Spring 2018

Considering Perspectives

Cynthia Epps

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CONSIDERING PERSPECTIVES

by

CYNTHIA EPPS

(Under the Direction of Jason Hoelscher)

ABSTRACT

This body of work, Considering Perspectives, explores the ideas of perspective, not only in terms of spatial perspective in art, but also regarding how our vantage point and presumptions affect how we feel about certain subjects. The subjects of my work are spaces or objects often overlooked or considered mundane. When we approach a work of art, we typically do so with a multitude of presuppositions that influence our response. Often, we are not even aware of this. By splicing together multiple perspectives I use my work to create awareness that there may be more than one way not only to view, but to feel about the subject.

INDEX WORDS: Perspective, Paintings of the mundane, Painting the overlooked, Multi-panel paintings, Grid paintings, Spliced images, Multiple perspective paintings
CONSIDERING PERSPECTIVES

by

CYNTHIA EPPS


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CONSIDERING PERSPECTIVES

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

My work explores ideas of perspective, of the ways our vantage point changes how we feel about certain spaces or subjects. We can all look at the same image, but feel something completely different based on the range of experiences we bring with us. The subjects of my work are spaces or objects that are often considered mundane. My goal is to encourage the viewer to slow down long enough to examine subjects they typically overlook, and thus to consider that there may be more than one way to view things. Sometimes my paintings even conjure an emotional response to something the viewer has never previously viewed as relevant. Why is one moved by an empty room, or an old staircase? How does one feel about a rumpled bed? What influences those feelings? Is it the angles shown? The colors used? What about your own emotional baggage?

Although my paintings contain details, sometimes even minute details, I try to leave enough ambiguity in my subjects that the viewer has room to bring their own feelings to their experience of the work. I may suggest a mood or feeling through the colors I use, but this is typically done to bring awareness to the fact that there are many ways to look at things from a physical perspective, and also many ways to respond to things emotionally.

**Perspective:**

1. the art of drawing solid objects on a two-dimensional surface so as to give the right impression of their height, width, depth, and position in relation to each other when viewed from a particular point. a “perspective drawing”

2. a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view.
I include both definitions of perspective because I feel my work encompasses both. Often when we hear the term perspective, as artists we think of linear perspective. While I enjoy using linear perspective in my work, especially when creating trompe l’oeil techniques in murals, part of the goal of my work is to remember that we all see things differently, from our own subjective perspective. By this I mean that we may all physically view things from different angles, and visually interpret them differently, but also that we all carry our own history and emotional baggage with us, which influence our attitude and emotional response toward a subject.

By splicing multiple images together, I combine different perspectives or views of the subject to create an entirely new composition. Because my subjects are mundane, one is led to consider what they have previously overlooked, and contemplate their own feelings about it. As the viewer approaches the work they see something that seems familiar, but upon closer inspection they find that it is actually multiple images that do not quite fit together the way they originally thought. Thus, I am taking something expected and familiar and making it unexpected to invite the viewer to examine it more closely. By presenting the viewer with multiple perspectives, I hope to also persuade them to reconsider their point of view and their feelings about the subject.

Sometimes I leave spaces or empty splices between the images to make the viewer notice that they are looking at different images, while other times the images are contiguous, creating an unrealistic perspective that throws the viewer off-kilter. I will talk more about these approaches later when I discuss my process.

I also like to incorporate multiple panels to encourage the viewer to further consider the spaces that may or may not appear between the canvases in relation to the spaces between the images. When painting on multiple canvases I am further directing the viewer to notice the
mundane, as the wall that the work is hung on suddenly becomes relevant to the work, often by becoming a sort of window pane. The flat color of the wall interacts with the painting to create a kind of push and pull, giving a new identity to these typically overlooked spaces.

I hope to lead the viewer to reconsider assumptions they have about the world around them, its history and relevance, and consider the possibility of alternative points of view. Perhaps if we can consider that ours is not the only perspective, we can begin to accept and value the world around us a little more.
CHAPTER 2
CONCEPTS/INSPIRATIONS

Ideas for my work come from all around; sometimes in nature, but often in the things we pass by every day without much thought. Inspiration may come from a walk downtown, or past an old building, sometimes from frustrations like living part of the week in one city, and the rest of the week in another, as I have done while making my way through graduate school. The things I encounter again and again as a result of my current situation sometimes make me consider the myriad feelings I experience when looking at common things like a bed or a suitcase, and wonder what feelings they might evoke in a viewer.

