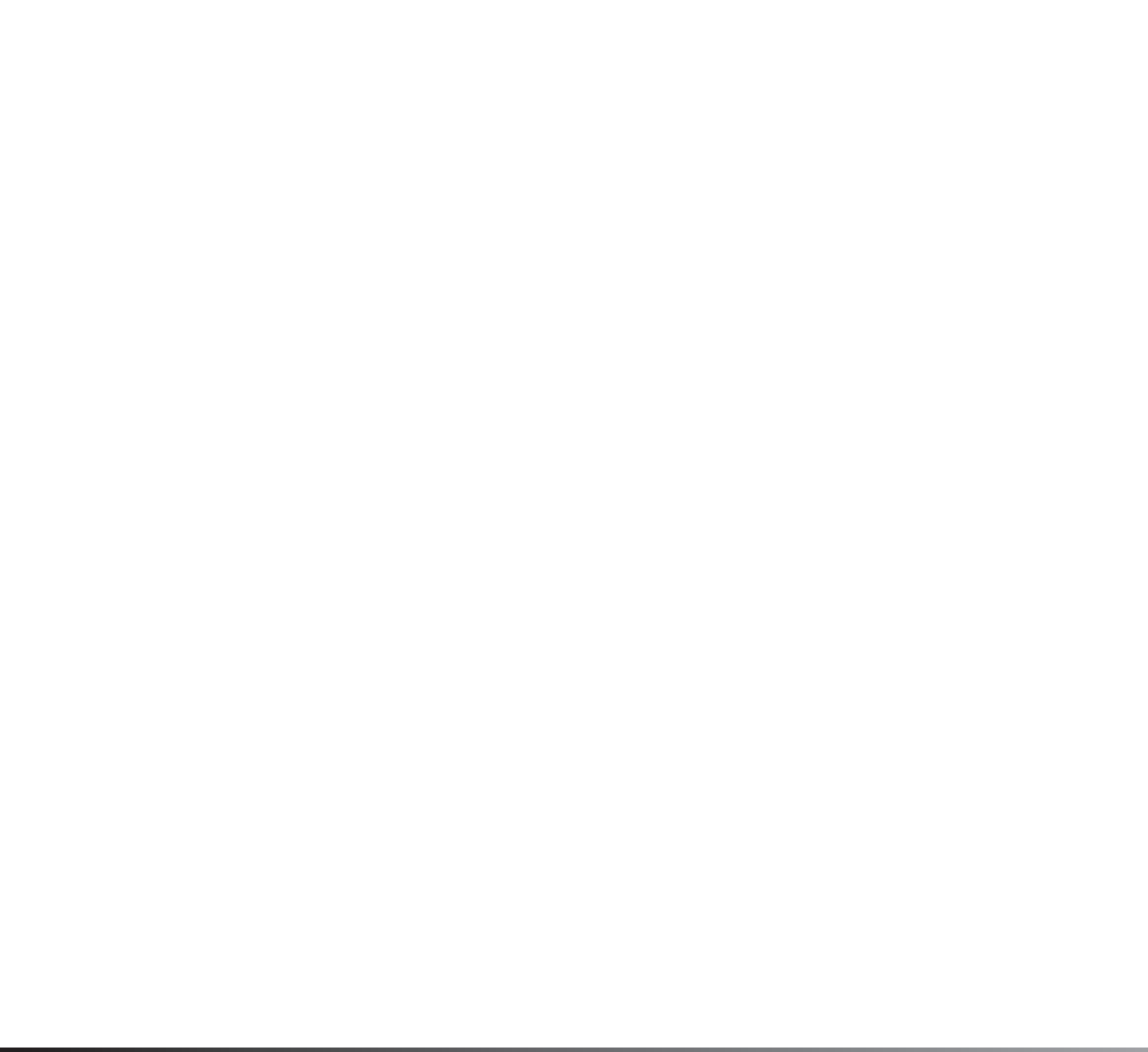


*MOVING FORWARD*  
*MOVING FORWARD*  
*MOVING FORWARD*  
*MOVING FORWARD*  
*MOVING FORWARD*  
*MOVING FORWARD*  
*MOVING FORWARD*

*Art Journal 2017*





PROVIDENCE COLLEGE  
ART JOURNAL

---

Editors

Evan Daigle

Jess Artigliere

Kimberly Caroll

Photography

Lindsey Stapleton

Printing

Sheahan Printing Corporation, 1 Front Street

Woonsocket, RI

Copyright 2017 Providence College

## Table of Contents

### **Art History**

Giovanna Franciosa: 10

Kimberly Carroll: 26

Caroline Woods: 42

### **Studio Art**

Jess Artigliere: 61

Evan Daigle: 73

---



A special thank you to Professors James Janeczek, Dr. Joseph Silva, and Professor Jasmin Blackmar for all of their guidance and words of encouragement throughout the creation of the 2017 Art Journal. Their knowledge and expertise inspired creativity and attention to detail. We would also like to thank the entire Providence College Art and Art History Department for guiding us through four years of hard work and learning. You have impacted our lives in more ways than we can begin to list.

---



# ART HISTORY

Giovanna Franciosa

Kimberly Carroll

Caroline Woods

The painting 'Sacrifice of Isaac' by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio depicts the biblical story of Isaac's sacrifice. In the foreground, Isaac lies on the ground, his body being prepared for sacrifice. His father, Abraham, is shown in a state of intense distress, holding a knife over Isaac's chest. A young boy, likely Isaac's brother Jacob, is seen from the side, pointing towards Abraham with a look of concern. The background features a dark, wooded landscape with a small town and a church visible on a hillside under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the figures against the dark background.

# Giovanna Franciosa

(Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1601-2. Galleria Degli Uffizi, Florence.)



# The *Sacrifice of Isaac*: Caravaggio's Merge of the Spiritual and the Physical

The separation between the spiritual and physical worlds is a key characteristic of the *oeuvre* of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. In his painting *The Sacrifice of Isaac* from 1601-2, however, Caravaggio, as he became known, brings the two worlds together and carefully intertwines them by capturing both the emotional complexities of life, as well as a deep reverence for God through the figure of Abraham (Fig. 1).



(Figure 1: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1601-2. Galleria Degli Uffizi, Florence.)

Caravaggio entangles these dialogues through Abraham, who straddles the two worlds and plays an important role in both the violence of the physical and a shared understanding of the spiritual. Through comparative analysis with several works by Caravaggio, I argue for the uniqueness of this image in Caravaggio's *oeuvre*, and the critical importance of the figure of Abraham within it.

Michelangelo Merisi was born on September 29, 1571 in the small town of Caravaggio, Italy. He studied painting for four years under the direction of Simone Peterzano in Milan. After his father's death, Caravaggio moved to Rome where he began working as a painter.

He struggled in his early years in Rome, where he painted only secular images that were seen as controversial and unnecessarily violent, especially when he depicted gory beheadings and deaths. Caravaggio's works of art seem to connect to his life, as he was frequently involved in physical altercations. He was arrested on various occasions for his violent outbursts, assaults, and the use of illegal weapons. Close to the end of his life, Caravaggio was even involved in murder, which forced him to flee Rome in order to escape execution. He often painted scenes depicting violent deaths, which could reflect the weight of the darkness that he felt in his life.

In his work, he typically “shows a few figures highlighted against the darkness [which] gives a rough profile of a man (Caravaggio) who tended to see human events in black and white.”<sup>1</sup> With the understanding of the difficulty and violence of Caravaggio’s life, it becomes easier to explain why brutality plays such a central role in his *oeuvre*.<sup>2</sup>

Caravaggio’s work is characterized by his use of tenebrism, the strong use of light and dark, which allowed for an increased emphasis on certain aspects of the scene and heightened the drama, pulling the viewer into the emotional narrative and allowing him/her to participate in it. Caravaggio lived in poverty, as he did not receive enough commissions to support himself as a secular painter.

Because of this, in 1596-97, he decided to change the subject matter of his art and began accepting more religious commissions. He began painting biblical scenes in the Baroque style and following the new guidelines put in place by the Catholic Counter-Reformation, established by the Council of Trent during its 25th session in 1563, which stressed the importance of painting scenes directly from the biblical text. The Church wished to place a stronger emphasis on prayer and meditation. In order to bring this tradition back to the Christian faith, the Counter-Reformation “prescribed that the meditator imagine a religious scene as if it were taking place before him ‘now’...and participate in it by means of the senses.”<sup>3</sup> Caravaggio followed this tradition in many of his religious works,

though he often went beyond these ideas, creating images that were considered to be controversial.

Within his works, the representation of the brutality found in the physical world is very present and confrontational. Caravaggio seems to recall the violence that was found not only in his own life but also in the everyday lives of his viewers. Throughout Rome, decapitations and public executions were seen on a daily basis, which may have contributed to Caravaggio’s realistic representation of tortured and horrified faces.<sup>4</sup> Through his many depictions of human emotion, it becomes clear that he desired to capture the “aggressive naturalism” that he was often faced with during his life.<sup>5</sup>

This specificity of the representation of violence can be seen in Caravaggio’s *Judith Beheading Holofernes* from 1599,

where Caravaggio depicts the violent moment when Judith's sword has sliced half way through the neck of Holofernes with blood pouring from his throat (Fig. 2). The strong emotions on the faces of Holofernes, Judith and the maid are a good example of the realistic and powerful expressions that he was able to recall from the violence that he was faced with in his everyday life. These expressions confronted the viewer and created a strong emotional response to the image. When looking at the faces of these figures, Caravaggio depicts a wide range of emotions: Holofernes stares up at the ceiling with his mouth open in a terrified scream, while Judith seems to pull back from her actions as her furrowed brow and tense posture suggest both hesitation and repulsion. The wizened maid, on the other hand,

stands with her eyebrows raised, expectantly and excitedly waiting for Holofernes' death.



(Figure 2: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1599. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome, Italy.)

In 1606, Caravaggio painted *David with the Head of Goliath* (Fig. 3). In this work, the viewer is confronted with the moment after David severs Goliath's head from his body. The scene is gory, as the severed head of Goliath, with life still in his eyes, stares into the darkness around him and blood pours from his neck. The head is believed to be a self-portrait of Caravaggio and reflects the tragic aspects of his life.<sup>6</sup>

With this piece, it seems that Caravaggio wants to shock and overpower the viewer with his own fear of punishment and death. While Caravaggio often incorporates the horror and fear that was present in everyday Roman life, he also, more importantly, captures the brutality and aggression found in his own life.

The violence of the physical world is not the only important theme present in Caravaggio's oeuvre. He also depicts the spiritual world, as he "brings sacred subjects down to earth."<sup>7</sup>



(Figure 3: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *David with the head of Goliath*, 1606. Galleria Borghese, Rome.)

By capturing the spiritual in the earthly realm, Caravaggio brings a physical tangibility to the spiritual world and allows the viewer to feel its presence in the work.

Caravaggio projects a human element onto the figures of Christ and the saints. He brings them closer to the viewer and offers a connection between these religious beings and the poor and common man. By giving these religious figures human traits, Caravaggio allows the spectator to engage more easily with the subject matter by representing the divine beings as relatable human figures.

Caravaggio's depiction of the spiritual world, however, can be found only in certain individual figures in his scenes. He typically creates a division between the characters: those who are and are not able to engage with the spiritual world on earth.

Within his works, Caravaggio allows certain figures to be able to see and recognize the presence of God, while others remain blind to the spiritual aspects of the scene. This concept, of those who can and cannot see, is shown through the use of eye contact and gesture, as well as through the use of light. Light becomes the embodiment of God, as it washes over those who are able to recognize the divine presence.

In the *Calling of Saint Matthew* from 1600, Caravaggio depicts a group of men, most of whom are totally unaware of the presence of Christ and his apostle, who stands next to him (Fig. 4). Christ points to Matthew, a Roman tax collector, calling him to join his mission. The light enters the scene from the right, above Christ, and washes over Matthew as he points to himself in response to Christ's call.<sup>8</sup>



(Figure 4: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Calling of St Matthew*, 1600. San Luigi del Francesi, Rome.)

The figures to the left of the scene play an important role, as they represent those who are unaware of the divine presence. They embody the ignorance of man, as they are concerned only with the secular world. The scene is set in a contemporary environment, as Caravaggio depicts a modern example of Christ's calling on humankind to trust in the power and strength of God. The ignorant men who sit at the end of the table counting their money are a perfect example of those who are enthralled only by material possessions.

The two men sitting closest to Christ and his apostle are both aware of their presence. The figure with his back towards the viewer leans over to speak with the apostle, and the other figure, who leans on Matthew's shoulder, looks directly at Christ. Although these men are able to recognize the presence of the figures of Christ and the apostle, there is no indication that they are capable of recognizing that they are the embodiment of divine beings. Matthew's expression is noticeably different from the other figures who look towards Christ, as he not only points to himself in recognition to Christ's call, but stares directly at Christ with raised eyebrows and wide questioning eyes. His expression sets him apart from the other figures at the table, as he is the only one who reacts emotionally in response to Christ's presence.

