New Day. New Painting.

An exhibition of artworks

by

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A thesis exhibition

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in fulfillment of the

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in

Studio Art

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The thesis I'm presenting is an investigation of the perceptual experience of my day-to-day life as a student undertaking the graduate program at the University of Waterloo. It consists of observational paintings, which are organized into four groups detailing my home, the campus, my six-week research trip (June – July 2022) to Charleston, South Carolina, and the walk to my car—an experience that was interrupted when a stand of trees that seemed almost familial were unexpectedly cut down.

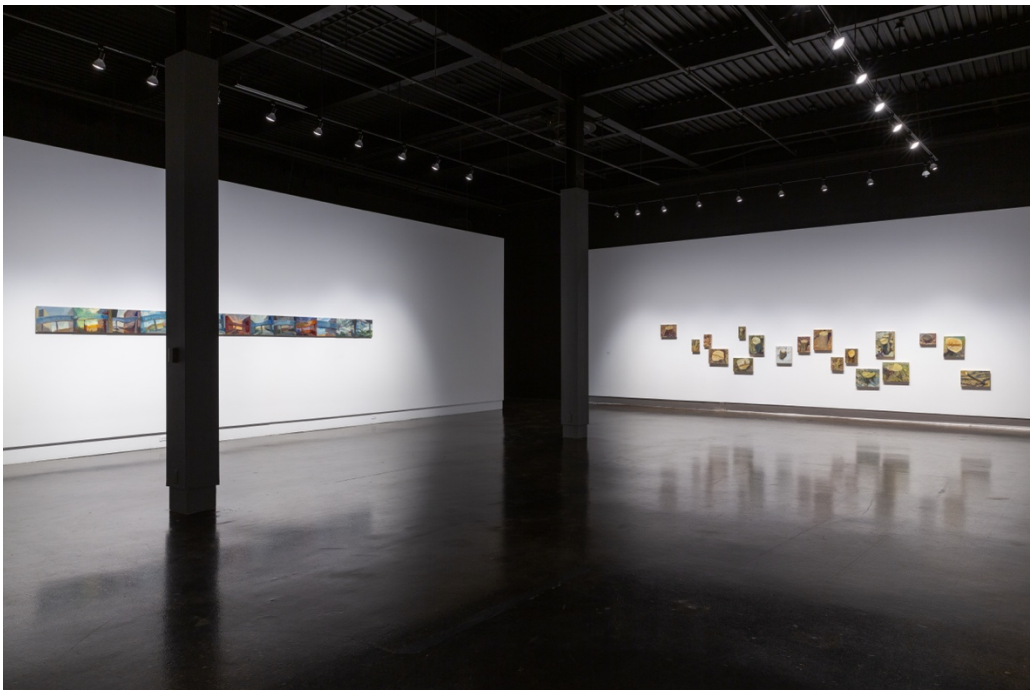

Fig 1. Brent Wade Garbett, *Installation Show at UWAG*, 2023, Photo Credit to Scott Lee.

Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

My home, now called Guelph, resides on *Between the Lakes Treaty No. 3 Territory* and is the traditional homeland of the Anishinaabeg Peoples, specifically the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The University of Waterloo, the school I attended while completing my master's degree, is situated on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. Built on the Haldimand Tract, the land that was given in treaty to the Six Nations but was never acknowledged.

When I paint the landscape, I recognize that I'm also painting a place that is rich in indigenous history, a history that has been buried by European settlers. I would like to acknowledge this history and to voice my respect and gratitude for the indigenous people who have been taking care of this land, and who still continue to love and care for this land. I recognize as well the injustices and violence these people still continue to face under a colonial system which is inherently racist and destructive.

I acknowledge the privilege that I have had to benefit and profit from these lands and my responsibility to continue to learn and unlearn the histories of these places and of the people who have shaped them.

Formal Acknowledgements

I owe *a lot* of coffee to *a lot* of people.

At the top of my coffee list are my advisors who have both encouraged me to push forward when I'm riddled with doubt. I'm forever in debt to your kindness, support, and incredible patience.

- Tara Cooper takes her coffee with cream but I feel a cappuchino would be a welcomed surprise.
- Doug Kirton will have a cup of whatever's being offered in the Engineering building.

I would also like to thank my graduate cohort who continuously put up with my odd sense of humour, hallway dance routines, and weird noises and smells.

- Christine De Vuono, a big mug of espresso.
- Stephanie Florence, a chai tea latte with oat milk.
- Clara Laratta, Chai Tea Latte, with soy milk.
- Sarah Martin, plain ol' cow's milk.

The staff and faculty at the University of Waterloo, as well as the Fine Arts technicians who have continuously stopped what they are doing to lend me a hand or to listen to me go on about something irrevelant. They will probably get a lot more work done now that I've graduated.

- Lois Andison thinks she owes me coffee but she doesn't. She takes milk.

- Adam Glover might be happier having beer.
- Timothy Walker takes cream and sugar but definitely not from Tim Hortons.
- Rick Nixon takes his coffee with cream.

And finally, I would like to thank my parents mostly because there would be absolute mayhem if I didn't.

- My Mom takes 3 spoonfuls of honey. I think that's too much but I'm not the one who has to drink it.
- My Dad takes decaf coffee, black, and French pressed.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

My life and painting are passionately interwoven. They are inseparable. I make paintings of my home, and I clean paint off my doorknobs. I play chess on my computer, and I think about the relationship between chess and composition—a painting as a puzzle to be solved. When I drive to school, I think about the way the blues of the cerulean sky reflect onto the ground. And driving home, I think that I may have left the studio too early because the landscapes I see feel illuminated by the setting sun. Painting and life, life and painting, one always informing the other.

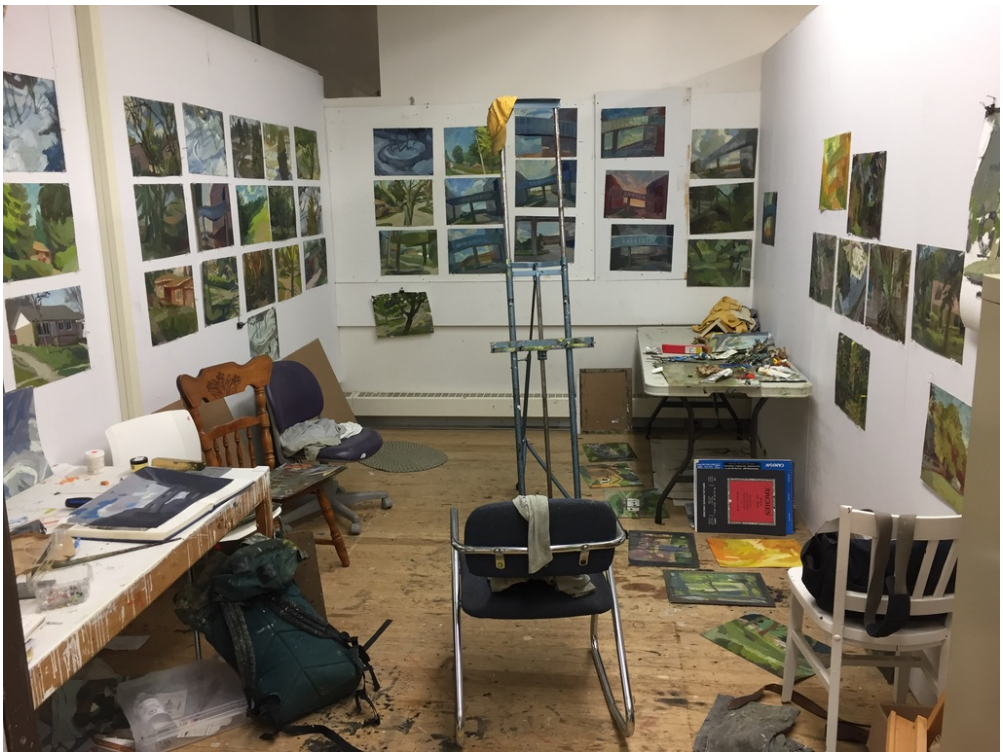

Fig 2. *Picture of my Studio at East Campus Hall*, University of Waterloo, 2022

PART 1

1.0 Everyday Life

For the past two years, this has been my daily routine: I wake up in my home in Guelph, do my crossword, a chess puzzle, and then drive down Highway 7 to the University of Waterloo. At school I do a variety of things from going to class, talking with other students, and drinking coffee, but mostly I am painting or thinking about painting. Then I drive home and go to bed. No explosions, and not a lot of action. My day-to-day is familiar and mundane. It is predictable and a little bit boring.

With the repetitiveness of routine, I become acquainted with the places I frequent. I know where the trees are and where the roads bend. I know the cracks in the sidewalk, the neighbours, and the fire hydrants. The things around me become an extension of myself, as the landscapes embed into my memory, and I am compelled to reflect on places from my past, places I once loved and knew just as intimately—my old houses and the schools I used to attend with all of their physical, intimately known aspects. I think I know every rock on the island that my childhood cottage was on. My life is experienced through the visual accumulation of things noticed and these noticed things inform my identity. I recognize that the conditions of now are both temporary and temporal. I will graduate and will establish a new set of rituals, a new set of routines. However, what I hope (and suspect)

will remain is this daily loop of noticing and painting, and painting what I notice.

Rita Felski describes the everyday as "the air one breathes " adding it's "the taken-for-granted backdrop.[1]" For me, the backdrop is the subject. It's my foreground. It's the stage for the stories I tell. And I am in agreement with Felski when she talks about the everyday as both non-negotiable and unavoidable. She says, "After all, everyday life simply *is*, indisputably: the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds. It is the ultimate, non-negotiable reality, the unavoidable basis for all other forms of human endeavour"[2].

Understandably, the same routine can be difficult. However, painting the daily aspects of it over and over opens me up, it allows me to see what I'm looking at in a new light, and this is where things change. This is where the small details of looking become big—big in the sense of belonging and being in the here and now. The light changes, the seasons move, it snows, it rains, it snows again. There are no other landscapes I would want to paint but those around me. Stepping off my front steps is far enough. These are the day-to-day things I witness. They're the landscapes I feel part of and

[1] Felski, "The Invention of Everyday Life", 17
[2] Felski, "The Invention of Everyday Life", 15

they are neither picturesque, nor transcendental. They feel like the places Henry David Thoreau and his legendary retreat to Walden Pond would have tried to get away from. However, what I share with Thoreau is a feeling for nature, but it's not nature untouched by people. I live in suburbia on a cul-de-sac and I take solace in the number of trees that line the street, and in the fact that people inhabit the houses along that same line.

1.1 Perception

I can only experience the world through my body and what I see is the sensation of light as it enters my eyes—a perception of what is in front of me. There is a kind of collapse, or at oneness, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes in his book *Phenomology of Perception*, "Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside of myself."[3]

This sentiment of wholeness or oneness with the world is reiterated by artist David Hockney when he talks about the difference between perceiving through the lens of photography and perceiving through the human eye. He says, "I mean, photography is all right if you don't mind looking at the world from the point of view of a paralyzed cyclops–*for a split second*. But that's not what it's like to live in the world."[4]

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[3] Merleau-Ponty, *Phemonology of Perception*, 474
[4] Still looking for the primary srouce..