In today’s world, we are bombarded with images, sometimes extraordinary images. So much so that we often do not even notice much about the environment around us. Much of the time we spend so preoccupied with our phones that we do not see the beauty in the things or places we encounter every day - the mundane. Our tendency is to see things from one point of view (ours), and not consider the extraordinary beauty that could be found in something that we dismiss as unimportant on a regular basis. What if we were to examine them more closely, or at all for that matter? What if we were to consider the parts that make up the whole, or consider it from different angles? Could the things we dismiss take on a new identity? Could they somehow even be seen as interesting? Relevant? What if we were to see these mundane things or places from more than one angle at a time? Could we reconsider the idea that there is only one way to view the world around us? I like to think that beauty can be found just about anywhere, including the mundane, and even the decrepit. If we can slow down long enough to notice things, and
examine them, to consider them from different view-points, maybe we can see that there is more
to the world around us after all.

We have all heard the phrases, “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure.” And,
“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” I have always found these adages to be true. Value, and
beauty are subjective. The concept of finding beauty in the mundane is not new by any stretch of
the imagination. Rhopography, as defined by the American Heritage dictionary, is the depiction
of trivial, everyday things. My kids laugh at me when I walk down the street and point out the
beautiful shadows cast on an old dumpster, or the colors of the fruit in the grocery store. I used to
take my drawing students to a favorite spot near the Augusta canal to draw. Most of them would
start out overwhelmed by the beautiful vista and not really know where to begin drawing. I
would encourage them to enjoy the scenery, but to find something interesting to home in on.
Often an old fence, or a drain pipe made a more interesting drawing than the river scene. We
used a kind of visual scavenging to find the treasure. Many of my students would thank me at the
end of the class not only for teaching them drawing skills, but also for teaching them to see the
beauty that is all around them and to notice the details they had never noticed before.

For a long time, I painted the things that were commonly considered beautiful,
landscapes, flowers, etc. because that is what I thought people would want to see. In graduate
school, I started experimenting with the juxtaposition of images that were “beautiful” paired with
images that would be considered “ugly.” The subjects for these paintings were images that were
physically close in proximity, but aesthetically very different. *Inside/Outside the Garden
Window* (Figure 1) is a good example of this. Setting up two sets of panels that depict the views
inside and outside of the same window or door, one is reminded that what seems idyllically
beautiful on the outside may in fact be dark and gloomy on the inside – just on the other side of
the glass. I found that people often react as much or more when I paint things that are not typically considered beautiful, depicting them in a beautiful way. Often there is more of an emotional response to things that are not so idyllic. By taking something that most people consider irrelevant, and painting it in a way that makes the viewer want to slow down and take notice, I hope to help them reconsider what is relevant and to take closer notice of the world around them. I tend to be the kind of person that is always looking for the good in circumstances and people, and I try to do the same with my artwork. Along that vein, I find things, or places that most would just hurry past without giving them much consideration as interesting subjects. I guess in my own way I am still trying to see something positive in something many would not even consider.

Figure 1. Cyndy Epps, *Inside/Outside the Garden Window*, acrylic on thirty-six canvases, 2016
Many of my subjects can be felt from different perspectives as well. Let me unpack that a little. When we look at something, anything, we do not just see it. We see it through the lens of our personal experiences. What do you feel when you see an unmade bed? Passion? Loneliness? Frustration because of insomnia? Anticipation because you are exhausted? The same subject can emote a plethora of feelings depending on the mood and experiences of the viewer. Perhaps you just get up each morning and do not give your empty bed a second thought. My goal is to make you stop and consider it. To consider why it is relevant to me, the artist, and to you the viewer. Is it the same feeling? *The Bed*, which I will talk about in greater detail later, was inspired by my frustrations of living in two homes while in graduate school, all while traveling for conferences, funerals, family events etc. The images are actual images of my two beds spliced together. The pillows and blankets come together and take on the impression of a landscape that moves the viewer across the canvases. Between the splices of the images are empty splices that emphasize the breaks in the images and create an unsettled feeling and emphasizing the fact that there is more than one image, and more than one way to feel about the subject. The same happens with an empty room, or a half-full/half-empty suitcase.

We all bring our own context to an experience and this affects our response to the subject, and therefore the painting. The result is that we may have similar emotional responses, or very different ones depending on our contextual overview.

Instead of just looking at the subject from a single angle I try to consider multiple points of view so I can then help the viewer to do the same. Honestly, I will usually take the parts that I find most interesting and splice them together to create a new version of the subject that is composed of several abstractions. Since we typically only consider the obvious, I enjoy making sure the viewer sees the parts that I find interesting. I compose them in a way that sums up the
subject, but that also leaves a lot of the details out so the viewer needs to reconfigure the pieces mentally in order to understand what is going on. They may think at first glance that they know what it is, but then, as they work through the details, they find that it does not completely come together the way they originally thought. *The Spiral Staircase* is a good example of this that I will discuss in greater depth later in this paper. This painting combines a number of different angles of a rusty old staircase that most people just walk right past. At first glance, you can tell it is a staircase, and you think you understand the perspective – actually your mind convinces you that you know exactly is happening. Upon closer inspection, you notice that the stairs are not all seen from the same perspective. In fact, they are spliced together on different canvases that are not even on the same plane, thus adding to the confusion.
CHAPTER 3