Caravaggio's *Conversion of St Paul* from 1601 is a very isolated and intimate scene of religious conversion (Fig. 5). Paul is sprawled out on the ground overwhelmed by the power of God, while the horse and servant seem unaware of Paul's interaction with the divine. Caravaggio's use of light is very important in the scene, and again, is used to represent the presence of God. The way in which Paul is thrown on the ground shows the intense power of God and Paul's



(Figure 5: Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *Conversion of St Paul*, 1601. Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.)

vulnerability and humility as he is put directly in the spotlight of God's divine grace. Paul "receives the literal enlightenment of conversion through the penetrating rays of God's light...an old man who is lighted but unenlightened by the divine efflorescence...is essential to provide a foil to Paul."<sup>9</sup> It becomes clear, that only Paul feels the power of God in the scene, as the servant is totally unaffected and unaware of the presence of God. The horse is just as unaware as the servant; it gazes toward Paul, but is completely ignorant as to what is going on. In the biblical passage, the men traveling with Paul were, in fact, able to hear the words of God as they spoke to Paul; however, they were not able to see where the words were coming from or comprehend the meaning of them.

The *Sacrifice of Isaac* was commissioned by Cardinal Maffeo Barberini in 1601-2. The commission of the work was personal as it was to be added to his private art collection.<sup>10</sup> Barberini was born in Florence to an aristocratic family. Throughout his life, he held many church positions and was finally elected Pope Urban VIII in 1623. Although Barberini commissioned the work for his personal collection, he still had Caravaggio follow the new guidelines that had been setup by the Counter-Reformation, as he was strongly against the rise of the Protestants and wanted to promote the teachings of the Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup> These guidelines specified that a religious work of art depict the biblical scene so that the viewer is confronted with a literal representation of the text,

which would avoid any heretical interpretations or misunderstanding of the subject matter. Religious art was to be easily recognizable and understood so that it could assist in personal reflection and individual meditation.

The *Sacrifice of Isaac* is a representation of the Genesis story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son to God.

God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham...Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering."... So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac...Abraham said to the young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." The two of them walked on together, Isaac said to his father..."The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb."... He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!...Do not lay your hand on the boy." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns.<sup>12</sup>

Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac* very closely resembles this passage. By depicting an old man with a knife, a scared young boy, an angel and a ram, it becomes clear to the viewer that this piece is without a doubt a representation of the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac. The presence of the two shadowy figures on the road in the background also helps to further this determination, as they represent Abraham's two men who wait for his return. By comparing the narrative and the painting, one can see how Caravaggio remained true to Genesis, capturing the moment of highest intensity and drama when the angel stops Abraham from harming his son. In the painting, Caravaggio captures not only this one moment, but the past and future moments of the story as well: the presence of the two young men in the background,



the violence of the sacrifice before the intervention of God and the angel, the tension as the angel stops Abraham from killing his son at the last moment, and the appearance of the ram that will later serve as the true sacrifice. There are, however, two aspects of the story that Caravaggio alters. The first is the physical presence of the angel. In Genesis, the angel calls down from heaven to stop Abraham, but in the painting, the angel is brought down not only to the same plane as Abraham, but also grabs his arm in order to restrain him physically from killing his son. Through this embellishment of the text, Caravaggio is able to heighten the drama and increase the tension of the scene. The second aspect that he altered is the role of the ram, as it is not stuck in a thicket as the text states; rather, it stands free, looking up at the angel and Abraham.

It plays an active role in the image as a knowing figure that understands the significance of the scene and is able to recognize the presence and power of God.

The Sacrifice of Isaac was a popular subject for artists to depict in both painting and sculpture. Filippo Brunelleschi cast a bronze relief of the subject in 1401 in competition with Ghiberti for the commission of a new set of doors for the Florentine baptistery (Fig. 6).



(Figure 6: Brunelleschi, Filippo. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401. Museo nazionale del Bargello, Florence.)

Though he lost the commission, Brunelleschi's panel is important, as it is a work of art with which both Caravaggio and Barberini

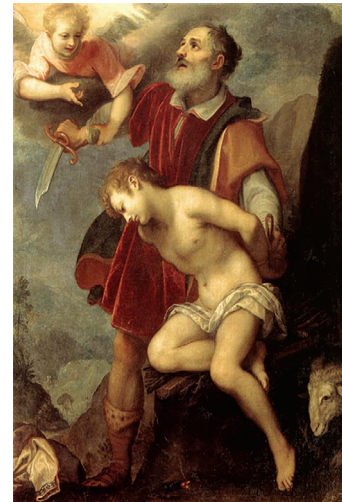
would have most likely been familiar. Upon examining the panel, the viewer is able to see that both Brunelleschi's panel and Caravaggio's painting share similar basic elements: an angel who physically arrests the arm of Abraham before he can sacrifice his son, which was seen for the first time in Brunelleschi's panel, as well as the ram that will become the new sacrifice, and the presence of the two young men who accompanied Abraham to Moriah. Caravaggio may have incorporated these similarities upon the request of Barberini, who would have wanted the piece to recall Brunelleschi's famous panel as a reminder of his familial Florentine ties.

The scenes differ, however, in the manner in which they are composed. Brunelleschi fills his panel with as much imagery as possible, as the donkey and the two men who wait further down the mountain

are as large as Abraham himself. They occupy the lower half of the panel and take away from the impact and violence of the scene. By incorporating the two men and their donkey in such a large portion of the panel, the piece becomes horizontally divided, as the upper-most part of the panel depicts the spiritual world, and the rest of the lower section depicts the physical. The sacred presence of God is not felt as strongly in this image as it is in Caravaggio's. The angel is the only representation of the spiritual world, as he enters from the upper right and remains fairly detached from the scene, except for the contact between his hand and Abraham's arm. The role of the ram is also not as significant: it stands off to the side scratching its head, acting very much like the ignorant animal that it is,

and does not play an active role in the scene. Brunelleschi's representation of Isaac is equally different, as Isaac tries to struggle and twist away from his father. His face is turned away from the viewer staring up at the sky with his mouth open, perhaps in a scream. In contrast, Caravaggio's painting creates a strong spiritual presence through both the angel and his use of light, as well as through the active role of the ram. Caravaggio depicts both anguish and fear through the terrified and naturalistic expression of Isaac, as he stares out at the viewer and engages him/her in the scene. Brunelleschi's panel seems to have had an impact on Caravaggio, as there are many similarities that can be found between the two, but Caravaggio was able to carry his piece far beyond the innovations of Brunelleschi.

Lodovico Cardi, more commonly known as Cigoli, painted the *Sacrifice of Isaac* in 1607 (Fig. 7). He, like most other painters of the time, was very concerned with representing religious art as close to the ideals of the Counter-Reformation as possible, as artists would often find themselves in trouble with the Church when they deviated from these new guidelines, as Veronese did in *The Feast in the House of Levi* in 1573.



(Figure 7: Cigoli. *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1607. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.)



When examining this work, it becomes clear that Cigoli strictly adhered to the guidelines of the Church and was not interested in embellishing or adding to the original story. He very literally depicts the biblical passage and does not stray from the text. In Cigoli's piece, there are similarities to Brunelleschi's competition panel, as he, too, would have been familiar with it. The few aspects of the piece that do not follow exactly from the text can be traced to Brunelleschi's interpretation. The angel reaches down and grabs Abraham's arm, as he does in Brunelleschi's. The ram also plays a very insignificant role, as he stands completely unengaged at the edge of the frame.

Cigoli, unlike Caravaggio, does not allow for further development or exploration of the scene. Cigoli remains fully devoted to the biblical text and remains within the guidelines of the Church. He emphasizes the importance of the story by depicting the scene without further interpretation, as it confronts the viewer with the teachings of the text and the spirituality of the moment. Cigoli and Caravaggio's works do share certain elements. They both put the focus completely on the sacrifice and the actions of Abraham, the angel and Isaac, and in doing so, the presence of the donkey and the two men in the far distance become barely distinguishable figures in the scene. Cigoli's depiction of the passage has a very different emotional presence than that of Caravaggio's. Cigoli's creates a very calm and peaceful atmosphere within his work as Isaac sits idly, totally submissive to his father.

The knife that Abraham holds seems to be pulled away from Isaac by the influence of the angel's hand, which removes the suspense of the sacrifice. In Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*, the tension of the scene overwhelms the viewer as the screaming Isaac struggles under the force of Abraham's grip and the knife remains steady and close to his face as if the sacrifice may still continue.

Caravaggio's religious paintings followed the new guidelines of the Church. He depicts the struggles and violence of the physical world with the light of salvation originating from faith and trust in God. Caravaggio placed a "new emphasis on an inward process [that] evoked a heightened emphasis on the conversion of self through meditation on the mysteries of Christ."<sup>13</sup>

Within his works, he focused on the important role of God's spiritual presence in the physical world, but struggled with keeping entirely within the guidelines set up by the Counter-Reformation. In his paintings, he often depicted the biblical stories more closely than expected by placing religious figures and scenes in settings that the viewer would be able to relate to. He would increase the drama of these scenes by creating a sharp contrast between light and dark in order to emphasize the divine presence. This aspect of creating very relatable scenes went beyond the new guidelines of the Counter-Reformation and brought the teachings of the text directly into the world of the viewer. In setting the biblical events into an everyday setting,

Caravaggio is able to represent the common man and relate him to the divine realm. Caravaggio's representation of the world is very dark, and depicts an alienation from God. However, through the darkness and brutality of his scenes, Caravaggio offers a glimmer of hope, specifically through light, as the light of salvation, to the poor and defenseless.

In Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*, brutality and violence immediately confront the viewer, as the figures are placed in the foreground and invade the viewer's space. The figures are placed close together: the intimacy of the scene merges the actions of each figure and creates a more chaotic and agitated depiction. The scene itself is set at the moment of highest drama. It represents the instant that the angel appeared to stop the sacrifice of Isaac.

It is the climax of the story and offers more tension and suspense than any other moment. He depicts the "inevitable pause between challenge and response...a reverberation in time, an implication of what has happened before and what will happen next."<sup>14</sup> The agitation, tension and suspense of the scene draws the viewer in and holds his/her attention long enough to discover the intricacies of the scene.

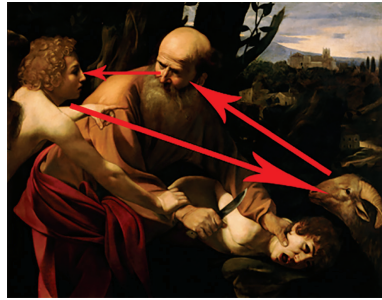
Examining the presence of the spiritual world in this image allows the viewer to see once again how Caravaggio contrasts those who do and do not have the ability to recognize the divine presence. Isaac is totally unaware of the presence of the angel or the divine light as his father holds him down for the sacrifice and he screams in terror. His wide dark eyes stare out at the viewer making eye contact with us and pulling us into the scene,

allowing us to share in his suffering. Abraham, on the other hand, is cognizant of God's spiritual presence. He turns toward the angel, who grabs his arm, and seems to understand that the violence of the sacrifice is over, that he will not have to kill his son. The viewer is able to see the dramatic struggle between infinite brutality and infinite devotion, as Abraham is bathed in the light of God and gazes toward the angel, while Isaac stares in terror at the viewer, completely unaware of the divine presence.<sup>15</sup>

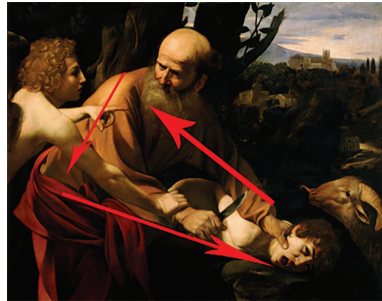
Within the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Caravaggio creates two different dialogues that occur both simultaneously and separately from one another (Fig. 8). Within the intimate group of figures, Caravaggio forms two triangular compositions;

(Center Above)

(Figure 8: Breakdown of the two dialogues present in the *Sacrifice of Isaac*. Diagram by author, Giovanna Franciosa.)



Spiritual World (Figure 8)



Physical World (Figure 8)

one depicts the spiritual world, while the other represents the physical. Abraham, the angel and the ram, occupy the spiritual, as they engage with one another through understanding and trust in God. The triangular composition moves from Abraham's face, who gazes at the angel, to the angel, who gazes towards and points in the direction of the ram.

The ram gazes back at both the angel and Abraham completing the triangle of enlightened and faithful figures. As it looks up at them, with its dark eye, the ram seems very thoughtful, as it pensively takes in the scene and understands the importance of its role in the sacrifice.

The physical overlaps with the spiritual, though it holds a separate conversation. The viewer is pulled into the physical world through the intense gaze of Isaac. His dark black eyes stare in terror at the viewer and thus connect the physical world of the painting to the viewer's world outside the painted scene. From Isaac's eyes, the dialogue moves to Abraham's left hand, as it is pressed very forcefully into Isaac's cheek, up Abraham's left arm, across his shoulders, down his right arm to the right hand of the angel as it grabs Abraham's wrist.

The triangular composition continues to Abraham's right hand, as he holds the knife up to his son's neck, and screaming face. Though these two conversations act separately from one another, Abraham takes part in both. He straddles the two realms and plays an active role in each. His head, turned toward the angel, is engaged in the spiritual, while his body, most importantly his arms, act in the physical. The work, representing the violence, brutality and evil in the world, recalls the humility of humanity, and also reminds the viewer of humanity's desire to elevate the soul and become closer to God.

