

Evaline Soltes

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Rick Bennett

Art & Design Thesis Paper

Waves of Emotions

For my thesis, I plan to paint a series of large acrylic paintings of the sea in different weather conditions. Each painting will convey a different emotional state: happiness, sadness, anger, anxiety, and peace. I chose painting because it is my favorite medium, and I want to push my technical skills and create more ambitious paintings than I have made before. I hope the paintings allow viewers to examine their emotions and explore connections between natural elements and inner psychological states. Completing the paintings will help me process my own grief and help me prepare for a career in Art Therapy.

The first step in my process was to complete a small study of ocean waves on four 9 by 12-inch canvases. The four emotions I matched with these canvases were happiness, sadness, anger, and peace. I used acrylic paints to create these. I had many failures and findings during this small study. One particular failure was that I would get frustrated easily and want to move on to a new painting almost immediately. This happens to me because I am mean to myself and think that my pieces look horrible when, in reality, they look great. Either that, or I would get annoyed with the painting process because it was not going as I thought it would, causing me to want to stop working on it entirely. This is what I call "painters block." Usually, when this happens, I force myself to keep working on the painting and not step away until I am happy with it. During my small study, I learned to step away from the painting I was working on or start on a

new one until I was ready to return to the other piece and complete it. This technique is something that has really helped me get past the "painters block" and to continue with my process.

During my small study, I also found that painting fast is more of my friend than painting slow. All of my pieces from my small study were basically done alla prima, which helped a lot when blending colors on the canvas. Another finding was to paint the colors I see and then focus on the details later down the road. I also learned to paint when the paint is wet, making it easier for me to blend the colors. I feel that this technique allows me to get the correct movement of the waves I am trying to achieve. All four of my paintings from my study are attached below:



Happiness



Peace



Anger



Sadness

I am using acrylic paints for my main thesis as well. I plan to paint five ocean scenes on 30 by 40-inch canvases for my thesis. The emotions that I will be using are happiness, sadness, anger, anxiety, and peace. Some of my bigger pieces may be like pieces in my study because I liked how they turned out, and I want to challenge myself to paint them bigger in scale. I learned from my small study that I need to try to paint my thesis pieces in alla prima as well because it will help me not to dwell on individual paintings forever. This painting style will hopefully help me push myself more and not get bored quickly. My pieces will be presented in the thesis show by hanging on the wall in a straight line going in order of my grief process.

The influences that I have chosen are Jacqueline Jones, Ivan Aivazovsky, Kymberlee Stanley, and Rick Bennett. I chose these individuals as my influences because they all have one thing in common: painting oceans, but all their styles differ. Some are more painterly, and some

are more realistic, but all are filled with emotion and remind me of the Romantic period. The Romantic period was known for its high emotion and deep appreciation of nature (Encyclopædia Britannica). These individuals affect my work by giving me different ideas of how several types of water and waves can be painted using various strokes, movements, and colors. I have discovered that in their work, they painted by the colors first and then added details. For example, I feel like the artists blocked out the dark and light colors of the waves before adding water-like details. This helps to see the depth and the highlights of the water. Below are images of work these artists have created so you can get a taste of what their work is like.



