

Giant Rock, 1999

Jasmine Little

A thesis proposal submitted to the faculty
of Adams State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Art

Alamosa, Colorado

February 2015

ADAMS STATE COLLEGE

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE APPROVAL
OF A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

Jasmine Little

Assistant Professor Claire van der Plas
Chairperson, Supervisory Committee

Date

Professor Margaret Doell
Member, Supervisory Committee

Date

Assistant Professor O. Gustavo Plascencia
Member, Supervisory Committee

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank all of the faculty members I worked with at Adam State University while pursuing my M. A. I would also like to thank my peers in the program for the inspiration and comradery they provided. Additionally, I would like to thank my loving husband Matthew Harris who is always helpful and supportive of all my interests and pursuits.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	5
Thesis Statement.	
Approach to work.	
Brief reference to historical background.	
Brief reference to theoretical and conceptual framework.	
Brief reference to technical choices made.	
Brief reference to artistic references.	
II. Historical Background.....	6
Landscape	
Portraiture	
Still Life	
III. Artistic Influences.....	11
Joan Mitchell	
Georgia O'Keefe	
Laura Owens	
Amy Sillman	
IV. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	16
Discussion of theoretical influences	
Discussion of main concepts used in work	
V. Technical Process.....	18
Process used and reasons why	
Technical decisions as related to conceptual framework	
VI. Description and Analysis of Creative Work.....	20
<i>Proposed Monument in the Mojave Desert.</i>	
<i>Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mojave Desert</i>	
<i>Three Totems</i>	
<i>Key's View</i>	
<i>Foothill Drive, 1998</i>	
<i>Attachment Therapy (The View Out the Sliding Glass Door), 1999.</i>	
<i>Palm Fronds.</i>	
<i>Dead Palm Tree.</i>	
<i>Jumbo Rocks, 2000.</i>	
<i>Jumbo Rocks, 2006</i>	
VII. Conclusion.....	28
Reiteration of thesis material.	

Giant Rock, 1999

I. Introduction.

The thesis body of work, *Giant Rock, 1999*, addresses memory through a series of large scale oil paintings on canvas depicting two main components: figures and landscape. Throughout the individual paintings self-portraiture is used to depict the artist, express personal narratives, and convey emotions attached to specific memories through abstracted figures. The landscape is used to establish a narrative within the exhibition, ground the paintings in space and time, and reinforce the personal content through a connection to a physical place.

The reoccurring female figure anchors the paintings in a specific subjective experience of the artist on a personal level and in regard to self-portraiture in the art historical context. The subject of the paintings is tethered to the Southern California landscape depicted, as a means of claiming and orientating one's self in the world at large. These two aspects are presented as facts regarding the narrative and the type of painting produced, but are then broken down and rebuilt to serve the content of the individual paintings. This process resembles the formation of memory, rather than the more traditional approach to landscape and self-portraiture. Several paintings use the concept of a monument in relationship to personal history, rather than a collective cultural representation of an event.

The paintings are made from ceramic models and sketches based on specific scenes from the past, which stick out in the artist's mind. This formative

step adds consideration to subjective nature of the narrative, and decisions are made regarding what aspects of the memory will be shown. Next, a palette is formulated in order to convey mood and reinforce content. The scale, quantity, and painting material chosen for the works in the exhibition reiterate the concept of staking claim by using a format which would traditionally indicate artistic significance, and by pushing the parameters of physical space.

The artist shares conceptual similarities with Joan Mitchell, Georgia O'Keeffe, Amy Sillman, and Laura Owens. Mitchell and O'Keeffe work with landscape to convey the feeling of being in a place, while also conveying human emotions. Mitchell and Sillman use color in specific ways to guide the viewer's experience. Mitchell uses color to convey the emotional content of memories and the subconscious, while Sillman uses color to create balance, upset, and unease through the juxtaposition of bright and muddied colors. Color is used similarly as a tool in the works presented in *Giant Rock, 1999*. Laura Owens uses scale to push and pull the viewer and pastiche to compartmentalize the paintings and disrupt the viewing experience. All of these methods are used together in order to guide the viewer in *Giant Rock, 1999*.

II. Historical Influences.

Throughout art history landscape painting was used to either record a specific place or depict an imagined place. Landscapes based on real places often function as meditations on the world we inhabit - a spiritual expression of

the gift of the land. In *Giant Rock, 1999* landscape is used to ground the figures in space and time through the ideas associated with specific landscapes rather than recording a real space. Landscapes historically assert the artist's authorship of the space and experience and in this body of work the creative potential of the human is highlighted over the transcendent.

Caspar David Friedrich's paintings magnify the subjective human experience of the sublime through nature (Prettejohn, 54). By highlighting the expanse of the land and thus the universe Friedrich suggests the fragility of the



Figure 1

human experience. Friedrich's *Tombs of the Fallen in the Fight of Independence* (Figure 1) confronts the viewer with a literal rock wall, which stops the viewer in his tracks. Upon further inspection the land seems to fold softly in the light

to a central darkened cavern, the mounded grassy ridges in the foreground appear lush and delicate. The viewer's attention is grabbed, they are drawn into the space, made to feel comfortable, and rest in a state of self-reflection. The scale of the paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999* create the same experience for the exhibition as a whole. The paintings protrude vertically from the conventionally used space of the gallery and create a new distant vantage point for the viewer. Additionally, the individual paintings begin to form a landscape as a collective



Figure 2

body, which invites the viewer in to examine them individually. This scale highlights the viewer's subjective experience in the gallery and draws attention to their own potential and fragility.

Often, memories are associated directly with people and places, the land

can be seen as a site loaded with content by the humans who interact with it. In many areas in the Southwest this relationship can be seen literally through petroglyphs. The Barker Dam petroglyph site in Joshua Tree National Park (Figure 2) was used for vision quests by Numic speaking Sonora region shamans

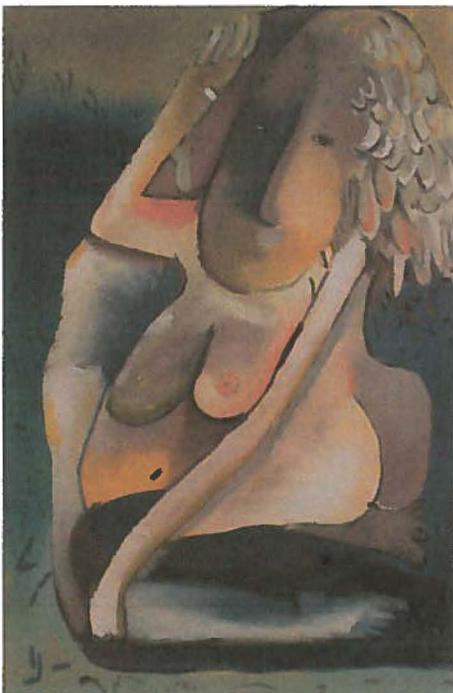


Figure 3

and depicts two-dozen examples of motifs used in that region (Whitley, 91). Prehistoric humans used existing recognizable sites on the landscape as sacred, while the modern incarnation of honoring a site is commemorating it with a man-made monument. Both types of monuments are cultural products in which a social group decided on the significance of a particular area and gave it designation. In *Proposed*

Monument, Mojave Desert a personal memory is memorialized in the subject matter depicting an idea for a sculptural monument in the vast desert landscape (this painting will be discussed in depth in the description of artworks section).

The paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999* use characteristics of the Mojave Desert in Southern California as this is the site of the artist's own memories. The landscape is used to evoke feelings of apprehension, fear, anticipation, nervousness, and *jamais vu*. The desert in the southwest presents a specific set of visuals (desolation, vastness, harsh rock outcropping, sparse vegetation), which are used in the individual paintings to drive the narrative. In the mind, characteristics of places are often compiled and sorted in order to be associated with different feelings and memories. This act of categorization is very personal yet the feelings attached are universal and identifiable. For example, the paintings *Jumbo Rocks, 2000* and *Jumbo Rocks, 2006* project different moods while depicting the specific characteristics of the desert described above. The coupling of the paintings in the exhibition and the titling suggest the same location at different dates. When entering the central circle of the gallery, the viewer is flooded with light from the skylight; these two paintings are hung on opposing walls and are rendered in the same scale. The characteristics of the land itself are pushed to abstraction through color choice and composition to project very different feelings in the two paintings. Yet, the experience of viewing either evokes *jamais vu*, or the eeriness of being in a situation one has been in before.

