

NEW TERRITORY: PAINTINGS BY MICHELLE FAIR January 14—April 3, 2021



Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas

Artist Statement,

Over the years, my work has loosely represented stages of my life: learning, loving, stepping into adulthood, etc. It was never my intention to create a timeline of what I would categorize as the different phases in my life, but here we are. Throughout these phases, some themes are central to what I make. Memory is the most present theme in my works, as well as loss.

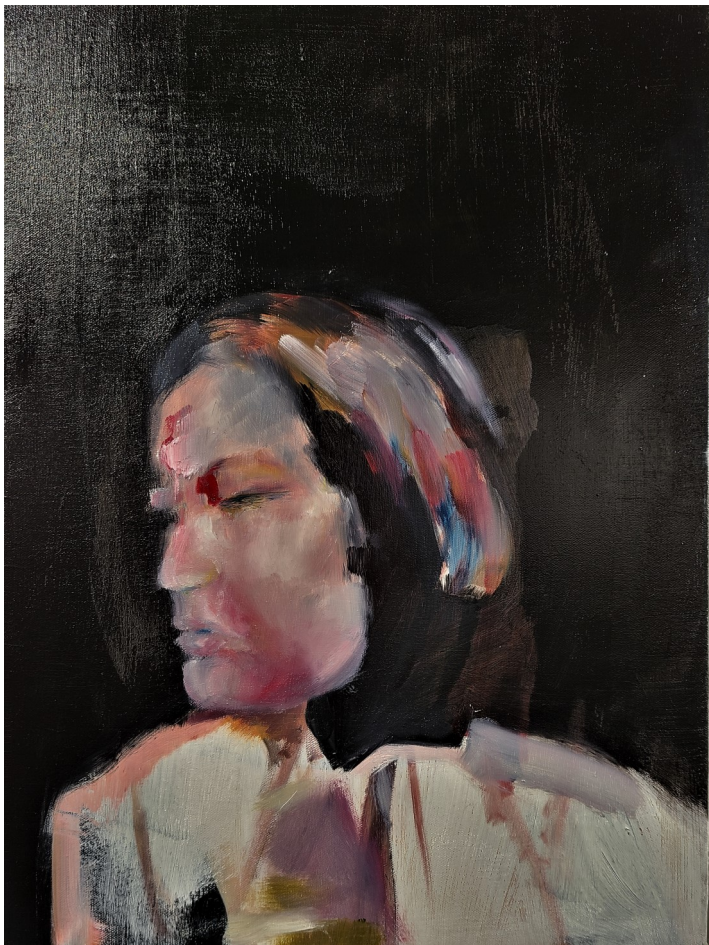
These two themes interest me because they are so universal. Memory is something everybody has, but it has a different relationship with different people. Things are misremembered, things fade into peripheral memory, memory sometimes completely vanishes. What these effects have on the way we play moments back to ourselves is interesting to me. I believe loss is just one of the saddest, but also the most beautiful emotions, that are depicted in art. People relate to it. When we see another person suddenly without, we think of a time we were suddenly without and we remember what that feels like.

Lately, I've been thinking more about the spaces my figures live in and how environment plays a role in my own life. I want to give the subjects of the paintings a home and in a way, I think this reflects a new stage of my life. In my new work, I'm spending more time letting space direct the overall feeling of the painting. I'm excited to see how the figures and the spaces balance and feed each other (or if they don't).

- Michelle Fair



Untitled II, Oil on canvas, 36x48, 2021



Portrait II, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 18x24

Exhibited works:

Take me with you – I will too, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 30x40

Untitled, Oil and Latex on Canvas, 2019, 36x36

Samantha I, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 24x30

You never listen to me, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 20x20

Go on, go on, Oil on Panel, 2020, 18x20

Portrait II, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 18x24

The Dining Room, Oil on Panel, 2020, 24x24

Throws, Oil on Panel, 2019, 16x16

Take a moment, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 20x20

Can you imagine being alone?, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 24x30

Innocence and Experience, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 24x24

Afloat on a flamingo, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 20x20

They forgot to tell you, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 36x36

Winter takes a toll, Oil on Canvas, 2020, 30x40

Untitled Portrait, Oil on Panel, 2019, 24x24

Extreme of winter, Oil on Canvas, 2019

Untitled II, Oil on canvas, 36x48, 2021

Untitled III, Oil on canvas, 2021, 20x20

Untitled IV, Oil on canvas, 2021, 20x20

Q&A with Artist Michelle Fair

1. What is your background?

I grew up in the city of Arlington. I didn't grow up in an artistic home, but I've been an artist for as long as I can remember. It's just what I did all the time. I think my first memory of creating something and being proud of it was in kindergarten. It was something my teachers always recognized and encouraged me to continue with.

