity, or friction rate, and then it was carefully brushed onto the canvas in a manner that made it appear even flatter. I later experimented with many oil paint mediums, such as cold wax, neo-megalip, galkyd, and finally settled on safflower oil that gave me the consistency and the slow drying rate that I sought. I realized that by changing the medium in the oil paint I was using, I could increase surface variations without having to build a deep surface.



Figure 11. Kristina B. Hall, *Midnight Dance*, 2009

Through mixing oil colors with safflower oil as a medium, or binding agent, I could thin the oil paint while retaining a heavier body. After I started using this medium, I realized I could use the paint like a micro-sculpture by layering multiple planes on top of each other. This led me to paint *Midnight Dance* (Figure 11), in which it is evident that I have extended my tool use from primarily small brushes to palette knives and rags. By layering one hue of paint on top of another and using the palette knife, I am able to create hard edges that trick the eye into advancing objects forward. This illusion can be seen in the trunks advancing and the sky receding, because of the interplay of hard and soft edges. Like individuals, the trees in *Midnight Dance* do not stand alone. They stand with their family and peers. They experience hardships and periods of optimal growth. My interest reflects what it is to exist, what our relationships are, and how they connect to what I have witnessed in nature and in life. I am enamored with how these ideas relate to my studies of color relationships and how colors are also influenced by their surroundings.

The contrasting green and red hues on the trunks pull the trees forward by the warmth of the red and by the interchange of the complementary colors. These complimentary colors give a charge of energy when they are placed next to each other. The value of the red and green hues in *Midnight Dance* has been adjusted, so that most of the shapes sit in the same visual space. Therefore, the value and intensity of the hues found in the tree forms are similar to one another, while the space around them recedes.

At about the same time I began using palette knives, I started to paint using whole body movements to lay color onto the canvas in broad strokes. This change in my approach to painting was new to me. Before that, I was just using my wrist to move my

paint brush, physically constricting the movements of my marks. When I began to use my whole body, I found that I was actually in more control of the outcome of the painting and that I took on a more aggressive approach to applying the color. I found there were moments, like in *Midnight Dance*, when I wanted to put the marks down quickly, so that I would not over analyze them. Like Turner, I started applying paint to create movement within my paintings. Using the palette knife allowed me to create the textural elements I was looking for, creating pock-marked surfaces for rough bark or slick surfaces for algae-covered tree trunks.

Sometimes, I would want the knife marks to be smooth, like those seen in the detail of *Grandfather* (Figure 12). The slick, warm brown marks move down the tree trunk and into the water where they are met by muted reflections of a pale sky. The softness of the trees in the distances and the smooth quality of the bark in the foreground portray tranquility. Although this painting is calm, it also has a charge of color vibrancy to it. I achieved this by painting the base layer red and allowing spots of red to show through succeeding layers in the completed work. I applied the base layer with a very large palette knife, so there are ridges in the paint's surface. I utilized these ridges to create surface and maintain spots of red throughout the image.

Other times, I may want a rougher texture, like that seen in the detail of *Fold* (Figure 13). When creating this image, I wanted the entire painting to be rough because this great tree had been destroyed. To me, the rougher texture visually communicates the agitation and destruction in comparison to a smooth surface. In *Fold*, I built up the oak tree with multiple layers of paint that describe the form, but also aid in developing the concept by showing broken limbs, a decapitated trunk, and a piece of dead wood at the base of the

tree. A smooth texture would not have told the story of this tree the way that I wanted. By having aggressive marks and a rough texture, I alluded to the energy of the sensation of being defeated. The use of edge can also be seen in the detail of the painting where the red hues that describe the tree form are pushed forward. When looking at the loop of the tree in the lower left portion of the painting, one can see that the red value is intense and has a clear, crisp edge where it was laid on top of a darker red value with a little less intensity. This combination of edge, value, and intensity propels this section of the tree forward. In comparison, I scumbled the blues, violets, and greens into each other with the palette knife, creating a soft, hazy feeling. This haziness along with a reduction in intensity and a change in the color's temperature causes the space around the tree to recede.