Traditionally, in self-portraiture, the artist is represented by their image being painted with effects, which suggest aspects of their personality. For female artists, the history of the female form as a subject matter by male artists, and the modern patriarchal norms for representation of women in the culture affect how artists chose to represent themselves. Female artist's ability to create a self-portrait offers an opportunity to claim authorship of her own subjective experience. One female artist prolific in self-portraiture who uses differing techniques in order to question the societal role assigned to her is Frida Kahlo. In one painting from 1940 Kahlo paints herself in a man's suit with scissors in hand and her hair in chunks around her on the floor (Figure 3). This painting was created shortly after she divorced her unfaithful husband, artist Diego Rivera. As

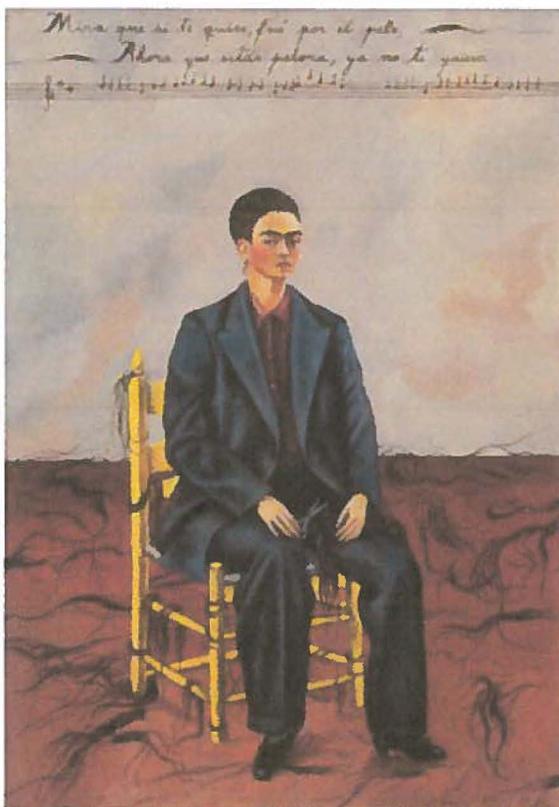


Figure 4

she is a painter of many self-portraits, often in traditional Mexican dresses with long flowing hair this portrait breaks away from the manner in which she typically represents herself (MoMA, p.181). The painting is her likeness, but it represents herself in a transitional state, embracing the freedom that comes from shedding the convention of female beauty. In *Giant Rock, 1999* self-portraiture is used in varying ways

to convey the memories. In *Foothill Drive, 1998* and *Attachment Therapy, 1998*, the artist is depicted in a descriptive narrative scene from memory, in *Palm Frond* metaphor is used as the forms become a stand in for the artist, and in *Proposed Monument, Mojave Desert* and *Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mojave Desert* the nude female form is used as a sculptural object out of its normal context in order to highlight the absurd.

The genres of landscape and self-portraiture are used in the paintings as vehicles for expression of the content being conveyed in the exhibition. The paintings monumentalize the subject experience of the individual through their own personal history.

III. Artistic Influences.

Joan Mitchell was inspired by music and literature that was infused with emotional content. She adored Proust's novels for their sensuousness, luminosity, and psychological subtlety. Mitchell and Proust transform pain into beauty by making their past meaningful through the resurrection of their memories. Mitchell's paintings express a feeling of a place from memory, which is referenced in the titling of her abstract works. *Minnesota* (Figure 5), while very abstracted, uses emotive marks and colors to suggest a feeling, while the titling grounds it in a specific landscape used as the site of the experience. In *Giant Rock, 1999* this method of titling grounds the psychological content in real space. For example, *Foothill Drive, 1998* indicates a real site and date of an event, while

the dating of the actual painting denotes that this event is being recalled from memory. While this painting depicts a narrative scene, the specifics of the story are left to the viewer's interpretation of the event.



Figure 5

Georgia O'Keeffe's means of documenting the landscape differs for Mitchell in her practice of plein air painting. She is associating her relationship to the land documented and her relationship to the painting being produced in real time. This distinction is important because it is not preloaded content and associations, it does not follow the same subjective filter that recalling from memory produces. Although, the aspect of her practice which is influential is the subconscious decisions being made and the filters being applied to the neutral land in order to infuse the work with her personal human experience as content. In *Storm Cloud, Lake George* a mountain, lake, and clouds are depicted. O'Keeffe rarely depicted weather events and the closeness of the clouds to the ground evokes anticipation and fear (Lynes, 220). The painting quickly becomes a metaphor about human experience.

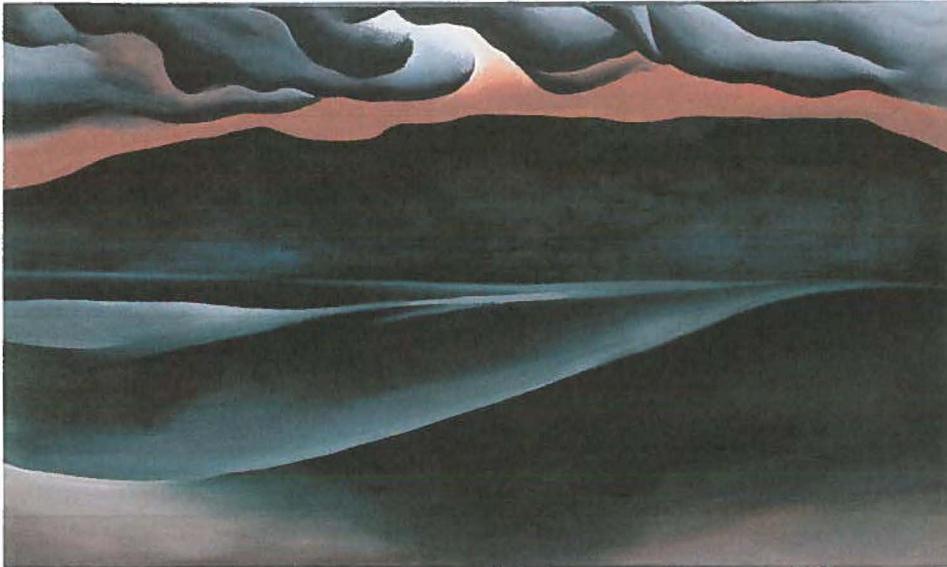


Figure 6

O'Keeffe uses color and perspective to exaggerate the vantage points and render a new space within the painting rather than just documenting the land as it is. Her paintings share the spiritual quality that Friedrich embodies though a vastly different style of painting. Formally, the modeling of the land, the perspective shifts, and the color use influence the paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999*. In *Dead Palm Tree* the palm tree is rendered in a realistic expressive fashion, yet the perspective shifts through its vertical length, distorting the subject matter and creating a more surreal space. These decisions when applied to this scale reiterate the subjective vantage point of the viewer.

Laura Owens' work uses a variety of styles and techniques in painting in order to push the possibilities of what a painting can do. Her subject matter varies and she uses figurative elements to talk about paint and painting rather than drive a narrative. The paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999* also use figures as composition tools and sites of painterly experimentation. In *Three Totems* the

figurative totems break up the surface of the canvas into compartmentalized sites where different experiences of paint qualities are occurring.

When referring to her 2013 show featuring ten 12'x 12' paintings (Figure 7) Owen's describes using scale to help illustrate the maximum potential for a painting to read differently at various distances. From very far away the painting look like a picture and when approached they become brush marks. As discussed earlier, *Dead Palm Tree's* vertical height creates a more distant vantage point for the viewer, creating a landscape within the exhibition as a whole, which can be entered and the individual paintings scale creates an immersive environment for the viewer.



Figure 7

Owen's also discusses the difference between singular paintings being produced as independent objects versus being produced as a part of a larger exhibition. An exhibition offers the opportunity from the viewer to gain more information on the content of the individual artworks and see the formal decisions being made in the context of other possibilities. *Giant Rock, 1999* uses the ability of the installation of a body of work for individual paintings to form relationships

and allow the viewer to gather more information than by the paintings being presented independently. The exhibition as a whole suggests more content than the paintings as singular objects.

Amy Sillman has one of the most distinct color palettes amongst contemporary painters. She often combines extremely muddy hues with recognizable readymade retail hues. In *Cliff 2* the central geometric form is neon orange, white and blue in the top one third of the painting indicate sky and warm muddy hues are used for the ground. This juxtaposition of color qualities make the central form more pronounced and the painting more dynamic when viewed closely (Molesworth, 46). In a lecture on color theory at the Whitney Museum in 2014 Sillman described the studio practices of over 20 artists who all used color in different ways to do different things in their paintings. The postmodern experience of color theory is an all-inclusive experimentation for practicing painters. The palettes used in *Giant Rock, 1999* have an internal logic, which is informed by the history of color theory but have been created to make the viewer question why choices are being made within the context of the painting. In *Giant Rock, 1999* the palette exhibits a mix of muddy hues and bright neons in order to project the tone of the exhibition. In *Attachment Therapy, 1998* the figures are painted in dark analogous tones, which push the viewer to examine the painting very closely to recognize the figures depicted beyond their gesture.



Figure 8
ambiguous.

Sillman has also developed a cast of characters within her work through the repeated figures depicted. Her paintings often seem to float between figuration and abstraction. Large swatches of color and fine line work describe figure and ground relationships while vaguely hinting at narrative but remaining open and

Sillman and Owens both speak of their experience as painters influencing their appreciation of the phenomenological aspect of paintings, the role of painting in a digital age, and the intended viewing of their work. Currently in the art world paintings are viewed most frequently on either a smart phone or computer through a digital reproduction. This type of viewing takes away the experience of physically being in front of a painting and how that feels as a viewer. *Giant Rock, 1999* as a body large scale oil paintings offers the viewer the chance to experience the material presence of the artwork in a increasingly digital age.