These dialogues act as two different and competing compositions within the work. Caravaggio contrasts the violence of the physical world with blind faith in the spiritual.

There is a peaceful serenity that can be found when looking at the angel, Abraham, and the ram in the spiritual. They gaze at one another with understanding and faith in God. There is no violence or anger present in this composition of pure faith. The physical, on the other hand, is the complete opposite. The agonized scream of Isaac, his pale skin contrasted against the dark metal blade of the knife, is brutal and terrible, as Isaac is alone and helpless against the aggressive force of his father.

Physical touch and eye contact play a very important role in this work. Without them, these two conversations would not be as easily distinguished. The eye contact among Abraham, the angel, and the ram, establishes their connection with one another.

The eye contact in the spiritual world is just as important as Caravaggio's use of hands in the physical. Both the angel and Abraham use their hands in strong physical action, while Isaac is helpless against them, with his own hands hidden, and most likely bound, behind him. The way in which Caravaggio incorporates both eye contact and physical touch into the composition, not only allows these two worlds to be understood separately, but also reinforces their presence in the scene. The spiritual is distinguished through eye contact and not physical touch, as the divine realm is not tangible. The physical world, on the other hand, is defined through aggressive action and touch, as physical contact is a very present aspect in the earthly realm.

When examining these two dialogues, one can see how Abraham straddles both worlds, while

Isaac and the ram remain completely within their own spheres. The ram is wholly involved in the spiritual while Isaac is entirely a part of the physical. The ram watches Abraham and the angel and is completely unaware of Isaac, even though they are next to one another. Isaac is also completely unaware of the presence of both the angel and the ram. Instead, Isaac stares out at the viewer and is overwhelmed by his own terror.

The *Sacrifice of Isaac* is significant in Caravaggio's oeuvre as Abraham participates simultaneously in both worlds. By depicting Abraham actively engaged in both dialogues, Caravaggio bridges the spiritual and the physical and creates the hope that human beings have the potential to be active in both of them. Caravaggio is able to represent the tangible presence of the spiritual world in the physical.

When examining Abraham's face, his expression is not easily read or understood. His expression reminds the viewer once again of Abraham's humanity and faith. As Abraham gazes at the angel, it becomes clear that his trust in the will of God is absolute. Looking at his hands, however, there appears to be a hint of uncertainty. Although the angel has come down from heaven to stop Abraham from killing his son, the viewer does not see any hint of relief in Abraham's posture. He still bends over his son, tightly gripping both the knife and Isaac's face, as if ready to proceed with the sacrifice at any moment. With these two conflicting actions of faith in God and brutal physical violence, tension is built up not just in the image itself, but also within the figure of Abraham. Two different parts of his internal self compete with one another, as he calmly interacts with the angel in the spiritual world, and is in the midst of a violent attack in the physical.

In many of his works, Caravaggio focuses mainly on either the spiritual presence or the physical violence within a scene. This is not so in the *Sacrifice of Isaac*. He creates two competing conversations within the piece, as the figure of Isaac struggles alone in the brutal violence of the physical and the angel and the ram are fully present in the faith of the spiritual. Caravaggio further complicates the *Sacrifice of Isaac* by merging these two realms through the figure of Abraham, as he is present in both of them. Abraham links both worlds and plays an important and active role in each. He is able to listen to and express unwavering faith in both the angel and the will of God, while he holds both the knife and his son in violent action, ready to commit a brutal sacrifice.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 261.
- <sup>2</sup> Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio: A life* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), 165-195, 222-234.
- <sup>3</sup> Joseph F Chorpenning, "Another Look at Caravaggio and Religion." *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 8, No. 16 (1987), 150.
- <sup>4</sup> John Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 78-79.
- <sup>5</sup> Helen Langdon, 180.
- <sup>6</sup> Howard Hibbard, 262.
- <sup>7</sup> Gloria K Fiero, "The Catholic Reformation and the Baroque Style." *Humanistic Tradition Vol. 4: Faith, Reason and Power in the Early Modern World Ch.20* (1997), 515.
- <sup>8</sup> Among art historians, there is a controversy as to which figure within the *Calling of St Matthew* represents Matthew. Many scholars believe that the figure who looks at Christ and gestures with his hand is Matthew, as he is understood to be pointing to himself. Other scholars believe that this figure is pointing towards the man who counts coins with his head down, which would indicate that this figure is Matthew. Through an examination of this work and various texts, such as Hibbard's *Caravaggio*, I have concluded that the figure of Matthew is the man who gestures towards himself, as he engages emotionally and through eye contact with the figure of Christ.
- <sup>9</sup> Howard Hibbard, 126-8.
- <sup>10</sup> Helen Langdon, 195.
- <sup>11</sup> Howard Hibbard, 167.
- <sup>12</sup> *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Genesis 22.1-22.14.
- <sup>13</sup> Helen Langdon, 187.
- <sup>14</sup> Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1989), 44.
- <sup>15</sup> Gilles Lambert, *Caravaggio* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), 82.







# Kimberly Carroll

(Eugene Delacroix. Liberty Leading the People, 1830. Musée du Louvre, Paris.)



# Liberty Leading the Women: Delacroix's *Liberty* as Transitional Image

One of the most iconic works of revolutionary art is Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, a painting from 1830 that depicts the July Revolution of the same year (Fig 1.). The main figure of the painting is the symbol of Liberty, an allegorical representation of the ideal of perfect freedom. Liberty is represented through the female form, a traditional manner of representation of victory that dates back to antiquity (Fig. 2). Many components of her appearance clearly indicate that she is an allegorical representation and not, in fact, a representation of an actual woman. However, Delacroix's particular symbol of liberty continues to hold relevance today through her reemergence in the contemporary milieu as a symbol that has, perhaps, transcended the allegorical trope and

transformed into a true woman of the people. Delacroix introduces through her figure a level of specificity that transcends her traditional representations as a passive, mythological, or allegorical symbol. In looking to the origins of the figure of liberty, the role of women during the revolutions, the artist's own history, and the reappearance of this figure into our own contemporary world, the evolution of Delacroix's Liberty as an image can be seen to serve as a bridge from a purely allegorical figure to a real woman.

*Liberty Leading the People* is a major work that in many ways announces the Romantic era. *Liberty* is a scene of revolution specifically from July of 1830, when a three-day uprising in Paris called for the

overthrow of the monarchy that had been reinstated shortly after the first French Revolution of 1789 – 99. It debuted in the Paris Salon in 1831 and was met with mixed reactions.

Many were horrified at the depiction of an event in what would have been contemporary history in which a bare-breasted woman was painted leading the people of France. In the same year of its debut, the painting "was censored by Louis-Philippe" and was "hidden from the public for years" because of its controversial and emotionally charged nature.<sup>1</sup>

The State, fearing further insurrection, kept the painting hidden until 1863 when it entered the Luxembourg Museum, only to find permanent residence in 1874 at the Louvre.

The setting of the painting is inspired by the 1830 revolution, where Delacroix allegedly witnessed the revolution from the window of his Paris apartment. The figures in the scene are identifiable by their clothing and weaponry. Both the fallen and fighting figures are dressed in clothes indicative of the time period, which also places them in various classes: from the working class, the military class, the bourgeoisie, the artisan class, and the aristocracy. Delacroix was known to be a patriot and a lover of his country, and believed his

painting to be his contribution to his country. As he stated in a letter to his brother, "I have undertaken a modern subject, a barricade, and although I may not have fought for my country, at least I shall have painted for her."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Delacroix painted a revolution that is by the people and for the people through his representation of a range of individuals who fight alongside one another. However, all of the figures depicted as fighting are men, except for the figure of Liberty at the center. While these figures are meant to represent actual people, the figure who leads them all is an allegorical representation. She is a symbol of an ideal that is greater than those who fight and encapsulates precisely what they are fighting for. By including a woman as the main focus of his painting, Delacroix follows an established tradition, but also implicitly

calls to attention the historical role of women in the July Revolution and the French Revolution years prior. Her widely acknowledged role as solely an allegory may not be as clear when she is taken into context with the rest of the painting and with Delacroix's specific depiction.

While Delacroix's personal opinion of women is not widely known, inferences can be made through his own personal writings. Eugene Delacroix records several encounters he had with women in his journal, nearly all of whom are cast in a flattering light. One instance is his depiction of his housekeeper, Jeanne-Marie le Gouilleu, a peasant woman who began working for him around 1834 when Delacroix fell ill. In the introduction of his journal, it is stated that Delacroix "admired the courage and integrity she

had shown under great hardship," and in his own words, praised Jeanne-Marie for her "blind devotion in person, she watches over my life and my time like a soldier on guard."<sup>3</sup> It is evident through his writings that Delacroix admired the strength and capability of his housekeeper, going as far as characterizing her as strong and soldier-like, someone who capably watches over him and protects him. In many ways, such a view of women can be projected onto the figure of Liberty, leading the people of France through the chaotic fog and into the light where liberty can be attained. However, in order to tease out her role as an allegory, it is helpful to look at the role of women during this time period and, more specifically, to the iconic figure of Marianne.



(Figure 2: Unknown. *Flying Nike (Victory) Sculpture*, 2nd century B.C.)

Marianne became the symbol of the French Republic in 1792 after the New Republic was formed during the French Revolution. To this day, she remains the specific symbol of the French Republic as the goddess of liberty and reason, and as an allegorical symbol of liberty, herself. It is possible that Delacroix's *Liberty* is merged with her identity.

Marianne is normally depicted wearing the Phrygian cap (Fig 3.) a notable symbol of liberty from the first French Revolution, as well as holding a spear in one hand. One important factor to note, however, is that Marianne is nearly always depicted in traditional, Greco-Roman garb, occasionally with her breasts uncovered. The state of her dress varies with the interpretation of the artist. The most notable feature of Delacroix's *Liberty* is her bare breasts, something that has led art historians to agree upon her identity as exclusively allegorical.



(Figure 3: Antoine-Jean Gros. *Allegorical Figure of the Republic (Marianne)*, 1794.)

Marianne, herself, was a symbol to be worshipped and her name derives from the combination of the Virgin Mary and her mother, Anne.<sup>4</sup> She evoked the “lower classes of the countryside, where the Madonna-like Marianne became an amalgam of the revolutionary goddesses Liberty, Reason, and Virtue.”<sup>5</sup> However, she is seen as a replacement of the religious iconography at the time, introducing a secular France that was no longer under control of the oppressive monarchy or Church.

The French Revolution prompted French Republicans to associate themselves with the ideal of liberty, which ultimately resulted in the figure of Marianne. The figure of Marianne thus became a recurring image of liberty and secularism in French art and culture, both during and after the Revolution. She and Delacroix’s Liberty have both become the “most enduring women warriors of French iconography.”<sup>6</sup>

The name of Marianne “fit the feminine-gendered *la République* and suggested that the Revolution had given power to the lower classes.”<sup>7</sup> To the commoners, Marianne represents a figure that empowered the lower classes through revolution. In comparison to the lower, working classes, the educated classes and the bourgeoisie “preferred classical and masculine allegories” of strength until Marianne came to symbolize France.<sup>8</sup> She became popular among the middle classes after 1800, and her representation and idealization varied depending on class and artist. For example, in one particular play entitled *Marianne and Dumont*, the figure of Marianne was represented through her depiction as a bourgeois woman who is in love with a man who is lower than she.

While she is not explicitly depicted as a woman warrior, she exemplifies the spirit of women warriors who were “willing to give up love in order to protect their families.”<sup>9</sup> Thus the meaning of Marianne would vary: to an illiterate peasant woman, she could be a symbol of empowerment and to the bourgeois woman, a symbol of strength and prestige. To many women, Marianne embodied what they wished to attain, much like the symbol of Liberty herself.

While Marianne is normally depicted as a passive figure, a clear symbol of liberty and reason in the Republic, Delacroix’s Liberty is active. French painter Antoine-Jean Gros’ depiction of Marianne, for example, is clearly an allegorical symbol (Fig 3).

With the Phrygian cap on her spear, a level atop a lector bundle that is surrounded by oak leaves, and her tunic, she evokes antiquity surrounded by symbols of liberty and reason, as she stands upright as if she is a sculpture. This is one depiction of Marianne with her breast uncovered, another indication of allegory. Delacroix's Liberty also displays bare breasts, tying her to ancient personifications of liberty and victory (Fig. 2).

However, Delacroix's Liberty transcends a simple symbol of liberty and reason by becoming a fighter, a warrior, and a leader.

While Delacroix's Liberty certainly has ties to the figure of Marianne, her representation also goes further in the specificity of her appearance in ways that transcend Marianne altogether. Instead of Marianne's spear, she holds a bayonet,

a weapon that was used during both the French and July Revolutions. This suggests that she is a soldier and a woman of the people. She wears the Phrygian cap much like Marianne, but she is unlike the delicate Marianne. Instead, Liberty is muscular and robust, a symbol of a peasant woman of France rather than a goddess of antiquity or, possibly, a secularized holy mother. As Eric Hobsbawm in *Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography* states, Liberty is more along the lines of a "woman of the people, belonging to the people, and at ease among the people."<sup>10</sup> Even a poem by French poet Auguste Barbier entitled *La Curée* describes Liberty as "of peasant stock, the very image of the people."<sup>11</sup> The first sketch of Liberty by Delacroix entitled *Study for Liberty* shows a Liberty with an emotionally expressive face as she cries out and leads the people toward victory (Fig 4).