It was in high school that I really became to think of myself as an aspiring working artist. I had an excellent art teacher- Carrol McTyre. She pushed me to pursue art in a way that I don't think I had ever really considered before- seeing it as a life for myself rather than a hobby. After high school, I went to undergrad at Christian Brothers University and majored in fine art. After receiving my BFA, I attended grad school at Memphis College of Art and received my MFA.

2. How did you choose the medium of your art?

I am very much a two-dimensional artist, and I work primarily with oil paint. I think this is because I grew up drawing, and it's what comes so naturally to me. There was never a decision to try to become a drawer. So the natural next step for me was painting. I have to work much more at painting, but I find it rewarding. I've dabbled in other mediums- mostly while in grad school- and my graduate thesis show was a perspective painting in a 6x7 foot room that I built in the corner of my studio (moved up to the gallery for the show). I do enjoy experimenting and mashing up different mediums, but I see and create mostly with color or graphite.

3. If there is an intended meaning to your artwork, what is it?

Over the years, my answer to this has changed quite a bit, and I suspect it will continue to do so. During my education, I became drawn to memory. I studied it all the time and incorporated it into my art in different ways. I was particularly interested in my own childhood memory, and how fragile a memory- and the process of remembering- can be. Since then, I've held that theme close and always seem to come back to it, although the visual representation of it has changed. I also always include the figure in my work. It's what I'm most comfortable with, and I think that's partly because I've done it so long but also because I think the human form can be a universal way to convey a thought or feeling.

I often use the figure to convey loss. I think to myself, I'm painting loss of a memory, whether it's a memory of someone or something or some time. As far as what I want the viewer to experience... I think that's just up to each individual person. I don't necessarily want to tell them what to think or feel. I've been a little more intentional in the past, and I think it's great when my intention comes through to the viewer clearly, but I think moving forward I want to get a little more deconstructive. I want to allow the viewer to feel whatever it is they might need to feel, and maybe my paintings can merely be a vessel to reach that conclusion.

4. What is your process of making art?

My process can be a bit irritating to me at times. It takes a lot of procrastination and many, many thrown out or painted over beginnings to finally get a piece. Often, I begin something small and quick and then scrap it, but I think this helps me loosen up my hands and my mind.

Sometimes I'll spend hours on something I end up hating, and then the actual thing I want to be doing just comes to me. Then I'll begin working again and everything flows so easily. I usually get a painting finished in one sitting, but lately, I've been allowing myself to stop and start again. I'm realizing there are more opportunities within a painting than I initially realize, and I'm enjoying letting things change over time.

5. How do you hope your art impacts viewers, the community, or general society?

For the most part, I hope my work gives people a sense of completion or affirmation if that makes sense. There have been times when someone will send me a message and say something along the lines of 'I've been feeling something and I can't quite describe it, but this piece of yours... that's it. That's the thing I've been feeling.'

5. What inspires you?

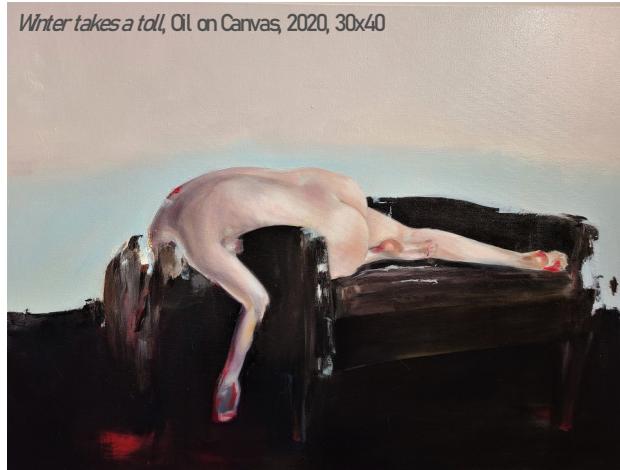
I'm inspired by many different forms of art. Social media has really changed the game I think in terms of finding inspiration. I've found so many different artists and new techniques that have inspired me to play around a try new things in my own work. Music and dance do this as well.

