

bitter/sweet

By
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Submitted for Honors in Studio Art
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My series of oil paintings titled *bitter/sweet* investigates how women navigate physical and emotional intimacy with both themselves and others. I began this year thinking about self-portraits, questioning how I define my identity and how other people see me. As I shifted to exploring experiences that many women can relate to, I continued thinking about those issues of identity. Women are the subjects of these paintings, although the presence of other people is suggested through the shadows and hands around the subjects. We cannot see the identity of the other figures interacting with the subjects, but the women can. The viewer occupies an outside perspective, seeing the women not as they see themselves, nor as the other figures see them, but from the outside to see how these women function in relationships.

At the beginning of the second semester, I began exploring the tension between the transparency I had already established and new moments of physicality. Doing preliminary drawings helped me observe the body in a different light than I had been, and I carried this into my paintings. While the hands and shadows of other figures are very transparent, I emphasized the physicality of the subjects' bodies with folds in their skin, mainly around their stomachs. I found that this balanced out the otherworldly or alien qualities that their unnatural color palette and setting might suggest. The subjects' physicality further separates them from the ghostly limbs, whose transparency suggests that they fade into the subjects' memory.

As the year progressed, I became less concerned with creating entirely naturalistic paintings and became more comfortable with abstraction of proportions and color. Part of this arose naturally from my process—because I didn't have live models, I used photo references of myself or other women. Rather than spending time making grids to create a perfect copy, I leaned into the subtly strange proportions that would arise from painting freehand. I was influenced by the paintings of Lisa Yuskavage for her use of both proportions and color to create strange worlds that might appear comfortable at first glance, but actually depict unsettling scenes.

This year I also considered how my paintings fit in to the tradition of nude female portraiture. In most of my paintings, the women are not looking at the viewer. In the canon, I associate the subjects with being unaware of the viewer and being depicted as a shy, unassertive object who does not object to being consumed for sexual pleasure (such as Ingres' *The Turkish Bath*). However, the women in my paintings do look at the limbs and shadows that touch them. Although we cannot see who these shadows belong to, the subjects often look in the direction of where their heads would be. These women are still assertive and facing someone who is looking at or touching them (in the spirit of Manet's *Olympia*), but it is not the viewer. In paintings that have stronger sexual undertones, I wanted this to add a level of voyeurism and discomfort as well; viewing these private and vulnerable scenes is not sexually pleasing or exciting, but rather concerning or intriguing.

Image List:

1. *Untitled*, 2020 oil on panel, 9x12"
2. *Stretch*, 2021, graphite and ink on paper, 8x10"
3. *Carrion*, 2020, oil on canvas, 16x20"
4. *Doll*, 2020, oil on canvas, 16x20"
5. *for you*, 2020, oil on canvas, 16x20"
6. *Viole(n)t*, 2020, oil on canvas, 16x20"
7. *Watch*, 2020, oil on canvas, 18x22"
8. Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas, 51x74"
9. Ingres, *The Turkish Baths*, 1863, oil on canvas, 3'7"x3'7"
10. Lisa Yuskavage, *Faucet*, 1995, Oil on linen. 72 x 60 inches
11. *(w)hole heart*, 2021, oil on canvas, 18x22"
12. *Aphasia*, 2021, oil on canvas, 16x22"
13. *Body Electric*, 2021, oil on canvas, 14x18"
14. *Deadwater*, 2021, oil on canvas, 24x16"
15. *Reflections*, 2021, oil on canvas, 36x18"
16. *Sex/Salvation*, 2021, oil on canvas, 18x24"
17. *Solitaire*, 2021, oil on canvas, 16x20"
18. *Two of Us*, 2021, oil on canvas, 18x22"
19. *Grasp*, 2021, oil on canvas, 18x24"
20. *Not Allowed*, 2021, oil on canvas, 18x24"







