IV. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.

Conceptually the work is a subjective experience of memory by conveying feelings and emotions attached to specific sites. Formal elements such as composition, color, balance, imbalance, surface tension, and scale reinforce this content. Memory is a subjective personal experience, which changes with the

passing of time, and can be reconstructed to serve any means. Authorship can be assured and memories curated to construct one's autobiography.

The concept of *jamais vu* is psychological event in which one is experiencing a situation that one recognizes in some fashion yet it seems unfamiliar. This type of event can be caused by trauma or while intoxicated. The artist has had this experience periodically throughout her life but at Giant Rock in 1999 after a dirt biking accident the uncanny feeling resonated and influenced this body of work as a metaphor for claiming and constructing her own identity. After crashing a dirt bike the artist suffered a concussion and experienced amnesia. The moment of this experience is vivid to the artist. Becoming aware of one's own existence and one's environment one is forced to construct a narrative regarding how and why they exist. The facts presented to the artist regarding her surroundings, activities before the accident, and clues to her own personhood did not ring true to her internal understanding of character. That being said, it became apparent that inherent characteristics and actions are not necessarily aligned, and one's personhood is malleable.

The landscape used in the paintings feels familiar yet uncanny as the Southern California desert is known to many, and is often used as a location in film. The desolate, sparsely vegetated land has been used since the 40's as the location in Westerns and carries the cultural connotations "The West" evokes. This location has been used since the 70's in science fiction films, as a fictitious representation of other planets or "The Last Frontier" extending the culture's

fascination with new beginnings, while the scene remains the same from previous decades. The desert provides characteristics, which are reminiscent and familiar yet perpetually evoke a blank slate. The narratives that unfold throughout the exhibition resurrected memories and monumentalize personal experience.

The structural framework in place for this body of work is defined by the immediate conditions imposed upon the body of work. For *Giant Rock, 1999*, a cohesive group of individual paintings are made to show together. The paintings function both as independent objects as well as a collected body. Relationships between individual works begin to form, highlight, and expand the content in the individual paintings. Recurring use of color and figures suggest a narrative within the collection of paintings, which form collective narrative in the gallery. The paintings relate to the gallery as objects, which reject being contained by the gallery in a conventional manner. They engage the viewer by highlighting the subjective experience of viewing art.

V. Technical Process.

The process involves several steps to produce the resolved body of paintings. First, scale decisions are made and the scope of the exhibition is determined, the substrates are then built and primed. Second, the subject matter for the individual painting is selected and either sketched or constructed in clay.

Third, the palette decisions for the painting are made, and the painting is executed.

Building the substrates demands consideration of the constraints of the in which the artist works, and consideration of the Snook Gallery parameters. The diptychs are constructed in order to reach the maximum height potential in the gallery while allowing the artist freedom and ease while painting on a reduced surface size. The breaks in the diptychs reinforce the conceptual strategies of reconstructing memory, as opposed to one singular continuous reality.

The second step asserts the content for the individual painting by selecting and editing the subject matter. The particular memory chosen to highlight is sketched and rendered in clay, worked and reworked until the composition is set. The paintings present either a narrative scene or abstracted forms. The focus of the painting is decided at this time but most decisions regarding how the paint is applied to the surface are made while painting.

The third step is setting the palette to be used and execution of the painting. The colors are chosen to reinforce the content of the individual painting by projecting the specific mood for the scene. Each memory conjures up specific feelings associated with an emotional, or visceral relationship. This subtle content of the memory is conveyed in the painting. The painting can start in many ways and takes varying degrees of time to become resolved. Paintings such as *Palm Frond*, *Family Portrait*, *Three Totems* and *Giant Rock, 1999* are painted in one sitting, with quick gestural brushstrokes and smooth resting areas

of solid color. *Jumbo Rock, 2000* and *Jumbo Rocks, 2006* are made over the course of a longer period of time in order to build up thin surface layers of translucent paint, which created a modeled effect. Each painting highlight the technical skill involved in their production. Color theory informs the hundreds of colors mixed for each individual painting and rarely is a ready-made pigment used, with the exception of exceptionally pure pigments such as cadmium red. Cadmium red provides a rich beautiful color that evokes so many associations and emotions, while never appearing tired or overused. These types of personal associations and feelings attached to particular hues reinforce the visceral relationship the artist has to the content of the memory being conveyed.

VI. Description and Analysis of Artworks

Giant Rock, 1999 (Figure 9) depicts anamorphic rock and four figures in a dusk desert setting. The primary figure is subdued by being rendered in shades of blue and green, which contrasts the warmly toned scene. This figure merges into the representation of the ground with bright yellow grass defining the outline of the female form. The other figures are all presented in warm red and pink tones outlined by the horizon, suggesting a transition. The central form is the rock, which also interrupts the horizon and is treated with the paint in the same manner as the figures, lending it human characteristics. The rock acts as a witness to the event transpiring. All of the figures represent the same character in different ways, the scene laying out the continually transitional aspect of life.



Figure 9

The death of some personality traits is necessary but is observed and sometimes, mourned.

Proposed Monument in the Mohave

Desert (Figure 10) and Proposed Statue

Commemorating an Event, Mohave Desert (Figure 11) both address the concept of monumentalizing a non-event. The word “proposed” in the titles suggested the non-existence of the intervention depicted in the land. Additionally, it makes reference to an artist design for a site that is often used in the planning stages of a commission or installation. This is contradicted by the painting itself, which implies through its physical nature (large scale oil painting on canvas) its own finality as a resolved object. The painting becomes the monument.

The female form has long been used as in the context of fine art, with the symbolic meaning shifting over time. Since 1989 when the Guerrilla Girls presented their iconic work questioning the Met. Museum’s collecting practices one thing this ongoing choice of subject matter can represent is the disparity in female artist representation in the fine art realm (gallery representation, museum

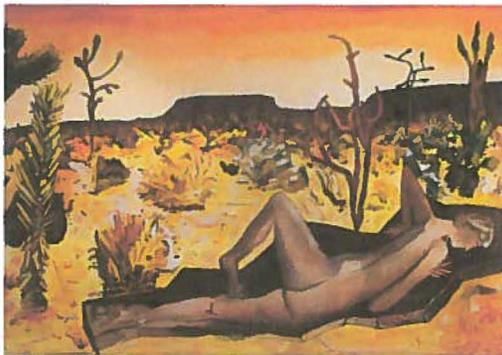


Figure 10

show representation, monetary value of artwork, etc.). The figures depicted in the paintings reclaim ownership of the artist’s body, and the format stakes claim to a traditional masculine approach to painting.



Figure 11

While in the scene depicted, the figure remains marginalized and alone, frozen in stone in the desert.

Three Totems (Figure 12) is a large vertical painting depicting three figurative shapes cutting through the picture plane against a blue to yellow gradient background. The shapes resemble totem poles with a variety in styles of rendering on all sides ranging from human faces to human forms to

geometric patterns. Totem poles traditionally represent figurative forms to document notable events or recount legends, although another traditional use of totem poles is to shame a member of a society. This concept is used in *Three Totems*. Each individual totem revolves around a central character depicted near the bottom of the canvas. Other forms balloon up from the head as a physical manifestation of the thought life of the characters.

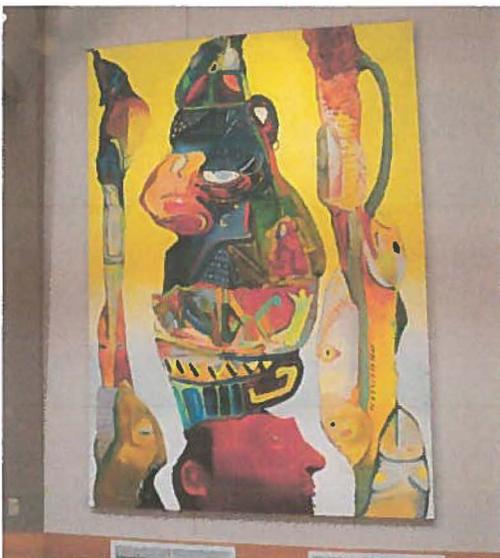


Figure 12

Three totems depict masses of forms clumped together into a solid representation of something, which is by nature very fluid. It is a depiction of the internal struggles of all humans, as a physical weight they are constantly with. The painting suggests that all humans carry baggage of shame in their

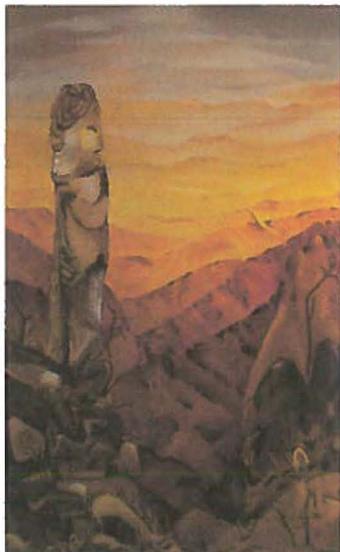


Figure 13

memories of themselves, yet are not alone in their struggles.

