

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Alfred University

*Filling in the Blanks: A Family Archive in the Form of Paintings*

by

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## Abstract

In support of my thesis, consider philosopher Michael Foucault's explanation of order as an artificial construct that cannot exist "except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, or a language."<sup>1</sup> This developmental scheme of classification, through a systematic style of grouping, results in a formed logic expressed in my senior BFA thesis show. Foucault's theory explores the blank spaces of an imagined grid as the origin of order and where expression is produced. I suggest these blank spaces that Foucault speaks about relate to those missing links within my personal family; as a result, I proposed an intentional plan through painting to suggest a metanarrative. In sum and in support of the postmodernism attitude, my belief is that meaning can be detached from any subject and have the ability to be renewed into a self-defined system. I chose to integrate my source material (my family archive of photos) with invented painted scenes where my subjects (family members) can co-exist in the present.

As an artist, I believe that I have a public responsibility as the maker. My mission, in combination with my unique process of painting, is to challenge the traditional mode of family portraiture and archival processes. However, it has come to my attention that I am also proposing a social critique claiming that the parental emphasis on ancestry and family history has suspended while the access to knowledge, through technological

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault states: "Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression," xx. For more, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things; an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xx.

innovations, has escalated to the point of overconsumption. This has resulted in my generation having a self-legitimizing complex.<sup>2</sup> This juxtaposition of the inaccessibility of knowledge I have personally with my family and the fact that I live in a “computerized society,” with an overflowing amount of information, has provided me the opportunity for a taxonomy through storytelling.<sup>3</sup> My process is based upon the little knowledge that I have about my family members; thus my imaginative thought process—through the media of old family photographs and negatives—is communicated through visual references. From photographs to paintings, my subjects are placed within a new order and are provided a place for continuity.

While investigating my family history, my paintings and artistic process aim to fill in the blanks and create an aesthetic order that both frames a neutral ground where my subjects co-exist and overcomes my nostalgic tendencies. The deconstruction of the image and its attached signifiers is relevant to my artistic process and can be paralleled with psychoanalytic and philosophical theories. The influence of Melanie Klein, Richard Wollheim and Jacques Lacan’s theories on the unconscious and art making will be briefly

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<sup>2</sup> Barry Smart states: “Philosophical self-legitimization is traditionally achieved by a metanarrative, for instance, about the necessary progress of knowledge and freedom,” 264. For more, see *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments*, edited by Barry Smart. (Google Books, 2002), [http://books.google.com/books/about/Michel\\_Foucault.html?id=yx4ymm-VpDMC](http://books.google.com/books/about/Michel_Foucault.html?id=yx4ymm-VpDMC).

<sup>3</sup> Structuralist theorist, Jean-Francois Lyotard studies the condition of knowledge and its effect in postmodern societies. He states: “These technological transformations can be expected to have a considerable impact on knowledge. Its two principal functions - research and the transmission of acquired learning—are already feeling the effect, or will in the future. With respect to the first function, genetics provides an example that is accessible to the layman: it owes its theoretical paradigm to cybernetics [...] As for the second function, it is common knowledge that the miniaturisation and commercialisation of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available, and exploited. It is reasonable to suppose that the proliferation of information-processing machines is having, and will continue to have, as much of an effect on the circulation of learning as did advancements in human circulation (transportation systems) and later, in the circulation of sounds and visual images (the media).” 4. For more, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies In The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 4.

discussed in relation to my work. Art historical references are also present in my works, which range from artists' works such as Louise Bourgeois' *Femme Maisons* (1947) and Gerhard Richter's ongoing *Atlas* (1964) to contemporary painters like Dana Schutz and her army of self-eaters (2004), and Marlene Dumas' latest portraits in the exhibition *The Image as Burden* (2015).

My process as a painter includes the research of these artists and others who have developed my understanding of a deeper theoretical concern that I find prominent in my work. Notably, the majority of these theories discussed in this essay did not come before the making of my work, but rather was discovered afterward and thereby provides support to my thesis. This written thesis accompanies my body of artwork that comprises a total of six paintings, which will be exhibited in my BFA thesis show on May 9, 2015.