Figure 12. Kristina B. Hall, Detail of *Grandfather*, 2010

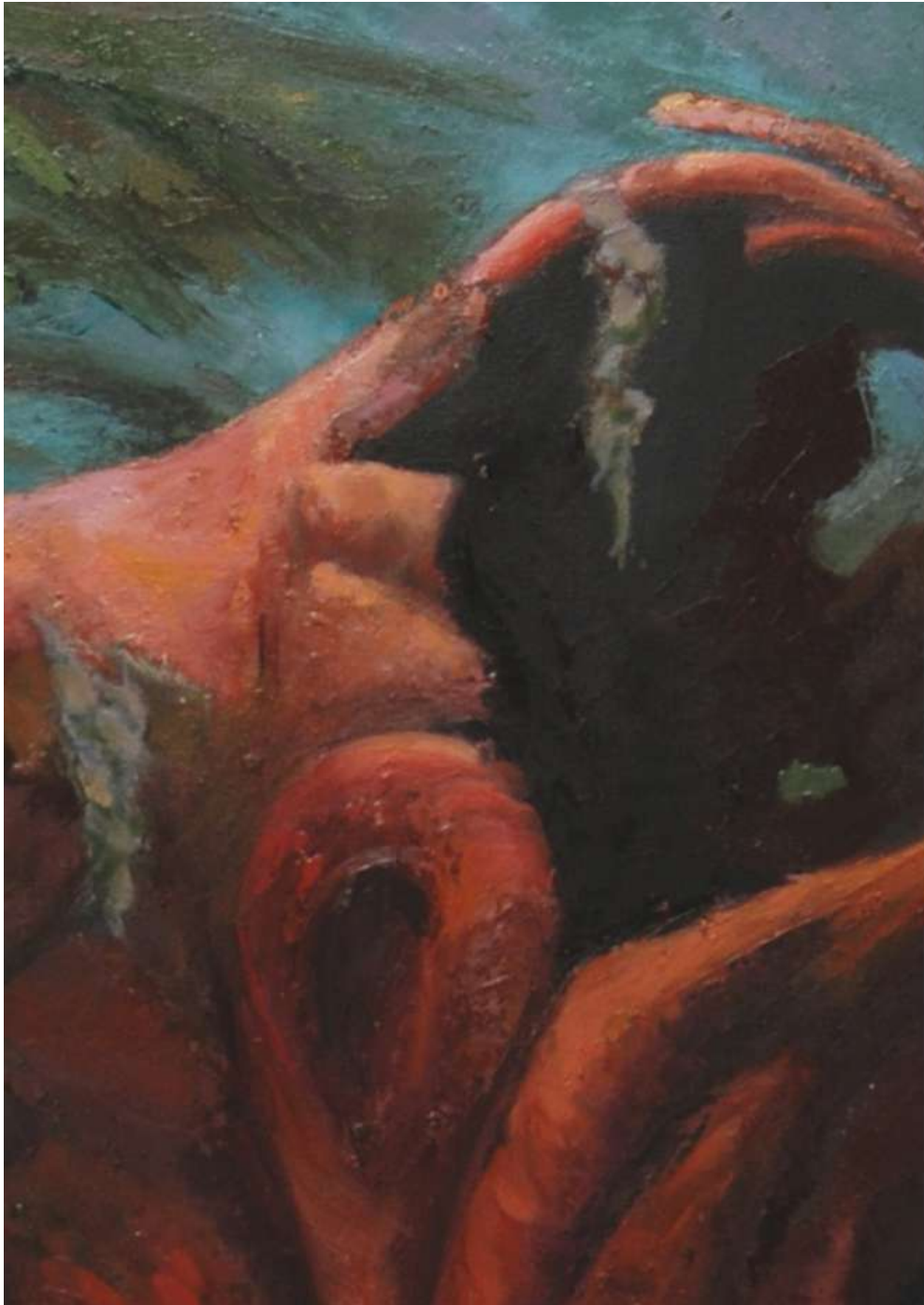


Figure 13. Kristina B. Hall, Detail of *Fold*, 2010

Once I determined that texture could be used as a complex means for expressing my ideas on the journey of human life, I began to look at color to further express content in my work. Since I was able to discern different types of energy from the surface of my

paint, such as tranquility and disruption, I decided that I needed to use color to further my concepts as well. What I discovered was that once I have general hues in mind for the portrayal of a mood, I have to get out of my comfort zone and into broader color usage. If I do not change my old habits and instead merely stay in my comfort zone, I will never progress. I must mix colors and use colors in ways that are different from what is normally expected, instead I want to manipulate the color to create an emotional field. In my head, I was saying blue sky, but in painting, that could mean green, red, yellow, or purple. When staying too close to what I already know, I see my paintings looking lifeless, compared to the paintings that I take chances on. The yellow portion of the limb on the left side of *Fold* (Figure 6) logically does not make sense, but as an intuitive mark, it works, by creating an unexpected element within the piece. The unexpected marks that come about from allowing the mind to be cleared and to paint from a more intuitive mindset create visual interest. These marks are not of our natural world; instead they convey the moods. These moods can be used to aid in defining a concept, or in just letting go and painting. When undesired changes in this process are created, I am forced to think of new ways to solve problems that I am having in the painting, such as issues with vibrancy or temperature, edge, eye movement, and/or value.

The final painting created for *Change Does Not Wait* was *Steadfast*. In this painting, I have continued to utilize the formal elements of art. When I wanted to soften edges, I used the palette knife to mix transitional hues directly on the canvas, such as the violets on the far right of the image. I also used layers of color that are equal in brightness to achieve soft edges. In the upper portions of *Steadfast*, where the lightness of the sky is

relatively the same lightness as some of the tree limbs, the closer the limbs get in brightness to one another, the more they start to blend and recede into space.