Key's View (Figure 13) depicts a receding horizon which transitions into an ascending series of cloud formations. The scene evokes a familiar yet generic landscape, with a sculptural monument in the foreground gazing into the distance. This painting touches on the idea of the temporality and fragility, with

the sculptural element representing permanence, domination, and staking claim to territory.

Foothill Drive, 1998 (Figure 14) depicts two figures in a body of water, two Joshua Trees framing the figures, sandy desert hills, and a pink sky. The memory being evoked in this painting is of the artist's first kiss in a hot tub in a neighborhood backyard in 29 Palms, California. The background is rendered in splashes of beige, lilac, and lemony ochre with illustrative renderings of Palm Trees, Yuccas, and Joshua Trees. This technique is used to give the impression of a "backdrop" for the event staged in the foreground. The flat rendering of the

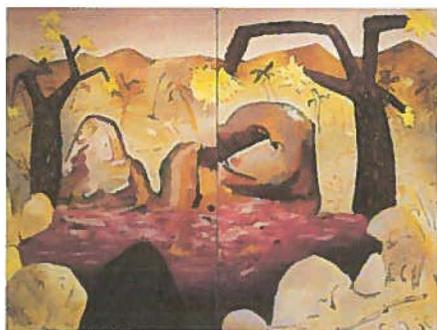


Figure 14

Joshua Trees, and their placement on both sides of the event reinforces the staged presentation of the figures. Additionally, the Joshua Tree indicates the general yet specific place. The pink sky and rosy water suggest a sweetness

and dreamlike quality while the waters also seem to boil with heat and darken to an unrefined murky purple which draws the eye to a singular black rock. This rock's color defines it as the "other" or spectator to the event. The figures are blocky awkward shapes, whose color make them harmonious in the scene, yet through their rendering remain separate from their surroundings. They become related only to each other in the scene, as their gazes lock in uncomfortable permanence. The overall effect of the painting is at first pleasant, while with extended viewing become uncomfortable and unsettling. The viewer feels the anticipation and nervousness while also the banality of the scene described.

Attachment Therapy (Figure 15) evokes an unsettled feeling through the gesture of the figures depicted. Two figures are seated on top of each other, the bottom figure's arms are wrapped around the waist of the top figure in order to embrace or restrain. The figures are obscured through their rendering; they become a whole entity, which is not necessarily read as two figures at all.



Figure 15

Aspects of their bodies are embellished by their reiteration; feet are drawn repeatedly on the bottom portion of the canvas to indicate action or struggle. One head hold several sets of eyes. Behind the figures lies a plane of yellow with black outlined organic shapes. This could read as a field or the way outlines remain once your eyes are closed on the backs of your eyelids or as pattern. While this is a simplistic

rendering of the background it complicates the scene by pushing the action and anxiety forward.

Action and anxiety can also be seen in the paint application and scale choices in *Palm Fronds* (Figure 16). The end of the palm frond rests in the center of the canvas with the branch extending up and out of the picture plane through the top right corner. The gesture can be felt though the weight of the object. Perspective pushes and pulls the negative spaces and objects back and forth projecting an anxious nervousness. It could be seen as a pendulum in mid-swing suggesting mortality or time.

The specific memory the symbolism in this painting denotes is of an aspiration and its limitations. The transplanted palm trees commonly associated with the California landscape denote a superficial leisure and success while remaining useless. This painting depicts the fallen fronds as a reminder of the termination of an ambition.

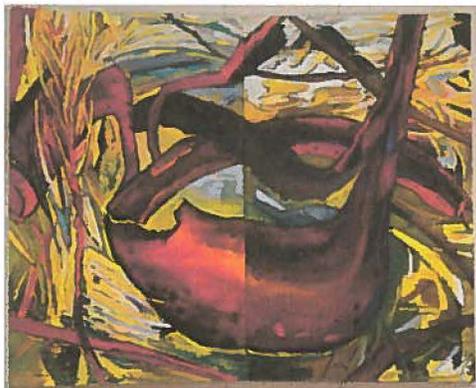


Figure 16



Figure 17

The painting *Dead Palm Tree* (Figure 17) uses the same symbolism as *Palm Fronds*, 2006. Formally, this painting uses scale as an entry point for the viewer. The format (five feet wide and sixteen feet high) is not a conventional painting size, it is meant to draw attention to the gallery it is hung in. The Snook Gallery can be viewed from two levels, neither of which would be ideal to see this painting in its entirety. The architecture of the gallery will obscure this painting from any vantage point. In this way the viewer is always reminded of his or her own subjective experience viewing the painting, by always having the architecture in sight. Large-scale paintings often deal with immersing the viewer in the illusion created by the paint on the canvas. Scale allows everything else to

disappear. With the particular format of this painting, this is impossible, while this painting remains the most representational and realistic in the body of work.

Dead Palm Tree and *Palm Fronds* are created as dyptics in order to create a seam or break in the representation. Both paintings are metaphors for



Figure 18

shifting objectives, and the abstraction caused by the breaks in the canvas reinforce this content.

Jumbo Rocks, 2000 (Figure 18) is based on the location Jumbo Rocks Campground in the Joshua Tree National Park, CA. The artist has many memories associated with this one site; it was a favorite campsite throughout her life. As discussed previously this painting is hung in juxtaposition from *Jumbo Rock, 2006*. The

rocks are depicted as rounded warm forms resembling bodies. The mass shifts

Jumbo Rocks, 2006 (Figure 19) This painting in particular depicts jagged rock outcropping through angled geometric forms in dark shades of blues, greys,



Figure 19

and greens. Glazing is used to give depth to the colors through layering. Some areas of the canvas, such as the central crevasse use the light coming through the canvas in combination with the brightness of the white gessoed surface to provide radiance to the thin pigment on the surface. Other light areas are painted on top of thick paint or use a high quantity of white pigment in order to create a different type of lightness (artificial depiction of light). These contrasting areas add more dimensionality

to the canvas. Additionally, this creates the push and pull described in other paintings, which breaks the illusionist space of the canvas with the materiality of the paint.

VII. Conclusion

The paintings in the exhibition *Giant Rock, 1999* convey feelings associated with memory through the use of self-portraiture and landscape. The varying themes throughout the individual paintings in the show touch on monumentalizing events, failures, marginalization, isolation, and anxiety. But the collection of paintings form a new landscape and narrative. An aspirational and hopeful theme is developed through the resurrection of the artist past in the narrative of *Giant Rock, 1999*.

Work Cited

Prettejohn, Elizabeth. *Beauty and Art: 1750-2000*. Oxford University Press.
2005.

Whitley, David. *A Guide to Rock Art: Southern California and Southern Nevada*.
Mountain Press. 1998.

The Museum of Modern Art. *MoMA Highlights*. New York: The Museum of
Modern Art. Revised 2004.

Lynes, Barbara Buhler. *Georgia O'Keeffe*. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Abrams.
2007.

Molesworth, Helen. *Amy Sillman, One Lump or Two*. Institute of Contemporary
Art Boston. DelMonico Books. 2014.

Artwork Cited

Figure 1. Friedrich, Casper David. Tomb of the Fallen in the Fight for Independence. Kunsthalle Hamburg. 1812. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 2. Petroglyphs. Barker Dam, Joshua Tree National Park, California.

Figure 3. Kahlo, Frida. Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair. Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1940. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 4. Little, Jasmine. Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mohave Desert. 2015. 48" x 72". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 5. Mitchell, Joan. Minnesota. 1980. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 6. O'Keeffe, Georgia. Storm Cloud, Lake George. 18 x 30 in. 1923. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 7. Owens, Laura. Installation shot 12 Paintings by Laura Owens. 356 S. Mission Rd. CA. 2013.