## **Acknowledgements**

The completion of my thesis and BFA show would not have been possible without my solid support system. I have the utmost gratitude for each of the following individuals. They have all shown me in their own way a sense of strength, compassion, wisdom, and vivacity that has become invaluable to my character.

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I am also grateful to my honors thesis committee members, which include: Kevin Wixted (chair), Dr. Kate Dimitrova, and Scott Alario. Their feedback and critiques throughout this year has helped shaped my work into a maturing practice in the context of the arts and art historical studies. Countless times Kevin Wixted, my senior year painting advisor, consoled me with the wise words of a practicing artist. His humor and thoughtfulness along with words of encouragement made me strive to continue to find my voice in art. My senior photography advisor, Scott Alario, was also incredibly supportive. Scott helped me infuse contemporary contexts into my practice as well as providing me with his fresh perspective toward the artistic practice; his insight on related artists kept me inspired. Also, I am lucky to have had him as a mentor during my

Fosdick-Nelson Gallery photographer internship where he provided his highly-skilled expertise in the process of post-production imagery. All of the advice that I have received by these three professors I recognize as priceless.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends Nicole Danik, Haley Nannig, and Sunny Patel whose optimism fueled my ambitions even when I was near empty. Their loyalty stood strong throughout all my obstacles and their patience and understanding kept me grounded. Nicole's motivation especially, through her emails and daily phone calls, has made me realize how important friendship is to academic success and overall peace-of-mind.

Lastly, my family has a significant role in my accomplishments. My mother, Nelida Melendez-Carroll and my father, Edward Carroll are essentially my life-long cheerleaders; they never slow down on giving positive feedback and continue to show their faith in me in whatever I do through unconditional love and moral support. Also, my two sisters, Michelle and Justine Carroll, have provided me from an early age with the belief of the possibility of success through their demonstration of strength and determination. Their routes to success continue to be a model for me to look up to and for which I strive. Now that I have reached my own period of achievements their encouragement has fueled my desire to continue to have ambitious prospects.

I am truly honored to have these people make up my team of supporters. I am fully indebted to their helpfulness throughout the difficulties I faced, as well as their support in moments of fulfillment that I have received in the past months. I could not have completed this project the way I intended without the help of each of them.

## **I: The Birth of an Idea that Developed into an Ambiguous Adolescent**

I have realized that, time and time again, there is no clear validity or causation for why you are who you are and *how*. For instance, try to recall a time when you made an effort to match your mannerisms with that of your parents or wondered why a specific gene trait of theirs was not passed on to you or, conversely, blame them for inheriting an unfavorable attribute (e.g. a bad memory or bunions). From a biological standpoint, it can sometimes be very clear how you are related to others. However, even with the concrete knowledge of your biology, all you truly can do is supplement these unexplained trajectories (that make up you) in an abstract way with loosely based associations and personal experiences.

Admittedly, I have little to no understanding of biology and do not intend to focus on relations in the scientific-sense for my thesis paper. Nonetheless, this essay and my senior BFA thesis show are primarily interpretations of an exploration of the self through my proximities vis-à-vis my family archive. With these photographs as my main source material, my artistic process has become about me actively filling in the blanks of my family's past through allegory, which is expressed in my paintings. As a result, this redefined family history assures my desire for order, as well as letting go of the "need to recapture an underlying continuity with past."<sup>4</sup> Instead, I allow the unknowns of my collective relatives to drive my creativity.

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<sup>4</sup> Smart discusses Lyotard's view of post modernism attitudes that involves freeing oneself from nostalgia in place of "lost narratives," 293-294. This claim parallels with my attempt to understand my relatives'



The result of this year's research, which is now in the form of a written thesis and BFA show, was the birth of an idea that was not grasped fully until recently. By this point, the idea had developed into an ambiguous adolescent that I call my body of work. I have aimed to unpack most, if not all, of my ideas in this essay. Nevertheless, if it does not suffice as "complete," I hope it prompts you, the reader, to interpret and substitute meaning in at your own leisure, similarly to doing a fun and thought-provoking mad lib. This is an opportunity to take on the process of filling in the blanks as I have done.