Figure 14. Kristina B. Hall, *Steadfast*, 2011

Another way that I execute soft edges is by wiping marks off with a rag. This is called a reduction glaze: it adjusts an area by applying color and then removing it, leaving a transparency of paint. In *Steadfast*, I used this method in the bottom left of the painting in the water and sand dunes. I added the reduction glazes by adjusting the paint down in intensity. I increased the depth by muting the colors in certain areas of the landscape.

Steadfast was composed while thinking about strong individuals who persevere through difficult experiences. My portrayal of this “individual” is through the use of a huge Live Oak. By using both palette knives and brushes, I created a massive tree trunk that sits firmly in space. Jutting out from it are tree limbs that stab into the sky. The tree

is solid in stature, but its bark is rugged and coarse from the hardships it has endured through its life. The tree sits on the precipice of erosion, never knowing when its last day will come. There is a storm brewing on the horizon, and its blurred dull mass looms in the distance. Both the erosion and the storm bring new challenges for this tree to encounter, reminding me once more that change is constant.

With compositional, philosophical, and symbolic elements at play, I constructed *Change Does Not Wait* based on color, movement, natural elements, and human character. By researching color perception and applying it to the tree in the landscape, I created images that portray essential human characteristics. I explored different mediums to mix with my oil paints and developed ways to use my palette knife to layer paint on the canvas to variations in surface texture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

While on Ossabaw Island, I discovered grand trees into which I was able to read the human impression of struggle. The shape and movement of the trees on the island were the most compelling components of the landscape. The trees clearly reflect, in their body movements such as twisting and reaching for light from under a dense canopy. The experiences they have encountered are depicted through broken limbs and growth patterns that have occurred during their life. As I visually studied the trees on the island, I thought about how they perpetually interact with one another and the environment, just as we humans do. As Jean-Paul Sartre states, “As soon as I exist, I am thrown in the midst of existences different from me, for and against me.”¹⁴ Merging the changes in life, both in humans and trees, with the relationships found in color and mark-making, I began to explore and express my inner emotions that dealt with existence, change, and transformation.

The color theories of Joseph Albers and Johannes Itten investigate color relationships. They discovered that perceived color relies heavily on the interaction of the color with the colors that surround it. I am able to create changes in spatial depth by using the idea of color relationships in my work, making adjustments in hue, temperature, intensity, and value. Wassily Kandinsky spoke about the impact of color relationships on our psyche. He and Itten both realized that humans have direct emotional responses to color. As an artist, I use my intuitive color perceptions, in order to create desired moods in my work.

The artists who have influenced me the most during my process have been Bill Viola who creates video that touches on the emotional and spiritual aspects of being human, William Turner whose freedom of mark-making is dizzying, and Brian Ruttenberg who is dedicated to color interactions. These artists are all concerned with creating an emotional response in the viewer. I am inspired by the work of Viola because his work is based on what it is to be human, and is provocative and courageous. Turner and Rutenberg approach human emotion through color and mark. Their commitment to the use of formal elements in painting, such as composition and rhythm, remind me that although my inner voice can direct me in painting, I am able to strengthen my concept through the application of formal strategies in my paintings.

My work in color has developed greatly over the course of my MFA candidacy. As I move forward from here, I will continue to pursue greater levels of understanding color relationships and how I can apply the knowledge to my images. I feel as though I have only scratched the surface of color theory, so I will continue to study how to create color interactions that will enrich my work. Research during my candidacy has led me to come to know artists, color theories, and surface techniques that strengthen the visual experience with a charge of emotional atmosphere. This knowledge will allow me to embark on new adventures in painting where I hope to continue interpreting emotional experience through the landscape in my imagery.

ENDNOTES

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- ² "Tate Channel: Bill Viola: Ocean without a Shore." *Tate Channel: Channel*. Web. 14 Apr. 2011.<<http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/26708479001>>.
- ³ "Winston Churchill." BrainyQuote.com. Xplore Inc, 2011. 15 April. 2011.
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- ⁴ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 1956. Pg.480
- ⁵ Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. London: Tate Publishing, 2001.
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- ⁶ Watkins, Nicholas. *Interpreting Bonnard*. England: Tate Publishing, 1997. Pg.53
- ⁷ Albers, Joseph. *Interaction of Color, Revised and expanded edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963, pg.12
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- ⁹ Itten, Johannes. *The Elements of Color*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1961.
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- ¹⁰ Watkins, Nicholas. *Interpreting Bonnard*. London: Tate Publishing, 1997. Pg.53
- ¹¹ Vaughan, William. *German Romantic Painters*. London: University Press, 1980.
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- ¹² Watkins, Nicholas. *Interpreting Bonnard*. Tate Publishing, England: 1997. Pg. 9

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¹⁴ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 1956. Pg.480

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