Figure 8. Sillman, Amy. Cliff 2. 183 x 152 cm. 2005. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 9. Little, Jasmine. Giant Rock, 1999. 2015. 120" x 84". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 10. Little, Jasmine. Proposed Monument in the Mohave Desert. 2015. 120" x 84". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 11. Little, Jasmine. Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mohave Desert. 2015. 48" x 72". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 12. Little, Jasmine. *Three Totems*. 2015. 120" x 84". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 13. Little, Jasmine. *Key's View*. 2015. 60" x 96". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 14. Little, Jasmine. *Foothill Drive, 1998*. 72" x 96". 2015. Oil on Canvas. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 15. Little, Jasmine. *Attachment Therapy (The View Out the Sliding Glass Window), 1999*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 16. Little, Jasmine. *Palm Fronds*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 120". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 17. Little, Jasmine. *Dead Palm Tree*. Oil on Canvas. 192" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 18. Little, Jasmine. *Jumbo Rocks, 2000*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 19. Little, Jasmine. *Jumbo Rocks, 2006*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

A thes
of /
1

ADAMS STATE COLLEGE

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE APPROVAL
OF A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

Jasmine Little

Assistant Professor Claire van der Plas
Chairperson, Supervisory Committee

Date

Professor Margaret Doell
Member, Supervisory Committee

Date

Assistant Professor O. Gustavo Plascencia
Member, Supervisory Committee

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank all of the faculty members I worked with at Adam State University while pursuing my M. A. I would also like to thank my peers in the program for the inspiration and comradery they provided. Additionally, I would like to thank my loving husband Matthew Harris who is always helpful and supportive of all my interests and pursuits.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	5
Thesis Statement.	
Approach to work.	
Brief reference to historical background.	
Brief reference to theoretical and conceptual framework.	
Brief reference to technical choices made.	
Brief reference to artistic references.	
II. Historical Background.....	6
Landscape	
Portraiture	
Still Life	
III. Artistic Influences.....	11
Joan Mitchell	
Georgia O'Keefe	
Laura Owens	
Amy Sillman	
IV. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	16
Discussion of theoretical influences	
Discussion of main concepts used in work	
V. Technical Process.....	18
Process used and reasons why	
Technical decisions as related to conceptual framework	
VI. Description and Analysis of Creative Work.....	20
<i>Proposed Monument in the Mojave Desert.</i>	
<i>Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mojave Desert</i>	
<i>Three Totems</i>	
<i>Key's View</i>	
<i>Foothill Drive, 1998</i>	
<i>Attachment Therapy (The View Out the Sliding Glass Door), 1999.</i>	
<i>Palm Fronds.</i>	
<i>Dead Palm Tree.</i>	
<i>Jumbo Rocks, 2000.</i>	
<i>Jumbo Rocks, 2006</i>	
VII. Conclusion.....	28
Reiteration of thesis material.	

Giant Rock, 1999

I. Introduction.

The thesis body of work, *Giant Rock, 1999*, addresses memory through a series of large scale oil paintings on canvas depicting two main components: figures and landscape. Throughout the individual paintings self-portraiture is used to depict the artist, express personal narratives, and convey emotions attached to specific memories through abstracted figures. The landscape is used to establish a narrative within the exhibition, ground the paintings in space and time, and reinforce the personal content through a connection to a physical place.

The reoccurring female figure anchors the paintings in a specific subjective experience of the artist on a personal level and in regard to self-portraiture in the art historical context. The subject of the paintings is tethered to the Southern California landscape depicted, as a means of claiming and orientating one's self in the world at large. These two aspects are presented as facts regarding the narrative and the type of painting produced, but are then broken down and rebuilt to serve the content of the individual paintings. This process resembles the formation of memory, rather than the more traditional approach to landscape and self-portraiture. Several paintings use the concept of a monument in relationship to personal history, rather than a collective cultural representation of an event.

The paintings are made from ceramic models and sketches based on specific scenes from the past, which stick out in the artist's mind. This formative

step adds consideration to subjective nature of the narrative, and decisions are made regarding what aspects of the memory will be shown. Next, a palette is formulated in order to convey mood and reinforce content. The scale, quantity, and painting material chosen for the works in the exhibition reiterate the concept of staking claim by using a format which would traditionally indicate artistic significance, and by pushing the parameters of physical space.

The artist shares conceptual similarities with Joan Mitchell, Georgia O'Keeffe, Amy Sillman, and Laura Owens. Mitchell and O'Keeffe work with landscape to convey the feeling of being in a place, while also conveying human emotions. Mitchell and Sillman use color in specific ways to guide the viewer's experience. Mitchell uses color to convey the emotional content of memories and the subconscious, while Sillman uses color to create balance, upset, and unease through the juxtaposition of bright and muddied colors. Color is used similarly as a tool in the works presented in *Giant Rock, 1999*. Laura Owens uses scale to push and pull the viewer and pastiche to compartmentalize the paintings and disrupt the viewing experience. All of these methods are used together in order to guide the viewer in *Giant Rock, 1999*.

II. Historical Influences.

Throughout art history landscape painting was used to either record a specific place or depict an imagined place. Landscapes based on real places often function as meditations on the world we inhabit - a spiritual expression of

the gift of the land. In *Giant Rock, 1999* landscape is used to ground the figures in space and time through the ideas associated with specific landscapes rather than recording a real space. Landscapes historically assert the artist's authorship of the space and experience and in this body of work the creative potential of the human is highlighted over the transcendent.

Caspar David Friedrich's paintings magnify the subjective human experience of the sublime through nature (Prettejohn, 54). By highlighting the expanse of the land and thus the universe Friedrich suggests the fragility of the



Figure 1

human experience. Friedrich's *Tombs of the Fallen in the Fight of Independence* (Figure 1) confronts the viewer with a literal rock wall, which stops the viewer in his tracks. Upon further inspection the land seems to fold softly in the light

to a central darkened cavern, the mounded grassy ridges in the foreground appear lush and delicate. The viewer's attention is grabbed, they are drawn into the space, made to feel comfortable, and rest in a state of self-reflection. The scale of the paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999* create the same experience for the exhibition as a whole. The paintings protrude vertically from the conventionally used space of the gallery and create a new distant vantage point for the viewer. Additionally, the individual paintings begin to form a landscape as a collective



Figure 2

body, which invites the viewer in to examine them individually. This scale highlights the viewer's subjective experience in the gallery and draws attention to their own potential and fragility.

Often, memories are associated directly with people and places, the land

can be seen as a site loaded with content by the humans who interact with it. In many areas in the Southwest this relationship can be seen literally through petroglyphs. The Barker Dam petroglyph site in Joshua Tree National Park (Figure 2) was used for vision quests by Numic speaking Sonora region shamans

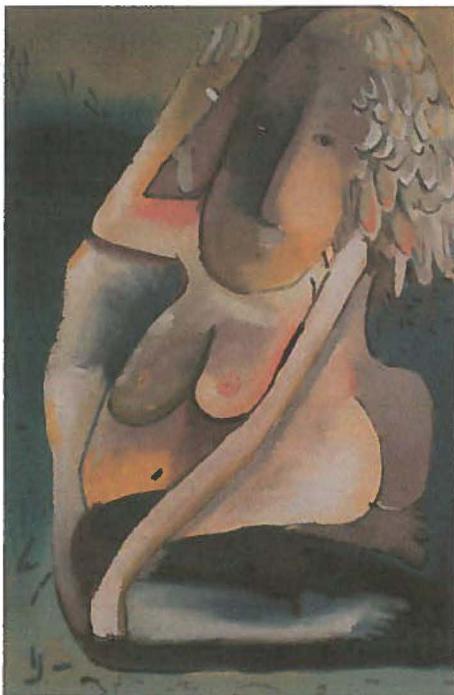


Figure 3

and depicts two-dozen examples of motifs used in that region (Whitley, 91). Prehistoric humans used existing recognizable sites on the landscape as sacred, while the modern incarnation of honoring a site is commemorating it with a man-made monument. Both types of monuments are cultural products in which a social group decided on the significance of a particular area and gave it designation. In *Proposed*

Monument, Mojave Desert a personal memory is memorialized in the subject matter depicting an idea for a sculptural monument in the vast desert landscape (this painting will be discussed in depth in the description of artworks section).

The paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999* use characteristics of the Mojave Desert in Southern California as this is the site of the artist's own memories. The landscape is used to evoke feelings of apprehension, fear, anticipation, nervousness, and *jamais vu*. The desert in the southwest presents a specific set of visuals (desolation, vastness, harsh rock outcropping, sparse vegetation), which are used in the individual paintings to drive the narrative. In the mind, characteristics of places are often compiled and sorted in order to be associated with different feelings and memories. This act of categorization is very personal yet the feelings attached are universal and identifiable. For example, the paintings *Jumbo Rocks, 2000* and *Jumbo Rocks, 2006* project different moods while depicting the specific characteristics of the desert described above. The coupling of the paintings in the exhibition and the titling suggest the same location at different dates. When entering the central circle of the gallery, the viewer is flooded with light from the skylight; these two paintings are hung on opposing walls and are rendered in the same scale. The characteristics of the land itself are pushed to abstraction through color choice and composition to project very different feelings in the two paintings. Yet, the experience of viewing either evokes *jamais vu*, or the eeriness of being in a situation one has been in before.