PROCESS

When I find a subject that compels me, I take photographs of it from a variety of angles. While I include what is the typical eye level perspective of someone walking by, I also like to include closely cropped images, and some from above and below typical eye level. This provides me with a lot of options to piece together a final composition. I will then create a sort of collage of images on my computer. The nice thing with doing this on the computer is that I can just pile up a bunch of pictures and see what interesting interactions start to take place. Often the images I initially thought I would use do not even come into play. I then select a few images and experiment with copying and cropping them. Often the best composition results from breaking down only two or three images and alternating the pieces. By doing this I enable the viewer to reconfigure the images mentally. I create a solvable puzzle, one that makes the composition more interesting than a single image, but not quite as confusing as the complex images constructed by the cubists, a connection I will describe in more detail shortly.

In some paintings, my goal is to surprise viewer when they realize that they are looking at multiple similar images as opposed to just one. I like the idea of slowing them down enough so they notice the inconsistencies between the images. The differences may be perspectives, or color schemes. In this case I will use blank splices between the images to slow down the viewing process. The blank splices vary in size and interval, and are typically not quite straight lines, but they represent the spaces you would see between images if they were represented separately and on different canvases. I use them to create a sort of rhythm by varying the sizes of both the images and the splices. The empty splices are not painted since they do not represent an actual
object – just the spaces between them. In some paintings, the blank splices are visually extended by the addition of spaces between the canvases. This leads the viewer from one surface to another and back, while experiencing the image in its entirety. In some works, the spaces between the panels are closed, and the splices between the images occur only on the canvas. This serves to create a push and pull for the viewer. Moving them in and out of the images, sometimes literally from one physical plane to another and back.

As mentioned earlier, my use of multiple canvases stemmed from an idea to create the illusion of a window or door. This led to a number of theoretical quandaries regarding the impact of multiple panels on how the viewer interprets the work. Does the viewer notice them? Or just visually pull the image together? What if there are no spaces between them? What then happens when there are spaces between images, but not canvases? When I use the blank splices, or leave sections of the wall in between splices, I feel it slows the viewer down. Other times my goal is to make the viewer go quickly through the images, make them realize that something is not quite right, so they have to look at it again, taking time to discover the inconsistencies that have set them off balance. When I splice together multiple images with varying perspectives but do not leave any empty spaces, the viewer automatically picks out recognizable image and assumes that they know what is going on, but it isn’t quite what they thought. By combining multiple views from different angles, I cause the viewer to stop and reconsider the subject and the perspective as they begin to notice the anomalies.

Using multiple panels or canvases creates a further inconsistency that should be considered, while also enabling me to work on a larger scale in a practical way. In the past, I painted a lot of murals and enjoyed blurring the lines between what was real, and what was painted. Working on multiple canvases and breaking them down into sections that are not
consistent with the parameter of the actual canvases allows me to do this as well. This goes a step further when painting on multiple planes, especially since the images do not align with the edges of the surfaces. The images shift from one into the next, moving the viewer’s gaze as they examine painting. In addition to changing viewpoints, the surface depth of the substrate also varies throwing things even further off kilter.

The colors I use often appear dull and muted, but as you approach the painting you notice hints of much brighter colors that have been combined to create the more muted tones. This harkens back to the overreaching idea that things are not always what they first appear to be. When emphasizing different images, I also use color to create different moods for each of the images represented. This emphasizes the fact that you are looking at multiple images, and at the same time forces you to think about the atmosphere represented by the palette, and the emotional response that accompanies it.
CHAPTER 4
ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

As someone who finds beauty in the world around me, I find inspirations from a variety of artists who do the same. When considering artistic inspirations, I find myself drawn to a scope of artists that range from Josephine Halvorson, Rackstraw Downes, Amer Kobeslija to Jennifer Trouton and Jennifer Bartlett and even early analytical cubist work.

Although our practices are quite different, Josephine Halvorson is one the artists I truly relate to. Like Halvorson, I find myself drawn to the odd details of our daily life that seem insignificant, but stir feelings in the viewer. Halvorson says, “I want to paint that which is perceptible but not necessarily visible, such as history, time, emotion, memory.” (Samet)

Halvorson’s work often includes old signs or parts of run-down buildings. She will often home in on one specific part of an object or space that she finds interesting. I often find myself intrigued by the same kind of subjects. While Halvorson will select a subject and go out to paint it from life, I will take multiple pictures to provide information for my paintings. Halvorson creates a
tension between realistic and impressionistic that I tend toward as well. I would not consider either of us photo-realists, but we do love to capture specific details to better inform the viewer in some areas, and leave looser brushstrokes in other areas. We both seem to be drawn to the odd details of our surroundings and how they can provoke an emotional response.

