

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Alfred University

## **Forced Intimacy**

by  
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My artwork speaks to a dramatization of personal history through metaphor and figurative storytelling. My creative investigation is based upon the need to process personally challenging experiences. In these installation-based paintings I explore themes of introspection and trauma, through representational depictions of nature, and landscape using unrealistic color. The installation is in an unconventional space that limits the movement of the viewer, a location that necessitates proximity, and rotation around a defined space. This forced perspective placed on the viewer mirrors the mental process of introspection, and how perspective changes throughout a journey.

Taking place in a three walled stairwell, this installation features a series of gilded mirrors containing the text of my artist's statement. There is one mirror on each wall, reflecting both the viewers and the surrounding walls and paintings. This installation includes ten large paintings, and three mirrors, paintings reaching scales up to 7' by 10', which tower above the viewer. These larger paintings contain scenes depicting smaller images, like small shells, or birds. The smaller paintings contain vast and large-scale images, like a storming ship at sea, or the vast expanses of the ocean floor. The space itself communicates this battling duality, as the tall white fifteen-foot walls, and floor to ceiling windows battle with the grunge of the filthy floor and hand railing coated in the original graffiti and stray spray paint from years of accumulation. The lighting of the space also battles in a transition throughout the way, the sole light sources are two flickering florescent lights, and the two floor to ceiling windows that bask the paintings in beautiful nature light. As the day progresses, the light transitions between bright and beautiful to grungy and insufficient. These concepts communicate my experiences, and the progression, regression, and at times stagnation that takes place when processing difficult experiences.

By presenting my work in this format, I am inviting my viewers on a journey, hoping that they too will reflect on a journey of their own. The large paintings attract viewers who begin to transcend the stairwell, some viewers may turn away from the challenge of an unconventional viewing space, others may not be capable of embarking up it. The railings are not appealing, and neither is the floor they must walk on to view the paintings on their clean white walls, those who continue to seek out what lies up the stairs out of curiosity. When reaching the top, they realize that there is no platform or additional level of the building to continue up to. The viewers must then descend, navigating their way through space, passing by paintings they have already seen from a new perspective.

## **Artist's Statement**

A miscalculation,

A misstep,

A lack of traction leads to a moment of weightlessness.

In another context, weightlessness might incite glee.

Like on a swing at the park or jumping on a trampoline.

Only now there is fear and surprise.

I am outside looking in.

Bearing witness to an experience that does not feel my own.

Watching the world spin, trying to find myself within it.

Railings, Treads, Handles, Walls, Doors,

Once markers of my location in space, blend together into a haze of confusion.

Hands reach out to break the fall, desperately grasping for stability.

Hasty motions make contact without the expected relief.

Contact reveals an immediate overwhelming feeling of pain.

The force of your own weight throws you further forward,

Tumbling down into yourself,

Collisions with bodies and forms unknown

Indistinguishable pain.

A body rests at the platform. Is it mine?

Where am I, how am I? How did I fall?

It was you,

You pushed me, it was my shoes, it was the wet floor, it was my bag catching on the railing,

It was the sun shining in my eyes.

It could not have been me. It would not have been me.

But it is me.

It is me,

Laying at the base of the platform looking up at where I have been.

I recognize every step I took to get to where I am,

Yet I expected to be somewhere else entirely.

Could I be there again?

It will not be the same,

In both the good and bad,

But it will be.

The climb begins again,

The same steps with a new resemblance.

Who are they?

Now that I am where I am?

Were they always that way, or has it always been how I perceived them to be?

Clarities or misperceptions?

The impact of each step is different, despite the deceit of uniformity.

Their bruises make a unique claim to the body I am in.

The pain of the individual contributions creates a map

Does the pain illustrate my journey,

Or how I carry myself, in relation to them?

While viewing my vulnerabilities, consider your own as you navigate the stairs.