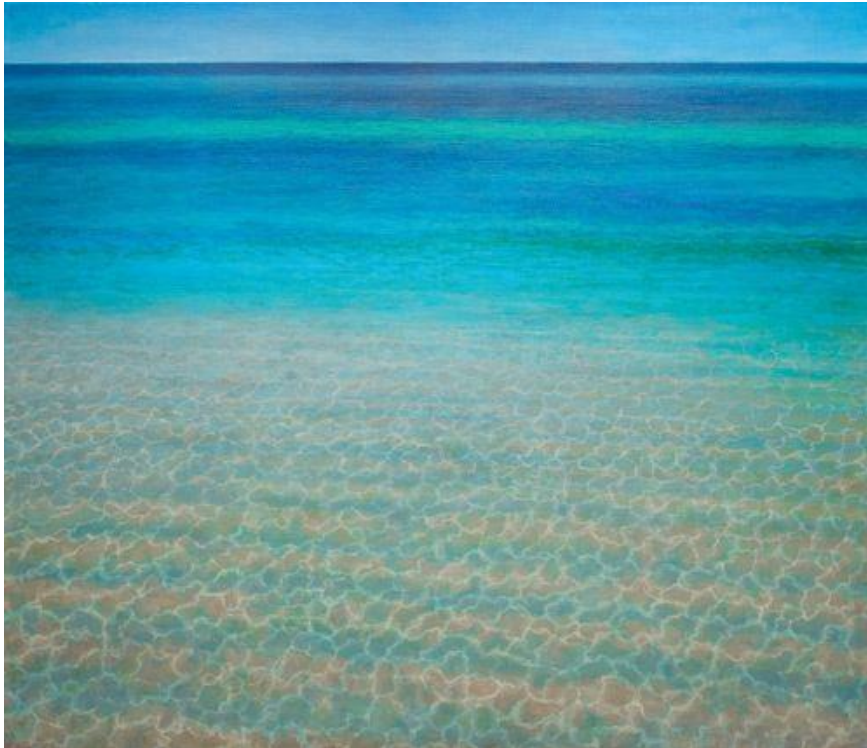
Jacqueline Jones: *Icelandic Shimmers*



Ivan Aivazovsky: *The Ninth Wave*



Kymberlee Stanley: No title found



Rick Bennett: *Curacao*

Now for a bit of information on my influences, starting with Jacqueline Jones. Jacqueline Jones is a plein air artist who began drawing and painting as a child. As a child, she also studied under Joseph Gionfriddo, a local artist in Connecticut. This is where her love for traditional oil painting came from. When Jacqueline Jones creates plein air pieces, she fully immerses herself in the environment. Jones travels a lot and creates art wherever her travel takes her. She expresses that her oil paintings "... are an expression of mood and emotion manifested through the beauty of the landscape" (Blogger). Jones not only expresses mood, emotion, and different elements of nature in her paintings but also infuses her paintings with the people she meets while painting. This reminds me of a romantic period painter because they, too, expressed the beauty of the landscapes through mood and emotion in their pieces.

Speaking of the Romantic period, Ivan Aivazovsky was a romantic period painter. Aivazovsky was an influence of mine when creating my small study because of the way he used color and emotion in his dramatic ocean scenes. Ivan Aivazovsky was not a plein air painter. Instead, he painted these scenes from the details of his memory. The Art Story says that he never actually witnessed what he would paint but had various sketches that he would combine to get the result he wanted. When looking at the progression of his pieces, I noticed that in his painting Chaos (The Creation), the waves are not as detailed as in some of the other paintings he had done in later years. Especially when compared to The Ninth Wave. I am hoping to see this same progression in my thesis when you compare them to the smaller paintings I did for my study.

Kymberlee Stanley is a plein air artist, but she is also a licensed psychotherapist and art therapist. Painting was her therapy and her way of coping while working as a mental health director during the pandemic. In her artist statement, Stanley said, "I believe that color, and the expression of feelings through color, is a God-given method of healing through nature. When I am painting, I am in a process of looking, feeling, and "flow" without words" (My Story). This is one of my favorite statements, and I fully agree with everything Kymberlee said. Looking, feeling, and flowing without words is exactly how I feel when I paint. When painting the ocean scenes with different emotions, that feeling will most likely happen to me because I will be putting all of my thoughts and feelings onto the canvas without speaking. The brush and paint will do the talking for me.

