

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Alfred University

*Memories of a Near Future*

by

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As my therapist once told me, anxiety at its heart is fear of the future. The future never gives itself away, which perhaps what makes it so frightening. Most people I've met spend their nights falling asleep to thoughts of the unknown. From dealing with fear of my own mortality, to my own successes/failures, or arriving somewhere on time, fear of the future is not alien to me; it's what I sulk in.

With this thesis, I sought to challenge my own thinking. No constant self-loathing or nail-biting, but willingness to wonder what memories are yet to be had. What if I fabricated memories that don't exist yet? Or a world that doesn't exist, but could be constructed in some way within a lifetime? What if the concept of future itself was something to look forward to? What if it could, in turn, help us make most of our present? In this body of work, I paint a world I want to see now, and later. Through fantasy and emotion, I illustrate a world that doesn't already have bad endings— there's always a possibility for more.

### Process and Exploration

Painting for me has been, and continues to be, a spiritual and emotional process. However, this comes with a large problem: spirituality and emotions don't express themselves clearly. For a period of time, I was unsure what I was trying to convey. *Why was I perpetually invested in creating these landscapes? What's their significance to me?*

My work bobbed back and forth between the abstract and the representational. Abstraction lends itself to expressiveness— representation is something myself, and the viewer can recognize and respond to immediately. Communicating a form of empathy

emerged as a theme of importance the more I painted. Sharing an emotional experience with the viewer was vital, but *what experience was I trying to communicate? How could I communicate it?* More questions began to be raised.

Eventually my art stagnated into primarily abstracted color fields— paintings made from fascination and enjoyment of the medium. Although this was physically and visually satisfying, it was nowhere in the depths of what I wanted to convey. The process was improvisational with little direction.

Naturalistic forms developed as a consistent trend. Over time, I gave into this more. The first form I truly employed were leaves. Leaves are a part of trees, flowers, the ground in the autumn, and plants in general— however, their arbitrary shape references an eye, a flame, the “female” form. I exploited a circle too. Mostly as an attraction to the moon and sun, but something embryonic or as a point of light as well.

These abstracted terrains slowly morphed into recognizable landscapes. However, their space and presence was not grounded in reality. A plum or a candle could inform you that this is a familiar place, but only within dreams or imagination.

My mark-making slowed down. My treatment of the paint developed into a loving temperament, and so did my attention to time and color. Uses of mediums such as cold-wax and stand oil provided me with ways of creating intriguing surfaces— matte and atmospheric, or shiny and gloss-like. In addition, these mediums lend themselves to richer colors. I had a new interest in manifesting light from the oil paint. The process felt like I was digging for a new place each time. It was new and exciting. The paintings now functioned as objects of desire, delight, and curiosity.

## Understanding Further

The process eventually led me to produce a catalog of my own symbology. Their meanings were still unknown to me however, as more symbols appeared. For instance, fruit appeared frequently, but specifically a plum. It was hard to not paint one of these vistas without the moon. Leaves often acted as pattern-making, or a dancing figure. Sometimes there was a window pane floating in space with no house attached.

These “symbols” not only acted as markers for representation, but they replaced the presence of humans in the works as well. I had no interest in using the human form — at least not in a direct way. The human experience is part of it, but a larger significance was placed on creating a new visual language to tell it.

In order to understand further, I broke down a list of what these “figures” meant.

*A window pane is the incoming future. A candle is the now. A plum is myself. The sun is working towards the future. The moon is waiting for the future, and will always be a guide. A tree is independence, but at the same time, a support. Flowers only grow when they can grow towards each other. They need each other. Leaves escape, but they stay here too. They grow into what's here, but cannot be stopped into growing away.*

The story created from this symbology all resonated with the future— how the future progresses, how we deal with the now, and how we keep growing into it. At first, I decided these landscapes existed as places of comfort for me, and this still rings true— except, these comforts weren't just recognizing the sweets, but also the sours of a sanctuary within hard times. They aren't trying to communicate the feeling of a soft blanket. It's acknowledgement of the darkness and melancholy that exists now, and

later. The questions they raise is what's important: *"Do we have to wallow in it? What do we do with it?"*

*"Is there more?"*

In this world and these paintings, the answer is yes.

