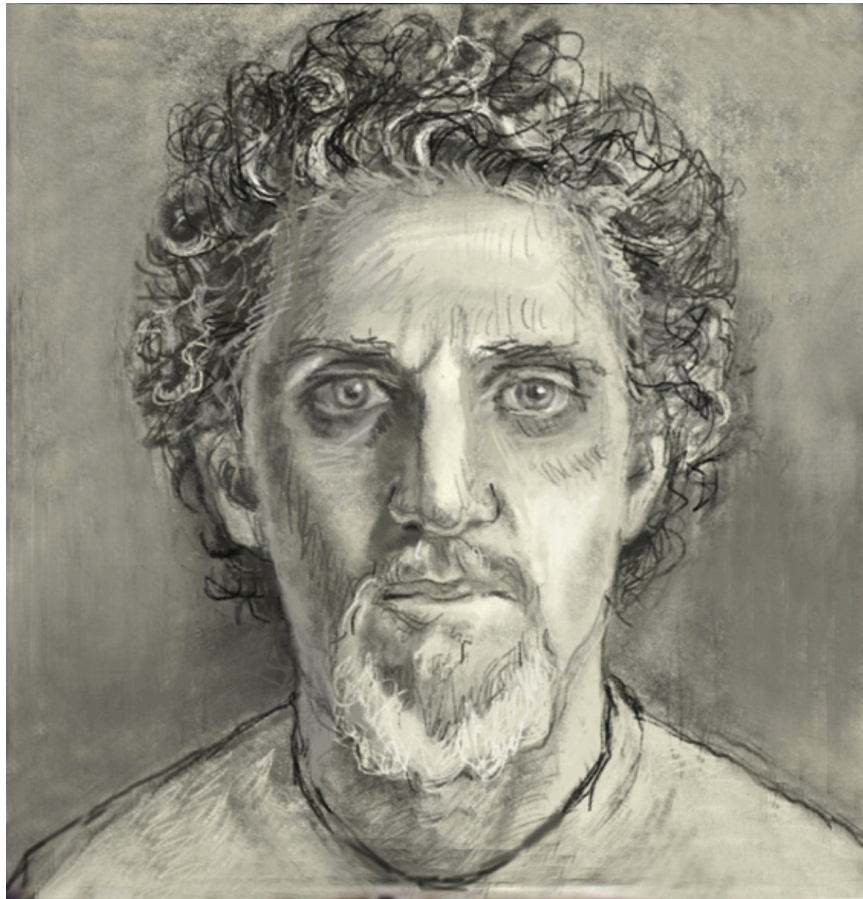


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Sabbatical Report

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Self Portrait, Fall 2020, digital drawing produced in Procreate on an iPad.

What does a sabbatical look like during the time of Covid19? Certainly not what I proposed it would be. I expected to travel, to visit galleries and museums, to be free from teaching, and to have uninterrupted time developing a personal body of artwork. This didn't exactly happen. My focus for the most part during this sabbatical semester was consumed with online learning, online teaching preparation, overseeing the online/home education of three children in elementary school, and of course, surviving.



Landscape Dystopia, Fall 2020 (work in progress), oil on canvas with digital manipulation, 21 x 48 inches.

Although I did get some personal work started such as the landscape painting above, my first and foremost activity was to complete the Canvas teaching certification process at El Camino College. In addition, I had to obtain and learn the periphery digital tools needed to create quality content for these online classes.

At El Camino College, I teach Life Drawing, Life Painting and Painting Fundamentals in the Art Department. After years in the classroom, I have found the best teaching method for students to reach course objectives is through the laboratory experience. The more a student practices, the more skill and understanding they develop. In my face-to-face classes, I intentionally kept my lectures to a minimum, transferring conceptual and technical information to each student during actual art-making activities. My student learning outcomes based on the work the students' produced was always very strong. Unfortunately, this kind of teaching method does not translate online.

Being mostly home bound and socially-distanced, I dived into the monumental task of building these online classes in anticipation of the spring semester, and spent most of my time figuring out how to develop quality digital teaching materials. This included extensive research, such as visiting virtual museums and galleries around the world, and enrolling in online art classes through the continuing education program of my graduate school, the New York Academy of Art. Through this exploration,

I was able to develop a method of capturing video demonstrations, video lectures and adapting assignments so they could be delivered into the Canvas course format.



The image on left, An Artist in His Studio, by John Singer Sargent, oil on canvas, 1904, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, provided inspiration for the image on right, Master Painting Study, produced in Procreate on an iPad, fall 2020.