## **II: Filling in the Blanks (My Process with Some Theory)**

"Filling in the Blanks" was my chosen thesis and show title for its playful connotation, in addition to the serious undertone that is my process as a practicing artist. I have chosen to make use of my family archive as a basis for my constructed scenes. Through the investigation of a select group of images, I provide narratives through painting for my subjects (my family members). In effect, my paintings become infused with both my memories and associations that are built by my imagination.

As an artist, I have developed a unique process of making that includes contemplating the dualities in nature, such as past vs. present, self vs. family, fact vs. fiction, and abstraction vs. interpretation. The study of the relationship between family and self in order to establish one's own identity through reflections on the past versus the present, results in nostalgic tendencies that surface as reoccurring motifs in my work.

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pasts chronologically, which results in a free interpretation and place-making through the mode of art-making.

Finding connections between memories and present experiences to position myself in relation, or opposition, to time is an inclination of mine. This tendency has to do with my brain wanting to construct a timeline of associations that can then act as a record explaining the make-up or evolutionary effects that I call myself.

Also, I cannot deny the parallels described by psychoanalytic theories that support my inventive working process, specifically Melanie Klein's interpretation of "art as reparation."<sup>5</sup> The status of my subjects as inherently relative to myself yet physically disconnected, grants my unconscious an endeavor to mend the past and formulate these connections. As a result, Klein's idea of the process of making art as a mode of repairing is significant to my painting practice. Through painting, I create solace by incorporating my family members in a neutral space unlike the present reality and more so like a dream-state of unconscious associations. In addition, Richard Wollheim's analysis of "painting as parapraxes" is relevant to my process of painting and to tapping into my unconscious.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the fact that these psychoanalytic theories support my painting process and thesis, I do not consciously delve into the theories of the inner-mind. Instead, I want to focus on my personal feelings of the painting process and how that has informed my thesis project.

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<sup>5</sup> Kleinian thought on art making is similar to that of an apologetic act in response to a psychic conflict that arises during early childhood and remains throughout life. This conflict has to do with feeling the need to mend relationships and fix past injustices. Also, Klein refers to the process of making art as a "constructive guilt." See more in Anna D'Alleva's *Methods & Theories of Art History*. Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (London: Laurence King, 2012), 96.

<sup>6</sup> D'Alleva discusses Richard Wollheim's psychoanalysis of the painting process. She argues that Wollheim "demonstrates that the explanatory roles of painter and painting can be reversed," (102) similar to the act of a slipping of the tongue where a painter's unconscious intentions are transferred through formal and visual language more easily than words; see D'Alleva's *Methods & Theories of Art History*.

Essentially, the traditional practice of the oil paint medium welcomes the effect of what I like to call a “slow burn.” This unhurried trajectory offers space for contemplation and a meditative state where emotions and admiration for a painting are brought on by different visual experiences that have been built up over time. Also, painting is based on a balance between patience (waiting for the oil paint to dry) and an immediacy and confidence in applying the paint. Consequently, forming an appreciation for a painting takes time for both the artist and viewer. Sometimes an individual’s given knowledge of a work’s background aids the viewer in realizing a painting’s value; other times, meaning is the result of a personal connection. Both are valid paths of understanding. The medium of painting reveals its process through showing reminiscences of brush strokes and the physical layering of paint. For me, these characteristics of paint attempt to lull the viewer’s process, as well as my own, through eliciting thoughts and free-formed associations.

My background in photography also greatly influences my paintings. Working from intimate 4”x 6” snapshots and black and white photographs mostly, I remain distant from my subjects and their experiences, while creating a new relationship with them on my own terms. Artistic influences, like the work of painter Gerard Richter and his on-going project called *Atlas*, informs my practice. *Atlas* is a chronological encyclopedic work of personal materials that range from over 4,000 photographs, reproductions, newspaper cuttings, and sketches, reveals his process in art making. This on-going work is an example of a collection of things that was constructed into an aesthetic order.