Similarly, Jennifer Trouton focuses on aspects of the mundane. While much of her work includes still life subjects of simple everyday objects, she also explores the textures and patterns of fabrics and run-down spaces, many of the same things that inspire me. She composes work in a way that attempts to make the viewer consider the history behind the object, whether a run-down building, or an old china bowl. Trouton’s juxtaposition of textures in Tomb (Figure 4) makes one contemplate many of the same considerations that I explore in Looking Back, Seeing Ahead (Figure 5). Both images can be viewed with either hope or despair, depending on the perspective of the viewer.
Trouton’s use of multiple images of the mundane, to communicate a sense of history and nostalgia, such as *Looking at the Overlooked* (Figure 6), is a concept I apply in *Home* (Figure 23). Both works combine images of still life settings, and spaces in order to create a push and pull that makes the viewer feel like they are experiencing snapshots of a home at the same time. By creating a large installation composed of many small still life paintings, Trouton manages to raise the idea of still life painting from one that is often looked down upon to a contemporary concept that combines many mundane subjects to collaboratively speak of one larger subject. This is what I hope to accomplish with *Home*. Instead of focusing on one image to stir a feeling in the viewer, I combine images of a weathered house, a rumpled bed, a grandmother’s clock, ambiguous photos on a shelf, and an old book on a dresser to conjure memories. By using muted colors, and obscuring some of the details in the images, I try to leave room for the viewer to make their own connections. These may include memory, time, aging, weariness, or a myriad of other ideas depending on the history and contextualization of the viewer. I will talk about this more later in this paper.

Figure 6. Jennifer Trouton, *Looking at the Overlooked*, oil on board
Although Rackstraw Downes’ work is more on the photo-realist side, I find his subjects intriguing. He can capture a city-scape from the view under a highway, deliberately making the viewer see the uglier side of his scenes as opposed to the idealistic. According to his interview with Art21, Downes “does not think of himself as a landscape painter, but as a painter of his surroundings—his environment.” I like that description because it provides more latitude. Our environment includes everything around us, whether inside or out.

Downes does not focus on the typical point of view, in which the artist works so hard to omit anything unpleasant or ugly. He includes it all, managing to represent the mundane in a way that makes it into a beautiful scene that rivals those of the most talented landscape artists. I have been told that even my work that does not include anything representing nature, it takes on the feel of a landscape. The way I compose my paintings leads the viewer on a journey through the work in much the same way a landscape does, bringing you forward and sending you back as you wander through the image. I have been told that many of my paintings that are clearly not of a natural landscape actually create an artificial landscape simply through their composition.

Though this is a subconscious act on my part, I realize now that not only do I have a tendency to do this, but also that it is reminiscent of other artists, including Rackstraw Downes. Downes’ work depicting air duct work of the Music Hall at Snug Harbor, New York (Figure 7) is a perfect example of this. The simple ductwork and the space it occupies become an unnatural landscape where the ductwork leads the viewer through the space.
While Downes focuses on making the places that we walk past regularly take on a new meaning, Amer Kobaslija does something very similar with interiors. Kobaslija finds inspiration in messy or dirty spaces – some of the most interesting spaces. Not everyone can appreciate the beauty of a dirty sink or bathroom, but, when I am not having to actually use it, I find a rusty sink or peeling paint absolutely beautiful. Kobaslija’s work showed me that not only am I not the only one who appreciates these things, but that viewers are also interested in these dirty spaces. He helped me understand that people do appreciate ugly things when they are painted in a way that is interesting. The Bathroom (Figure 9) was a real eye opener for me. I was attempting to create juxtaposing images of the inside and outside of a window with the interior being a dirty run-down bathroom. Ironically, no one cared about the “pretty” image. Everyone found the “ugly” bathroom far more interesting, especially because of the way it had been painted. This was a bit of a breakthrough for me.
The work of Jennifer Bartlett has influenced me in several different ways. The most obvious way is her use of multiple panels in her work. This bothers some, but I continue to be drawn to it. When I first started using multiple panels it was mostly to give the feel that the viewer was looking through a window or door. The spaces between the panels became the framework that you were looking through.
In examining Bartlett’s work though, I found that some of her newer works combine different views of the same space constructed in a way that sets the viewer off kilter. I have since adapted a similar approach. While my techniques do not replicate those of Bartlett, you can definitely see her influence in my work. I feel I have taken her idea of combining multiple perspectives a step further by interweaving splices of the images with each other as opposed to just putting them beside each other. In addition, I often include empty splices on the canvases, between the images to mimic the blank wall between the panels. Sometimes there are true spaces, sometimes there are just empty splices, sometimes I adjoin multiple canvases, removing the actual wall spaces and leaving only the blank splices to act as the spaces between the images. While Bartlett is best known for her multi-panel works, her current work is often created on two or more canvases that are shown right beside each other creating the illusion that they are one image. Again, I have taken this a step farther by using blank splices in some of my paintings that create the illusion of spaces, and further closing the gap where actual spaces exist.