These symbols/figures exist to tell you that yes, hope can be found in dark times whether they happen here or somewhere else; now, or in coming time. They exist to be something familiar, and a memory that's yet to be formed. They exist to be you, and guide you through it. They exist to create what you hope to see, and what you hope to create.

## Inspiration

Throughout this process, I've been referencing the feminine, the gentle, the intimate, along with the concept of wonder. I first started thinking about children's books— the willingness to experience something unknown, and the frankness of it's purpose. *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown was referred to frequently. The story is simple and effective. It's acknowledgement of our surroundings, and the world before we end the day.

Visually and conceptually, I was mainly inspired by the works of Hilma af Klint. Her paintings resemble diagrams or symbols— these motifs display a larger meaning to her religion, the "Temple."<sup>1</sup> Specific shapes and patterns appeared frequently and repeatedly throughout all of her works. They continued a story and investigation of

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<sup>1</sup> Hilma af Klint. (n.d.). Retrieved November 15, 2020, from <https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/hilma-af-klint-2013/topics/>

phenomenon we could not see or understand, whether it was supernatural or scientific.<sup>2</sup>

I was attracted to this development of visual language, and how invested Klint was in it.

Klint was convinced these figures were manifested through her hands by God himself.<sup>3</sup>

Her visual storytelling and organization of meaning became a key for her theological beliefs and experiences. Past creating this symbology for her religion, she continued to make work to investigate the world's enigmas as she ran into them.<sup>4</sup>

Klint's curiosity and passion made me curious of my own practice. Her desire to represent femininity, masculinity, and love with her iconic figures inspired me to investigate my own visual expression. With her history and my own findings, I found I was painting from a place of love. However, I had my own story to tell through my own emblems as referenced previously.

Along with Klint, I looked at the works of Joan Mitchell and Grace Hartigan. Abstract Expressionism informed much of my painting technique. Mitchell's use of violent and gestural brushstrokes to create vast and suggestive "landscapes"<sup>5</sup> inspired some of my approaches to temperament. Furthermore, Hartigan's use of shape and allusions of worldly anxiety<sup>6</sup> imbued my navigation of emotion within abstracted work.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Mitchell by Cora Cohen, Betsy Sussler - BOMB Magazine. (1986, October 1). Retrieved November 15, 2020, from <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/joan-mitchell/>

<sup>6</sup> Grace Hartigan. (2020, June). Retrieved November 15, 2020, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace\\_Hartigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Hartigan)

## Final Thoughts

To present these questions during a year like 2020, was at first difficult. During any period of anxiety and unrest, the future seems so distant, but still so looming. It feels all the more impossible to create this work when the entire world is going through the same daunting experiences. The anxiety and heartbreak no longer feels individual, but extraordinarily massive and overwhelming.

As the process of making went on, optimism felt like too much of a cop out to fall into. This work isn't necessarily about optimism, but creating something better out of hard times. The calamities ahead can be just as scary, if not more, than the days we experience now— so we might as well create our own promises and points of light. At the heart of it, I made this body of work for me. However, I encourage others to explore the places I've created. It is in my hopes that people will navigate through this world, and the symbols they find within it to create their own meanings and purpose. The world will continue to have moments of tragedy, however there is always something to hold on for.

I invite anyone viewing this work to entwine themselves in the possibilities of the future. It will always be there waiting for you to meet it.

## Artist's Statement

The world is bleak and there's no hope for the future. There is no purpose to continue, or to be here now, and there was no purpose to be here before. There is nothing to look forward to.

...however, maybe that isn't actually the case.

Through bouts of anxiety and self-doubt, the typical response is to convince myself there is nothing to look forward to. How could there be anything worth my time when right now is so awful? What am I supposed to do with all this existence left?

The thing is, there has always been something that reminds me why it's a wonder to exist. Whether it be my friend group, the work I produce, the smell of fall air, light coming through a window, a cloud passing, etc., there is always something worth moving forward for.

In this body of work, I try to imagine these figments of hope for the future... memories that don't exist yet; something to look forward to. Although nothing is for sure with time that is relentlessly progressing, creating an idea of a future incites a feeling of hope in me. With endless future, maybe it's better to embrace it's comfort and possibilities. Our pasts run out, but our prospects are always yet to be had. Perhaps it should be something to be excited about, rather than constantly feared.