Interestingly, the subjects of his paintings come from this extensive mapping out of source material and provides an inside look into Richter's relentless investigative practice.

Notably, as a child I believed that my grandparents and any ancestors before them lived in a black and white world. Although a naïve outlook, this imaginative idea grew into my current ideology of a metanarrative where my painted subjects are set within an inner law that I create. The use of found images has always intrigued me more so than taking my own photographs; my process benefits from my excavation of such existing materials. I chose to focus mainly on my family archive to build scenes and utilize the materiality and rich historical associations of photography in support of my painting practice.

### **III. Who Are You? And Where Did You Come From (Before Me)?**

To begin, my subjects' origins come from my father's archives. The photographs and negatives range from when he was a child through his first marriage. Initially they were unkempt and stuffed into three plastic bins (protected from moisture and any inquisitive spectators). If I was lucky, dates and names were written on the back. I wish I could thank my grandmother for being a guardian of family heritage by authenticating these materials. I neither met my grandmother nor do I have any recollection of meeting any family members on my father's side. I consider this encounter with these images, with the little information I know about them, as being the closest effort to a family reunion I can have. This get-together began the summer going into my third year at Alfred University, when I was in the process of helping my parents unpack and move into

their new apartment in Rochester. My preoccupation with using these images for my senior thesis reveals my fascination with nostalgic imagery. This also parallels with my fixation to restore associations with certain experiences or people I feel warranted to have.

#### **IV: Home As a Signifier**

The shift in my idea of home happened when my family moved out of my childhood neighborhood in New Jersey to Rochester; it was traumatic for me. Once I returned to Alfred from my first summer in Rochester, I immediately began to brainstorm projects dealing with memorialization. It was my first semester of my junior year and I aimed to create a device that could act as a surrogate-home. This object's function would contain all my emotions and reminiscences brought on by my changing idea of home. I sketched out suitable, separate compartments to hold all my information securely. This was an ideal vision that was never accomplished and yet seen as a trajectory toward my ultimate goal in expressing the theme of nostalgia.

The shifting ideas about and associations with home can be identified in art historical cases. For instance, French-American artist Louise Bourgeois' series of paintings called *Femme Maisons* (1947) (fig 1) visually expressed Bourgeois' strong sentiment toward the home as a place of imprisonment for women.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Julie Nicoletta argues Louis Bourgeois' *Femmes-Maisons* (1947) initial Freudian interpretation that was connected to the artist's troubled childhood. Nicoletta claims the *Femmes-Maisons* have a greater relationship to Jacques Lacan's theory revolving around language and communication through signifiers (e.g. home). Nicoletta explains Bourgeois' ambiguous tendencies in relation to Lacan's theory, which she states: "The Femmes-Maisons exemplify the difficulties of communication between humans through images rather than words..." 367. In addition, through Nicoletta's further analysis, she proposes Bourgeois created this series during "a period without feet" (366). This is just a singular interpretation of the paintings

She utilized the form of the home to reference the notion of domesticity and the suffocating limitations that go along with the oppression of women; moreover, in these works the structural demands that come with the home take on the form of the woman's head and mind, which Bourgeois draws on top of the female nude body.

The signifier "home" for Bourgeois is the usual form of a house (square bottom and triangular-topped roof), yet at the same time is infused with anxiety. As a result, this image of home expressed her own personal associations, yet the meaning of home is not fixed and viewers of her work may interpret these works quite differently. Art historians have turned to Jacques Lacan's approach to the unconscious to further understand how meaning is constructed. Lacan's approach to the unconscious can briefly be summarized as follows: "the meaning created by the signifier/signified is in turn displaced through (A) metaphor, a masculine conception that functions through similarity and substitution, and (B) metonymy, a feminine concept that functions through contiguity (proximity) and displacement."<sup>8</sup> One primary idea is that a signifier's meaning can never be stabilized. Therefore, for each and every viewer, meaning is fluid and expansive, given our individual perspective or understanding.