Figure 12. Todd Hido, #1927, photograph, 2014
Figure 13. Todd Hido, #1447, photograph, 2014
In addition to painters, there are a number of photographers who have influenced my work. Uta Barth and Todd Hido are two such photographers. Both of these artists focus on space and light. While Hido shares my passion for dark empty rooms and spaces, his work carries emotion with it that can bring his viewers either hope or despair, depending on what presuppositions they approach his images with. This is one of the emotional responses I hope to bring with my work. The idea that the subject is obvious, but how you are supposed to feel about the work is ambiguous intrigues me. His work really started to make me consider the impact of the context in which a viewer approaches a work of art. When looking at his photographs one can get a feeling of despair for the isolation and neglect shown his work. At the same time, in the wake of the myriad home improvement shows one can find on TV at any given time, one could look at the very same image of a vacant, dirty room with feelings of hope for what can become of that very space. This irony is one of the reasons I often enjoy sitting back and listening to the responses of viewers when looking at artwork, whether it is my own work, or that of other artists. It is fascinating to hear the interpretations of someone who has no insight into the artist’s intention.

Uta Barth is another photographer that inspires me. Though her work is very different from that of Hido, in some ways it is very similar. Much of Barth’s work focuses on the interplay of light and shadow and the effects and moods it can create. Working predominantly from home, Barth often includes windows, and the shadows cast from them as lighting and framing devices in her work. In an article for artsy.net, Barth says of her work:

I start most discussions about my work by saying that I am interested in perception; in vision itself, and in how we see, more than in what we see. I want to foreground the perceptual experience over anything we may think about whatever we may be looking at.
The window is a wonderful vehicle for referring to the act of looking. I always remember an image I first saw in undergraduate school by Robert Frank. It is from “The Americans”, a view from a hotel window onto a nondescript town. The photograph has a wonderful twist. By stepping back slightly and including the window’s ledge and both curtains, one thinks of the person standing at this window, looking out onto the scene. It becomes an image about the act looking. Without these simple inclusions, we would only have an elevated view of an ordinary town.

Figure 14. Uta Barth, *Untitled (...and of time #4)*, chromogenic print, 2000
Figure 15. Uta Barth, *Sundial (07.9)*, chromogenic prints, 2007

Where Hido is much darker and emotional in his use of vacant spaces, Barth’s work uses the ambiguity of images created by the lights and shadows to conjure deeper to consideration of the context of her work. Barth’s subjects are often not subjects at all, but the shadows cast by the mundane. By focusing on a reflection or shadow of a still life, instead of the objects themselves Barth brings a fresh twist to the idea of looking at the overlooked.

Since I have begun combining multiple perspectives of an image to create my work, it made sense for me to research the beginnings of analytical cubism. While the cubists were attempting to consider a wide range of points of view of their subject, I am combining only a few, but still trying to accomplish the task of representing the subject from several points simultaneously. This approach creates a kind of visual push and pull that moves the viewer
through the painting in a way that can feel off-kilter. This is especially true in my paintings that do not include empty splices. Without the splices to pace the viewer, making them to notice the separation of the images, the planes of the images seem to fuse with one another creating one image depicting impossible space. I must admit that I was always more of a fan of traditional rendering of space as opposed to that of cubist artists. However, the more I have explored the idea of representing multiple perspectives of the same subjects, I have reached similar conclusions, including the relevance of adjusting my palette. As with many analytical cubists, I have found that when I splice multiple images together the completed image is more successful when the colors are somewhat muted. Although I do not shy away from color, I use mixtures of many colors to create combinations of neutrals that either blend one into another, or, if trying to push the cinematic value of the colors to illustrate multiple moods, I will create two or more separate palettes to move the viewer through the painting. By alternating palettes, the viewer is forced to consider the potential that this is not only a subject that can be viewed differently, but also one that may emote different feelings. While analytical cubists emphasized the multiplicity of different ways to see a subject, when varying the palette within the same painting, I am placing more emphasis on the viewer’s feeling about the subject, or a particular perspective of a subject.
Figure 16. Pablo Picasso, *The Sacre Coeur*, oil on canvas, 1910
Figure 17. Pablo Picasso, *Carafe, Jug and Fruit Bowl*, oil on canvas, 1909
CHAPTER 5