Traditionally, in self-portraiture, the artist is represented by their image being painted with effects, which suggest aspects of their personality. For female artists, the history of the female form as a subject matter by male artists, and the modern patriarchal norms for representation of women in the culture affect how artists chose to represent themselves. Female artist's ability to create a self-portrait offers an opportunity to claim authorship of her own subjective experience. One female artist prolific in self-portraiture who uses differing techniques in order to questions the societal role assigned to her is Frida Kahlo. In one painting from 1940 Kahlo paints herself in a man's suit with scissors in hand and her hair in chunks around her on the floor (Figure 3). This painting was created shortly after she divorced her unfaithful husband, artist Diego Rivera. As

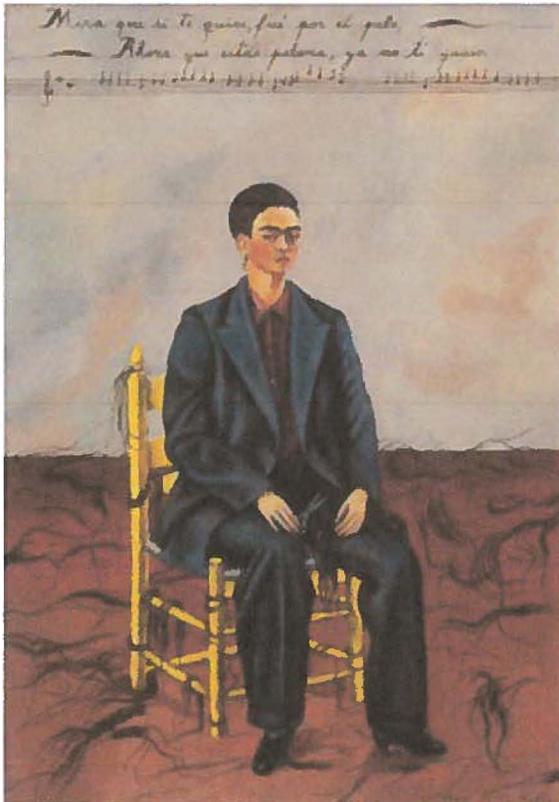


Figure 4

a painter of many self-portraits, often in traditional Mexican dresses with long flowing hair this portrait breaks away from the manner in which she typically represents herself (MoMA, p.181). The painting is her likeness, but it represents herself in a transitional state, embracing the freedom that comes from shedding the convention of female beauty. In *Giant Rock, 1999* self-portraiture is used in varying ways

to convey the memories. In *Foothill Drive, 1998* and *Attachment Therapy, 1998*, the artist is depicted in a descriptive narrative scene from memory, in *Palm Frond* metaphor is used as the forms become a stand in for the artist, and in *Proposed Monument, Mojave Desert* and *Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mojave Desert* the nude female form is used as a sculptural object out of its normal context in order to highlight the absurd.

The genres of landscape and self-portraiture are used in the paintings as vehicles for expression of the content being conveyed in the exhibition. The paintings monumentalize the subject experience of the individual through their own personal history.

III. Artistic Influences.

Joan Mitchell was inspired by music and literature that was infused with emotional content. She adored Proust's novels for their sensuousness, luminosity, and psychological subtlety. Mitchell and Proust transform pain into beauty by making their past meaningful through the resurrection of their memories. Mitchell's paintings express a feeling of a place from memory, which is referenced in the titling of her abstract works. *Minnesota* (Figure 5), while very abstracted, uses emotive marks and colors to suggest a feeling, while the titling grounds it in a specific landscape used as the site of the experience. In *Giant Rock, 1999* this method of titling grounds the psychological content in real space. For example, *Foothill Drive, 1998* indicates a real site and date of an event, while

the dating of the actual painting denotes that this event is being recalled from memory. While this painting depicts a narrative scene, the specifics of the story are left to the viewer's interpretation of the event.



Figure 5

Georgia O'Keeffe's means of documenting the landscape differs for Mitchell in her practice of plein air painting. She is associating her relationship to the land documented and her relationship to the painting being produced in real time. This distinction is important because it is not preloaded content and associations, it does not follow the same subjective filter that recalling from memory produces. Although, the aspect of her practice which is influential is the subconscious decisions being made and the filters being applied to the neutral land in order to infuse the work with her personal human experience as content. In *Storm Cloud, Lake George* a mountain, lake, and clouds are depicted. O'Keeffe rarely depicted weather events and the closeness of the clouds to the ground evokes anticipation and fear (Lynes, 220). The painting quickly becomes a metaphor about human experience.

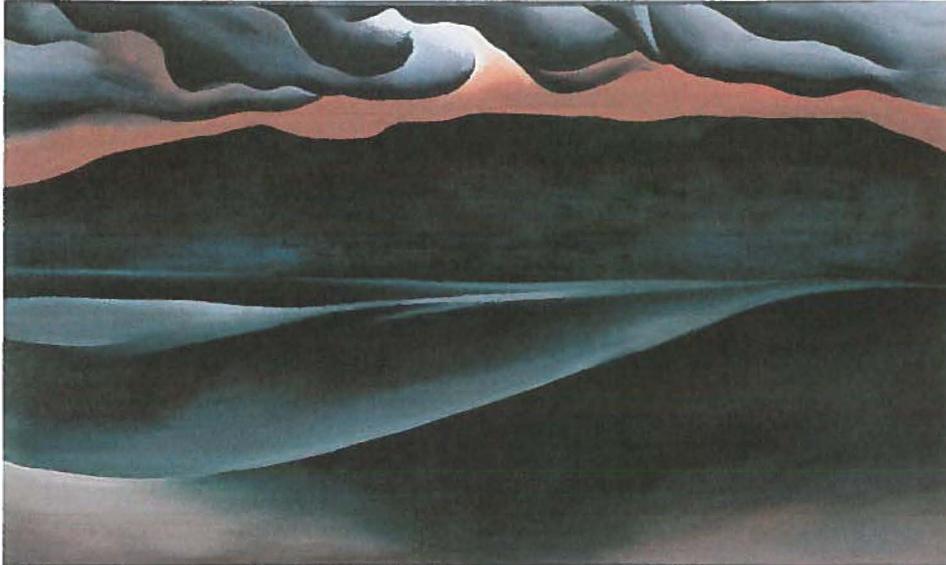


Figure 6

O'Keeffe uses color and perspective to exaggerate the vantage points and render a new space within the painting rather than just documenting the land as it is. Her paintings share the spiritual quality that Friedrich embodies though a vastly different style of painting. Formally, the modeling of the land, the perspective shifts, and the color use influence the paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999*. In *Dead Palm Tree* the palm tree is rendered in a realistic expressive fashion, yet the perspective shifts through its vertical length, distorting the subject matter and creating a more surreal space. These decisions when applied to this scale reiterate the subjective vantage point of the viewer.

Laura Owens' work uses a variety of styles and techniques in painting in order to push the possibilities of what a painting can do. Her subject matter varies and she uses figurative elements to talk about paint and painting rather than drive a narrative. The paintings in *Giant Rock, 1999* also use figures as composition tools and sites of painterly experimentation. In *Three Totems* the

figurative totems break up the surface of the canvas into compartmentalized sites where different experiences of paint qualities are occurring.

When referring to her 2013 show featuring ten 12'x 12' paintings (Figure 7) Owen's describes using scale to help illustrate the maximum potential for a painting to read differently at various distances. From very far away the painting look like a picture and when approached they become brush marks. As discussed earlier, *Dead Palm Tree's* vertical height creates a more distant vantage point for the viewer, creating a landscape within the exhibition as a whole, which can be entered and the individual paintings scale creates an immersive environment for the viewer.



Figure 7

Owen's also discusses the difference between singular paintings being produced as independent objects versus being produced as a part of a larger exhibition. An exhibition offers the opportunity from the viewer to gain more information on the content of the individual artworks and see the formal decisions being made in the context of other possibilities. *Giant Rock, 1999* uses the ability of the installation of a body of work for individual paintings to form relationships

and allow the viewer to gather more information than by the paintings being presented independently. The exhibition as a whole suggests more content than the paintings as singular objects.

Amy Sillman has one of the most distinct color palettes amongst contemporary painters. She often combines extremely muddy hues with recognizable readymade retail hues. In *Cliff 2* the central geometric form is neon orange, white and blue in the top one third of the painting indicate sky and warm muddy hues are used for the ground. This juxtaposition of color qualities make the central form more pronounced and the painting more dynamic when viewed closely (Molesworth, 46). In a lecture on color theory at the Whitney Museum in 2014 Sillman described the studio practices of over 20 artists who all used color in different ways to do different things in their paintings. The postmodern experience of color theory is an all-inclusive experimentation for practicing painters. The palettes used in *Giant Rock, 1999* have an internal logic, which is informed by the history of color theory but have been created to make the viewer question why choices are being made within the context of the painting. In *Giant Rock, 1999* the palette exhibits a mix of muddy hues and bright neons in order to project the tone of the exhibition. In *Attachment Therapy, 1998* the figures are painted in dark analogous tones, which push the viewer to examine the painting very closely to recognize the figures depicted beyond their gesture.



Figure 8
ambiguous.

Sillman has also developed a cast of characters within her work through the repeated figures depicted. Her paintings often seem to float between figuration and abstraction. Large swatches of color and fine line work describe figure and ground relationships while vaguely hinting at narrative but remaining open and

Sillman and Owens both speak of their experience as painters influencing their appreciation of the phenomenological aspect of paintings, the role of painting in a digital age, and the intended viewing of their work. Currently in the art world paintings are viewed most frequently on either a smart phone or computer through a digital reproduction. This type of viewing takes away the experience of physically being in front of a painting and how that feels as a viewer. *Giant Rock, 1999* as a body large scale oil paintings offers the viewer the chance to experience the material presence of the artwork in a increasingly digital age.

IV. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.

Conceptually the work is a subjective experience of memory by conveying feelings and emotions attached to specific sites. Formal elements such as composition, color, balance, imbalance, surface tension, and scale reinforce this content. Memory is a subjective personal experience, which changes with the

passing of time, and can be reconstructed to serve any means. Authorship can be assured and memories curated to construct one's autobiography.