If you've never taken a picture of the moon, you might be surprised by how it turns out. The moon looks big to our eye but when photographed, it turns into a small little dot on the picture plane. It's disappointing to say the least, and it is in this example that we can tell how the camera and our eyes see things differently. When we focus on an object, it becomes our attention and we perceive it to be bigger because it takes most or all of our visual and mental focus. A photograph, to me, reads as Hockney phrased like "a paralyzed cyclops." It is a frozen perspective from a single-lensed machine. It is an experience that doesn't encapsulate the sensorial body and it's why I choose to paint from life and not use photography as a reference. I don't trust the camera to represent how my body perceives the environment around me. I don't trust it to capture the lived perspective, the tone and colour, the humidity in the air. I don't remember a place as a static image. I remember it as a compilation of many sensations, from many perspectives, which are all experienced over time. I remember a place by how I move through it, whether I'm walking, driving, or riding a bike. To represent it photographically dismisses the larger dimensionality of my body in space and time.

The more closely I look as I paint (i.e. the process of painting), the more a photograph doesn't make sense. The shadows are either too dark, or the light is blown out. The colours are either too saturated or too dull. It

takes time to accurately perceive the way I see things. The camera quite simply makes too many of the decisions for me.

PART 2

2.0 A Painter's Painter

"Every painted picture thus contains genuine painterly pragmatic knowledge. However, this knowledge remains dependent on experts. The codes at play in an artwork—such as lumps of paint, silk-screen marks, or the visual language of figuration—have to be deciphers along with their historically variable meanings." – Isabelle Graw[5]

To understand the reasons why my paintings look the way they do, I would have to trace back to when I began as a painter. The history of my paintings are the marks, tools, and processes I have learned from the artists before me and their messages can be found imbedded in my material outcomes. I am often referred to as a "painter's painter" and I admit that I don't fully understand what that means. The implication is that I'm a painter who speaks a language that is understood and appreciated by other painters. Implicit in this is the perception that this language is inaccessible to those who aren't painters or experts in the medium. As such, I will decipher my own history with painting in the way that I learnt it. Behind my brushwork are the marks of a thousand paintings by artists that have

[5] Graw, The Love of Painting, 18

influenced me. I will also speak to my personal methodology—how a painting plays out in real time.

If I begin a painting with a detailed plan, I quickly abandon it. Forcing an idea usually ends up with a painting that seems too self-aware. It becomes overly careful and considered, giving the impression that I'm *trying* to make a painting instead of just making one. I prefer to take a more subconscious approach, one that embraces curiousity. Not knowing where the painting is going fosters a heightened awareness, it becomes part of the adventure as I literally get to see where the painting takes me. I let the brush make the mark. I let the paint move how it wants to move. I do not try to control their behaviours, I let the tools and materials speak for themselves. In taking this approach, I create problems—problems that need to be solved. There are awkward relationships: a lack of focal point, tonal issues, and colours that don't work. These problems do not need to be solved on the spot and can be resolved later in the studio. Sometimes, I take my paintings back outside and continue to work on them—a new day, a new painting.

I rarely take paint away. I tend to let the surface build up, layering thick gobs of paint on top of other thick gobs of paint. I sometimes wonder about the longevity of this approach but then quickly push it out of mind. I

can't worry about the future. My focus is the *now* of the painting. The surfaces become layered and textured, they feel gritty against my fingers. Sometimes I am tempted to pick little dried clumps of paint off the surface. The texture is reminiscent of the textures found in nature such as dirt and bark, or maybe it's the dried grass that has blown into the paint. I don't worry, I just paint over it. There is another accumulation that occurs, a sense of time. And struggle. I don't understand every painting I make. So there is usually a reflective period following a sequence of days and their paintings—more time needed to make sense of what I saw and what I see in the paintings in front of me.

2.1 A Word on Plein-Air...

I go back and forth on whether I should use the term *plein air* to describe my process. On one hand, it accurately describes what I do. As the words translate, I paint outdoors "in the open air." And it's true, I *am* that person on the landscape with the French easel, hat, and backpack full of supplies. Although, the term can elevate the work in knowing that it was not made in a studio from a photograph, memory, or sketch, but required a different, less common skillset—one that relies on the ability to work within an unstable environment, being able to adapt to atmospheric changes, movement, weather conditions, and wildlife. Working *en plein air* can also embed a small narrative into the work, that the painting has been on a

journey to a real place. The painting has traveled. It was there with the subject. In this way, the painting and the place are interconnected. For me, I wonder when I see a painting made *en plein air,* how closely it resembles or feels like the place it's depicting. There's an extra curiousity that can arise.

On the other hand, *plein air* takes the focus off the painting, placing it more on the process. Take a studio painting, label it *plein air* and something about it changes. For the better? Not always. I find people are generally more forgiving in their critique of the work if they know the conditions that affected the process. *Plein air* is also a term, not a descriptive word. It is historical as its etymology directly relates to the development of outdoor painting in France, confining it to a time period and a traditional restraint. I feel like I'm a European from the 1850s anytime I use it. As a term, it describes an external experience of painting outdoors well, but my process focuses more on the internal experience. I'm more interested in keeping the viewers focus on the body and the way the body moves through space than the romantic image of painting a landscape outdoors. Moreover, my process doesn't change whether I'm painting a brown paper bag indoors, or a tree in a field.

2.2 Traditional Influence

My paintings are built on painting's history (primarily vis-à-vis Western Art History), along with the history of my own influences, each coming at different times in my life. A number of these influences would be considered traditional—some of the traditions I embrace, while others I actively try to dismantle. The latter influencing me as something to push up against. For simplicity's sake, I'll focus on three painting groups: Group of Seven and Thomson, Monet and the Impressionists, and Cezanne.

The structure that underlines a lot of my compositional choices and methodologies are born from The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson. Their work served as my introduction to modern painting as it embeds the experience of landscape through a way of mark-making that feels both personal and individualistic. It is also a subject that I understand having spent many summers as a child in Muskoka. I know the shapes of the pines, the movement of waves, and the billowing, overlapping clouds.

But it was the physicality of Thomson's paint that reflected the rawness of the landscape that had the bigger impact. It matched the sensorial experience of being at the cottage as a child. Consider Thomson's *Burnt Country* [Fig 3]. It's not a painting that is trying to be polished by carefully refined shapes or colour blending. Instead, the brush strokes remain clear, textural and evident while the quick application of paint

maintains its viscous, streaky properties that keeps the painting feeling more alive. It's more rugged in approach than thin applications of paint and more fitting to the unkept parts of nature: thick and unhinged.

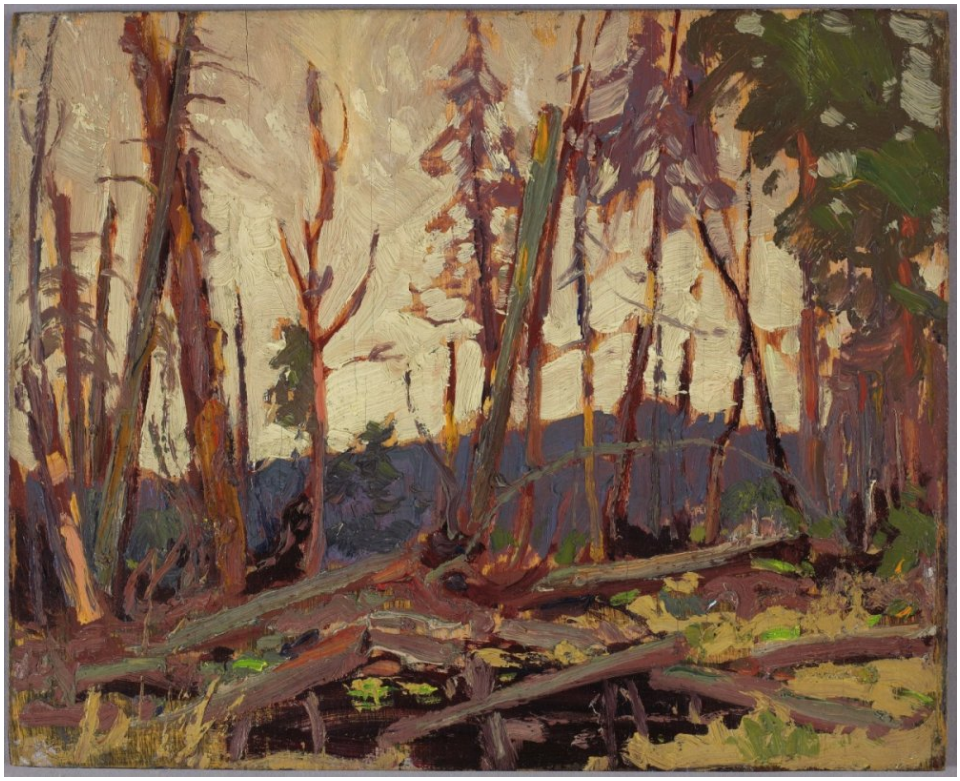

Fig. 3. Tom Thomson, *Burnt Country, Evening*, Oil on Plywood, 21.5 x 26.6 cm, 1914

As I developed my studio practice, I came to realize that the physicality of paint and surface alludes to the hardness of what I associate as real. It is something that I can touch. There is a bluntness to the ways that paint can represent the world with a more contemporary example found in Lucian Freud's bodies. The ways in which Freud applied Cremitiz White as thick built-up brushstrokes, a quality that lends an extra "realness" to

his portraits. It enhances the impression that these are real people still walking the streets.