THESIS EXHIBITION

The first painting in this collection, *The Bed* (Figure 18), was inspired by the fractured lifestyle that has been graduate school for me. I have spent the past two and a half years living part time in Statesboro, Georgia and part-time in Augusta, Georgia. In addition, I have traveled for conferences, family events, funerals, art exhibitions, etc. which eventually landed me in the position where I had to examine my surroundings when I woke up to assess where I was. My bed came to represent many things, depending on the given day, or time of day, or even just my state of mind. Living away from my husband for much of the time meant that depending on where I was, it could be viewed with loneliness, or passion. Given the stress of graduate school that often results in exhaustion, paired with frequent bouts of insomnia, it could be viewed with relief or dread. As I started to reflect on my feelings toward my bed I became inspired to create a painting that depicted its duality. I took a series of photographs of both my bed at my apartment, and the
bed at my home. As it turned out, the lighting in each was very different, creating contrasting color schemes even though the bedding was white in both beds. This prompted a more decisive consideration of the color schemes used in the dual images that I deconstructed, then reconstructed to create my composition. The splices of one image are painted in, warmer, neutral tones, while the other image is represented in bluer, cooler colors. Thus, expressing my feelings about my bed—sometimes warm and inviting, but other times with sadness and even loneliness—thus emphasizes the fact that there is more than one way to not only see, but to feel about a subject as well.

I decided to experiment with leaving empty white splices between the images to emphasize the fact that they were in fact two alternating images. In order to create a feeling of discord I decided to make the empty splices a little off kilter—not quite straight. I found that when I push the alternating color schemes, and include the empty splices, it creates a cinematic flux that helps emphasize the emotional shifts between the images that I am trying to communicate.

This painting was created as an emotional response to something very mundane. Many say that a bed is a very charged subject, and I can understand that. As I stated earlier, we all respond to it in very different ways depending on how we feel at a given time. At the same time, though, it is something that we walk right past and ignore most of the day. Many people do not even take the time to make their bed when they get up in the morning. We lie there at night, get up, and leave it the way it is until we are ready to go back to sleep. To me, this puts it back in the category of rhopography, the overlooked. By painting The Bed in a way that took something mundane and brought it to a place a prominence and importance, my hope was to make others stop and consider how they feel about their own bed. I hope they will consider for a moment the
myriad feelings they may experience at a given time, or how the given time affects how they feel about the bed itself.

When splicing together the images to create the final composition I focused on allowing the lines to flow from one image to the next, and back again. *The Bed* is composed of only two images, of two different beds, that are broken down and can be visually re-composed, but the lines of the bedding often connect and flow, creating the appearance of a landscape within the overall composition. This landscape effect leads the viewer through the painting even though the images are broken up, thus creating a soothing continuity to the work. The viewer makes connections between the images that belong together, but they can also make partial connections between the different images, so it becomes like a puzzle.

![Image of Cyndy Epps, *Dirty Little Corners*, acrylic on canvas, 2017](image)

Figure 19. Cyndy Epps, *Dirty Little Corners*, acrylic on canvas, 2017
While, *The Bed* uses the organic flow of bedding to move the viewer through a domestic interior scene, *Dirty Little Corners* (Figure 19) creates a similar effect using geometric shapes to push and pull the viewer through an overlooked exterior scene.

For this work, I combined several different views of the same corner of an old building, showing the peeling paint, a traffic cone, a metal ring, and the dirt and debris from multiple angles at the same time. The spliced images include harsh geometric shapes and angles that seem to make sense at first glance, leading the viewer through the image like a landscape. But the perspectives do not quite match, and the cone is repeated from various angles creating a sense of confusion.

Where the empty splices in *The Bed* helped slow down the viewing process to place emphasis on the conflicting images, the lack of empty splices in *Dirty Little Corners* speeds the process up, contributing to the viewer’s feeling of disorientation while observing a subject that one could easily walk past on the street. Typically, when we view a painting, especially one that, at first glance reads as a landscape, we expect to be absorbed into the scene. We assume the canvas will act like a window into a space, but the combination of the splices disrupts this experience, making the viewer more keenly aware of the space that is depicted due to its unpredictability.