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but one in which supports my thesis of nostalgia as an exhibitor in artistic works revolving around the idea of "home." Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *Louise Bourgeois' Femmes-Maisons: Confronting Lacan In Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 361-71.

<sup>8</sup> In Dr. Kate Dimitrova's lecture "The Art of Louise Bourgeois through the Lens of Lacanian Psychoanalytic Theory" she summarizes that Jacques Lacan's understanding of the unconscious as "structured like a language." Visually, Bourgeois used the signified "home" and processed, unconsciously perhaps, her feelings or "signifiers" of home through these paintings. We as viewers are able to interpret and analyze these three paintings and still only derived perhaps a fraction of her intentional language. Kate Dimitrova, "The Art of Louise Bourgeois through the Lens of Lacanian Psychoanalytic Theory," presented at the Alfred University, Alfred, NY, April 14, 2015.

For example, my red painting called *Another Red Room* (2015) (fig 2) was my interpretation of my primary childhood home in New Jersey. Through a form of transference, I expressed my feelings towards my childhood home furniture, specifically my dining room table, through depicting an image found in a 1960s encyclopedia on decorative arts called *The Practical Encyclopedia of Good Decorating and Home Improvement*. The words “home improvement” caught my eye initially. I asked myself: how could the content of this book fulfill my task in improving my idea of home?

The text was accompanied by an array of captivating indoor environments, all adorned by matching color schemes, patterns, trinkets and plants with the aim to enhance the sellable experience. A particular image stood out to me the most among the others for the reason that it reminded me of my round, claw-foot dining room table that I used to hide under as a child. Although the image was of a retro style dining set with the recognizable tulip table and chairs (designed by Eero Saarinen), I created a loose association between an unfamiliar scene and a cherished memory. The result was a 6’ x 4’ painting. Through my process of filtration, I chose to depict the chairs and table similar to the encyclopedia image for the purpose of creating an environment from which the viewer could also draw associations. Conversely, reminisces on the table and the hanging plant is left under-developed to draw attention to my imaginative process and heighten the well-rendered fruit bowl that is the centerpiece of the image.

My aesthetic has developed into leaving portions of the canvas blank, in a state of that is undeveloped. The blank spaces are equivalent to portals that signify a mystery to

the scene that is clearly “edited” as well as open-ended. The furniture is from an earlier era and draws on nostalgic associations. Yet, I attempted to overpower that sense of nostalgia that drew the viewer in by using expressive formal qualities that allow the attention of the viewer to be overpowered by the obvious brush-strokes, intense quality of color and boldly defined line work.

The table was full of silverware, cups, saucers, and a pitcher that I intentionally allowed to mesh with the tabletop. The furniture in the image is a stark, plastic white with a sheen that I interpreted as a softened coagulation of colorful layers of paint. The furniture was my central focus, an homage to my childhood dining set. The primary colors used are a reddish orange and maroon.

Although this was a single image, the loosely based associations and the displacement of one experience with another formed my objective and resulted in re-contextualizing a found image that was originally 8” x 11” and turning it into a 6’ x 4’ painting. The enormity of this painting gives it an inherent presence that allows the viewer to imagine a visually-charged scene where the presence of two people perhaps linger just beyond the pictorial frame.

“Another Red Room” painting is different from my other paintings for my deliberate decision that it does not incorporate any people. As the first painting of my series, this is meant to act as an introductory piece, acting as a stage or set for the viewer to contemplate on their own, in addition to the other paintings in the series.



## V: Ambiguity in Portraiture

Through the simple act of reconfiguring my subjects and placing them into a metanarrative with aesthetic qualities, I aim to construct venues that can be enjoyed by the greater public such as the “art scene.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, accurately representing my past is not my main objective and an impossible feat. Instead, I chose to play and make associations based off of instinctive inclinations, utilizing reminiscences of the past for the present. This transition goes through a variety of filters that I have explained above. The result is ambiguities in portraiture and presents images that allow the viewer to interpret and fill in the blanks.