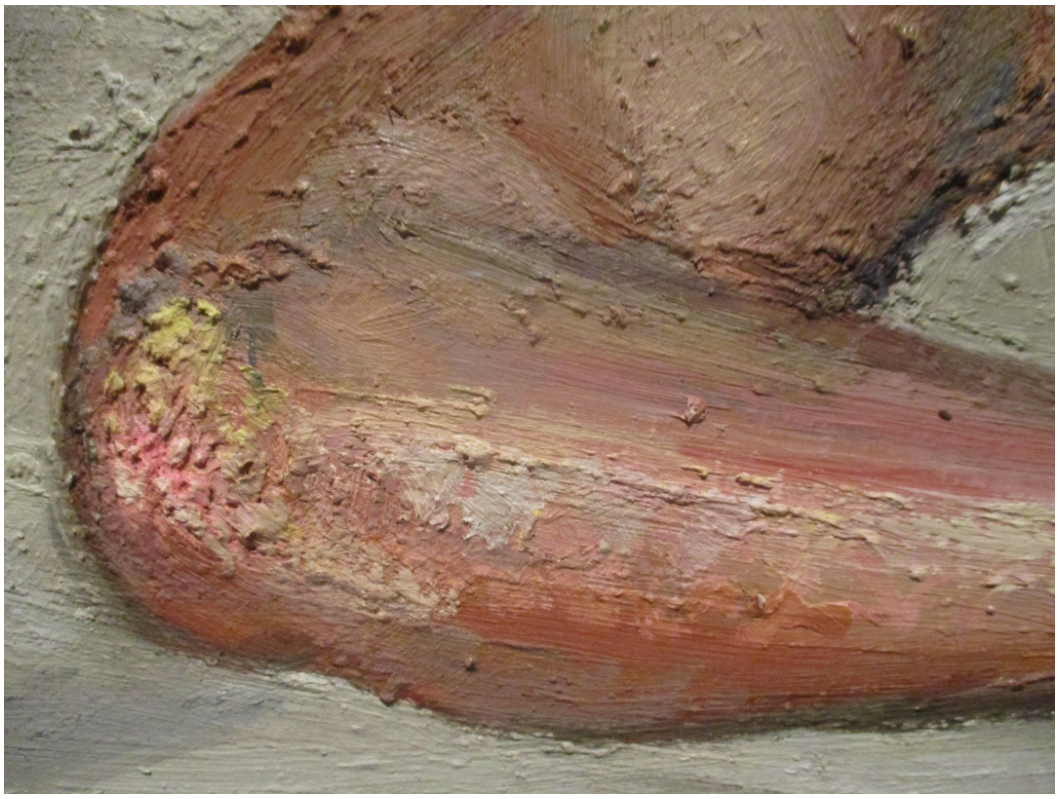

Fig 4. Lucian Freud, Detail of *Flora with Blue Toe Nails*, Oil on Canvas, 2000–2001

Through Claude Monet's work, I am able to "see" with my whole body. It goes beyond the extensions of sight, again tapping into real experience. The familiar quote that he was a "painter of light" doesn't fully capture the phenological experience that extends past the idea of light. For me, Monet's work serves as something that feels attainable, reinforcing the concept that experience is learned by way of visual observation—a constant, close observation of light and colour, framed by an understanding of how this

relates to the properties and potential of paint. My colour sense, or perhaps the more apt term is my colour philosophy, stems from an impressionist idea. Monet believed it is not the colours you use, but how you use them. He also believed that shadows contain light and therefore colour. As such, I do not use black on my palette, although this rule is not set in stone and might change in the future.

In his essay "Cezanne's Doubt" Ponty describes Cézanne paintings as a "lived perspective", that is the experience of seeing in time.[6] And what I like about this phrase, in particular Ponty's use of past tense, is that it speaks to the failings of the stationary perspectives that paintings in Western culture took from the Renaissance (15th and 16th centuries), up until Cézanne's time (19th century). What Cézanne understood is that we experience life from a multitude of perspectives as we move our bodies through space, and as Cézanne began to address these multiperspectives in two-dimensional form, it presented new problems that could not be solved with the geometry of two-point perspective. As Cézanne broke what was considered proper perspective in order to resolve this issue of aliveness, he also introduced new formal problems within his paintings, resulting in some unusual scenes. Consider Cézanne's painting, *La Table de Cuisine* [Fig 5].

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[6] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense,* 14

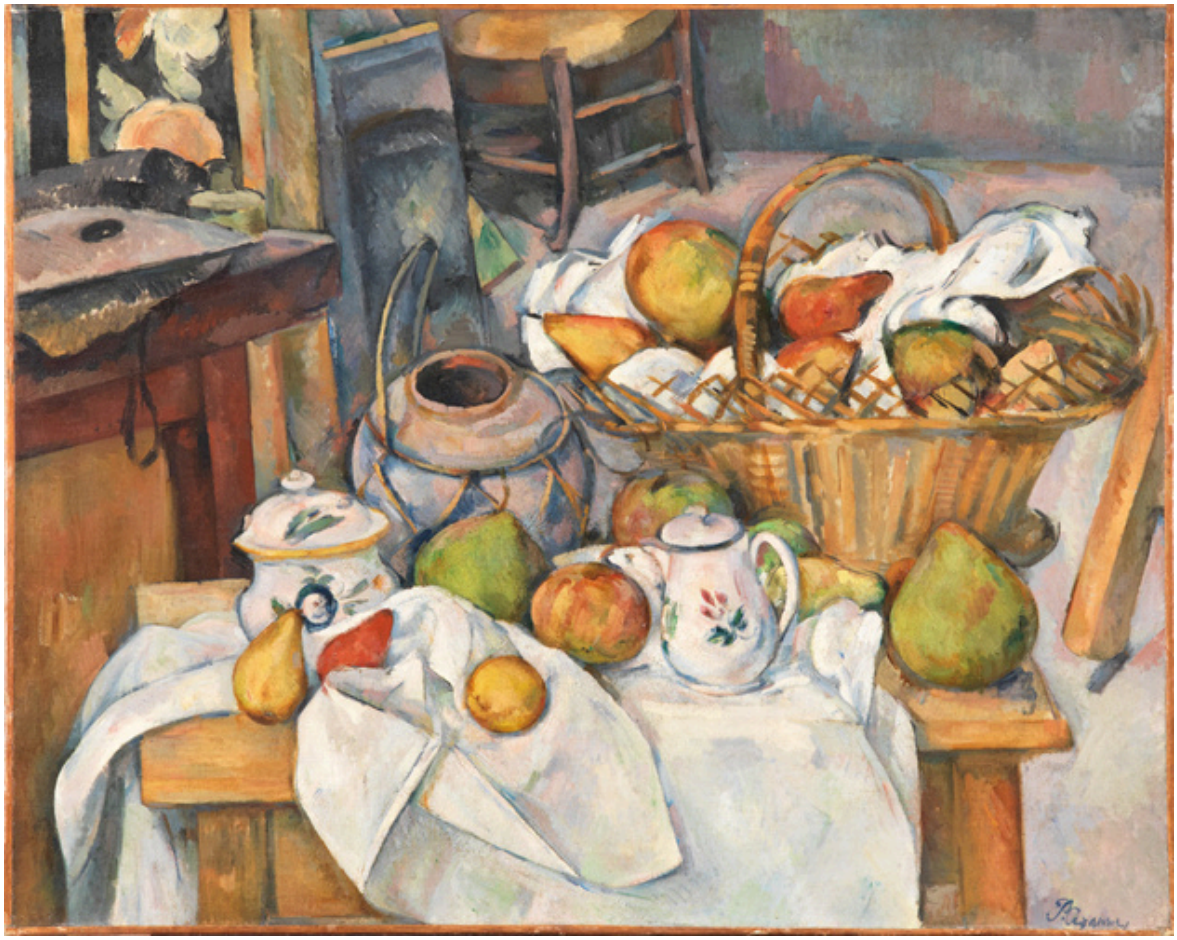

Fig 5. Paul Cézanne, *La Table de Cuisine,* Oil on Canvas, 65 x 81.5 cm,1888–1890

At first glance, the image appears orderly and exhibits a lively vibrancy. But the more you consider the painting, the more strange the space within the painting becomes. For example, the basket sitting on the table is rendered as if it's firmly on the table, however, it's hard to understand exactly how much of the table it's sitting on, and as you look more closely it begins to feel like it's teetering on the corner about to fall off the back—a pictorial tension that is compounded by a floor that although

receding into the background, also appears to rest on top of basket, as if it wants to be in the foreground. And because of this, the hidden part of the table beneath the basket might, somehow be, gouging into the floor.

2.2 Contemporary Influence

Stanley Lewis

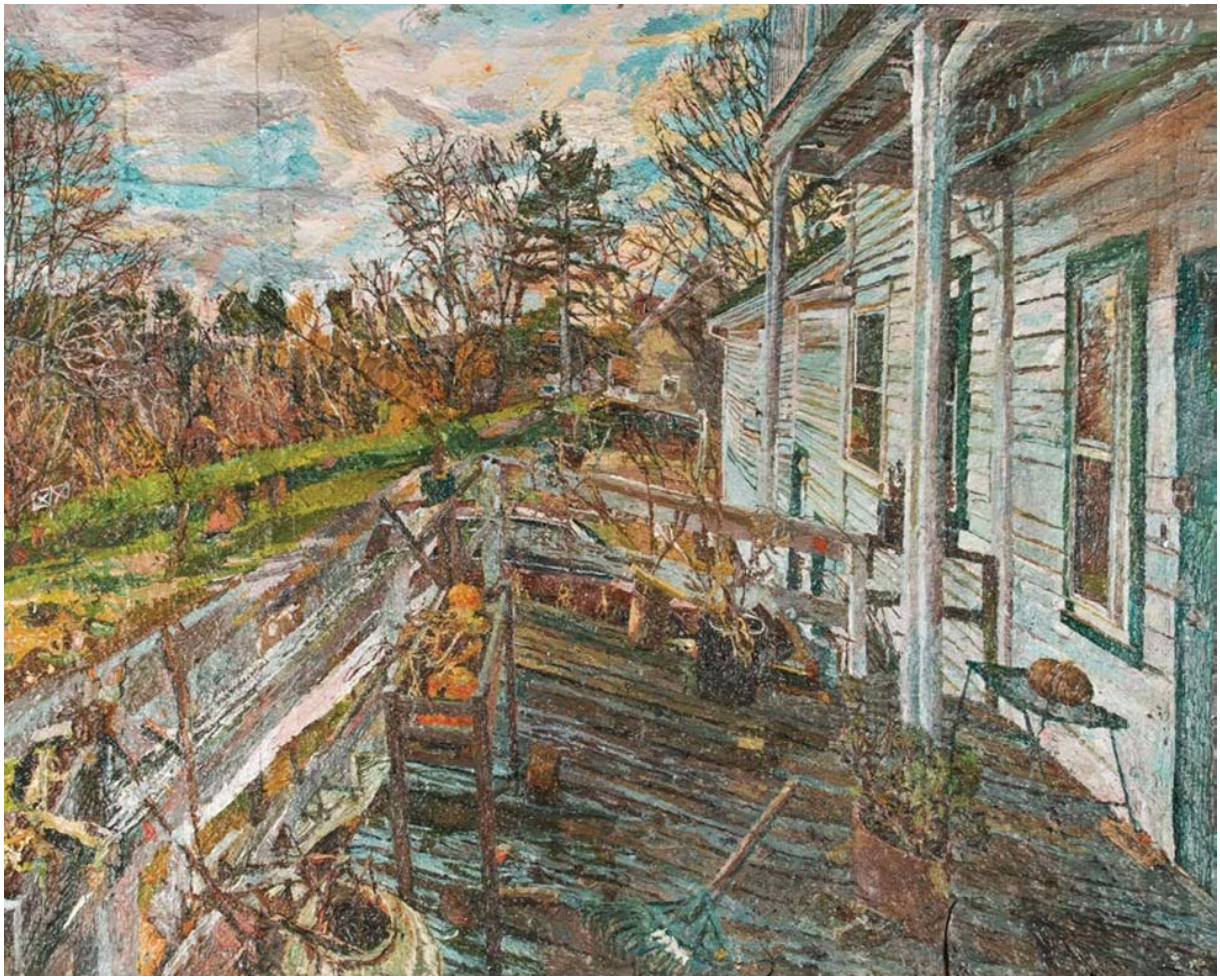

Fig 6. Stanley Lewis, *View from the Porch, East Side of House*, Acrylic on Canvas, 38 ¾" x 48", 2003–2006

When I think that there isn't anything worth painting in front of me, I remind myself of Stanley Lewis. His subjects are ordinary—the back porch of a house, the view down a town street—but he always manages to construct highly sophisticated paintings that are complex in surface, and

riddled with interesting spatial relationships, movement, and detail. Lewis, like me, paints observationally but he does it with a higher intensity.