The final version of Liberty, instead, shows a more serene expression that is indicative of the serenity exhibited by the statues of antiquity, but her new role as an active fighter for the cause of the French people remains. Liberty is among the people of France, leads the people of France, and is a woman. However, woman as leader or even equal to men in society was historically not the case in France, even during the French Revolution, the July Revolution and beyond.



(Figure 4: Eugene Delacroix. *Study for Liberty*, 1830.)

Prior to the French Revolution, women were taught to be committed to their husbands and their husbands' interests.<sup>12</sup> Women worked in the home, considered incapable of working outside of the home until the Industrial Revolution when they largely worked in factories, as washerwomen or as prostitutes. Women, overall, were banned from the political sphere with no representation whatsoever, but during the French Revolution, women began to politicize. Political clubs were formed in which women spoke of politics and equality. Clubs like the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women of 1793 were "centrally involved in the mainstream movement for political democracy and social equality, and had even begun to ask for equal rights for women."<sup>13</sup>

Petitions for equal rights were not uncommon at this time, and women played a significant role in both revolutions as they fought alongside men. However, any kind of equality was denied to the women of France after both revolutions. Suppression of women's clubs was widespread, and women never gained full political rights. Any rights that were gained were crushed by the Napoleonic Law Code of 1804 that "proclaimed a uniform regime of patriarchy" and stripped women of rights by officially deeming them second-class citizens in relation to men.<sup>14</sup> Women thus faced a major setback in the fight for equality, despite their role as fighters and champions of freedom. Yet Delacroix depicts Liberty as a woman, one that draws upon the mythological representation of women but is represented as the leader of a real battle.

Women did, indeed, fight alongside men during the July Revolution. Several scholars have suggested that a number of French insurgents inspired Delacroix's Liberty, herself. Given Delacroix's own personal admiration for strength in women, it is not necessarily unlikely. Art historian T.J. Clark claimed that Delacroix was inspired by a "working woman called Marie Deschamps, who fought on the barricades and was decorated."<sup>15</sup> While images of her do not exist, a description of her is found in the official *Narrative of the French Revolution* in 1830, which is considered an authentic detailing of the events that took place. The depiction of her is as follows:

On the Quai de la Cité, a young woman snatched the musket of a citizen who had fallen, and fired briskly upon the Swiss Guards. A ball passed through her gown. This heroine is named Marie Deschamps – her residence is in the Rue St. Victor.<sup>16</sup>

Clark furthered his claim of the influence of Marie Deschamps through observing the female figures of Delacroix, noting that Liberty's sexuality is notably different. He states that Liberty's "nakedness is not one with which Delacroix was endlessly familiar: her breasts and shoulders are those of Marie Deschamps."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Liberty is unique in her depiction and specificity, as a figure who is more like the fighting, workingwoman than a goddess of antiquity. With Delacroix's Liberty she "transitions from the chaste and emblematic representations of Liberty that were commonplace of the period to Delacroix's arresting figure," her representation making her "no more than a woman of the people."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to Marie Deschamps, many other women fought during the July Revolution, and formed, following the revolt, a feminist insurgency that advocated for the widespread support for women's rights.

From 1788 to 1791, there was "widespread support for liberty" with "interaction among social classes," emphasizing a unity at this time that was needed to overthrow the current monarchy.<sup>19</sup> During this time, women became more prominent as active fighters for liberty, including female authors who wrote for their freedom. A 1797 pamphlet written by Constance Pipelet on the role of female authors contains the words, "O women! Take up the pen and the paintbrush; the arts, like happiness, belong to everyone," which emphasizes her belief that women were entitled to a voice despite the constant "scrutiny and redefinition" they faced during this time period.<sup>20</sup>

During this time, "living women often represented revolutionary ideals, such as Liberty, Reason, Nature, or Victory, and the allegorical female figure of Marianne came to represent the Republic."<sup>21</sup> This suggests that real and allegorical women during these turbulent times became the representation of liberty, a representation that was exemplified during revolutionary festivals where women were idealized. During these festivals the position of women in the Revolution was highlighted with "abstract, philosophical depictions of women as Liberty or Marianne [distancing] women from involvement in the pragmatic, everyday workings of politics and [setting] up a model of femininity that was aloof, moral, and abstract."<sup>22</sup>



This serene idealization of women as liberty, which is also mentioned as replacing Catholic figures and French monarchs as symbols of community and nation, changes with Eugene Delacroix's depiction of an active, fighting Liberty, a figure that transcended the ideal of woman and became an embodiment of a female liberty herself.

With the symbol of Marianne, a contemporary woman – neither the Madonna nor an ancient allegory – is chosen to represent the Republic, making a break from the norm. With women now fighting more forcefully for liberty and equal rights, such women thus became living models and embodiments of the goddess of liberty – women such as Madame Roland, Claire Lacombe, Madame de Staël, and other fighters

who politicized and called for equality in rights and opportunity, along with representation. Eugene Delacroix even praises Madame de Staël, a French woman of letters, in his private journal, stating that he uses the same method as she, and that “art, like music, is higher than thought.”<sup>23</sup> It seems likely that his admiration for Madame de Staël and other influential revolutionary women is projected onto his depiction of Liberty as the leader of the revolution. Although idealized versions of Liberty did little to include women in the real politics of France, women looked toward actual figures of liberty to call for equality and political participation. An illiterate woman of France, for example, could find the use of imagery extremely important.

Just like the image of Marianne empowering the women of the lower classes this, in turn, would specifically help to champion feminism during the revolutions and lead to woman-warrior mentality.

Women as warriors were not new to art during the Romantic era, nor was it new to French art. Depictions of Joan of Arc, for example, resulted in the popularization of the idea of the woman warrior in art. Nonetheless, the heroine as subject proliferates in Romantic art. Delacroix's Liberty, herself, is a warrior in that she actively leads the people in battle and is prepared to fight as well, rather than standing immutably in place. Both Marianne and Delacroix's Liberty are enduring women warriors in French iconography with Liberty specifically as an embodiment of the iconic image of the July Revolution and its revolutionary women.



The centrality of Liberty in the painting indicates her role as “woman-as-nation” as she depicts the sincerity of the rebel’s cause by charging into the battle headfirst.<sup>24</sup>

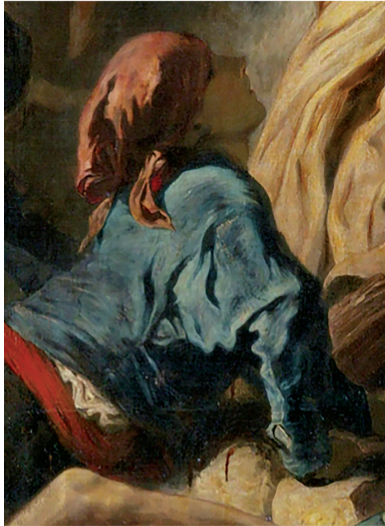
At first glance, *Liberty Leading the People* appears chaotic as a group of armed, fighting individuals are led by a woman whose garments hang off of her body, exposing her breasts. Each figure, however, plays an important role in the July Revolution of 1830, a revolution whose purpose was to overthrow the monarchy of King Charles X of France. In the hand of the woman at the forefront of the fight is the tri-colored flag of France, in the other a bayonet, while she wears the Phrygian cap atop her head. At her feet lay the dead and the dying. The scene is identifiable as a street in Paris due to its landscape and the towers of Notre Dame in the background.

As one begins to look more critically at the painting, the specific time in history can be determined through the depiction of clothing and weaponry the figures carry. It is as if Delacroix’s *Liberty* is more of a journalistic piece than a romanticized depiction of revolution, which would make the presence of a purely allegorical Liberty questionable.

Liberty is the only figure in the painting that is considered allegorical, or simply a symbol. The revolution is historically based and the figures that surrounded her are historically based, as well. We find figures such as a factory worker, possibly of color, who wields a saber and is identifiable through his work shirt, apron, and trousers. Directly next to him is a man wearing a black top hat, a white shirt and cravat, and a black coat, a figure who has been speculated to be a self-portrait of Delacroix, himself, despite his admission that he did not personally participate in the fight.

They stand together, and yet they are strikingly different as they are clearly from separate social classes. Other figures include soldiers, one of whom rises from the left frame of the painting and out of the rubble, another fallen and dead to the right of Liberty, herself. A bourgeois man lies dead as well, his clothes looted and shirt torn. A schoolboy next to Liberty, identified by his school satchel and black beret, is a testament to the younger generation of France who will hopefully keep the fight for liberty alive throughout future generations. Spectatorship and the male gaze are suggested through his representation but with a twist, particularly in the man at Liberty’s feet who looks up at her in worship (Fig. 5).

This man suggests, perhaps, that France is replacing one religion with another when both he and Liberty are considered within the context of the entire painting.

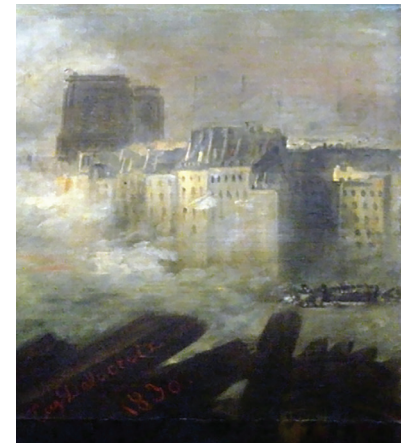


(Figure 5: Eugène Delacroix. *Man at Liberty's feet detail*, 1830. Musée du Louvre, Paris.)

Despite Delacroix's discussion of Catholicism and Christ's influence on him in his journal, dated well after the original July Revolution, a whole new element of the secular is introduced in *Liberty Leading the People*.

With the burning towers of Notre Dame in the background of the painting (Fig. 6), Delacroix seems to call for the abolition of the Church in addition to the monarchy. Notre Dame did go up in flames during the July Revolution; nonetheless, Delacroix seems, at least, to be stressing the importance of secularism particularly in the New Republic, and perhaps is replacing liberty and freedom as a creed to be followed. With many in France at the time viewing the Church as corrupt, a more secular France was insisted upon, a new France that better reflected the people and the people's interests. A secular Marianne who championed liberty replaced the figure of the Virgin Mary. Delacroix's Liberty, in particular, is once again a secular figure of liberty, depicted through a woman, whom the people follow, worship and emulate.

The French writer Alexandre Dumas said of Delacroix's Liberty that "these are real paving stones, real boys, real men of the people, real blood," and that, "Liberty is not at all the classic Liberty; it is a young woman of the people, one of those who fight not to be *tutoyée*, outraged, violated by the great lords."<sup>25</sup> This suggests that the Liberty who leads the people is, in fact, a real woman of the people, and such interpretation continues to be seen through her reappearance into the contemporary world.



(*Notre Dame's towers detail*, 1830. Musée du Louvre, Paris.)

The power of Delacroix's Liberty as a generalized abstract concept cannot be denied when her use in the contemporary milieu is seen. The figure of liberty is a timeless one, a symbol that is evoked time and again across cultures. America's Statue of Liberty, completed in 1886 as a gift from the French, and is a statue that emulates many common depictions of France's Marianne, is considered a symbol of pride that a nation who champions liberty continues to evoke (Fig 7). Liberty in this context idealizes the overarching ideal of liberty. Nonetheless, this figure of liberty has been used specifically to champion equal rights and call for the equality of women.

One particularly important example would be the feminist protest on Bastille Day, July 13, 2013 in Paris when *Liberty Leading the People* was reintroduced as a tribute to a new feminist

movement with the topless Liberty involved. The mural was accompanied by words from the artist himself, street artist COMBO, who stated that "by hijacking such an iconic piece of art ... I want to denunciate the discrimination and other misogynistic behavior that women still suffer too often and to pay a tribute to the activist's fight."<sup>26</sup>



(Figure 7: Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi. *Statue of Liberty*, 1886. New York.)

Entitled *Femen Leading the People*, this referred to the feminist group "Femen" which is comprised of "theatrical, warrior like women" who advocate in public displays of power with bare chests to address issues of sexism, misogyny, and more. A wall mural further depicted five women atop a pile of rubble and fallen bodies, in emulation of Delacroix's painting (Fig. 8). The woman in the center holds the French flag like Liberty, while phrases such as "I Am Free," "Naked War" and "Liberty" are painted upon their bare torsos. Their aim was to take back the objectification of the woman's body as an instrument of patriarchy through striking a power pose, like women warriors themselves. These women are associating themselves with Liberty in order to take her back and take back her form, using their nakedness as a reclaiming of their bodies and their rights altogether.

This clearly suggests that Liberty is no longer purely allegorical but, in fact, transcends its purpose as symbol and occupies a strictly gendered political space.

*Liberty Leading the People*, to this day, continues to be a cultural icon. The representation of a woman as leader personifies the change and social reform that the French fighting in the Revolution sought, as the only woman represented in the battle. She is a testament to those women who did fight and epitomizes the true liberty and freedom for which both men and women fought. Liberty has thus become a figure that is more than her allegorical implications, but rather a symbol that has been recognized as a feminist icon.

Her clothing, weaponry, and position gives her ties to real women who fought in the revolutions, and has now been embraced by women of today who call upon her as a feminist symbol. Delacroix's Liberty stands as a symbol of liberty who real women could look to and emulate, and with whom to evolve.