I enrolled in three classes. The first class was a six-week course in Procreate. Procreate is a digital drawing and painting application, that utilizes an iPad and an Apple pencil to digitally duplicate the traditional drawing and painting experience. The size and portability of the iPad, really feels like I am working on a sketchbook in my hand, so too does the Apple pencil. Procreate has a variety of mark making tools that create the look of different traditional mediums, such as, watercolor, oil painting, charcoal and pencil drawing, ink drawing, etc. To learn the tools, I worked from master drawings and paintings and from direct observation. The Master Painting Study, above right, is one example I produced using Procreate to simulate an oil painting technique. The best thing about Procreate, for me, is the portability of the tools. There is no need for a special space to create or to store artworks. I also love the ability to save the artwork as a time-lapse animation video. The downfall with this medium is the finished artworks lack the actual texture of real paper or canvas or actual painting and drawing mediums. I intend to experiment with different printing processes in the future to see how these works can be saved as hard copies.



iPhone Screenshot from my Instagram page. I know, not too many posts or followers... maybe one day!

The second class I took was a workshop on how to utilize Instagram as an artist. Instagram is a social media platform that is based on posting images. The workshop was lead by an alumnus from my graduate school, who is much younger than me and has mastered Instagram as a self-promotion tool. The instantaneous platform and the potential for reaching a vast audience are pretty amazing.

The objective of Instagram is to get people to like and linger on your posted images. The longer viewers linger on your posts, the more Artificial Intelligence expands each post's reach. What increases viewers to linger on an image can be the image itself, but also can involve asking a question or offering the viewer a way to learn something. For example, rather than post a painting completed, one could post a work in progress and ask the viewers their opinion on how to resolve the painting, or even better, post a short video of a work of art being made.

I never really understood the function of “influencers,” and really needed this explained. Influencers are individuals that have huge social media followings. To have an influencer endorse one of your Instagram “posts,” could potentially generate a huge increase in viewers. Influencers charge for their endorsement, so an artist could pay a nominal fee from \$20 and up, to hire an influencer to help them. Am I going to use Instagram to build this kind of network? I am not sure, but it has a lot of potential. As an instructor, at least I have a deeper understanding of this platform, and can advise students on its usefulness in developing a career in the arts. Chances are, though, they will already have more insight into Instagram and other social media platforms than me.

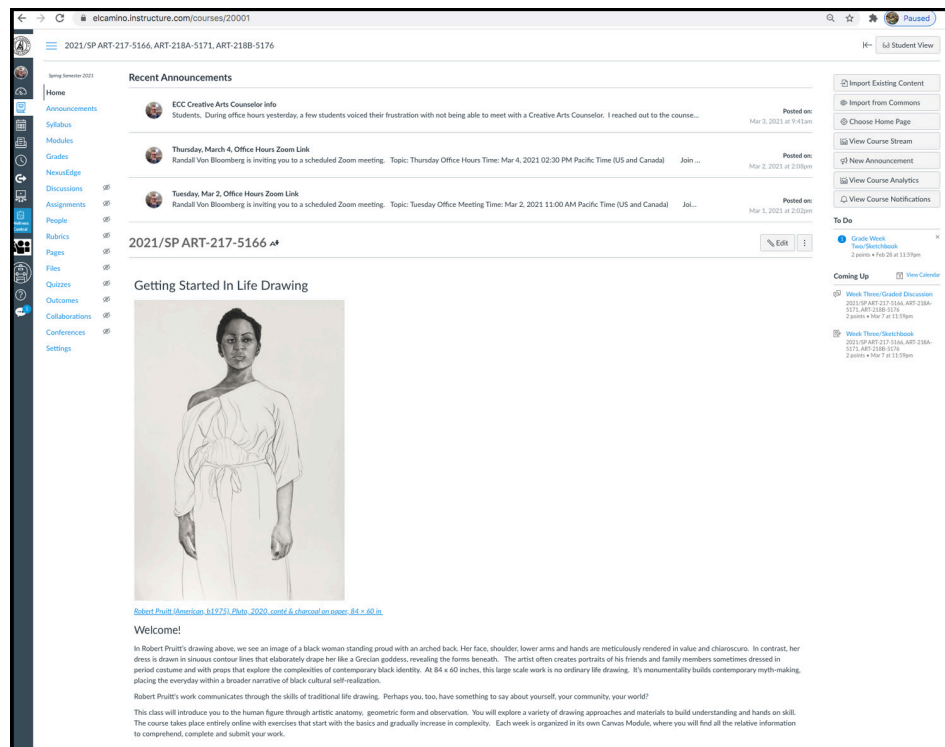


*The image on left, Study for St John the Baptist, Andrea del Sarto (Italian 1486-1531), red charcoal on paper, inspired
My drawing on right, Skeleton Projection, produced using Procreate on an iPad, fall 2020.*

The third class I took was an anatomy lecture class, also taught by an alumnus of the New York Academy of Art. This alumnus graduated about fifteen years after me. I have to say it was really interesting to revisit my graduate school, the New York Academy of Art, and see how it has evolved, and how its graduates have found their way into the art world.

This anatomy lecture class was excellent. The instructor organized his class using Google Classroom and delivered lectures with PowerPoint, utilizing the pen tool to draw over the images. I found his breakdown of human anatomy and his delivery method very inspiring and visual, and modeled the lectures for my online life drawing class in a similar approach. Many of the books this instructor referred to were books that I have been using myself through the years, but there were several others that he recommended, that I have since collected and have incorporated into my class.