This world I've created is inspired by naturalistic forms, femininity, and intimacy between myself, the people around me, and the earth I live on. Although there's an absence of people, the forms in these paintings represents the space they take up. Sometimes it represents the space they don't take, or spaces for people that do not exist in my life yet.

With these vignettes, I hope it shows there's something to hold on for. Whether it be a candle or a plum, it's waiting for you to be entwined in it's wonders.





Sungirl  
Oil on Canvas  
8 x 10 inches  
2020



Dawn or Dusk  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020



Moon  
Oil on Wood  
2020



Could you hear it?  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020

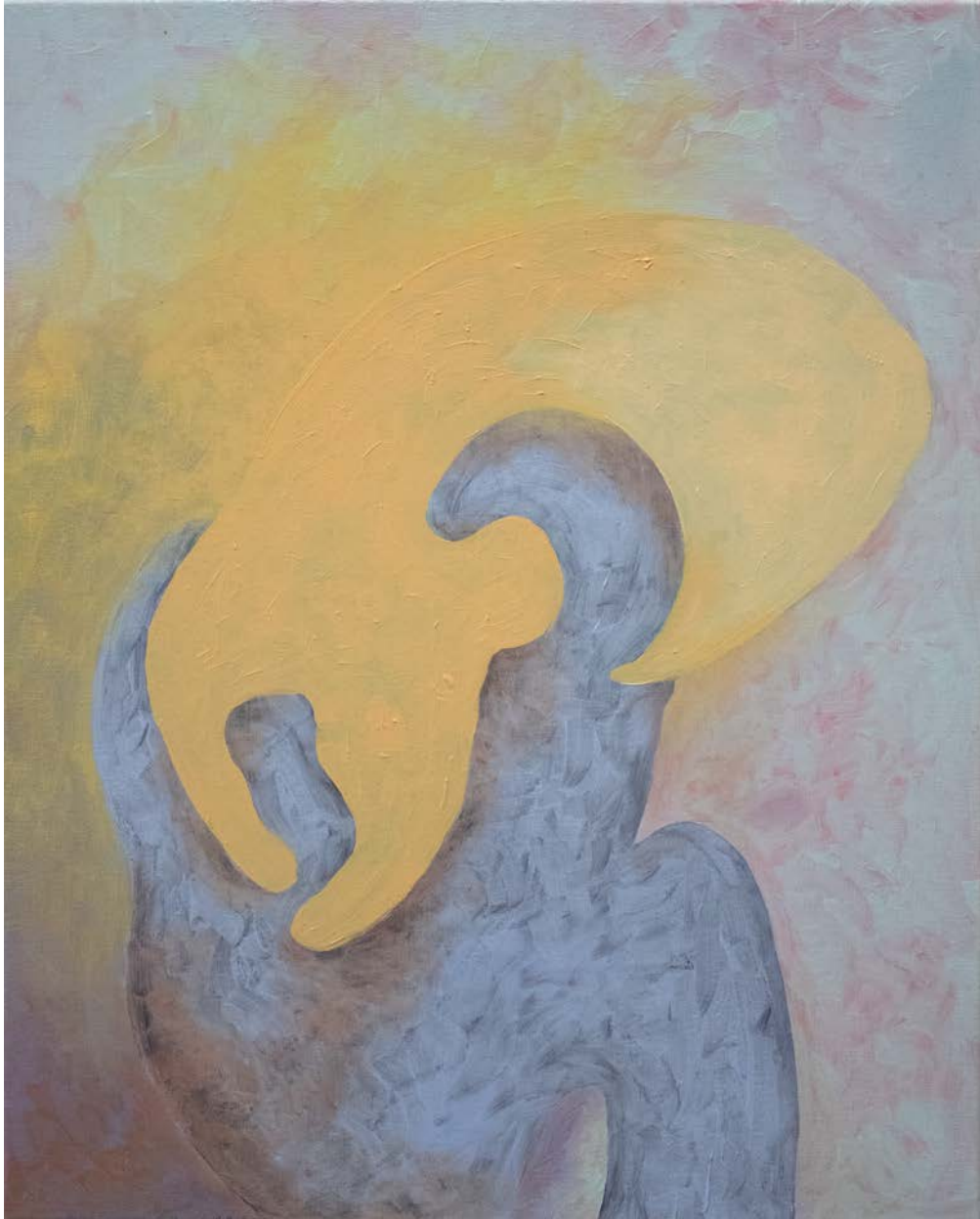




Here With You  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020



*Moongirl*  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020

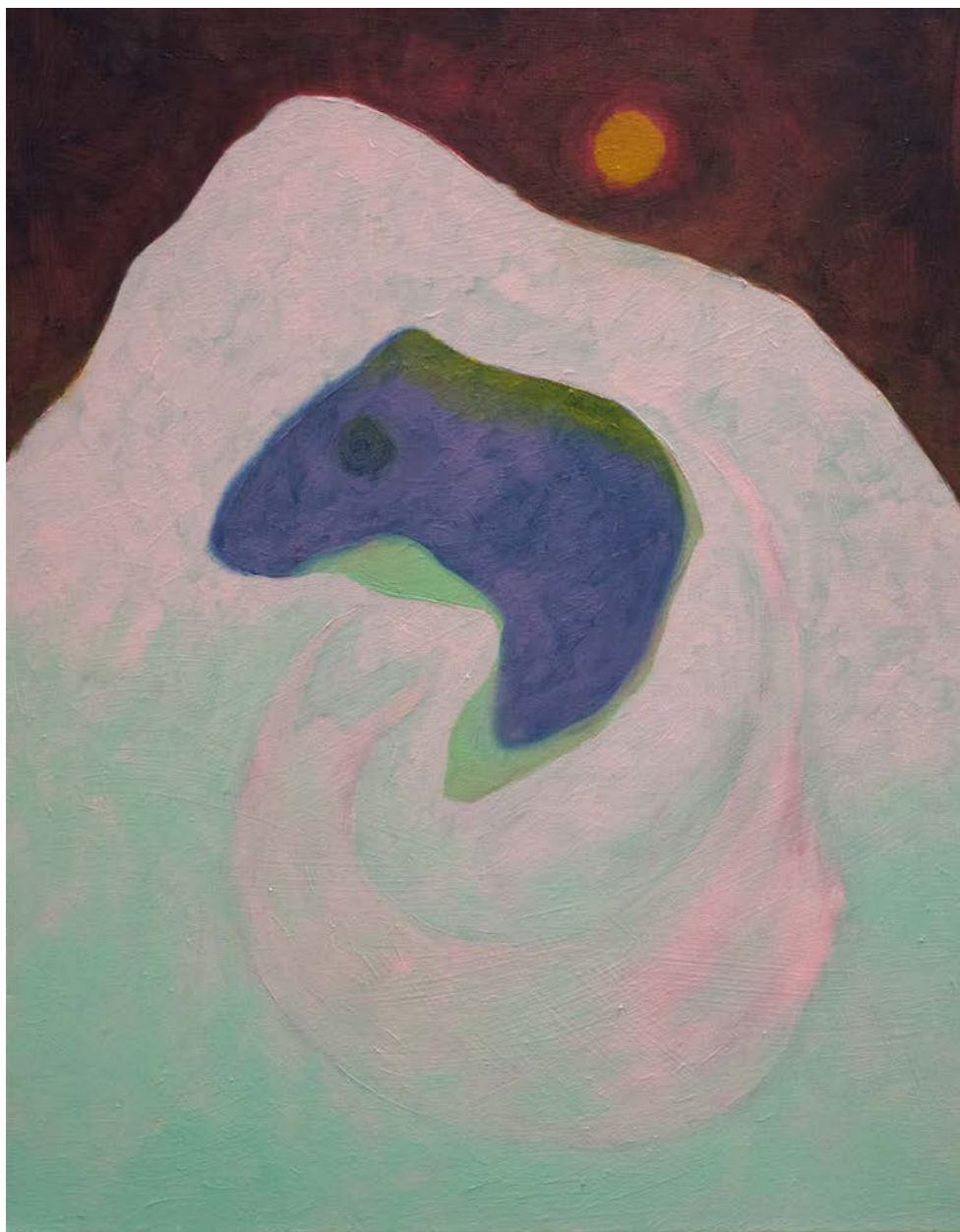


Hug  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020