(Figure. 8 Combo. *Femen Leading the People*, 2013. Paris.)



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Lanselle-Bouvet, Violaine and Pommerau, Claude. Musée du Louvre. Paris: Beaux Arts/TTM Editions, 2012, 135.
- <sup>2</sup> Artble.
- <sup>3</sup> Delacroix, Eugène, and Walter Pach. The Journal of Eugene Delacroix. New York: Covici, Friede, 1937, 30.
- <sup>4</sup> Nielsen, Wendy C. Women Warriors in Romantic Drama. Newark: University Of Delaware Press, 2013, 136.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 135.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 136.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Hobsbawm, E. "Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography." History Workshop Journal 6, no.1 (1978): 121-38, 124.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 122.
- <sup>12</sup> Rose, R.B. "Feminism, Women and the French Revolution." Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques. Vol. 21., No. 1 (Winter 1995), pp. 187 – 205,193.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 188.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 193.
- <sup>15</sup> Barry, David. Women and Political Insurgency: France in the Mid- nineteenth Century. Hound mills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1996, 170.
- <sup>16</sup> Colton, C. C. Narrative of the French Revolution in 1830: An Authentic Detail of the Events Which Took Place on the 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th of July. Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1830, 321.
- <sup>17</sup> Reynolds, Sian. Women, State and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe since 1789. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, 35.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>19</sup> Montfort-Howard, Catherine. *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*.  
Birmingham, Ala.: Summa Publications, 1994, 239.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Delacroix, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Nielsen, 135.

<sup>25</sup> Jobert, Barthélémy, and Eugène Delacroix. *Delacroix*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998, 130.

<sup>26</sup> Huffington Post.

---



# Caroline Woods

(Berthe Morisot. *The Wet Nurse*, 1879. Private collection, Washington D.C.)



# The Female Avant-Garde: Challenging Ideas of Gender in Morisot's *Wet Nurse* and Valadon's *The Blue Room*

Berthe Morisot and Suzanne Valadon have long been considered pioneering women artists whose lives and work coincided with the emergence of modernity. Each artist is representative of the *avant-garde* from a different generation – Berthe Morisot was born in the first half of the nineteenth century in 1841, while Suzanne Valadon was born in the second half in 1865. The two artists had very different lives, were very different people, and had very different class limitations. In addition, they come to maturity at transitional moments in socio-historical conditions for women and women professionals. In the following analysis,

I compare Morisot's *The Wet Nurse* of 1879 with Valadon's *The Blue Room* of 1923 in order to analyze how the lives of these two women as individuals as well as gendered subjects play out in each of her works both formally and iconographically. By doing so, I hope to ascertain the terms by which each woman was revolutionary.

Berthe Morisot was born in Bourges, France on January 14, 1841. She had two older sisters, Yves, born in 1838, and Edma, born in 1839, and a younger brother Tiburce, born in 1848. Her family moved from one provincial capital to the next, for her father was a high ranking civil servant who frequently had to move posts.

It was her father's job that allowed the family to live comfortably at the upper end of the bourgeois class, but would also limit Morisot's opportunity as an artist. In 1852, he finally settled his family in Passy, an area on the western outskirts of Paris.

In 1855, Morisot's father took a position at the national accounting office as senior council. He had studied to become an architect in his youth and as a result, aesthetic pursuits were a high priority for the family. At one point, Morisot's mother decided to surprise him on his birthday and have their daughters study painting under the tutelage of a private master, Geoffroy-Alphonse Chocarne, an advocate for the Neo-classical style of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres.

However, the Morisot girls soon lost interest in their teacher's lessons, perhaps pointing to Berthe's preference for a less traditional style. Since the Ecole des Beaux-Arts would not accept women until 1897, the Morisots hired a new private teacher, Joseph Guichard.<sup>1</sup>

Guichard took his job as teacher very seriously. It was normal for the daughters of upper-class families to receive an art education, but only at an amateur level to produce a commonplace hobby.<sup>2</sup> Guichard, however, recognized the daughters' talent and potential early on.<sup>3</sup> According to Tiburce, Berthe's younger brother, Guichard approached Madame Morisot once realizing this potential and said,

Given your daughters' natural gifts, it will not be petty drawing-room talents that my instruction will achieve; they will become painters. Are you fully aware of what that means? It will be revolutionary – I would almost say catastrophic – in your high bourgeois milieu. Are you sure you will never one day curse the art, once allowed into this household, now so respectably peaceful, that will become the sole master of the fate of two of your children?<sup>4</sup>

Berthe's mother was unaffected by the warning, and the girls continued to paint. Not long into their tutelage, they requested lessons in *plein air* painting, which introduced them to the famous landscape painter, Camille Corot.<sup>5</sup> He lent the sisters several of his own works to copy, and it was these paintings that inspired Morisot to utilize the same undisguised brushwork found in his work.

In 1864, Morisot and her sister Edma submitted paintings to the Salon de Paris, and all four of them were accepted.<sup>6</sup> They pursued other tactics to display and sell their artwork, such as placing paintings in a street-front window of a shop owned by Alfred

Cadart, but this was largely in vain.<sup>7</sup> This type of behavior was very unusual for the time, as it was exceptional for a woman to pursue a professional career as a painter in the 1860s.<sup>8</sup> The Morisot parents were not yet worried, though, for Edma and Berthe's interest in painting still appeared to them as just a hobby. A successful career in painting produced commissions, medals, high-priced pieces, and memberships in state academies. In order to achieve these accomplishments, one had to study in the central school at the École des Beaux-Arts. It was only there that a young painter could find access to the full program of anatomy and learn to draw after classical art. More importantly, it was in that atmosphere that young painters found the support of peers and professional contacts that could lead to the advancement of careers.

These studios did not accept female students, and therefore Berthe and Edma were excluded.<sup>9</sup>

In 1865, the Morisot family had a studio built in the garden of their home.<sup>10</sup> This studio was not just a building, but also a place of independence. Set apart from the house, it was there where the sisters could escape from domestic obligations to concentrate on painting. After a year of this, their mother finally began to worry. Berthe was twenty-six and Edma was twenty-eight, and their mother began to complain that they were neglecting their family obligations and unappreciative of the marriage prospects she was seeking for them.<sup>11</sup>

Morisot continued to show her work in the Salon regularly until 1873.<sup>12</sup> In 1868, she became friends with the future Impressionist, Edouard Manet.

Manet's style was very inspirational for Morisot, and he influenced her in many ways. Their relationship, however, was reciprocal. For example, Morisot convinced Manet to attempt *plein air* painting.<sup>13</sup> While Manet held himself somewhat apart from the circle of painters who later became known as the Impressionists, Morisot exhibited her work with them from 1874 on. In 1874, she married Manet's brother, Eugène, and they had a daughter, Julie. Morisot missed only one exhibition with the Impressionists in 1878, the year that Julie was born.<sup>14</sup>

Morisot's subject matter in her paintings consisted of scenes she experienced in her day-to-day life. Her paintings show the restrictions placed upon nineteenth-century artists of her class and gender. She was unable to paint in public unchaperoned, so she avoided painting city and street scenes.

She rarely painted the nude figure for she did not have access to figure painting classes and it would have been inappropriate, to say the least, for her to paint her own body. Instead, she turned to scenes of domestic life and portraits, for she could use her family and friends as models. She also painted landscapes and garden scenes in the privacy of her home in the countryside, away from urban Paris.<sup>15</sup>

Morisot's *The Wet Nurse*, 1879 is an example of an ordinary event she experienced in her everyday life (Fig. 1). This painting, however, is anything but ordinary, in terms of both style and iconography. The central focus of the painting is of two figures, a mother and a child. They are hard to make out, as they melt into the rhythmic green background.

This painting could easily be mistaken as a Madonna and Child, updated and secularized, as the other prominent female Impressionist, Mary Cassatt, was doing. Morisot's rendition is different in that the woman holding the child is actually not her mother, but a *seconde mère*, or a wet nurse. She is feeding the child for wages, not out of maternal obligation. The subject matter of this painting is even more curious in that Morisot is not painting just any wet nurse and child, but her daughter, Julie, feeding from her *seconde mère*.<sup>16</sup>



(Figure 1: Berthe Morisot. *The Wet Nurse*, 1879. Private collection, Washington D.C.)

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *industrie nourricière*, or wet nursing, was a large-scale industry in France. Families of the urban artisan and shop-keeping class would send their babies out to be nursed by women in the country, allowing the wives to be free to work. This industry had many issues, however, including unsanitary practices, high mortality rates for the infants, and financial arrangements that were often unstable.

These issues caused the government to step in and regulate the industry in 1874, supervising wet nurses and their clients across the nation. Morisot was a member of the upper bourgeoisie, however, so she was not tied to this regulated industry. Instead, members of this class would hire a *nourrice sur lieu*, a live-in wet nurse. Her main purpose was to provide the infant with milk, but she would also take the child to the park, comfort her, etc. Although this was a way for a poor countrywoman with few skills to make a considerable amount of money, it did involve her own personal sacrifices. The wet nurse's diet was strictly monitored, as was her sex life, although the biggest sacrifice was leaving her own infant at home in the country in the care of another family member.<sup>17</sup>



Morisot's choice of utilizing a *nourrice sur lieu* was the norm for someone of her class. It would not have been considered careless or neglectful, for it was within the appropriate cultural constructs of her time. Morisot turning to a wet nurse as subject matter for a painting was not unheard of either. In Degas' *At the Races in the Countryside*, 1869, he depicts a husband and wife who are accompanied by a wet nurse in the act of feeding an infant (Fig. 2). While representing French society in his *A Sunday on La Grande-Jatte*, 1884, Georges Seurat also includes a depiction of a wet nurse, although heavily geometrized and barely recognizable (Fig. 3). As in the case of Morisot's painting, the wet nurse is identifiable by her uniform, which consists of a white dress, red scarf, and a white bonnet.



(Figure 2: Edgar Degas. *At the Races in the Countryside*, 1869. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.)



(Figure 3: Georges Seurat. *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, 1884. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.)

Morisot's case was particularly special because she was a female painter. Not only does the viewer get to see this depiction through the lens of a woman, something unusual for the time, but through the lens of the infant's mother. This image is now no longer a simple mother and daughter scene, but one with many more complications. Morisot, while working, watches another woman work. The crux of this painting is two women workers from different social classes, with very different lives, coming together over something they share in common yet also do not share: motherhood of this particular infant. The women confront each other over a child with whom they do not share the same connection. This tension reflects an unavoidable conflict:

Morisot was, in fact, a professional painter and a mother at a place and time in history when the two things were mutually exclusive.<sup>19</sup> She must watch, as she works, another woman perform an act of motherhood upon her daughter.

This tension becomes apparent when looking at the formal aspects of the painting. At first glance, the viewer is confronted with a triangular whitish lump that seems to be dissolving into a chaotic yet rhythmic green backdrop. Under further inspection, the viewer begins to make out a bonnet-wearing head on top of the lump and the rosy-cheeked, red-headed child in its center, and begins to realize that it is a seated woman with a child in her lap. Morisot's broken and visible brushwork is so heavily applied, that if she had gone any further, the viewer might not be able to distinguish the imagery at all.

Just as the woman blends into the surrounding landscape, the child seems to melt into the woman's lap, almost as if they are one being. Morisot gives the woman two brown dashes for eyes and a red smudge for lips, but that is the extent of her facial features. The only spot of relative clarity is the face of the infant suckling at the woman's breast.

It is tempting to suggest that Morisot's handling of this figure's body is reflective of the tension she must have felt in the paradox of creating this work. She was a mother, but also a worker. She was a woman, but also a painter. She took pleasure from painting, but also may have felt conflict watching another woman perform an act of motherhood on her own child. This tension seems to manifest in the openness of the facture, the disembodiment and erasure of the woman's form, and the lack of outline that begs the question of identity and dissolution.

Morisot's take on this classical idea of mother and child gives way to her reality and experience living as a woman artist in the mid nineteenth century. Unlike Renoir's *Mother Nursing Her Child*, 1886, which depicts the artist's wife Aline breastfeeding their child, both of them content and happy in their mother and child relationship, Morisot's depiction of motherhood is not idealized (Fig. 4). She does not ignore, but confronts the tension she feels by almost erasing the identity of the wet nurse altogether. Even her brushstrokes seem to emphasize a contradiction, as they are chaotic yet purposeful, turbulent yet calming.

Of course, as an Impressionist-identified artist, Morisot may very well have been exploring open facture for its own sake, according to the premises of that movement.

However, Morisot deviates from the Impressionist agenda by choosing to paint figures, subject matter that some of the other Impressionists avoided because of its inherent emotional implications. Moreover, Morisot has given us other images of mothers and children, such as *The Cradle*, 1872, that are emotionally realistic and unidealized views of the challenges of motherhood (Fig 5). It is difficult to imagine that, consciously and/or subconsciously, Morisot managed to paint an entirely objective image of this charged subject matter that is so relevant to her own life. Another revolutionary female painter who focused on gender-based issues was Suzanne Valadon. Marie-Clémentine Valadon, was born on September 23, 1865, in Bessines-sur-Gartempe, a small town located in central France.



(Figure 4: Pierre-Auguste Renoir. *Mother Nursing Her Child*, 1886. Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.)