Bourgeois’ ambiguity and the multivalent meaning of her *Femmes Maisons* serves as a counterpart to my play with my subjects. Even more, my fondness for such opacity in portraiture comes from the South African-born artist Marlene Dumas (b. 1953). Dumas’s approach to drawing her subjects is remarkable especially in *Rejects* (1994-2014), a collection of portraits that she had rejected from her previous series of work. She

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly to Dana Schutz’s aesthetic, I enjoy building otherworldly scenes that relate to our own world, but with rules that follow my own imaginative skills. Schutz talks about her artistic practice on Saatchi Online Gallery: “My paintings are loosely based on metanarratives. The pictures float in and out of pictorial genres. Still-lives become personified, portraits become events and landscapes become constructions. I embrace the area between which the subject is composed and decomposing, formed and formless, inanimate and alive [...] I often invent imaginative systems and situations to generate information. These situations usually delineate a site where making is a necessity, audiences potentially don’t exist, objects transcend their function and reality is malleable,” 2004. Dana Schutz, “Dana Schutz Exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery”, *Saatchi Gallery*, accessed April 9, 2015. [http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/dana\\_schutz.htm](http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/dana_schutz.htm).

speaks about her process with these subjects (fig. 3) in a short video clip called

“TateShots: Marlene Dumas Talks About Rejects.”<sup>10</sup>

From what I understand about her process, she utilizes photographs as her main source material. This allows a distance between her subjects that is evident in her unabashed technique where the figures’ mangled faces are given fluids for flesh, explicitly allowing the qualities of her medium, ink on paper, to take-on an appearance, a face, that we process as familiar. Her portraits, therefore, are intimate and evoke a solitude that is universal; the figures’ melting faces sometimes square off to the edge of the paper. Also, the translucency of pigments results in the majority of her subjects retaining a ghost-like and eerie quality. Also, Dumas’ use of ink on paper results in a grayscale, which in turn speaks to her photographic references. Dumas creates a tension in her portraiture between memorializing her subjects through the framework of portraiture and displaying her gestures through such a fluid medium as ink in interpreting the figure. *Measuring Your Own Grave* (2008) is another series of Dumas’s that included seventy paintings and thirty-five drawings. Again, through the human figure, “Dumas merges themes of race, sexuality, and social identity with personal experience and art-

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<sup>10</sup> Acknowledging her subjects as rejects, Dumas gives herself total curatorial freedom to display her subjects any she likes without the fear of an outsider’s ridicule. With such a status, her subjects are able to be serious as well as playful, some which have been cut and relayed on top of other rejects, completely transformed from its original. Ownership of these subjects, because they are considered rejects, is solely Dumas and no longer holds the original intention of a portrait. This random selection of drawings started in 1994 up until 2014, the evolution of her rejects spanning 20 years in the making. Dumas talks about her relationship with her rejects in comparison to her other works: “The rejects belong to me and they are mind so I can change them.” (For more, look up: TateShots: Marlene Dumas Talks About Rejects) This relationship Dumas has created with her subjects in *Rejects* parallels with my sentiment towards my source material that was left unattended and without a function. Altering these rejects and placing them in a new context, like Dumas did with *Rejects*, grants a subject a new life and new intentions, similar to my artistic practice. TateShots, Marlene Dumas, *Marlene Dumas: Talks About Rejects*, Directed by Rudolf Evenhuis., released February 5, 2015, accessed May 1, 2015. <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/tateshots-marlene-dumas-talks-about-rejects>.

historical antecedents to create a unique perspective on important and controversial issues of the day.”<sup>11</sup>

Taking my family as my subject matter and proclaiming myself an archivist is an understandable lofty feat. I began to ask myself if these deviations in my source materials were disrespectful in that they are images of my family and ancestors, most of whom I never had the chance to meet. I decided it would be impossible to fully honor my subjects through memorializing them; instead I celebrate my imaginative skills of story telling and constructing narratives to foster human connectivity. In addition, an abstract representation of a family portrait is telling, since it can be deconstructed as a set of idealistic beliefs and universal nostalgia. I aim to unhinge these preconceptions of the “family portrait” and rather commemorate associations that form over time through personal experience.