Rick Bennett is not only a nationally known artist who paints landscapes, seascapes, still life, and much more but is also a professor of Art and Design at Hanover College. Yes, he is one of my professors/advisors. Rick Bennett is a fantastic artist who has so many tips and tricks up his sleeve. He has helped me during my time at Hanover to better my painting skills and makes

me paint subjects that are out of my comfort zone... like painting self-portraits or eggs. Without him pushing me to do the best work possible, I do not think my painting skills would be where they are today. Bennett was featured in the Acrylic Artist Spring 2015 magazine for his ocean paintings. In that article, Rick stated, "The paradoxes and mysteries of life are all present in the sea" (Acrylic Artist). I really like this quote that Rick Bennett used because this is one of the things that emotions and the sea have in common. Emotions are complicated, yet not complicated at all. Some may feel a particular emotion for no reason at all. For example, some may start to cry randomly and may not necessarily know why they are crying. That alone can be considered a mystery.

After doing this, I want to be able to paint several ocean styles with many different colors, emotions, and more. I hope my final paintings clearly express the different emotions I am trying to convey. I want my audience to see that they can express their feelings through almost anything they love. This is relevant to the world today because art therapy is becoming bigger and bigger by the minute. Showing that you can use art to help yourself through a tough time could influence those who are going through a challenging time to find something they love and use it to release all the negativity in their life. Whether that is painting, sketching, sculpting, writing, or anything else! Emotion is in everything and can be expressed through anything. Art is my form of therapy. I have used art to help myself, and I hope to help others express themselves through art by becoming an art therapist. I plan to take this process into my future career, expand on this series, and add more emotions to it.

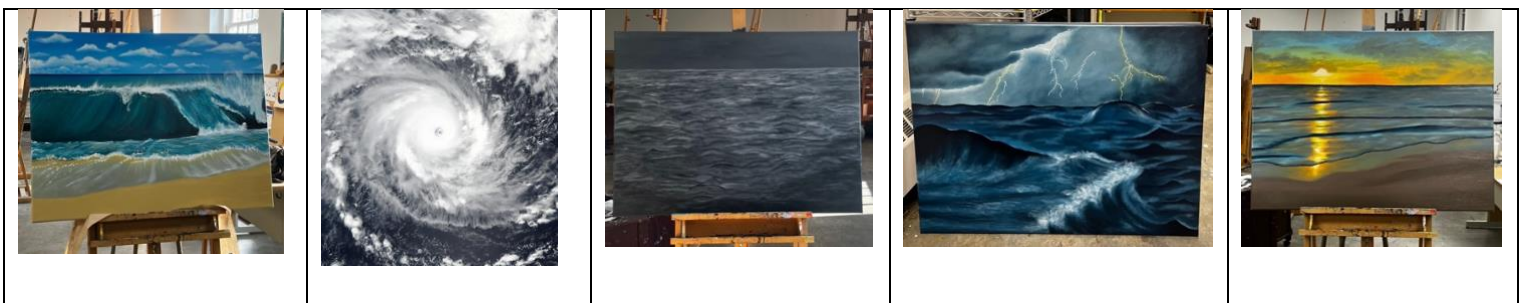
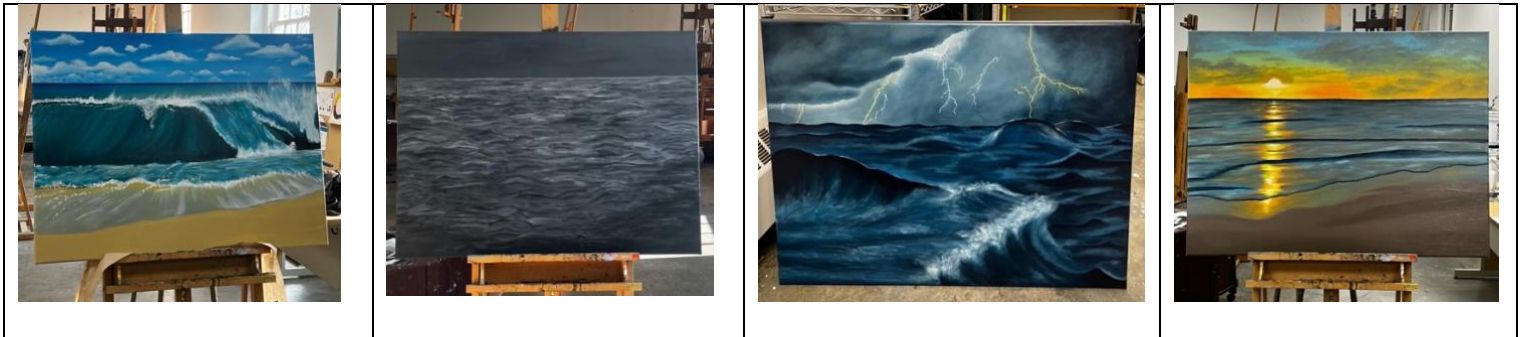
Addendum Update