(Figure 5: Berthe Morisot. *The Cradle*, 1872. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.)

Her mother, Madeleine Valadon, would never disclose Marie-Clémentine's father. Madeleine worked as a maid in a bourgeois household in the small town, and had been married to Leon Coulaud, with whom she had two older daughters. He worked as a blacksmith, but was arrested for forgery in 1859, and died later that year. With the death of her husband, and the birth of the illegitimate child who would become Suzanne Valadon, Madeleine fled to Paris, leaving her two other daughters in the care of relatives.<sup>20</sup>

Madeleine settled in Montmartre, an inexpensive bohemian neighborhood perched on top of a hill known for its working mills and the large number of musicians and artists who lived there. This place would be an important aspect of inspiration in Valadon's career.

Her mother enrolled her in a day school at a convent nearby, where she studied until about the age of eleven. She was not a good student, and would often skip school altogether to explore the streets of Montmartre, for she was not interested in her classes. She was finally removed from school at the age of eleven in order to help provide for herself and her mother. She started and abandoned various jobs, and it was not until 1880 that she joined the circus, fulfilling a childhood dream. She only stayed with the circus until she was fifteen, when a serious injury in the ring left her with impaired agility.<sup>21</sup>

At this time Valadon began modeling for artists. She became Maria, and her patrons included artists such as Puvis de Chavannes, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

During this period, it was assumed that many models were sexually available to their artists. There is some speculation that these men may have become her lovers, although some biographers disagree.<sup>22</sup>

On December 26, 1883, Valadon gave birth to her son, Maurice. He was illegitimate, and although the identity of his real father is unclear, one of Valadon's lovers, Spanish journalist Miguel Utrillo, signed papers recognizing paternity. After the birth of her son, Valadon's mother took care of the baby while she returned to modeling. In 1896, Valadon married stock broker Paul Mousis, thus ushering in a new era in the Valadon family's financial affairs. They became a bourgeois family, and no longer had to worry about money in the way they had.<sup>23</sup>



Valadon had started drawing at the age of six, and began painting at the age of fourteen. However, she destroyed most of her early attempts. For guidance, she turned to the many artists who surrounded her in the Montmartre neighborhood. Through these artists she was eventually introduced to Degas, although she never modeled for him. He saw enormous talent in her, and even bought one of her first drawings. They would continue to be friends throughout her career.<sup>24</sup>

In 1909, Valadon met André Utter, a painter and one of her son's contemporaries. Although she was twenty-one years his senior, she began a love affair with him. She asked Mousis for a divorce and she and her family left Pierrefitte, where she had moved with Mousis, and returned to Montmartre. At the suggestion of her new lover, she began to turn from drawing to painting.

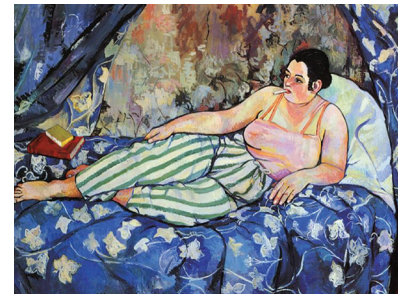
In 1912, the couple visited Corsica, and Utter posed nude for Valadon's *Casting of the Net*, 1914, which was revolutionary for its use of a nude male model by a female artist (Fig. 6).<sup>25</sup>



(Figure 6: Suzanne Valadon. *Casting the Net*, 1914. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.)

Valadon's *The Blue Room* of 1923 is perhaps her most well-known work (Fig. 7). In the painting, Valadon depicts a curvaceous woman dressed in loose, striped pants and a camisole. She reclines on a day bed and has a cigarette in her mouth. At her feet, atop a richly decorated blue blanket is a pile of books. She is the new, modern woman of Paris in the 1920s.<sup>26</sup>

With the closing of World War I, women's roles in society began to change in Paris and elsewhere. Women no longer had to be accompanied by a chaperone in public, they were fighting for the right to vote, and they had different kinds of jobs, such as blue collar work. These changes in roles were reflected in appearance. Women no longer wore the constricting corsets and modest dresses of the nineteenth century. Instead, they wore loose, shorter dresses that allowed movement and wore shorter, bobbed hair.



(Figure 7: Suzanne Valadon. *The Blue Room*, 1923. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.)

Many more were educated and even smoked cigarettes, a mostly male habit. After the men came back from War, however, there was growing anxiety about this role shift. There were contradictions about this seemingly newfound freedom, for women had access to more opportunities, such as education, yet were still not equal to men in many ways, such as the right to vote. Valadon's painting reflects and celebrates this new woman.<sup>27</sup>

Although the formal aspects of this painting are not quite as revolutionary as the iconography she depicts, they are on par with her *avant-garde* contemporaries and contribute to her radical subject matter. The composition shows the culmination of Valadon's mature style and balances a careful harmony between the woman's figure and the décor

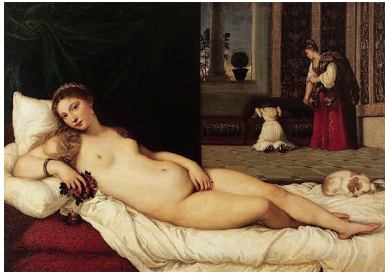
that surrounds it. She deliberately paints contrasting geometric and floral patterns, but unifies them subtly with the blue that covers the scene. Valadon may have been looking to Matisse in the curvilinear arabesque shapes that cover the blue fabric and contrasting patterns, as well as the poses and heavily proportioned bodies of his odalisques, showing that she is well aware of the leading contemporary male artists. The fabric's cool values enhance the model's warm accents in her shirt and books. The blue hue also alleviates the visual discomfort the viewer might have felt from the complexity of differing patterned surfaces. Valadon uses the model's striped pants to stretch the composition laterally and to calm the claustrophobia of the heavily patterned fabric.

The design on the wall behind the model shows Valadon's skill at "painterly painting" and also echoes the tones found in the model's skin and shirt, unifying the composition yet again.<sup>28</sup>

Valadon's depiction of this reclining woman is a direct response to an earlier depiction of a reclining woman: *Olympia*, 1863, by Manet (Fig. 8). Manet's depiction was itself a response to a painting known as the *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, by Titian (Fig. 9). Titian's depiction of a reclining woman serves as a model of ideal womanhood in the 16th century.



(Figure 8: Edouard Manet. *Olympia*, 1863. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.)



(Figure 9: Titian. *Venus of Urbino*, 1538. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.)

The woman is called a “Venus,” the goddess of love, and she reclines across the bed with her hand curled in between her legs, apparently masturbating. She looks out at the viewer with an alluring and seductive gaze. Curled up at the end of the bed near her feet lays a dog, a reference to the fidelity a woman must have within her marriage. In the background, a maid watches over a young girl who looks through a chest, symbolizing matrimony and motherhood.<sup>29</sup>

In his *Olympia*, Manet reinvents this scene, and instead of depicting a model of ideal womanhood,

he creates a controversial scene that comments on Parisian society. In his painting, rather than the goddess of love reclining on the bed, he paints a young prostitute. Prostitution was a major industry in France in the nineteenth century. However widespread it was, people were still shocked when they saw Manet’s depiction displayed at the Salon de Paris of 1865. Rather than enticing the viewer, she hides her genitals, waiting for her next client. Instead of a dog lying at her feet, a black cat arches its back, alluding to female promiscuity. Her gaze stares directly at the viewer, confronting her audience head-on, while her maid approaches her with a bouquet of flowers, a gift from one of her customers.

Valadon’s reinvention of this scene takes Manet’s depiction of a working class woman and turns her into an image of the new modern woman. This woman, like Titian and Manet’s, reclines upon a bed. She, however, is not naked. Not only is she clothed, but she also wears pants. This would have been a very charged and radical image, as pants were still seen as men’s clothing. She also smokes a cigarette, an activity in which men typically engaged. Instead of a cat at the end of her bed, this modern woman has books, a reference to her intelligence, or at least, literacy. Unlike Olympia’s thin girlish figure, Valadon’s figure is full-bodied and solid. She also appears to be sunburned with red cheeks and a red “v” mark on her chest, possibly a result of work she performs outdoors.

Her bare feet also appear to be large and rough-looking. These aspects mark her as working class, and combined with her intellectualism and distinct modernity, show Valadon's awareness of the new emerging woman.<sup>30</sup>

In both Morisot's *The Wet Nurse* and Valadon's *The Blue Room*, there is an aspect of truth surrounding the way these women represent other women. In Morisot's case, she is unidealized about the paradoxes of motherhood and how she represents the woman nursing her child. In Valadon's case, she is truthful in the way she represents the modern woman emerging in Paris. Both of these images are depictions of their perception of the world around them, and the women in it.

The two paintings, although created by women from different generations, both challenge ideas of gender in their respective time periods. In Morisot's case, her depiction of her wet nurse and child counters the idealized, happy, mother-baby relationship that was expected at the time. A woman's duty was to be a mother, and although a woman of Morisot's class was not expected to nurse an infant herself, she was only excused from doing so because doctors thought a healthy country wet nurse was a better alternative to a nervous new mother. Everything a mother did was for the benefit of her child, which is why her world was confined to her home. Morisot challenged this notion in her depiction, for she acknowledges the tensions that surrounded motherhood with her use of psychologically charged

subject matter and formal style. The tension that she possibly felt may have been the factor that pushed Morisot to be even more daring in her technique. It is possible that the facture is so open and free because she felt liberated from some of the burdens of motherhood, and was free to explore more radical technique. Her wet nurse may have not only been a source of discomfort and tension for Morisot, but also a conduit that allowed her to be daring and revolutionary in her work.

Valadon challenges ideas regarding gender by representing the new woman as her model. Unlike the woman of the nineteenth century, this new woman works, is educated, and has agency, which is reflected in her solidly outlined body and books, both of which give her a sense of identity.

She casts off her corset and instead turns to loose-fitting, male-identified pants.

Although Valadon paints her indoors, she challenges the idea of separate spheres in the way she depicts her model as the new woman likely to have made the choice to remain on her bed, rather than confined to it, literally and figuratively.

Although both of these paintings are radical, the artists achieve this radicalness in different ways. Where Morisot's work is perhaps most profound in regard to its formal aspects, Valadon's is revolutionary in terms of its iconography. Both artists are signaling a new era for women. Iconographically, Morisot's challenging of gender assumptions was perhaps less intentional, almost accidental, even as she was living a revolution in gender expectations.

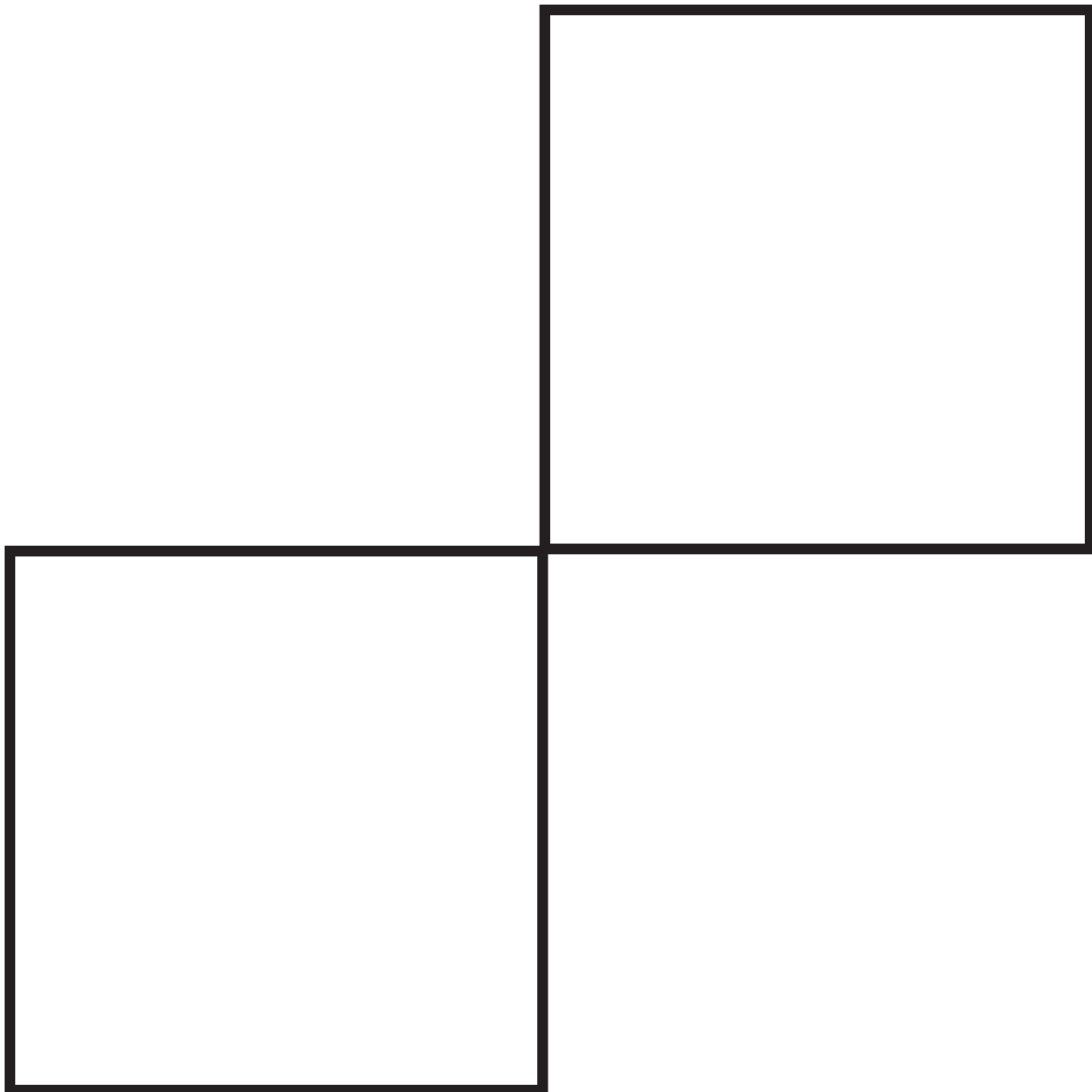
She was depicted what she had access to in her everyday life. Her wet nurse was there, and therefore, Morisot uses her as a tool in which she creates a radically innovative painting. Valadon, on the other hand, was from a generation earlier than Morisot, and with the emergence of the new woman in Paris, her challenging of ideas regarding gender is more self-conscious. She knows that although her formal style is in stride with her contemporaries, she is aware that her subject matter is a groundbreaking innovation. Although these artists were revolutionary in different ways, Morisot and Valadon were both representatives of the *avant-garde*.