For example, my purple painting called *Purplexed* (2015) (fig. 4) constitutes my reasoning behind representing my figures’ through an ambiguous filter. My use of line is a primary concern. Each stroke is intended to signify a train of thought or attitude towards a specific subject while giving access to a possible pathway or a narrative that evokes an idea or memory. The images derived for this painting came from two images superimposed, using my Photoshop skills to create a digitally enhanced image (fig. 5).

My approach to each figure is unique and is meant to express my chosen relationship with that figure. This, in turn, can affect the viewer’s associations with each

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<sup>11</sup>“Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave,” MoMA: Exhibitions, accessed May 1, 2015, [http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/34#related\\_events](http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/34#related_events).

subject differently. The two images used for this painting came from my father's photo album from his first marriage. The woman on the left is his ex-wife who holds my half-sister, Justine. Knowing their present relationship, I consciously separated her from the others with painted framing devices. Additionally, with that knowledge, I intentionally distorted her face to look as if she is wearing some sort of mask, similar to that of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) (fig 6). Although her mother is holding her, I provided a separation/addition to the image that is based off of my own associations and relationship to her.

The second image, which I layered on top of the initial one was purely to skew the initial image further, shows the same young boy but floating in space and wearing glasses. This close up of the boy makes it hard to recognize him. I intentionally meshed his figure, with whom I have no emotional tie, with that of the figures of the first photograph to create an aesthetically pleasing field of colors. This superimposing of two images and the utilization of the layering effect on Photoshop translated very differently into the medium of painting. In addition, I used materials like spray paint and pastel to further the transition between photograph and painting. This evolution resulted in an expression of nostalgic tendencies and functions as an indicator of our universal ability to retrieve and construct memories (fig. 4).

## **VI: Color as A Subject**

By coming to terms with new meaning and sliding signifiers, my intention for using such a selective color palette is rooted in this attitude that a single hue over an

entire scene can act as an inner law through the use of color theory. This choice also enhanced the formal qualities of my work as a whole. The colors chosen are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple; each is part of their own world yet a part of my painted series of six works through the use of an overarching monochromatic scheme. The process of choosing a single color for a painting was instinctual, yet I realized each color choice drove an unconscious emotion that is expressed through subject matter, texture, line and form. The selection of one color for each scene is a logical order that resulted in bridging together all my seemingly disparate scenes. Also, the monochromatic colors unify my paintings and relate to their source materials, which were mostly black and white photographs. Sequencing through color visually shows my desire for order. Other paintings from the series include (Starting with: *Orange Peeled Pits* (fig. 7), *Yellow* (fig.8), *Blue Eyed* (fig. 9), and *Green (and) Airy* (fig 10):

## **VII: Reaching a Point of Resolution**

In conclusion, my self-realized logic resulted in the process of me making up the majority of my family story. Past projects that were driven by this idea was my fake-family photo album (presented as a zine), which I made for my Advanced Print Media class in my junior year, as well as reconstructed portraits of my grandmother through a Photoshop process. This manipulation was quick and intuitive where I selected portions of her face by random, deleted them, and the tool then processed these selections and filled in the space with surrounding data. The result was an image that became distorted to the point of strange. It was from these projects that brought me to the realization of the

common themes and ideologies of my work. Storytelling has taken over my own ancestry and their representations or signifiers have taken on a new form.

In conclusion, my research investigated the structure and the psychological and philosophical ramifications of my process of painting or “filling in the blanks.” I aim to provide a collective consciousness into the dynamic fields of relationships that surround us through the scope of pedigree. Lastly, how images or things and their meanings are ordered continues to interest me. The future will only carry more past experiences and associations with people, places and things and there will always be a story to tell or for which one needs to fill in the blanks.