Lewis took the adage "paint what you see" verbatim, trying to quite literally paint everything that he sees. For example, he does not rely on a formulaic image of what he thinks a tree branch might look like, but instead paints the way the branches appear before him. In doing so, he continuously extracts more and more information. However, he also recognizes that there is a compromise between what we see and what he paints, stating in a video that "nobody can paint what we see".[7] I find myself coming back to his work, again and again, to figure out the logic of his paintings—what makes his compositions work.

Based on this notion of painting what is seen, Lewis paints locally, often on paper, and his surfaces are built up; his compositions shift, and there is always something to "unpaint." Lewis' paintings are constructions, full of precise looking, but there are also components which don't make sense when you deconstruct them. Consider Figure 6. The back deck seems to lift off the ground while it pokes itself into the background, and I've recently noticed how one part of the deck pushes into the landscape and the other pulls back towards me. I'm always discovering something new about

[7] "Artist Stanley lewis NA, featured as part of See It Loud: Seven Post-War American Painters.", 4:12

Stanley Lewis and his work pushes me to rethink, to make more out of my own work. Like Cezanne, his approach underscores the concept that paintings, although static, can embody the act of seeing, as experienced over time. He demonstrates that there are more details and relationships to be uncovered.

Part 3: Artwork in Four Sets

The four bodies of work I'm presenting as my thesis were made between January 2022 to May 2023. The first three bodies of work were painted with restraints such as size and substrates employed, to help address a few practical and formal problems I was having, which I wanted to resolve in graduate school. Firstly, the works were painted on Arches Oil Paper, its lightweight properities making it a reasonable choice for *plein air* painting. Plus knowing that I'm prolific[8], I needed something economical ($2/sheet) that wouldn't take up a lot of studio space. Working on paper solved this problem while also cutting down on the time and energy needed for preparation. I could simply rip a new sheet off the pad and quickly move onto the next painting. Secondly, I kept a landscape orientation and a consistant 12"x16" size restraint. I knew there were some underlying formal

[8] While at Waterloo, I created more than 125 paintings over the course of the five terms.

problems within my work that, prior to coming to Waterloo, I found difficult to define. I felt that working within this restraint would keep me more focused on the formal properities such as composition and colour. The ability to change the scale or format with new each painting seemed like an easy way to hide my problems, whereas the 12" x 16" scale was preset by the manufacturer and was also slightly larger size than my paintings prior to graduate school.[9]

As a final note, for this paper, I've chosen to present them in the order of creation—*Windows*, *Charleston, South Carolina*, *The Bridge Paintings*, and *The Stumps*—to demonstrate the linear progression of what I have learned throughout the Masters program. Within these groups, I reflect on painting, both the noun and the verb, taking the lessons learned into the next body of work. I am still amazed by what I've learned, what I've gotten to know about myself and my work, in just seventeen months.

[9] Previously I gravitated towards an 8" x 10" format.

3.1 Windows

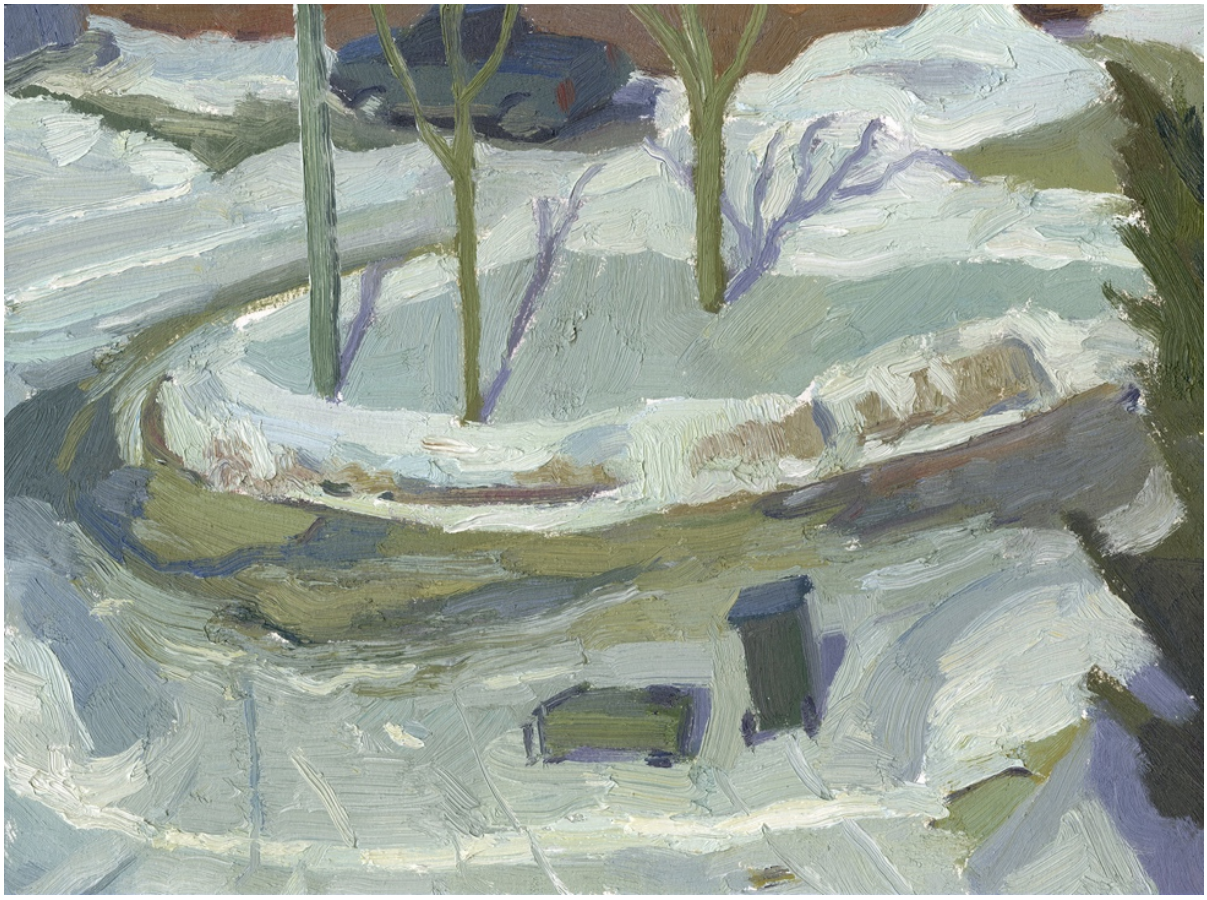

Fig 7. Brent Wade Garbett, *Untitled*, Oil on Paper, 12” x 16”, 2022

Winter painting is not my favorite activity: you hold your brushes with big snow gloves, you can’t stay out too long because of the cold, there’s little daylight, and you wear more gear than you care to. At the beginning of January 2022, my time was even more compressed, constricted by the demands of online teaching (something I had never done), a sculpture

course (also new), plus the reading and writing requirements of seminar. So painting became an activity I had to squeeze into the cracks of my day.

As a result, I decided the easiest way to paint the landscape was to do so from my studio window at home. I didn't have to think about what to paint, nor did I have to battle the outdoor elements. I could just go upstairs for a couple of hours, pull off a sheet of paper, and from a fixed standing position paint the view outside my house. But painting and staring out the window felt as though I was procrastinating on all my other work and I found the experience more fraught than working outside. That being said, having to paint the same view over and over from a fixed vantage point presented new challenges. There were new problems and new questions, such as how do I approach the same subject over and over? Should I come up with new compositions, or do I stick with the same composition, leaning into the little differences that each day brings—the snow melting, the snow accumulating, and the snow melting again. Every day, the light changed and the weather changed, and then the green bins went out each Sunday.

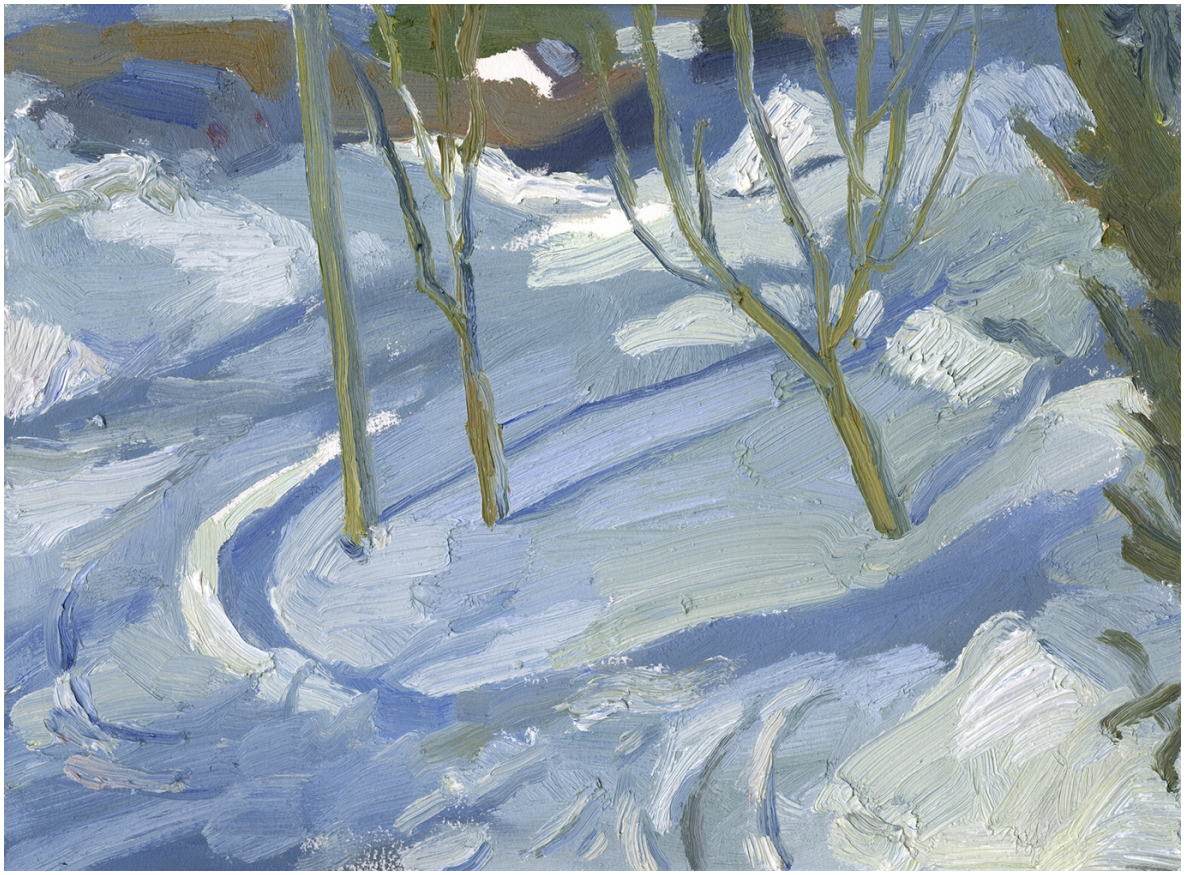

Fig 8. Brent Wade Garbett, *Untitled*, Oil on Paper, 12” x 16”, 2022

I found that repeating the same composition was nearly impossible. I even tried to repeat some of the more successful compositions but would end up focusing on one part more intensely and then the rest would fall apart. Often times, when bored, I played with the objective facts of what I saw, and watched as the trees and streetlight bounced around to different places on the canvas. Other days, I wouldn’t put them in at all. After a couple of weeks, I noticed smears on most of my windows, marks left from my forehead pushing against the glass. I wasn’t just looking out the window, I leaned my head onto it as if trying to get as close to being outside