They were very different people and lived very different lives, but the experiences of these two women as individuals as well as gendered subjects plays out in each of her works, creating innovative and revolutionary pieces.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Charles F. Stuckey, William P. Scott, and Suzanne G. Lindsay, *Berthe Morisot, Impressionist* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1987), 16.
- <sup>2</sup> Anne Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 13.
- <sup>3</sup> Stuckey, Scott, and Lindsay, *Berthe Morisot, Impressionist*, 17.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 18.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 19.
- <sup>6</sup> Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot*, 27.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 29.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 30.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 31.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 34.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 35.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 102.
- <sup>13</sup> Jane Turner, *The Grove Dictionary of Art. Late 19th-century French Artists* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) 319.
- <sup>14</sup> Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot*, 27.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>16</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Morisot's "Wet Nurse": The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 231.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 236-7.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 241.
- <sup>20</sup> Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon* (New York: Universe, 1994) 16.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 17.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 18.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

- <sup>26</sup> Paula Birnbaum, *Women Artists in Interwar France: Framing Femininities* (Farnham, Surrey, UK, England: Ashgate, 2011) 1-3.
- <sup>27</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (5th ed. London: Thames & Hudson, 2012) 253.
- <sup>28</sup> Rosinsky, Suzanne Valadon, 72.
- <sup>29</sup> "Venus of Urbino by Titian." Uffizi.org. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Oct. 2016.
- <sup>30</sup> Birnbaum, *Women Artists in Interwar France: Framing Femininities*, 196-7.
-





# STUDIO ART

JESS ARTIGLIERE

EVAN DAIGLE



# UGLY CRIER

A THESIS EXHIBITION BY JESS ARTIGLIERE







*To perceive texture is never only to ask or know, What is it like? nor even just How does it impinge on me? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?*

-Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 2003





No!  
20 x 26 inches  
2017  
Spray paint, acrylic paint, pouring  
medium, and printed transparency  
paper on BFK Rives

As a visual artist, I treat painting and bookmaking as related, parallel practices. In both, I condense and contrast incongruous pieces of information into new currents of meaning.

My paintings include scanned and printed advertisements directed at the 60/70s-era housewife. I am intrigued by their original print quality and nostalgic color palettes, as well as the gendered, ludicrous messages they contain, such as "Eating May Not Be Good For You" and "If you want to capture someone's attention, whisper."

I couple these images with fragmented scans of velvet as I explore the tension that exists between touch and sight. Touch, what was once an exchange taken for granted, has been overtly replaced by sight in the digital era. In general, I attempt to build a subjective vocabulary for processing questions of gender and intimacy against the backdrop of digital self-expression.

I import these disparate but specific representational elements onto canvas, and then partially obscure them in order to create layered abstract paintings. Fields of perceptual ambiguity suggest digital platforms.



Graffiti-esque passages are hidden under striped foregrounds, reminiscent of the buzz of the screen. I am interested in exploring new ideas about gesture. We have been taught to understand Abstract Expressionism as a male genre defined by ejaculatory action; my work reinterprets the gesture as a collecting hand that receives and re-situates the world's vertigo of visual information.

My zines and handmade books allow me to combine text and graphics in order to directly address the themes that drive my work. In the tradition of artists such as Barbara Kruger and the Guerilla Girls, I am interested in bringing attention to the under-representation of women artists. I also carry this corrective energy to a more personal sense of how to cultivate resiliency against the casual violence of dominant culture. For example, in my zine about hysteria, I end with some tongue-in-cheek advice to the reader about what to do if they find themselves in a venus fly trap: "Don't panic!!! Just take a nap instead and everything will be fine, honestly. If you panic, you will be die". I nestle humor against factual information to offer readers an outlet of relief.

-Jess Artigliere



Virginia Slims  
36 x 48 inches  
2016  
Spray paint, acrylic paint, pouring  
medium, and printed transparency  
paper on canvas



Touching, Feeling  
36 x 48 inches  
2016  
Oil paint and collage on canvas





Eating is Really Good for You  
36 x 48 inches  
2016  
Spray paint, acrylic paint, pouring  
medium, and printed transparency  
paper on canvas



Sour Lemon Mouthful  
36 x 48 inches  
2016  
Spray paint, acrylic paint, pouring  
medium, and printed transparency  
paper on canvas



Capturing Your Attention  
22 x 26 inches  
2016  
Spray paint, acrylic paint, pouring  
medium, and printed transparency  
paper on BFK Rives



You've come a long way  
9 x 12 inches  
2017  
Acrylic paint and silkscreen on canvas





Dirty Blonde  
20 x 26 inches  
2016  
Spray paint, acrylic paint, pouring  
medium, and printed transparency  
paper on BFK Rives

You've come a long way  
9 x 12 inches  
2017  
Acrylic paint and silkscreen on paper

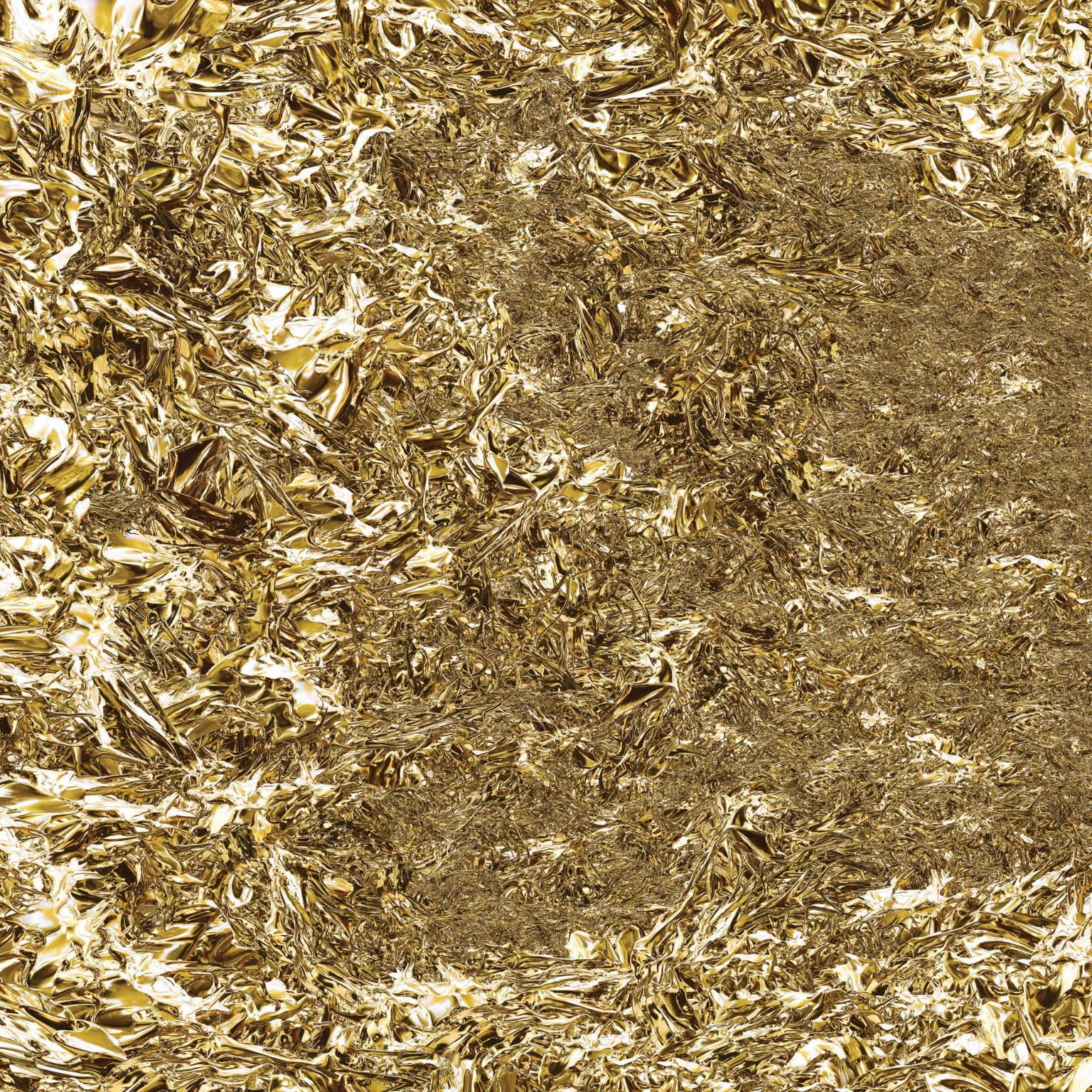




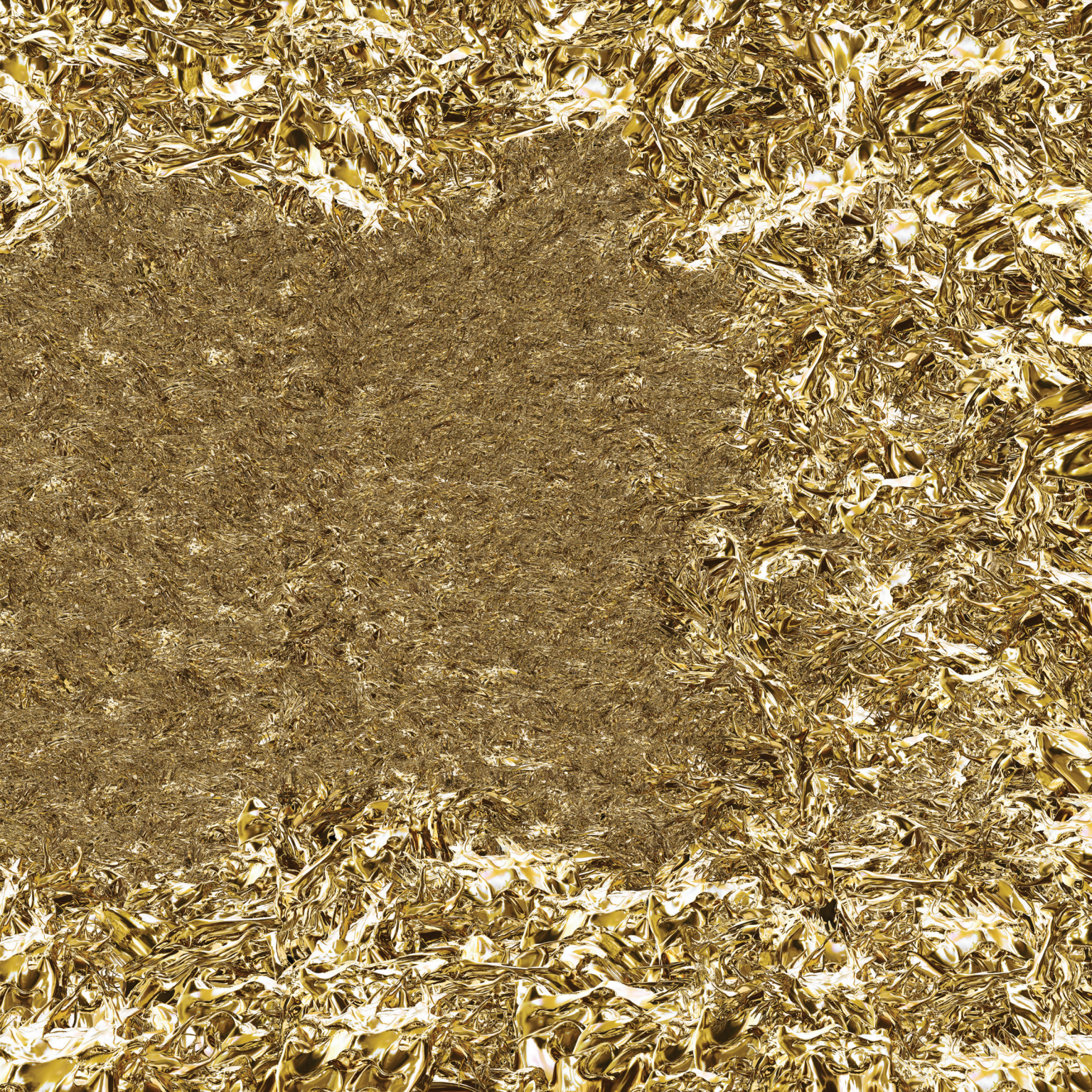
Grandeur  
Is Only a  
Shimmering  
Illusion

A THESIS EXHIBITION BY EVAN DAIGLE











My artwork is an exploration into the depths of wonder and confusion. High contrast colors and soft edges compose complex interwoven shapes that are meant to draw in the viewer. My work includes large-scale digital prints derived through 3D programming and Photoshop. Digitally sculpted objects are collaged together in Photoshop to build fluid and organic shapes evoking natural forms. I draw inspiration from vines and tree branches and the chaotic, flowing shapes that they create; the vines and branches not only create dynamic positive structures, they also create active negative spaces, which I work to incorporate in my images. The natural entanglement of the vines and branches creates a distinct visual world of deep space, which I try to capture and elaborate in my pieces. I invite the viewer to become fully immersed in this work; I want viewers to become disoriented when looking closely at a piece, in turn losing some premise of where they are and gaining an opportunity for inner reflection.

