“To banish imperfection is to destroy expression, to check exertion, to paralyze vitality”  John Ruskin

The paintings in this exhibition at UNCP were created within the period of my position as the Martha Beech Endowed Chair (2007-2012). There are historical and personal references within the work. The paintings are made directly: there is no use of mechanical or digital devices. The perceptual tools are my eyes and intuition. Expansive and without fixed points, these are the paintings I needed to paint during this period of my life.

I would like to thank Martha Beech for her insight and generosity. I would also like to thank Professor Janette Hopper for her support and patience.

Materials: The paint is hand ground dry pigment with linseed oil. It is ground on a glass sheet with a glass Mueller and palette knife in the same manner as artists have made paint before tube oil paint was available. Various amounts of distilled turpentine, wax, resin, stand oil, larch turpentine or linseed oil is added to the initial mixture. These are natural materials found in trees, the earth and minerals. The variation in the materials creates various densities and luminosities of surface structure. For instance, a flat, non-glossy ground can play against a glossy figuration. This can create tension in the picture plane and illusionistic depth. Variations in the surface and material can create either a uniformed or disjunctive structure.

Brushes: Brushes vary in width, shape, the length of the bristles and the length of the wood handle.

Support: Belgium Linen woven with a coarse grade is stretched over a wood support (stretcher bar). The linen is “primed” with three coats of gesso and then one or two coats of a lead based oil primer. Depending upon weather conditions, the lead primer needs several weeks to dry. Over a period of three months, the lead seems to yellow (oxidize), giving a good ground to work against. The lead is not as absorbent as the gesso allowing the layers to remain wet longer (desirable) for sustained reworking over a period of weeks and months. Everyone has their own particular way of preparing a canvas. Some painters use rabbit skin glue which can make a brittle unstable surface.

Layering: Layering (fat over lean) is followed to avoid cracking, checking, shrinking and the other numerous mishaps of oil painting. Each color has a different drying time. As the painting gets “built”, the paint requires additional time to dry. Oils have varieties of flexibility and brittleness. Walnut oil is thinner and less flexible than linseed oil but it is better for fine details such as portraiture. Layering combined with transparency can create luminosity or a light or glow which seems to emit from the interior of the painting as opposed to an outside source of light.

The subject is painting itself: the submersion of the self with a wet, oily, gravity prone pigmented color using a bouncy bristled brush with a long handle on a bouncy surface. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. Then I must scrap the paint off. And repaint. This can continue numerous times until I have an intuitive sense that “it is right”.

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