as I possibly could. From this leaned view point, I saw more of the outside world. I could even feel the cool effects of the air, as it came through the glass, and the edges of the room's walls disappeared. Looking out the window brought a feeling of comfort, serving as a threshold between the indoor and the outdoor. It was a place for my eyes to rest so that my mind could wander. Even as I write these words, I find my head turning towards the windows, as I look out into my backyard, thinking and reflecting on what to write next. With windows, I see myself moving through the landscape, but the only way to travel is with the neck. Up down, side to side.

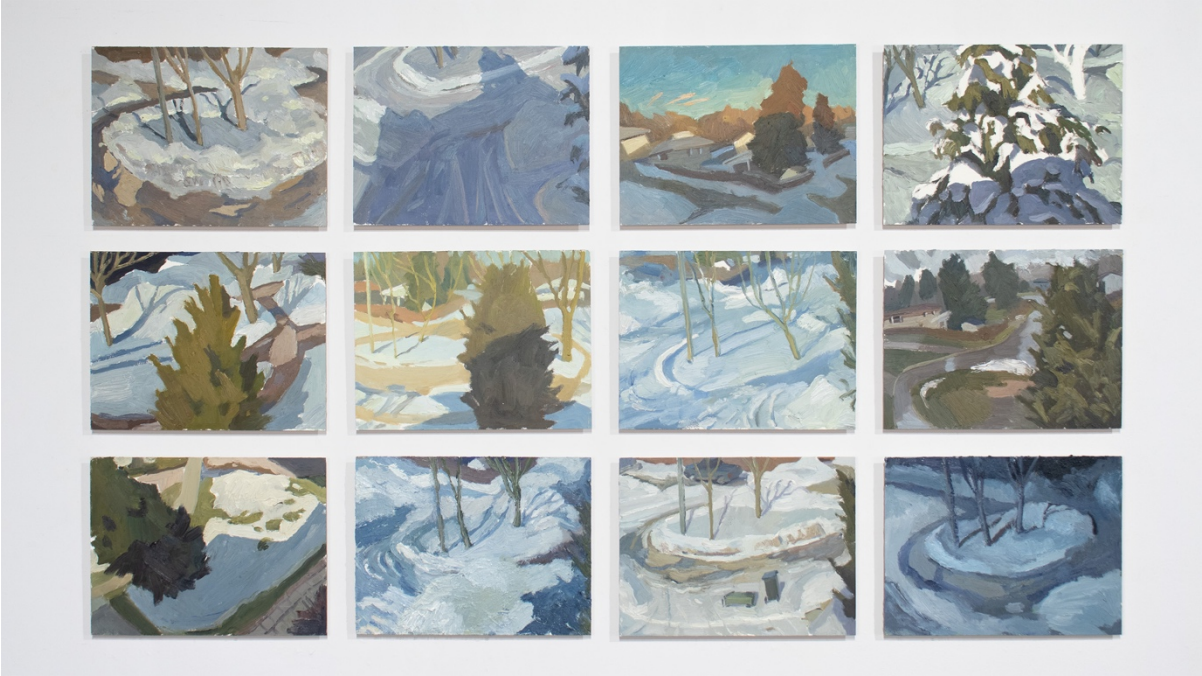

Fig 9. Brent Wade Garbett, *Installation View*, 2023

The group of work titled *Windows* consists of 12 paintings on paper arranged in a 4 by 3 grid. The grid format draws a comparison to the glass paneled windows that are commonly seen on houses within my neighbourhood. The grid also allows viewers to make distinctions between each painting allowing them to more easily see their differences, making room for more interpretations.

3.2 Charleston, South Carolina

Fig 10. Brent Wade Garbett, *Untitled*, Oil on Paper, 12” x 16”, 2022

When I arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, my Airbnb host met me on the driveway. Her welcoming words were “Don’t let anyone tell you any differently. Charleston was built on slavery.” Her follow-up question was “You aren’t a weirdo, are you?” My only knowledge of Charleston, prior to my arrival, was constructed through movies, photographs, a few stories from a visitor, and a tv special where Stephen Colbert came back to Charleston to revisit the home he grew up in. So I wasn’t sure what types of

people I'd meet and I had no concept of how polarizing the politics would be. The South is a geography drenched in history: slavery, confederacy, and political divide—a kind of historical blanket over the landscape that showed itself in both visible and invisible ways. It's not that Canada doesn't share a similar history, one built on racism, oppression and the traumas of its colonial legacy, it's just that as a newcomer I found it to be more palpable, more present.[10]

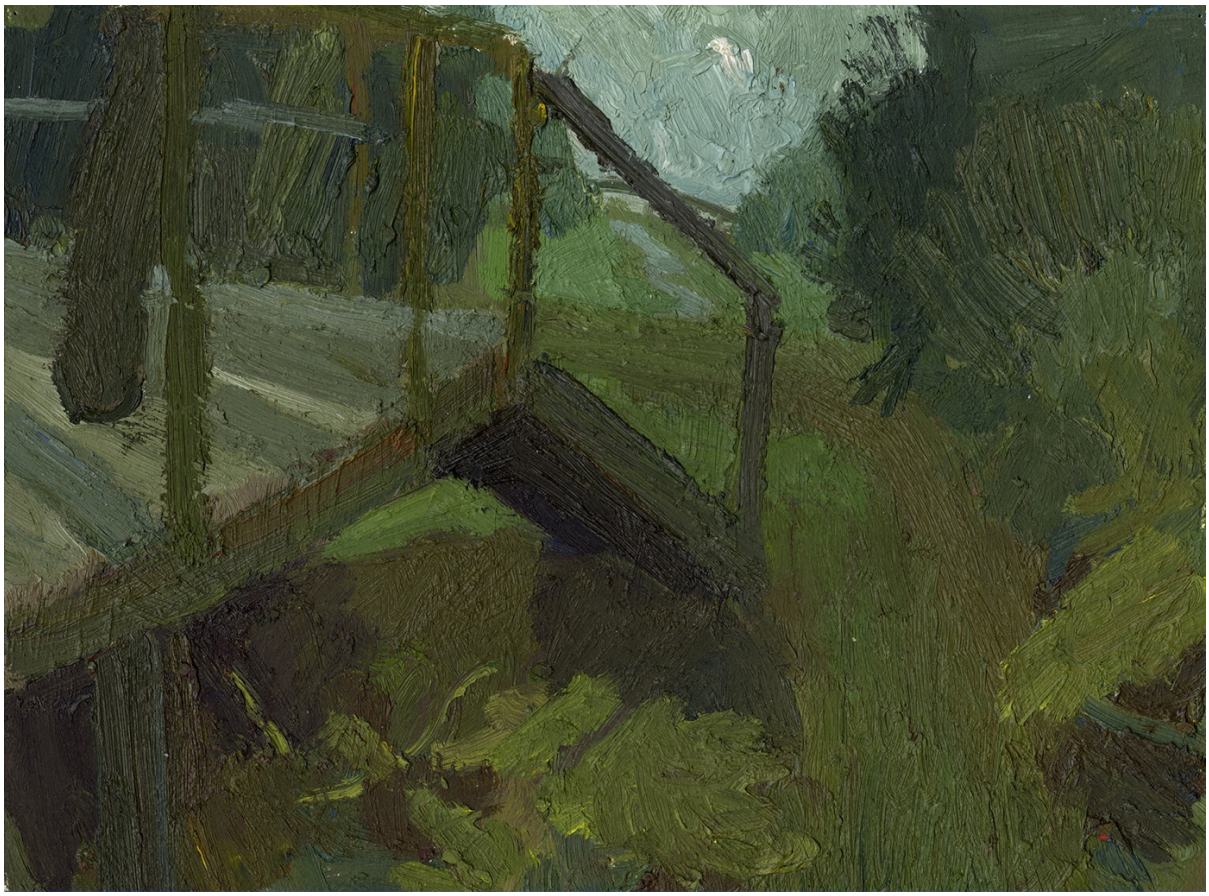

Fig 11. Brent Wade Garbett, *Untitled*, Oil on Paper, 12" x 16", 2022

[10] There were signs pointing to plantations, streets named after confederate soldiers, slavery museums, placques, cannons, tons of stuff. My complimentary tea bags were stored in a container labeled "plantation sugar."

The landscape's atmosphere was not what I had envisioned. The neighbourhood trees where I stayed had deep green leaves and long branches that stretched over the road. The air was thick and humid, the light felt like it was consistently pushing down on my body, and the water had a slightly muddy taste. The palm trees gave everything a pointy feel, but I wonder if that had more to do with the fact that I kept locking my eyes on them (similar to the experience of looking at the moon versus taking a picture of it). Having only lived in Canada, everything felt different[11].

Part of Waterloo's program, the Keith and Win Shantz International Research Scholarship is what brought me to South Carolina. It afforded the privilege of working with Brian Rego[12] as part of a six-week internship. Brian lives in Charleston and is an artist whose works and process are similar to my own. He works on location and shares, as I found out last summer, a similar ambivalence to photography as a reference.

There are a number of reasons why I wanted to work with Brian, things that drew me to his work: how well he encapsulates movement, the way his spaces embody more of Ponty's "lived perspective," along with how he's able to draw your eye into the painting. However, the most significant

[11] My only experience outside of Canada was a trip to Florida for two weeks in 1997 when I was 11.
[12] A friend of mine couldn't believe I chose to paint in the south as a destination. He has me intimately tied to the Canadian landscape.

lesson I learned from Brian was a way of thinking through the relationship of space volumetrically. How two separate objects on the landscape, objects that reside in different places in space, can form a volume across a two-dimensional surface. As an example, consider Brian's oil on linen painting *The Bell Tower* Figure [2].

