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Bones

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Thesis Statement

Holly Palmer

For my thesis I am using all of the technique I acquired in my oil painting class, as well as my past three life drawing classes. Working with oils allows me to achieve smooth color gradients and rich pigments. Life drawing taught me to understand ratios between different parts of a subject as well as the relationship between it and its negative space. By using all of these techniques I am working to create the most accurate representation of the pieces as possible. I am painting a series of bones floating on the canvases over different tones, allowing each one to have its own personality. My work is largely inspired by some of Georgia O'Keeffe's pieces, particularly her skull artworks. I am exploring different color palettes to accent the bones that I am painting, allowing each one to create its own tone.

Traditionally in European art history, bones are painted to represent death and possible damnation of the viewer. They are meant to remind the audience that life is fragile and temporary, and that they should right themselves with God lest they die unexpectedly. In my work, I want to ask the viewer to see the bones not as a reminder of their own mortality, but as a symbol of a life lived, as that is the only way that bones can come into being, is through life. I ask the viewer to take a minute, and get to know the bones as I have done. Become familiar with their changing textures, their sharp edges and gentle curves. I ask the viewer to think about what kind of life this being experienced. How did it come to be? How did it live? What happened for it to end up being painted onto a canvas?

Bones are such unique things. They're a testament to a living body that was formed through microscopic cell division, and millions of intricate pieces of an animal working together to make that being function. They're perfectly adapted, and serve their purpose continuously until the death of the animal. I want my viewers to experience the beautiful forms that bones can produce, recognize that they another one of nature's perfect creations.

This process has allowed me to sit, and take the time to learn each individual characteristic of the bones that I paint. I have done my best to convey the soft tones in the bones that I observe, as well as the gentle off-whites and shadows that are found there. I have been given multiple opportunities by different administrators to observe specimens that I would not have had access to previously. Through this act of generosity, I have been able to observe, handle, and photograph an incredible amount of bones so that I can portray them on my canvases as accurately as possible and create the most realistic experience I can for my viewers. The vibrancy in the background tones that I am choosing is meant to represent the liveliness of the pieces, so as to portray the bones as incredibly dynamic objects with potential liveliness. I have also roughly centered the pieces on their canvases so as to direct the audience's attention to the individuality of each bones. Each has their unique characteristics, a scuff, a fracture, a growth plate, something that could be an identifier, or a remnant from a life lived. I want my viewers to know the bones like I do, and ask questions about their past.