How has all this research affected my class pedagogy and the online format? As I stated earlier, the studio art classes that I've taught face-to-face have been heavily reliant on the lab experience. Delivery of information was accomplished through formal lectures, but more significantly through instructor demonstrations and talking to each student individually at their easel, addressing questions that their level of work specifically asks. Online changes all of this. These studio art classes have become far less lab dependent, and have morphed into more lecture dependent classes.



Screenshot of the "Home Page," from my online Life Drawing Canvas Course, Spring 2021 semester, featuring a Drawing by the contemporary artist, Robert Pruitt (American b1975).

In Life Drawing, I developed ten formal anatomy lectures, that I saved as narrated PowerPoint videos. Each lecture covers a different topic relative to drawing the human body. Life Drawing also requires from 1-3 video demonstrations per week, showing a different drawing technique or concept.

I created similar demonstrations and lectures for Painting Fundamentals. To teach these classes online, I decided oil painting was not a good medium for students to work with at home. The oil painting process, though amazing and special, requires spaces with proper ventilation, proper disposal of paints and rags, and safe places to allow the oils to dry. Though I've dabbled in acrylic painting in the past, I decided to really learn how to use this medium for the purpose of teaching. I read a few books, purchased supplies, and proceeded to develop acrylic paintings as demonstration works for my Painting Fundamentals class. Acrylic paints, mediums and tools have really advanced in recent years, and can be handled much more similarly to oil paints. They are still different, but there is much potential. The images below show a traditional painting process produced in acrylics.



Earth-Tone Palette, Paper Bag Study (demonstration paintings), 18 x 24 inches, acrylic on canvas. Above left, Monochromatic Underpainting; above center, Color Overpainting; above right, Demonstration Palette for color mixing.

Capturing video demonstrations requires suitable equipment, including a decent video camera, and a rolling tripod with a boom arm, so my body and head are not blocking the shot. Creating these videos was all trial and error, that I developed alone in my studio, while socially distanced.

In a face-to-face class, Life Painting and Life Drawing are taught with live models. There is no better inspiration than working from a live model. To teach online, I had to find quality images that could provide inspiration and reference.

Fortunately, I found a huge source of online public domain images including historic master paintings, drawing and sculptures, as well as online pay-sites to view reference photographs of figure model sessions.

To emulate the live model in-class experience, I created several timed PowerPoint videos of models in different poses, for students to view and work from, such as a series of one to five-minute poses from which students can capture the model's gesture by drawing quickly. All of these classroom tools took enormous amounts of time to prepare (not to mention the potential technical glitches that occur from saving large video files, uploading, closed captioning, etc.).

Black Lives Matter, LBGTQ, diversity, gender and social equality, etc.... really challenged what I thought was a pretty progressive viewpoint. Having studied extensively in a European Academic tradition, my personal artwork and teaching philosophy adheres to these principles. Though white European male artists certainly provide great examples of the learning objectives for my courses, I've searched wide and deep to broaden the artists I choose to include in my lectures and examples. Finding new inspiration from artists that reflect our diverse community at ECC has been one of the most exciting parts of my research and shift in teaching.

All this really leads to an important question. Can a studio art class be taught successfully online? Yes, I think it can be taught online, but the experience is different. The challenge to equity, in terms of having a space to work, suitable computers, printers, Internet access, and digital know-how is very real and very concerning. I am not sure if the actual artmaking outcomes the students are creating will match the success of the face-to-face classes, but I will see as I put these courses into further motion in this Spring 2021 semester.

When we return to face-to-face instruction, there is definitely a lasting benefit in that I will have a huge source of support materials, including not only my recorded lectures and demonstrations, but also links to a variety of public domain and free online resources, including downloadable books, and image libraries from collections around the globe. Much of these online resources have been newly created in response to the pandemic and social shifts, and they spotlight historic and contemporary artists that are inclusive and diverse.



My California Native Garden, early spring 2021, digital photo

Inspired by my 2018 artist residency at the Theodore Payne Foundation, I was able to create (with some help) a native California garden in my front yard. It's been a joy to watch it grow, and I look forward to finding inspiration in the years to come.

What are the things I wish I could have done during my sabbatical? I wish I could have been freed from the stress of teaching for one semester to really delve deep into my personal art-making process. I wish I had been able to take that summer trip to Sicily with my family and friends. But I know the time and effort spent developing these advanced digital skills serve a greater purpose. What I've learned about myself (or reinforced what I already know) is that I am open and flexible, and never settle for mediocrity. I approach life as an artist, always searching for clarity out of chaos and meaning out of randomness. I believe we have entered into a new world paradigm, and there is great hope. I am grateful for this period of sabbatical and reflection, and believe I am better equipped and informed to continue to move forward.