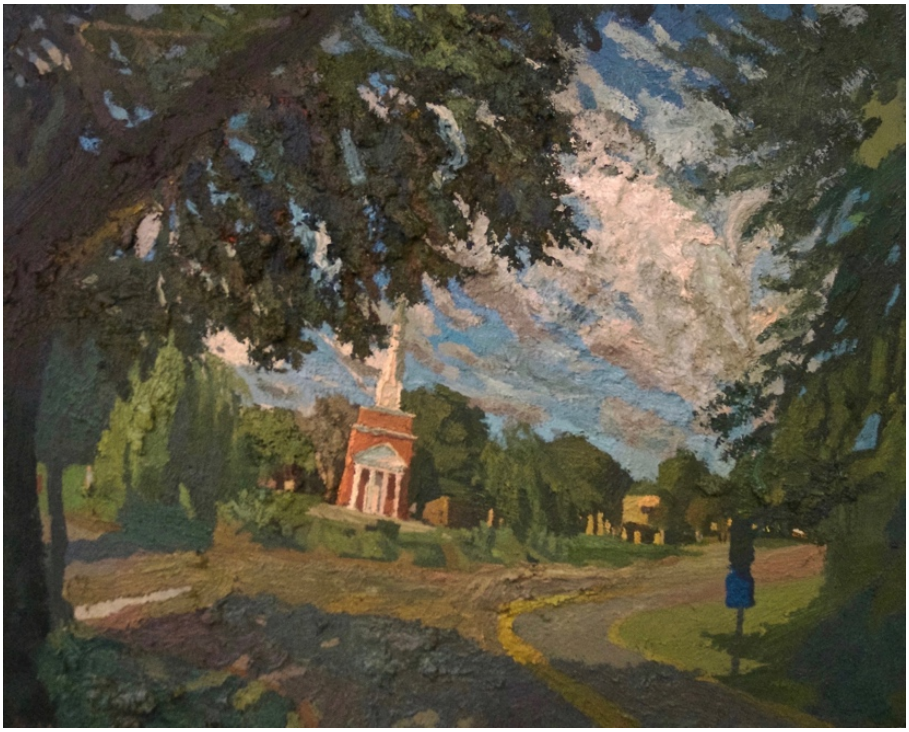

Fig 12. Brian Rego, *The Bell Tower, Heathwood Hall,* Oil on Linen, 16" x 20", 2016

The sky itself forms a imaginative volume that comes out towards the viewer. The branches of the trees in the foreground of the painting along with the trees in the background hold the volume of the sky to this egg shape. The volume gives the sky an additional weight as it pulls the movement of the sky downward, while the trees in the background push in

the opposite direction. It feels a bit like the sky could crush the trees with it's weight.

This is a way of bringing weight and movement into the painting's composition. This volumetric looking, encouraged me to push my work by reworking the image. Although modest, this new way of looking was a kind of paradigm shift that completely upended habits I didn't even know I had. This was both exciting and destabilizing, the latter compounded by that fact that I found painting the Charleston landscape uncomfortable. It didn't feel I like I belonged there and painting the landscape felt as though I was stealing something from it.

As the days progressed, I found myself painting places closer and closer to my Airbnb on St. John's Island. I painted in the backyard, or in areas that I frequently walked to like the church or firehall down the road, the nearby boat launch, or the mini park that I passed by on my nightly strolls.

Knowing that my time was limited, I worked feverishly. I arrived home with 36 paintings, all of which I believed were unsuccessful. They were too dark, and moody, with little variety between them. Some of them felt done, but most felt stuck in process. Over time, and some distance, I've come to appreciate them more. I've been able to see their strengths, see my successes.

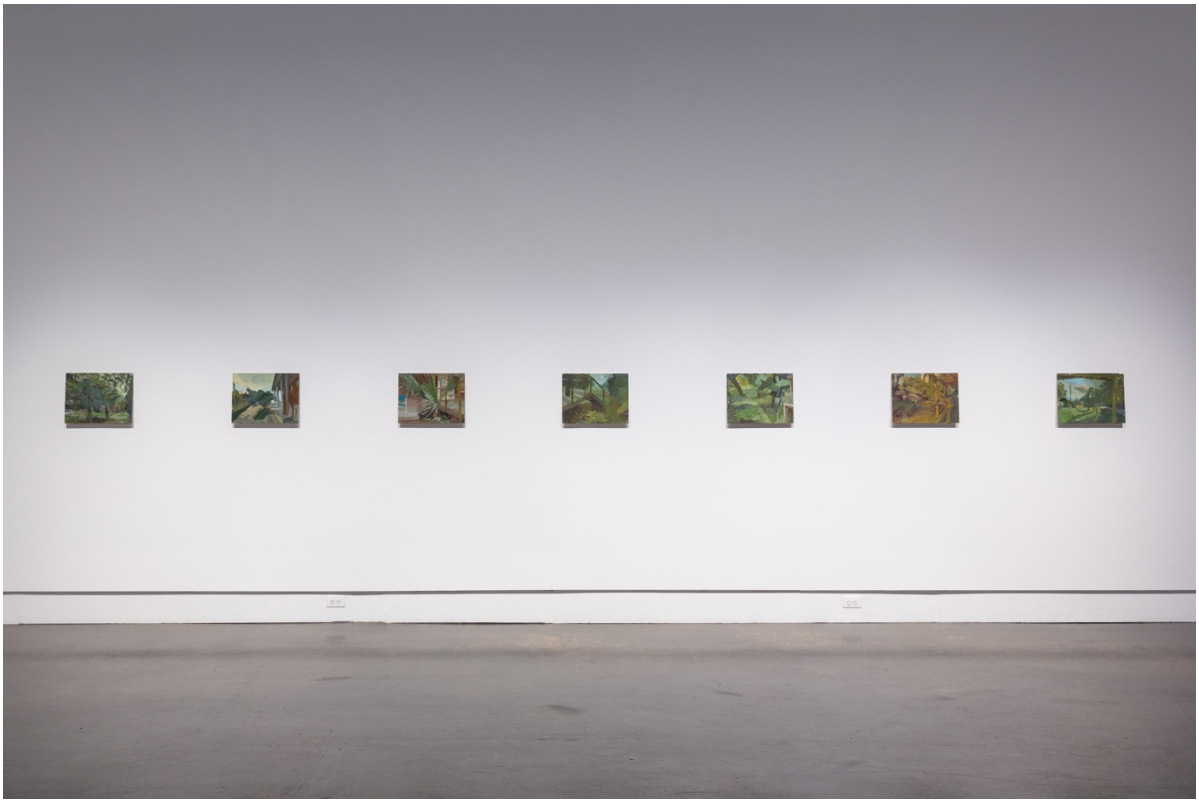

Fig 13. Brent Wade Garbett, *Installation View*, Oil on Paper, 2023, Photo Credit to Scott Lee

Presented in the exhibition are ten paintings from the *Charleston, South Carolina* series. Each one is 12” x 16” made on paper. The selected landscapes focus on the places I became most acquainted with—the ones close to my Airbnb. To give the paintings more solidity, I have mounted the paper onto birch panels. The works are very layered, built up, heavy and thick with paint. Their surface reminds me of how grown, textured and aged the Charleston landscape was. Deep greens and browns are found throughout the ten paintings. There’s a thick, almost syrupy mood that lingers over the set—an unintentional quality that seems to reflect the

weight of my discomfort while I was there. Charlie Starr, one of my fellow graduates, suggested I may have been channeling the landscape, and something about her observation rings true to the memory of my experience, a kind of heaviness I felt in my body.

3.3 The Bridge Paintings

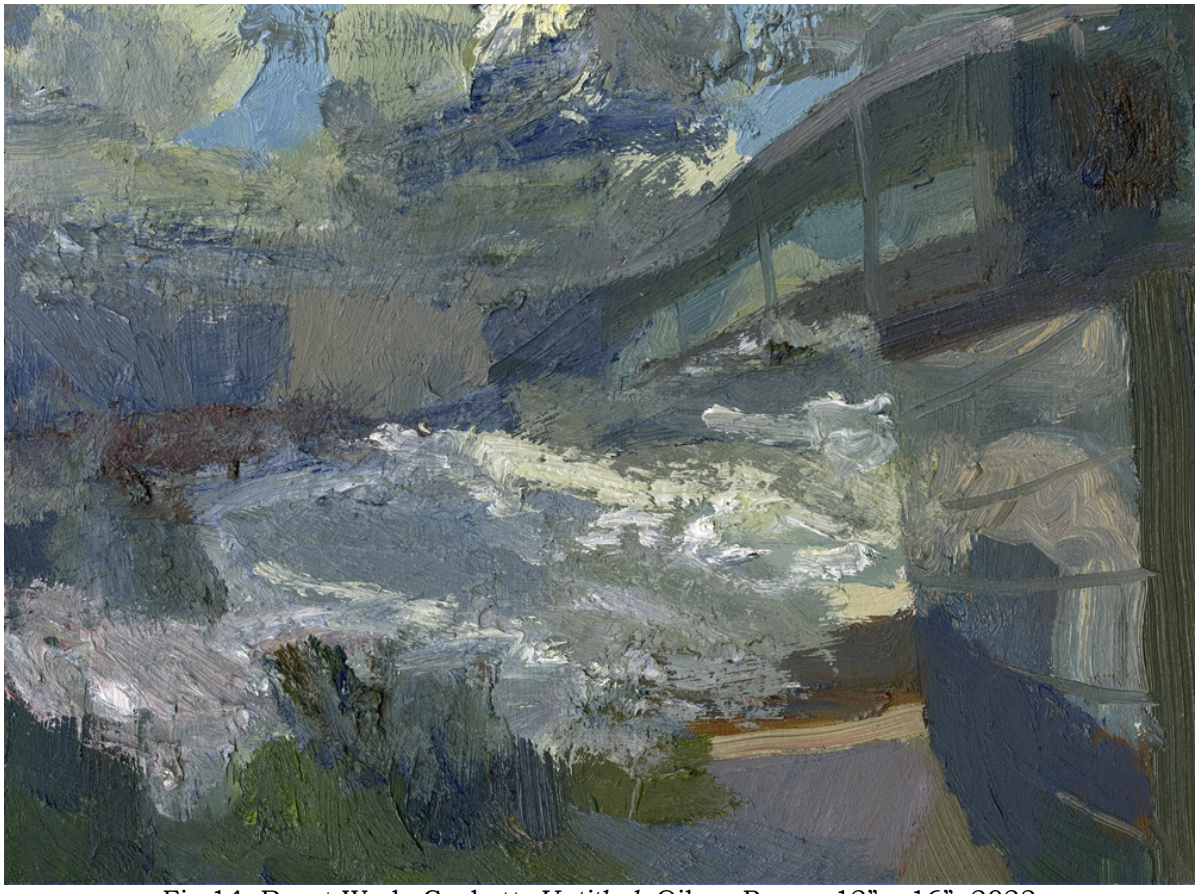

Fig 14. Brent Wade Garbett, *Untitled*, Oil on Paper, 12” x 16”, 2022

I arrived home with a new way of seeing and I was eager to apply the effects that I learned. I was surprised looking at the Charleston paintings, surprised by how similar they all were in colour and tone, and I wanted to break some of these patterns. But more importantly, I want to play with the invisible volumes that I felt could solve some of the compositional problems I was having. I wanted to see how this new volumetric approach could

impact the perception of motion. For example, could it make me feel like I was moving into the painting?