The colors in this painting also demand attention. When taking the source photos for this painting I was intrigued by the disparity of the orange traffic cone against the build-up of dirt and debris in this corner on the city street. My depiction emphasizes this contrast by using shades of gray for most of the painting in juxtaposition to the bright orange of the cone that appears at least in part, in several of the splices from various perspectives.
Figure 20. Cyndy Epps, *Of Brick and Wood*, acrylic on canvas, 2017

*Of Brick and Wood* (Figure 20) scales way back both in size and content. Homing in on tightly cropped images of a rotten wooden door and uneven bricks, it takes things that were once a beautiful part of a historic property, and focuses on the result of neglect and time. By cropping in closely on the images and splicing portions of each together, I use them to once again create something that is beautiful. The angles of the spaces between the bricks, and under the wooden door move the viewer through the painting much the same as the geometric lines in *Dirty Little Corners*. Meanwhile, the empty splices, and the space between canvases slow down the viewing process. Instead of being absorbed into one image, the eye moves between two, and also from one abstraction to the next, bouncing from the tight abstraction to the wider view and back again. The blank splices and the physical space between the first two canvases emphasizes the cracks between the bricks and under the wooden door. This is reiterated through the imperfections in the bricks, and the skewed lines between the images.

The smaller canvas size used for *Of Brick and Wood* creates a more intimate experience with the images. Rather than standing back and viewing the work from across the room, the viewer is inclined to step forward and explore the details more closely, thus experiencing the image by themselves and in closer proximity to the work itself.
Spiral Staircase (Figure 21) probably harkens back to the ideas of analytical cubism more than the rest of this body of work because it is an attempt to not only encourage the viewer to see something as mundane as a staircase on the side of an old building, but to make them feel the experience of it as well, the somewhat vertiginous experience of shifting space. This work experiments with the impact of planes in a number of different ways, including visual, and physical spaces that are not what the viewer would expect.
When composing this painting I felt it was important to emphasize the verticality of the subject so I decided to make it a vertical triptych. I feel that the shape and size of the panels, as well as the composition of the painting, help communicate the cramped feeling one has when climbing such a staircase. Each section bleeds off the edges and fails to provide the security of the railing. The splices are taken from angles that you might experience all at once, but at different times. When you begin to climb a spiral staircase, you would be at the base, and most likely look down at the bottom step. You would probably then begin to look up, experiencing some steps at eye-level, and others from beneath. In other words, you would not experience all of these things at the same time, but would have to view each angle in a different instant. *Spiral Staircase* combines these views into one image so you actually experience all of these views simultaneously. At first glance the image makes sense, but upon closer inspection the viewer realizes that although there are connections, the images are in fact spliced together to create the whole.

When splicing the images together on multiple canvases I like to blur the lines, figuratively, not literally. Though the edges between the images remain crisp, they are not always evident at first glance, and they are not necessarily where you would expect them to be. While in some of my paintings I will allow breaks in the images to appear at the edge of a canvas, often I will construct or crop the image to overlap the perimeter of the painting surface. This is the case with *Spiral Staircase*. In this painting, however, I have taken this a step further by using different levels for the surfaces. The middle canvas is actually an inch deeper than the top and bottom surface. This complicates the painting in multiple ways. With both the images at the top and bottom of the middle panel continuing onto the adjacent panel, the viewer is typically surprised at the disparity of not only the images continuing on another panel, but onto a different
level as well. While there are no empty splices, the protrusion of the middle panel creates a similar conundrum regarding the relevance of the surface they are looking at and its relationship to the space around it. The variation of the surface depth also serves to further provoke the feeling of the space and depth of the staircase itself. Much as the staircase depicted would move in and out in the space it occupies, so too does the painting itself.

![The Suitcase](image)

Figure 22. Cyndy Epps, *The Suitcase*, acrylic on canvas, 2017

*The Suitcase* (Figure 22) depicts the love/hate relationship I have developed with my suitcase. While it is based on my personal feelings, I was determined not to make the painting personal. The clothes are generic, the suitcase is simple, even the bed they lie on is nondescript. It could basically be anyone’s suitcase, which means that the viewer determines the meaning based on their own interpretation of circumstances. The suitcase is on a bed, half full/half empty, being either packed or unpacked. The subject is the same in both images, but taken from
different angles, and painted in alternating warm and cool colors to make the viewer realize the possibility of different circumstances, and of different perspectives of the same subject.

I have included the empty splices to create a cinematic flux that emphasizes the mood swings between the images. The empty splices are irregular spaces, placed almost rhythmically, so they do not coincide with the edges of the canvases, thus creating discord. Additionally, the lines of the suitcase and the linens sometimes meet, and other times do not quite align. This again mimics the lines of a landscape, leading the viewer in and out of the image, while at the same time disrupting that very balance it creates. This feeling is further emphasized by the juxtaposition of the horizontal white lines on the suitcase to the empty white vertical splices that separate the splices themselves.