The concept of *jamais vu* is psychological event in which one is experiencing a situation that one recognizes in some fashion yet it seems unfamiliar. This type of event can be caused by trauma or while intoxicated. The artist has had this experience periodically throughout her life but at Giant Rock in 1999 after a dirt biking accident the uncanny feeling resonated and influenced this body of work as a metaphor for claiming and constructing her own identity. After crashing a dirt bike the artist suffered a concussion and experienced amnesia. The moment of this experience is vivid to the artist. Becoming aware of one's own existence and one's environment one is forced to construct a narrative regarding how and why they exist. The facts presented to the artist regarding her surroundings, activities before the accident, and clues to her own personhood did not ring true to her internal understanding of character. That being said, it became apparent that inherent characteristics and actions are not necessarily aligned, and one's personhood is malleable.

The landscape used in the paintings feels familiar yet uncanny as the Southern California desert is known to many, and is often used as a location in film. The desolate, sparsely vegetated land has been used since the 40's as the location in Westerns and carries the cultural connotations "The West" evokes. This location has been used since the 70's in science fiction films, as a fictitious representation of other planets or "The Last Frontier" extending the culture's

fascination with new beginnings, while the scene remains the same from previous decades. The desert provides characteristics, which are reminiscent and familiar yet perpetually evoke a blank slate. The narratives that unfold throughout the exhibition resurrected memories and monumentalize personal experience.

The structural framework in place for this body of work is defined by the immediate conditions imposed upon the body of work. For *Giant Rock, 1999*, a cohesive group of individual paintings are made to show together. The paintings function both as independent objects as well as a collected body. Relationships between individual works begin to form, highlight, and expand the content in the individual paintings. Recurring use of color and figures suggest a narrative within the collection of paintings, which form collective narrative in the gallery. The paintings relate to the gallery as objects, which reject being contained by the gallery in a conventional manner. They engage the viewer by highlighting the subjective experience of viewing art.

V. Technical Process.

The process involves several steps to produce the resolved body of paintings. First, scale decisions are made and the scope of the exhibition is determined, the substrates are then built and primed. Second, the subject matter for the individual painting is selected and either sketched or constructed in clay.

Third, the palette decisions for the painting are made, and the painting is executed.

Building the substrates demands consideration of the constraints of the in which the artist works, and consideration of the Snook Gallery parameters. The diptychs are constructed in order to reach the maximum height potential in the gallery while allowing the artist freedom and ease while painting on a reduced surface size. The breaks in the diptychs reinforce the conceptual strategies of reconstructing memory, as opposed to one singular continuous reality.

The second step asserts the content for the individual painting by selecting and editing the subject matter. The particular memory chosen to highlight is sketched and rendered in clay, worked and reworked until the composition is set. The paintings present either a narrative scene or abstracted forms. The focus of the painting is decided at this time but most decisions regarding how the paint is applied to the surface are made while painting.

The third step is setting the palette to be used and execution of the painting. The colors are chosen to reinforce the content of the individual painting by projecting the specific mood for the scene. Each memory conjures up specific feelings associated with an emotional, or visceral relationship. This subtle content of the memory is conveyed in the painting. The painting can start in many ways and takes varying degrees of time to become resolved. Paintings such as *Palm Frond*, *Family Portrait*, *Three Totems* and *Giant Rock, 1999* are painted in one sitting, with quick gestural brushstrokes and smooth resting areas

of solid color. *Jumbo Rock, 2000* and *Jumbo Rocks, 2006* are made over the course of a longer period of time in order to build up thin surface layers of translucent paint, which created a modeled effect. Each painting highlight the technical skill involved in their production. Color theory informs the hundreds of colors mixed for each individual painting and rarely is a ready-made pigment used, with the exception of exceptionally pure pigments such as cadmium red. Cadmium red provides a rich beautiful color that evokes so many associations and emotions, while never appearing tired or overused. These types of personal associations and feelings attached to particular hues reinforce the visceral relationship the artist has to the content of the memory being conveyed.

VI. Description and Analysis of Artworks

Giant Rock, 1999 (Figure 9) depicts anamorphic rock and four figures in a dusk desert setting. The primary figure is subdued by being rendered in shades of blue and green, which contrasts the warmly toned scene. This figure merges into the representation of the ground with bright yellow grass defining the outline of the female form. The other figures are all presented in warm red and pink tones outlined by the horizon, suggesting a transition. The central form is the rock, which also interrupts the horizon and is treated with the paint in the same manner as the figures, lending it human characteristics. The rock acts as a witness to the event transpiring. All of the figures represent the same character in different ways, the scene laying out the continually transitional aspect of life.

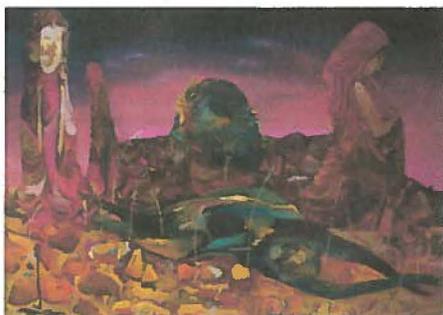


Figure 9

The death of some personality traits is necessary but is observed and sometimes, mourned.

Proposed Monument in the Mohave

Desert (Figure 10) and Proposed Statue

Commemorating an Event, Mohave Desert (Figure 11) both address the concept of monumentalizing a non-event. The word “proposed” in the titles suggested the non-existence of the intervention depicted in the land. Additionally, it makes reference to an artist design for a site that is often used in the planning stages of a commission or installation. This is contradicted by the painting itself, which implies through its physical nature (large scale oil painting on canvas) its own finality as a resolved object. The painting becomes the monument.

The female form has long been used as in the context of fine art, with the symbolic meaning shifting over time. Since 1989 when the Guerrilla Girls presented their iconic work questioning the Met. Museum’s collecting practices one thing this ongoing choice of subject matter can represent is the disparity in female artist representation in the fine art realm (gallery representation, museum

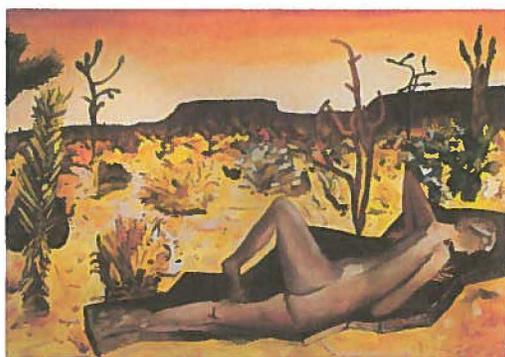


Figure 10

show representation, monetary value of artwork, etc.). The figures depicted in the paintings reclaim ownership of the artist’s body, and the format stakes claim to a traditional masculine approach to painting.



Figure 11

While in the scene depicted, the figure remains marginalized and alone, frozen in stone in the desert.

Three Totems (Figure 12) is a large vertical painting depicting three figurative shapes cutting through the picture plane against a blue to yellow gradient background. The shapes resemble totem poles with a variety in styles of rendering on all sides ranging from human faces to human forms to

geometric patterns. Totem poles traditionally represent figurative forms to document notable events or recount legends, although another traditional use of totem poles is to shame a member of a society. This concept is used in *Three Totems*. Each individual totem revolves around a central character depicted near the bottom of the canvas. Other forms balloon up from the head as a physical manifestation of the thought life of the characters.

Three totems depict masses of forms clumped together into a solid representation of something, which is by nature very fluid. It is a depiction of the internal struggles of all humans, as a physical weight they are constantly with. The painting suggests that all humans carry baggage of shame in their

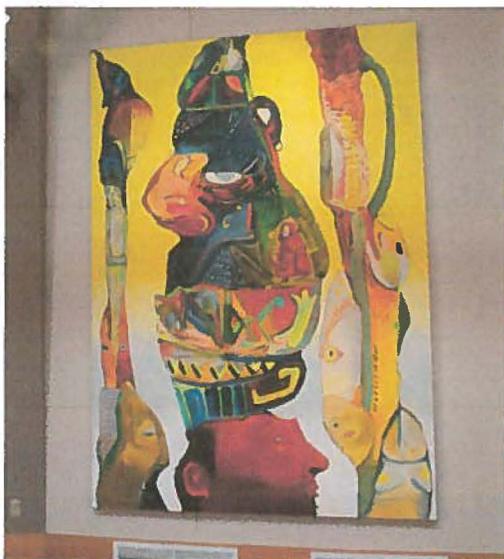


Figure 12

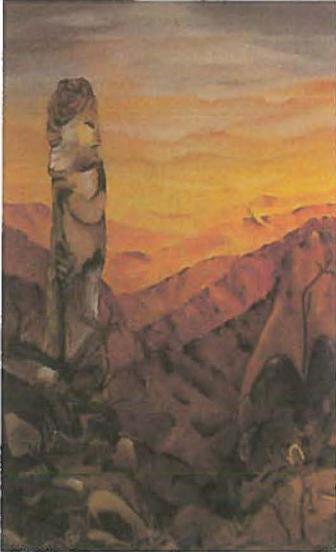


Figure 13

memories of themselves, yet are not alone in their struggles.