This entire process has seriously put me through the Waves of Emotions. There was a lot of love, hate, crying, yelling, smiling, being anxious, and much more throughout this process. I think this is because while I was painting these paintings, it took me back to my grief process that I went through when I lost my little brother, and at times, it was not fun. Just like emotions, waves ebb and flow from one state to another, vary in intensity, and can be unpredictable. For example, there were times where I would get a sudden wave of anger and I would have to step away and breathe or else I was just going to continue to mess up the part of the painting that I was on.

For some reason, none of the paintings really gave me trouble, except for my “*Happiness*” painting. This was the first painting that I had started on and the last painting that I finished... I started this one about two weeks before I was able to get more canvases, and it was my main frustration throughout the entire process. Everything on this painting looked perfect to me except for the crashing waves on the right side of the piece. For some reason, I just could not get it to look how I wanted. Yes, I am a perfectionist, but I know how this piece was supposed to look and I was not going to let a wave, that I had painted before, defeat me. So, I repainted that crashing wave almost ten times before I could get it to look the way I wanted. I did want to throw this painting out of the painting studio window so many times, but I am so glad I did not do that because I do like how it turned out.

I originally was going to paint five different emotions. I did not get to make the fifth painting because I ran out of time. I plan to paint this fifth emotion in the future to add to the series. The emotion that I did not get around to painting was anxiety. My idea for this emotion was to paint a bird’s eye view of a typhoon/hurricane forming. This would have been a

completely different point of view from the other paintings, but that was the whole point. This was to give that break in these emotions that did not make much sense because that's how anxiety works. Anxiety comes at random times, and you just cannot control when it happens. The order of my paintings hung in the order of my grief process. Without the anxiety piece in there, the paintings hung in this order: *Happiness*, *Sadness*, *Anger*, and *Peace*. If the anxiety piece had been finished, the order would have been this: *Happiness*, *Anxiety*, *Sadness*, *Anger*, and *Peace*. Reading them in order does not seem that abrupt with anxiety thrown in between happiness and sadness, but visually it would have been, which just shows how anxiety really is. Let me show you what the order looked like in person with my complete pieces vs. what it would have looked like with the anxiety emotion in there (the typhoon image is just an example of something I would have done).



The oral defense and the gallery show made me super nervous. I have not been that nervous to give a presentation in front of people in a long time. I kept wondering why I was so

nervous to give these presentations, but I came to realize that I think I was that nervous because this was a touchy subject for me. I did not want to show my emotions and cry in front of everyone over the meaning of this thesis and the meanings behind the paintings, but that all went out the window once my oral defense questions came around. I realized that telling people the story and meanings of these paintings is okay to do and it may help others that are going through grief to see that it's okay to feel what they are feeling. Other than that, the gallery show was so much fun! I loved getting to see everyone present what they had put all of their time and hard work into. Not only that but seeing my paintings hanging up in an actual gallery setting was just amazing. Lastly, I want to say thank you to Rick Lostutter, Rick Bennet, and Matthew Gaddie for making my four years in the Hanover College Art & Design Department so much fun and for giving me memories that I will never forget! (Completed pieces are pictured below.)



Happiness



Sadness



Anger



Peace



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