While I continue to depict the mundane, with this painting I was also exploring the use of scale in my work, using three larger canvases to create a stronger visual impact. While the subject in this work has been kept relatively simple, the large scale of the painting makes a visual impact that provokes the viewer to stop and consider the subject further.
Home (Figure 23) combines many of the same ideas that I have explored through this body of work, but it also pushes many of these ideas further yet in some directions. The idea of scale actually goes both ways in this work: It combines numerous smaller canvases to compose a large work that is fluid and can be re-composed in multiple configurations depending on the viewing space. I feel the smaller, more intimate sections are appropriate in this particular work primarily because they draw the viewer in a little closer so they experience them in a more personal way. While one can stand back and take in the overall work, the viewer must approach the work in order to experience the details. The experience is similar to conjuring a memory of home. Sometimes one thinks of specific things, but these specifics come together to create an overall feeling or memory.

Home is also composed of a greater number of images spliced together to conjure feelings of home and sentimentality. Although we all have different experiences and interpretations of “home,” there are things that we can all relate to that can point the viewer to
understanding the subject. I include a combination of basic interior and exterior images that are tightly cropped to help conjure these feelings. Integrating both geometric and organic shapes I try to move the viewer’s eye around the composition.

The empty splices between the image splices in *Home* are often exaggerated and combined with the space between the canvases in an attempt to slow the viewing process way down. Since the empty splices help create the rhythm with which the viewer takes in the painting, by letting the splices run off the side of the canvas, and leaving areas of blank wall between them, it creates large pauses between the images. While the height of the canvases is consistent, the length and depth both vary in order to further emphasize the interaction between the splices, the empty splices, and the wall itself, pushing the viewer in and out as they explore each image. While the images often contain a high degree of detail, the colors are muted to make them seem more like a memory than an experience. This use of color also helps join a large number of images into a cohesive work.

The images in *Home* range from the peeling exterior of a family farmhouse to glimpses of an heirloom clock, the suggestion of items on a bedroom dresser to the bed itself. While the choice of images originated with the idea of nostalgia, as I was painting it I realized that this combination can also suggest the ideas of time, aging, change, and memory. I like leaving the door open for the viewer’s interpretation. The peeling paint on the exterior can just be an old family home, but it can also represent neglect, aging, and any number of other ideas. By itself it would have a singular meaning, but combined with the other images I feel it opens the door for other perceptions, and for the viewer’s interpretation.
Figure 24. Cyndy Epps, *Coming and Going*, acrylic on canvas, 2018

*Coming and Going* (Figure 24) is a large-scale painting that incorporates multiple images of a staircase near my studio. The images are not immediately recognizable since they are, for the most part very abstracted. This image also combines different views of the stairway in each splice, instead of alternating parts of the same images. I feel this lends a sense of ambiguity and unease to the painting. By using this approach, I am almost just giving the viewer hints about the actual subject, the letting them piece together the clues to identify it. The large scale of the work also contributes to the abstract quality of the painting.

The angles and lines of the steps and bricks lead the viewer up and down, then across and down through the work. I continue to use the blank splices to create space between the images, as well as utilizing the depth of the canvas itself to mimic the levels of the stairs. The combination of these elements directs the viewer’s experience of the painting. In some ways, this work resembles *Of Brick and Wood*: the use of architectural lines and cracks in the surfaces to direct the viewer, the use of the physicality of the canvas itself to emphasize the spaces between bricks, or in the concrete, the ambiguity and abstraction of the subjects. But while *Of Brick and Wood* is about the ravages of time and neglect on something that was once beautiful, *Coming and Going* is meant to make you think about the feeling of going up and down the stairs, and the
thoughts that come with those motions. The repetition of the images from different angles creates a rhythm which you can almost hear as your eye wanders up and down the stairs.

To most, this work could emote a sense of familiarity simply because we each have those places we pass routinely as we move through our daily routine. As I mentioned earlier though, these particular stairs are near my studio, so as I come and go again and again each day, I make my way up and down them. It is funny how things can trigger memories. Over the course of my time in graduate school I have experienced a number of emotional highs and lows, including the passing of my brother and step-father – both sudden. I tend to use the time walking back and forth to my studio from the parking lot to process things, both good and bad. The result is that pushing myself to climb those concrete steps stirs memories of the things I have contemplated while making my way up them before. So, while this painting may stir some feelings of pushing through to reach a goal to some, it holds some pretty potent feelings for me as I use it to conclude my journey in graduate school.
By painting subjects that are generic, common things, I feel that most people can find a connection to my work on some level which opens the door to an emotional response. It could be something they pass on the way to work, or while walking through their house. But I try to approach these subjects in a way that helps the viewer reconsider the subject, and how they think and feel about it. While I often include tight details, I also leave a level of ambiguity that allows the viewer to bring their own thoughts and ideas to the work. I am not trying to lead the viewer to feel a particular way about the subject, but to help them consider that there are typically multiple viewpoints. By simultaneously showing several perspectives I hope to demonstrate that there is more than one way to look at things, and that sometimes the most interesting way is not what we originally thought at all.
SOURCES CITED