Key's View (Figure 13) depicts a receding horizon which transitions into an ascending series of cloud formations. The scene evokes a familiar yet generic landscape, with a sculptural monument in the foreground gazing into the distance. This painting touches on the idea of the temporality and fragility, with

the sculptural element representing permanence, domination, and staking claim to territory.

Foothill Drive, 1998 (Figure 14) depicts two figures in a body of water, two Joshua Trees framing the figures, sandy desert hills, and a pink sky. The memory being evoked in this painting is of the artist's first kiss in a hot tub in a neighborhood backyard in 29 Palms, California. The background is rendered in splashes of beige, lilac, and lemony ochre with illustrative renderings of Palm Trees, Yuccas, and Joshua Trees. This technique is used to give the impression of a "backdrop" for the event staged in the foreground. The flat rendering of the

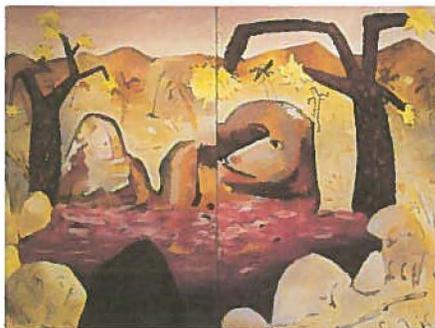


Figure 14

Joshua Trees, and their placement on both sides of the event reinforces the staged presentation of the figures. Additionally, the Joshua Tree indicates the general yet specific place. The pink sky and rosy water suggest a sweetness

and dreamlike quality while the waters also seem to boil with heat and darken to an unrefined murky purple which draws the eye to a singular black rock. This rock's color defines it as the "other" or spectator to the event. The figures are blocky awkward shapes, whose color make them harmonious in the scene, yet through their rendering remain separate from their surroundings. They become related only to each other in the scene, as their gazes lock in uncomfortable permanence. The overall effect of the painting is at first pleasant, while with extended viewing become uncomfortable and unsettling. The viewer feels the anticipation and nervousness while also the banality of the scene described.

Attachment Therapy (Figure 15) evokes an unsettled feeling through the gesture of the figures depicted. Two figures are seated on top of each other, the bottom figure's arms are wrapped around the waist of the top figure in order to embrace or restrain. The figures are obscured through their rendering; they become a whole entity, which is not necessarily read as two figures at all.



Figure 15

Aspects of their bodies are embellished by their reiteration; feet are drawn repeatedly on the bottom portion of the canvas to indicate action or struggle. One head hold several sets of eyes. Behind the figures lies a plane of yellow with black outlined organic shapes. This could read as a field or the way outlines remain once your eyes are closed on the backs of your eyelids or as pattern. While this is a simplistic

rendering of the background it complicates the scene by pushing the action and anxiety forward.

Action and anxiety can also be seen in the paint application and scale choices in *Palm Fronds* (Figure 16). The end of the palm frond rests in the center of the canvas with the branch extending up and out of the picture plane through the top right corner. The gesture can be felt through the weight of the object. Perspective pushes and pulls the negative spaces and objects back and forth projecting an anxious nervousness. It could be seen as a pendulum in mid-swing suggesting mortality or time.

The specific memory the symbolism in this painting denotes is of an aspiration and its limitations. The transplanted palm trees commonly associated with the California landscape denote a superficial leisure and success while remaining useless. This painting depicts the fallen fronds as a reminder of the termination of an ambition.

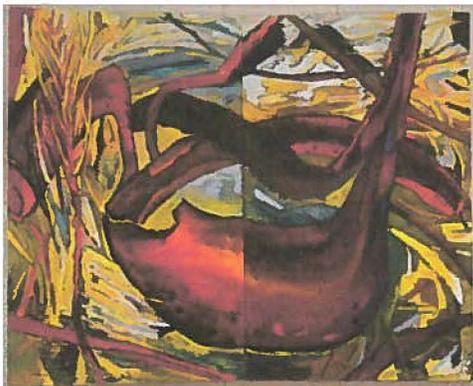


Figure 16



Figure 17

The painting *Dead Palm Tree* (Figure 17) uses the same symbolism as *Palm Fronds*, 2006. Formally, this painting uses scale as an entry point for the viewer. The format (five feet wide and sixteen feet high) is not a conventional painting size, it is meant to draw attention to the gallery it is hung in. The Snook Gallery can be viewed from two levels, neither of which would be ideal to see this painting in its entirety. The architecture of the gallery will obscure this painting from any vantage point. In this way the viewer is always reminded of his or her own subjective experience viewing the painting, by always having the architecture in sight. Large-scale paintings often deal with immersing the viewer in the illusion created by the paint on the canvas. Scale allows everything else to

disappear. With the particular format of this painting, this is impossible, while this painting remains the most representational and realistic in the body of work.

Dead Palm Tree and *Palm Fronds* are created as dyptics in order to create a seam or break in the representation. Both paintings are metaphors for



Figure 18

shifting objectives, and the abstraction caused by the breaks in the canvas reinforce this content.

Jumbo Rocks, 2000 (Figure 18) is based on the location Jumbo Rocks Campground in the Joshua Tree National Park, CA. The artist has many memories associated with this one site; it was a favorite campsite throughout her life. As discussed previously this painting is hung in juxtaposition from *Jumbo Rock, 2006*. The

rocks are depicted as rounded warm forms resembling bodies. The mass shifts

Jumbo Rocks, 2006 (Figure 19) This painting in particular depicts jagged rock outcropping through angled geometric forms in dark shades of blues, greys,



Figure 19

and greens. Glazing is used to give depth to the colors through layering. Some areas of the canvas, such as the central crevasse use the light coming through the canvas in combination with the brightness of the white gessoed surface to provide radiance to the thin pigment on the surface. Other light areas are painted on top of thick paint or use a high quantity of white pigment in order to create a different type of lightness (artificial depiction of light). These contrasting areas add more dimensionality

to the canvas. Additionally, this creates the push and pull described in other paintings, which breaks the illusionist space of the canvas with the materiality of the paint.

VII. Conclusion

The paintings in the exhibition *Giant Rock, 1999* convey feelings associated with memory through the use of self-portraiture and landscape. The varying themes throughout the individual paintings in the show touch on monumentalizing events, failures, marginalization, isolation, and anxiety. But the collection of paintings form a new landscape and narrative. An aspirational and hopeful theme is developed through the resurrection of the artist past in the narrative of *Giant Rock, 1999*.

Work Cited

Prettejohn, Elizabeth. *Beauty and Art: 1750-2000*. Oxford University Press. 2005.

Whitley, David. *A Guide to Rock Art: Southern California and Southern Nevada*. Mountain Press. 1998.

The Museum of Modern Art. *MoMA Highlights*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. Revised 2004.

Lynes, Barbara Buhler. *Georgia O'Keeffe*. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Abrams. 2007.

Molesworth, Helen. *Amy Sillman, One Lump or Two*. Institute of Contemporary Art Boston. DelMonico Books. 2014.

Artwork Cited

Figure 1. Friedrich, Casper David. Tomb of the Fallen in the Fight for Independence. Kunsthalle Hamburg. 1812. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 2. Petroglyphs. Barker Dam, Joshua Tree National Park, California.

Figure 3. Kahlo, Frida. Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair. Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1940. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 4. Little, Jasmine. Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mohave Desert. 2015. 48" x 72". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 5. Mitchell, Joan. Minnesota. 1980. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 6. O'Keeffe, Georgia. Storm Cloud, Lake George. 18 x 30 in. 1923. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 7. Owens, Laura. Installation shot 12 Paintings by Laura Owens. 356 S. Mission Rd. CA. 2013.

Figure 8. Sillman, Amy. Cliff 2. 183 x 152 cm. 2005. Oil on Canvas.

Figure 9. Little, Jasmine. Giant Rock, 1999. 2015. 120" x 84". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 10. Little, Jasmine. Proposed Monument in the Mohave Desert. 2015. 120" x 84". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 11. Little, Jasmine. Proposed Statue Commemorating an Event, Mohave Desert. 2015. 48" x 72". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 12. Little, Jasmine. *Three Totems*. 2015. 120" x 84". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 13. Little, Jasmine. *Key's View*. 2015. 60" x 96". In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 14. Little, Jasmine. *Foothill Drive, 1998*. 72" x 96". 2015. Oil on Canvas. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 15. Little, Jasmine. *Attachment Therapy (The View Out the Sliding Glass Window), 1999*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 16. Little, Jasmine. *Palm Fronds*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 120". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 17. Little, Jasmine. *Dead Palm Tree*. Oil on Canvas. 192" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 18. Little, Jasmine. *Jumbo Rocks, 2000*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.

Figure 19. Little, Jasmine. *Jumbo Rocks, 2006*. Oil on Canvas. 96" x 60". 2015. In the private collection of the artist. Alamosa, Colorado.