Presented in *The Bridge Outside of East Campus Hall* are thirteen oil paintings, depicting the bridge that connects two of the engineering buildings—two neighbours that kittycorner the Fine Arts building. Each are painted on a horizontal, 12” x 16” sheet of paper and are mounted onto a wooden panel. All thirteen follow a similar compositional format with the bridge extending from the left to right across the page. Most contain elements of the two engineering buildings, but only some show the road that goes under it, or the back of the strip mall that flanks the southern end of the campus, along University Avenue.

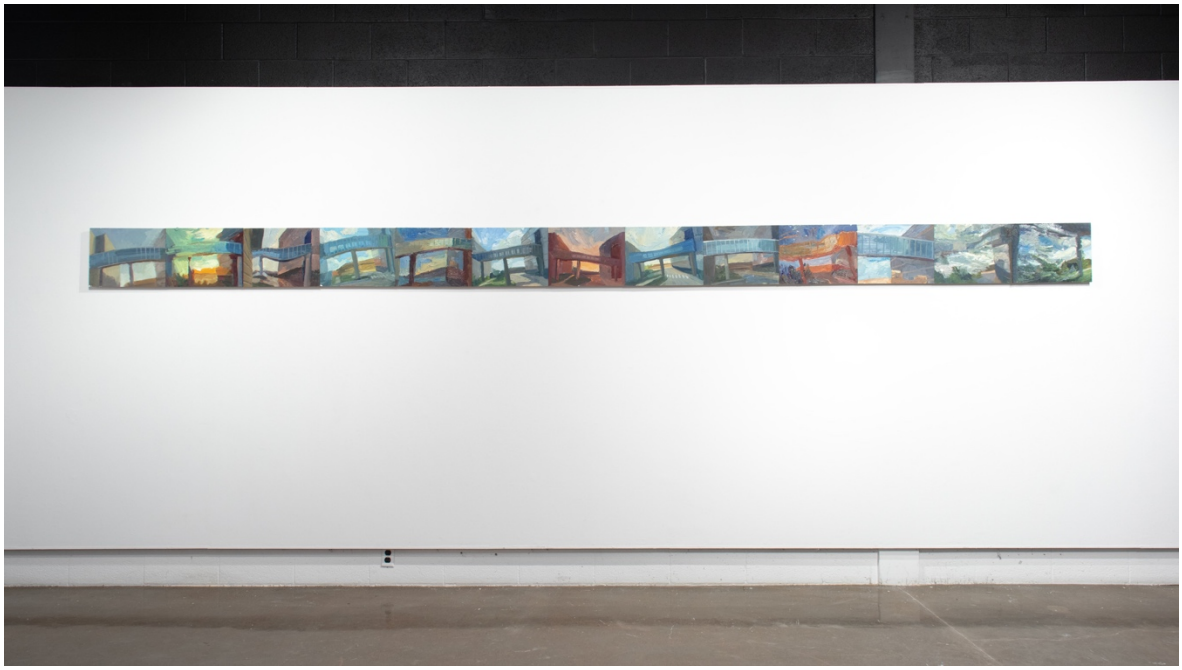

Fig 15. Brent Wade Garbett, *Bridge Outside of East Campus Hall*, Oil on Paper, 12” x 208”, 2022

Each bridge painting chronicles a different experience I had over the last month of summer, August 2022. Some are painted vibrantly in coherence to the changing quality of light, some give the feeling of moving into the space, some break the forms of the bridge, and others play more to the visual facts of what I saw. The paintings are arranged as a continuous horizontal line, creating in effect, a single, larger bridge. Arranging them this way brings attention to the differences between the paintings. It forms a rhythm that undulates as your eye travels from left to right. Installed unusually high at 6 feet, the viewer shares a similar experience to how I witnessed the bridge while painting it—that is looking up.

I chose the walking bridge connecting the two engineering buildings as my subject for a few reasons. The first was accessibility. It's quite literally just outside the studio doors. Knowing that I would make many paintings, I didn't want to waste physical energy and time by having to lug equipment to a distant location. The second was relational. I found I actively ignored the bridge each time I came into the studio, so I wanted to see if I could develop a relationship, a kind of kinship to the bridge, by the very act of painting it. I wondered if I could take this mundane, everyday thing and make it more monumental. However, my association with the engineering bridge is fraught by the fact that I am attending a STEM university. As an art

student, this has made me feel small and I've noticed that nothing connects to East Campus Hall, the building that houses fine arts. Third, the bridge allows students to forego going outside. It allows them to bypass nature. This mimics the practice of employing a photograph as reference, that is the artist doesn't have to deal with challenges like weather. And fourth, the series was a way for me to develop some of the lessons learned in Charleston and in the window series. It served as a bridge for other paintings, a cheeky joke to myself.

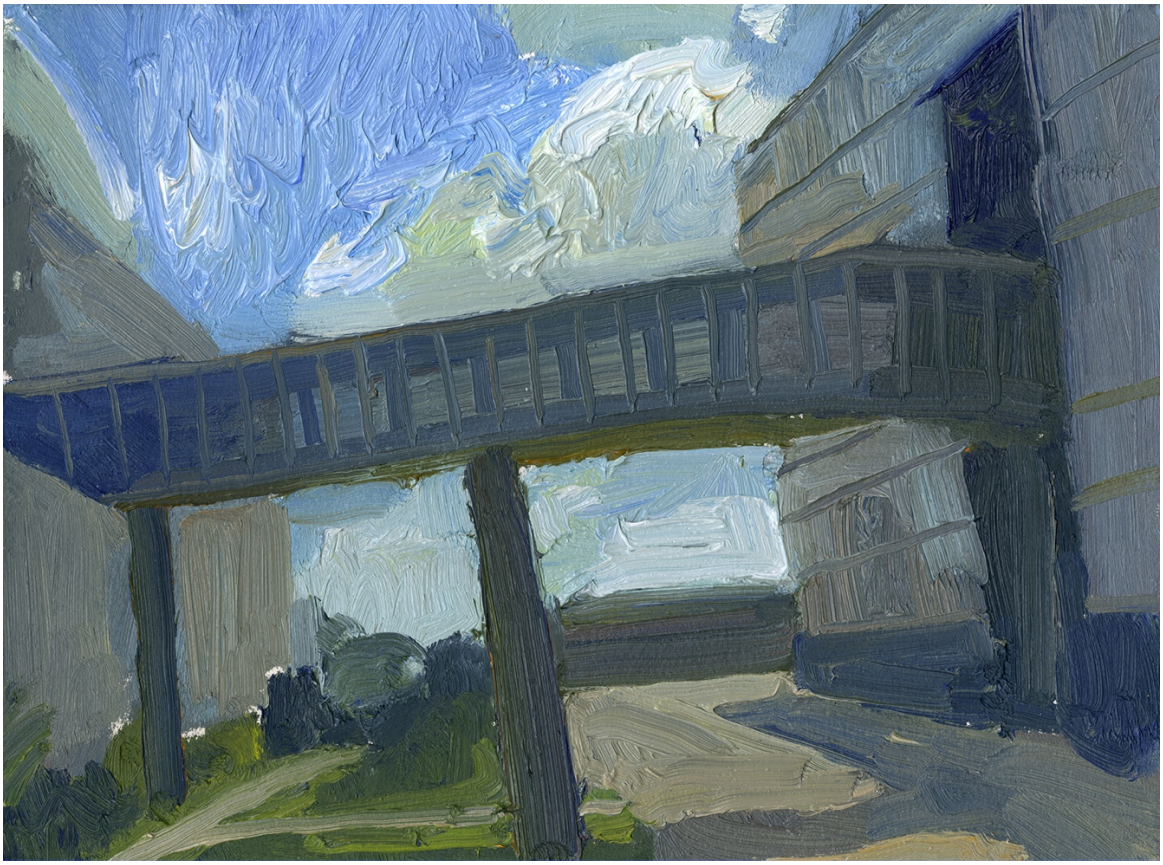

Fig 16. Brent Wade Garbett, *Untitled*, Oil on Paper, 12" x 16", 2022

Throughout the process, I found myself saying I want to “break the bridge”, and this became a catch-phrase for the habits I also wanted to break. It also afforded me some control over the thing I was painting—a way of pushing back the smallness of the arts and humanities and STEM’s bigness. I’m wary of society’s growing reliance on technology, and I find it amusing that I’ve chosen the technological capitol of Canada to attend a school known world-wide for computer science and engineering. In setting up my easel in the middle of campus, I am out of place—a painter amongst the engineers. What am I even doing here? This series however unequivocally answers that question. I am painting. A new day, a new painting.

3.4 The Stumps

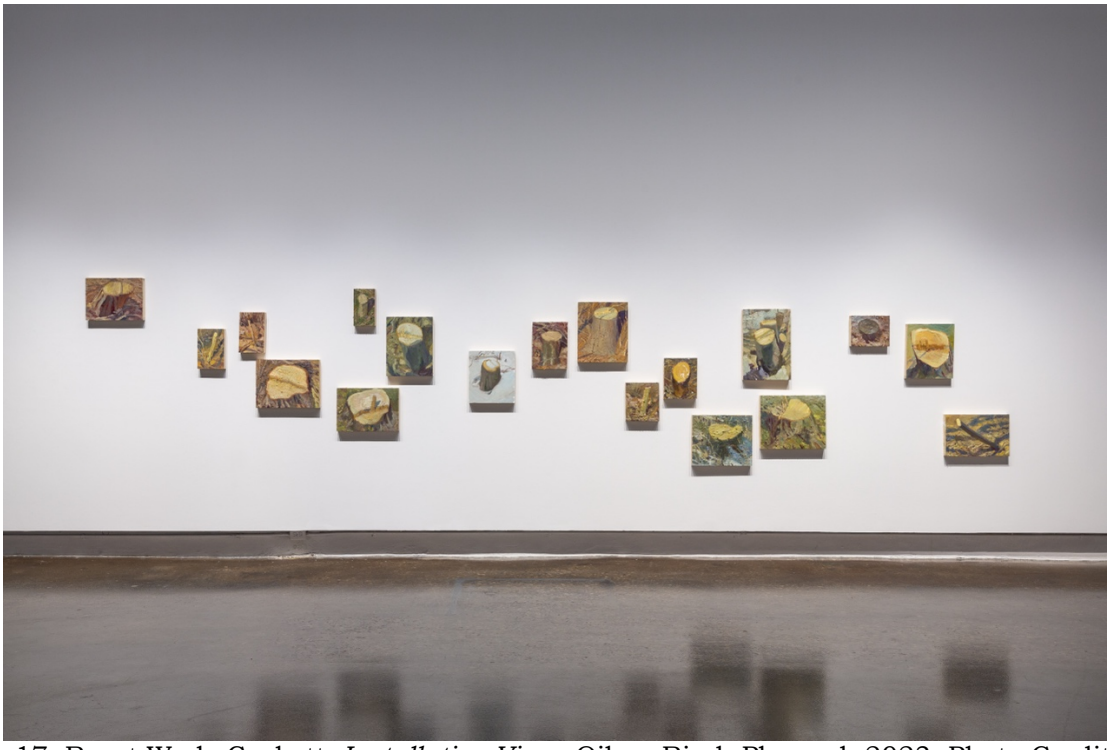

Fig 17. Brent Wade Garbett, *Installation View*, Oil on Birch Plywood, 2023, Photo Credit to Scott Lee.