Figure 1  
*Louise Bourgeois*  
*Femme-Maisons*  
1947  
*Photograph taken by: Christian Sinibaldi for The Guardian*



Figure 2  
*Joanna Carroll*  
*Another Red Room*  
*Oil and pastel on canvas*  
*2015*





Figure 3  
*Installation shot of Marlene Dumas' Rejects (1994-2014)*  
*Photograph taken by: Guy Bell. All rights reserved.*



Figure 4  
*Joanna Carroll*  
*Purplexed*  
*Oil, pastel and spray paint on canvas*  
*2015*

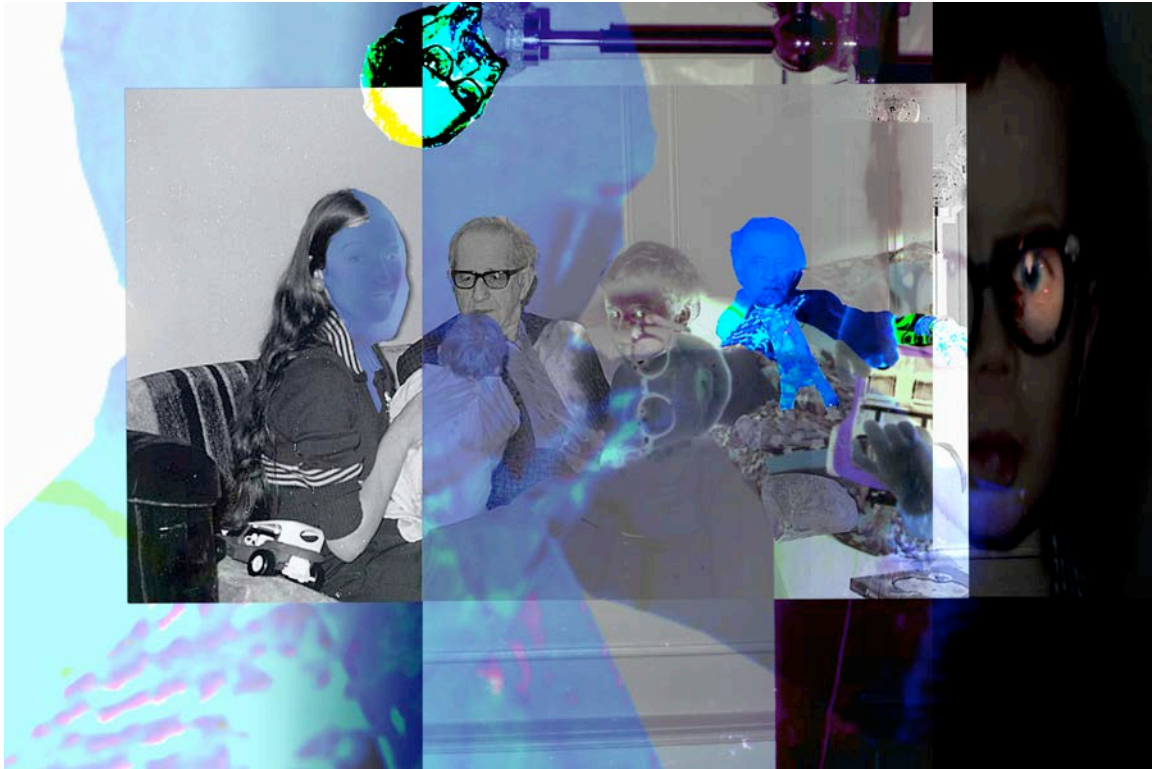


Figure 5  
*Joanna Carroll*  
*Sketch for Purplexed painting completed on Adobe Photoshop*  
*Archival print on matte paper*  
*2015*





Figure 6

*Detail of Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger (1907)*

*Taken in 2010 by Mountains of Travel Photos: New York City Photo Gallery – Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)*



Figure 7  
*Joanna Carroll*  
*Orange Peeled Pits*  
*Oil, pastel, and spray paint on canvas*  
*2015*



Figure 8  
*Joanna Carroll*  
*Yellow*  
*Arcrylic, goauche, and watercolor on canvas*  
*2015*





Figure 9  
*Joanna Carroll*  
*Blue-eyed*  
*Acrylic, pastel, and spray paint on canvas*  
*2015*



Figure 10  
*Joanna Carroll*  
*Green (and) Airy*  
*Oil on panel*  
*2015*



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