Plum  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020

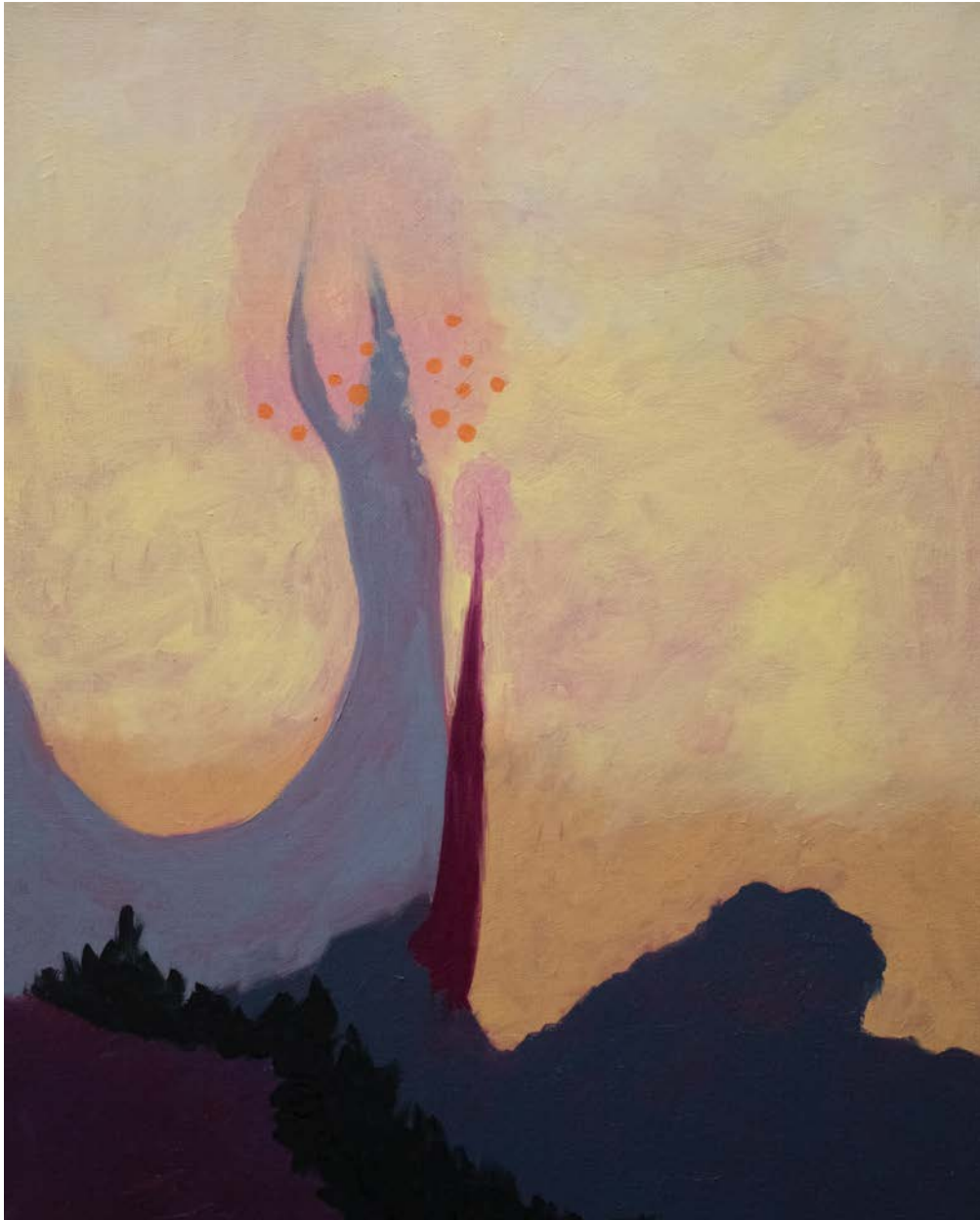




To Stay  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020



Candle  
Oil on Canvas  
8 x 10 inches  
2020



*Tree*  
Oil on Canvas  
16 x 20 inches  
2020





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from [https:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace\\_Hartigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Hartigan)

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