

Oil Painting

When I was a child I wanted to feel the edges of an oil painting — the ridges that gave it texture and dimension.

My Mother would take me to art galleries and we'd stare at passion hidden behind a layer of glass. She taught me to understand its importance and the need to protect it, but I still longed to run my fingers along those ridges.

As I grew older, I spoke with other children until I found their ridges. I thought that once I uncovered that passion and brought it out from behind the glass that our paintings could become a collaborative work. But soon I found that some ridges are better kept behind glass — that they were not formed from sable brush but angled knife as I ran home from school to avoid the harsh colours of their undeveloped palette.

High school brought about a period in which my sole focus was on shades of black and grey. I found comfort in their dreary countenance and even connected with others who wanted to paint with the same brush. Yet in the end, I would only be the turpentine to their Pollock, my own canvas secured behind plate glass sitting silent on a gallery wall.

Still, I chose to carry my palette of shades with me through University when on rare occasion inspiration would align and our oils would pour out in an explosion of rainbow fireworks until I felt like I could — —

Rule the world.

But sometimes we apply too many layers of paint to a canvas. Worse yet, we allow others to join in on this process, not as collaborator but as new master of the work, building and building in layers until the canvas is thick and heavy and not a trace of the original painting remains.

The overladen canvas will fall from a wall.

I fell from the wall, colours bleeding out, filling the cracks of the hardwood gallery floor. Stuck, as the layers I had allowed to be built — my ridges — cemented me to the lowest point.

The only thing worse than being frozen behind glass on a white wall is being face down in the dirt.

My 20s were a blur. I felt that my paint had dried. Though I righted myself, my canvas was a melding of mismatched colours, frozen in place for the world to see. If a reviewer had taken a real look they would have panned me and I would not have blamed them. But I owned my dappled colours. The spatter of red that illuminated the black. I ran fingers over the imperfections and learned to love them.

And, by the age of 30 I learned that turpentine was not something to be ashamed of. That one can start over with a fresh canvas, no matter how dry our layers of paint have become. How rough our ridges appear.

One day, you will find others who have left behind an armour of dried oils to reveal their blank canvas, somewhat worse for wear, and you can build new ridges together. Ridges that do not need to be hidden behind glass but which you can run your fingers over until you understand every stroke that went into their creation.