My work is influenced by artists who create illusory or ambiguous space within a two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects, such as J. M. W. Turner and James Turrell. Though working in very different mediums, both artists play with depth of field and the ability of deep space to produce confusion and awe. Turrell creates an immersive, destabilizing experience through the use of cropped and diffused colored light, while Turner renders the landscape, similarly, as enigmatic and abstract. I work to create an equivalent sense of depth within my work while using a combination of observation and abstraction. I seek to find a balance between the digital world and the physical experience of viewing artwork.

- Evan Daigle



Preceding Pages:  
Aspirations of Grandeur  
120 X 180  
Digital Sculpture 2017  
Inkjet printing on Rewall

Reilly Gallery Instillation 2017:  
Asperations of Grandeur

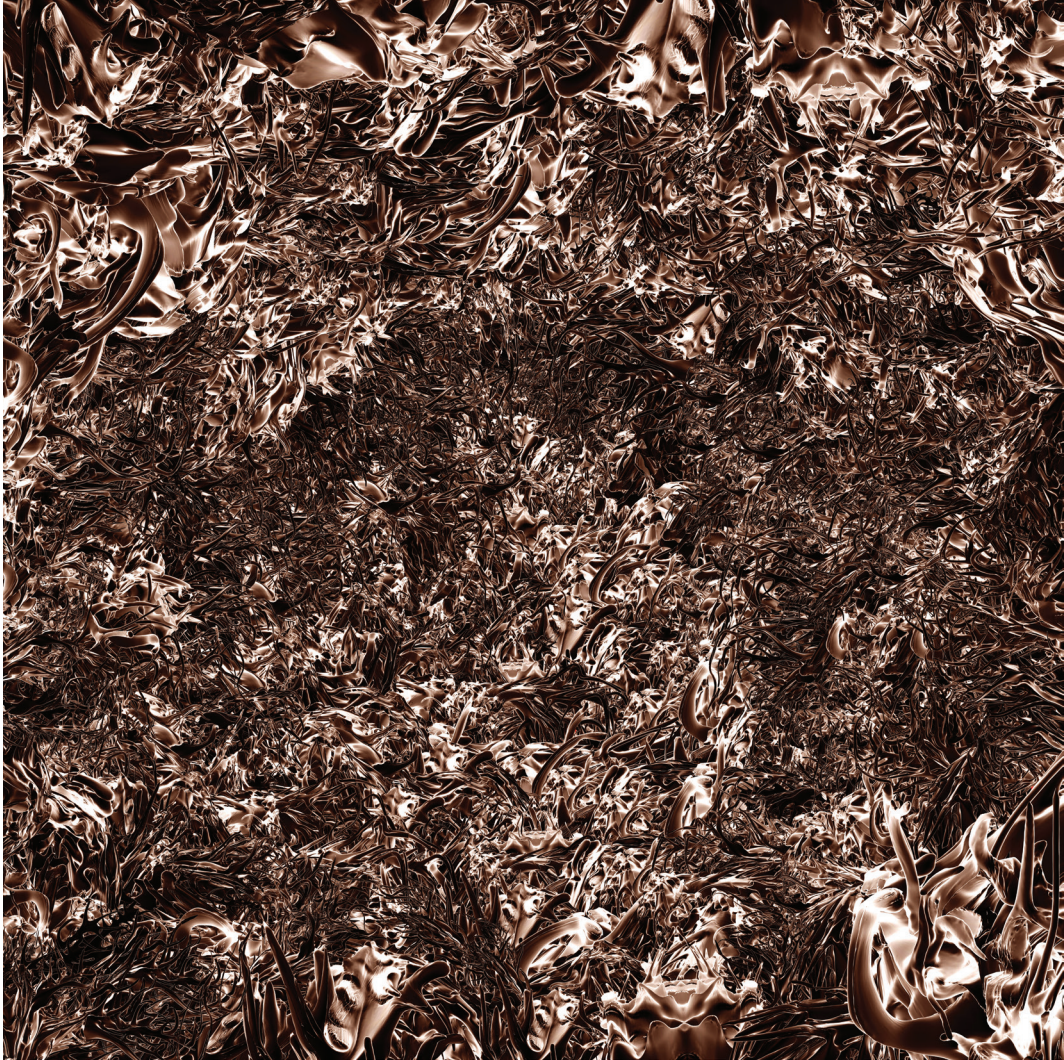
(Left) Blissful Serenity  
(Right) Flowers for a Friend





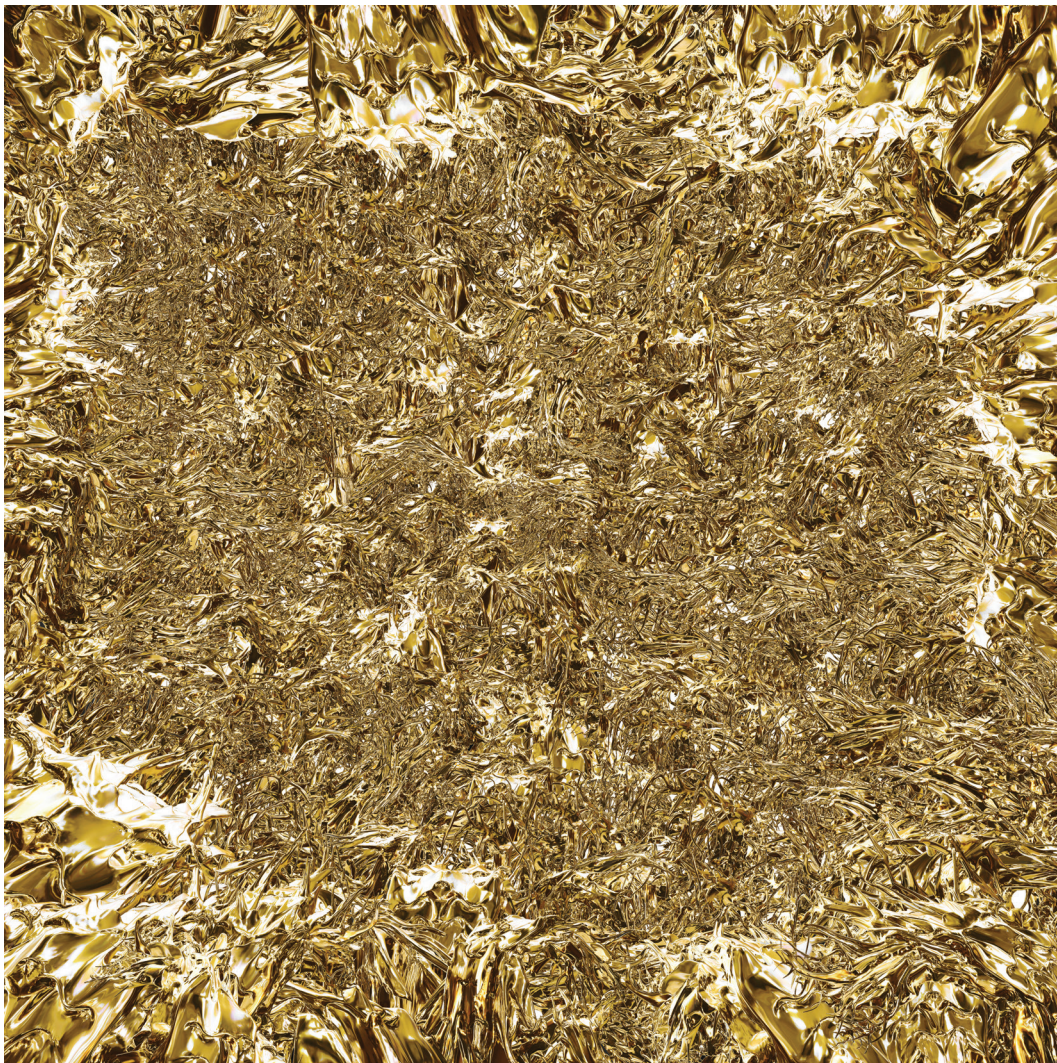
Flowers for a Friend  
40 X 40  
Digital Sculpture 2017  
Inkjet printing on Rewall





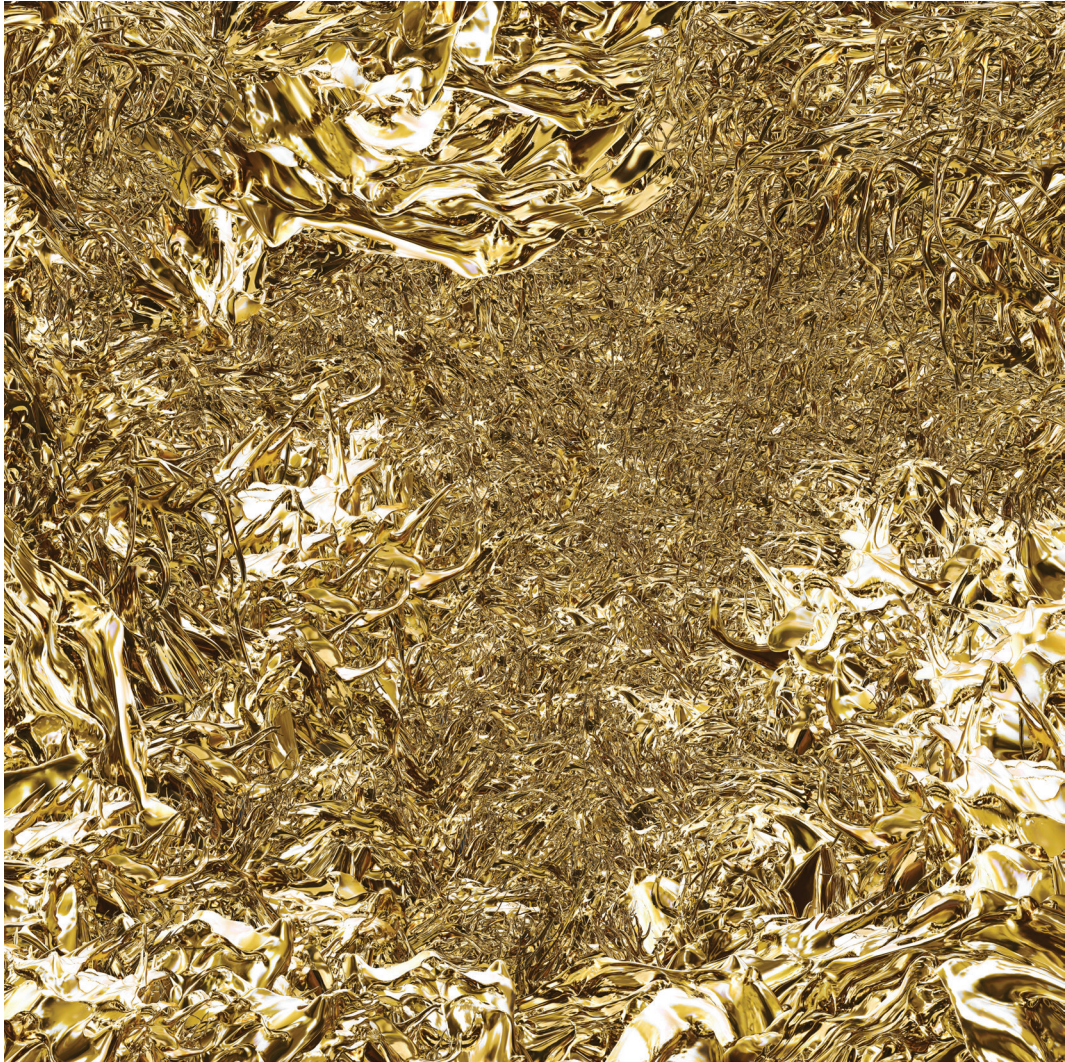
Bed of Roses  
40 X 40  
Digital Sculpture 2017  
Inkjet printing on Rewall





Gold Silk  
40 X 40  
Digital Sculpture 2016  
Inkjet printing on Rewall





Stories of Opulence  
40 X 40  
Digital Sculpture 2017  
Inkjet printing on Rewall

Overleaf:  
Blissful Serenity  
72 X 36  
Digital Sculpture 2016  
Inkjet printing on Rewall