My favorite album to listen to while I paint is Keaton Henson's Romantic Works. It transports me and seems to give me endless inspiration and motivation. Movies inspire me quite a bit as well. There's so much opportunity in film to convey ideas or feelings, and that has always been something I'm really drawn to.

7. How have you seen your art or art practice change over your career?

I've always gotten so caught up in detail and realism, especially when depicting the figure. I think it goes back to being a child and just drawing anything and everything in

an attempt to make it look as real as possible. I've seen my work change the most in that I'm a lot looser now. I'm learning how to be intentional with it and how to make certain choices in my painting that reflect the things I'm trying to convey. It's been difficult to break out of the rigid structure that I naturally gravitate to, but I'm getting there.



8. Are there any trends in the art world that have caught your attention?

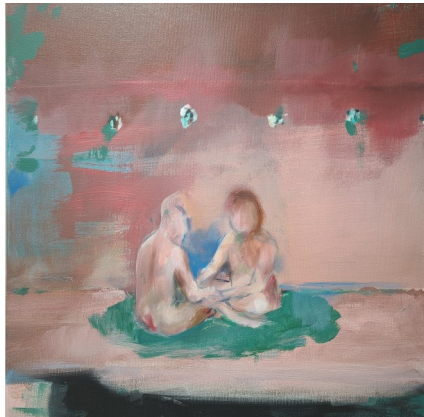
I've seen a lot of artists work with deconstruction more and more. Deconstruction of the medium itself, or of subject matter, or of themes as a whole. I'm really drawn to it so I'm sure that has played a role in my own work, and I think it's something I've been trying to grasp for a while but haven't known quite how to go about it. It's fun to see the different ways other artists do it. To be honest, I haven't kept up too much with trends in the art world.

9. What would you tell someone interested in becoming an artist?

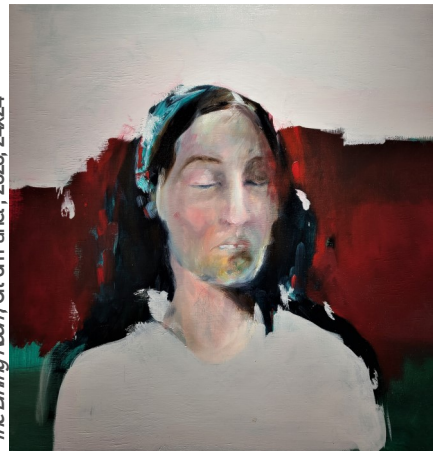
I would tell them to go for it. The thing about art is that it doesn't have to be a full time job or support you fully. If you want to create, then you can create. And you can create with anything. I would suggest studying it and exploring other artists and mediums, and also looking at forms of art outside of visual art with a new lens than before. Books, poetry, music, dance... they all are beautiful forms of expression that lend themselves so well to a visual artist's inspiration.



Untitled IV, Oil on canvas, 2021, 20x20



Untitled III, Oil on canvas, 2021, 20x20



The Dining Room Oil on Panel, 2020, 24x24

10. Why art?

I don't know that I ever really 'chose' art, it kind of was just the natural path for me. I guess I just never paid too much mind to anything else. This was most likely because of the support of all of my teachers growing up. Had they not been so encouraging and motivating, maybe I would have ended up somewhere else.

Fair focuses on the fading of human memory. As your memory fades, does your story change? Do you change as a person? Societally, we talk about how our actions affect us, our personality, and who we are. But, as our memory fades, we make new decisions, take new paths than perhaps we would have, and how does that affect us as a person? Fair's distortion of the physical body reflects the distortion in memory or personhood, through the blurred, painted over, or closed eyes of the subject as well as the use of negative space within the background.

Chaney Jewell, Curator of Collections & Exhibitions

The themes of home and evolving environments resonate throughout the Arts & Science Center's 2021 exhibition schedule. The experience of enforced shutdowns and self-quarantine altered our perception of home. Before 2020, the concept of home might have conjured images of comfort or conflict, but as the year unfolded in the most unpredictable way, the feelings and experiences associated with home ran the gamut from DIY adaption, boredom, isolation, struggle, anxiety, and, regrettably, tragic loss. As we ease into a new year, these emotions and experiences continue to linger. Even so, the new year brings a strengthened sense of hope and an acute understanding of how one global event connected each one of our homes together.

Dr. Rachel Miller, Executive Director



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