As part of a larger series, I began painting the daily walk I make between the studio and the parking lot. I felt my experience painting on paper was exhausted and birch panels, mounted on pine backing, more aptly supported the historical narrative of painting I am influenced by. Additionally, I wanted to break the mundanity of the 12” x 16” landscape format in favour of a variety of different shapes and orientations that better reflected the multiple ways we engage in the landscape. New series. New challenges. New paintings.

The focus with the stumps was to build dynamic, asymmetric compositions of my experience moving along the path, while at the same time pushing myself to find paintings in places I didn't think would evoke a painting. My first painting was a cluster of trees that grew along the walking path with a glimpse of a campus building squeezed through the trunks and branches. A few more paintings followed over the next month. There were snow banks, a few trail paintings, and the old Blackberry building— until early in March when I came into school and witnessed the unexpected devastation of all the trees from the first painting having been cutdown and thrown into a woodchipper. I don't know why someone cut them down.

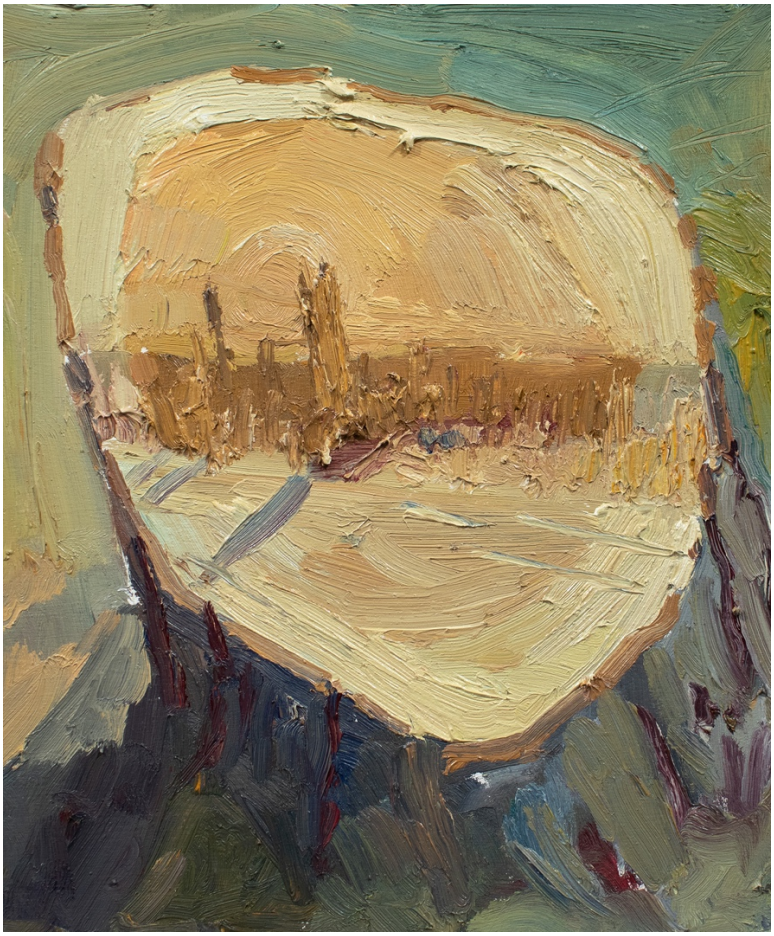

Fig 18. Brent Wade Garbett, Untitled, Oil on Birch Plywood, 12.5” x 14 3/4”, 2023

It wasn’t just the death of the trees that struck me, it was the death of something else unseen. I can’t really explain it. But the completed painting now took on a different meaning. I feel that, in painting, and recognizing it, I had given that stand of trees life. Or perhaps the life, more likely, was already there and I only took notice of it. Whatever the reason, what I have left is the painting and this lingering feeling of death.

So I started to paint the stumps as portraits, as many as I could do, as quickly as possible. I suspected the school had plans to remove the stumps as it would likely be viewed by the school as unsightly. In total, I made 18 stump paintings.

The irony of witnessing the loss of these trees is that I was now painting on the birch panels, the wooden remains of another tree that likely met its end in a similar fashion. My easel is also constructed of wood as are the handles for my paint brushes. So although I recognized the hyprocisy of my grief, the trees mournful absence remained.

The Stumps are presented in different sizes to reflect the varying size differences between each subject. Larger stumps were painted on larger panels, and the smaller, stick-like stumps, were given smaller panels. The group is presented in a salon-style format to closer represent the sporadic nature in how they grow.

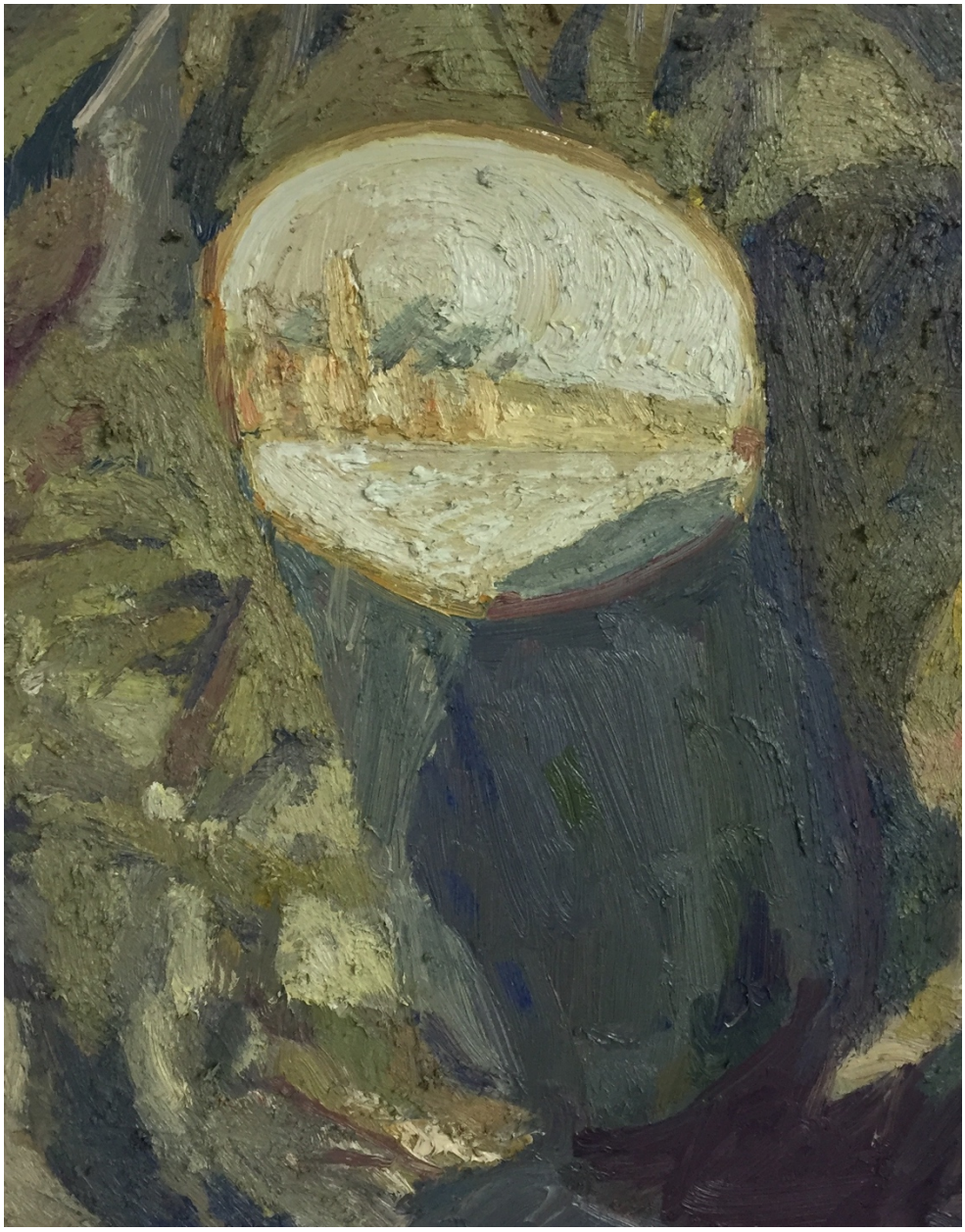

Fig 19. Brent Wade Garbett, *Untitled*, Oil on Birch Plywood, 12.5” x 16”, 2023

Other Days, Other Paintings

During my graduate program, I made over 125 paintings and saw many of them tossed to the floor of my studio or painted over completely. As I moved through the program, I felt my paintings improve. They became a little more varied in size, the surfaces became more textural, and I began to focus more formally on relationships. My work felt more compositionally integrated, and as I considered the relational aspects of the paintings (i.e. one to another), I was able to think more conceptionally about what to paint next.

With the graduate show now hanging in the gallery, I feel critical of the work I've completed. Perhaps it is like "Cezanne's Doubt", but I wonder if the imposing deadline of the thesis exhibition might have influenced the quality of some paintings. Could these paintings have been pushed further texturally and compositionally, in ways that didn't seem clear to me in the moment? This sense of doubt looms even larger, as I wonder whether or not these paintings have a place in the greater context of contemporary Canadian art. What I do know however, is that I currently have direction as to what I want to do next, and in terms of longevity, in terms of a continued studio practice, this is a gift to hold on to.

Moving forward, I'm going to continue working texturally and building up dynamic surfaces. I also want to look more closely at underlying compositional structures to see how I can use form and space to lead the viewer around the picture plane. And I'll be looking more closely at Corot and the other Barbizon school of painters for further insights into the quiet ways they developed movement.

While I can't say what the next body of work entails, I can say with confidence that my experience at the University of Waterloo has changed the way I see, the way I paint, and it will forever affect my day-to-day experience as I move forward with my artistic career.

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