Growing up in the country I became fascinated by trees and the various ways their branches wind and contort to look like other things. As I got older and encountered hardships and obstacles in my life I began to feel a kinship with the tree because they show their “history” both externally and internally, and because my life was just as winding and contorted as the branches on the tree. As this concept developed over the past three years the tree images have become even more abstract and the colors much richer. The colors help to establish the moods for the paintings and the painting experience itself allows me to commune with God in my own unique way.

The work I am creating contains large, close up views of tree branches. The interlocking and winding of the branches create enigmatic images which begin to be read as veins or figures. This is a quality that I am not specifically seeking to create in all of my works, but one that I am seeking to incorporate into some of my images as I feel it adds to the interpretive possibilities. I am also using color to add emotion and to better express the feeling I am trying to convey through the work. An example of this can be seen in my oil painting titled “Sorrow” (see Figure 1.1). In this image red trees are painted with a blue background. Dark values swirling throughout both the background and the knots in the trees help to create a much darker and more unified image. The overall image seems sad because of the swirling darkness but at the same time there are
spots of blue that seem to be lit from behind that offer a sense of hope. This is where the emotions begin to show up in my work. If you just glance at the image it appears very dark, but if you stop to reflect on the painting, subtle nuances of light and form start to reveal themselves.

My images have changed as I switched from painting with acrylics to oils. The brush work is smoother, the colors richer, and the blending of values more subtle. While I have attempted to use thicker paint in some of my images, I find I still go back and smooth the surface. I have this almost uncontrollable need to have the foreground and background images sit smoothly on the same plane, blurring the line from the branches to the background as I paint. When I blur the line from one piece to the next, the entire image seems unified and one item is not standing out more than another.

When I first embarked on my painting journey I encountered numerous problems related to technique and subject matter. In the beginning I had trouble deciding how to represent what I was feeling through my work. I created images that were highly literal and could only be viewed or interpreted in one way. For example, many of the paintings displayed either pink ribbons or pink as a main color to represent breast cancer. Dead trees, stark forest landscapes with ominous shadows, and lots of negative space represented loss. These earlier images reflected what was heavy on my heart and mind at the time. As a result of this I found the paintings lacked the aesthetic beauty that I find in my current work.

I’ve solved a lot of the technical issues by switching to oil paint and I finally realize the visual direction I want my work to go. My recent images are much more vibrant and emotional not just because of the paint I am using but because the ideas and
overall compositions are so much richer and stronger. I am no longer using obvious imagery. Instead, I focus on my use of color and the interaction between positive and negative space to create different moods. It is no longer my goal that each person read my work in the same way but rather that each viewer have his/her own unique, emotional experience, while contemplating the piece. As artist Mark Rothko stated, “The progression of a painter’s work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be toward clarity: toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer... To achieve this clarity is, inevitably, to be understood” (Rothko 65).

There are two artists to whom I am continually drawn: Georgia O’Keeffe and Mark Rothko. I admire O’Keeffe’s talent for taking ordinary objects and through the use of composition, color, and scale, turning them into beautiful and often monumental things. The following is a quote by O’Keeffe that resonates strongly within me. “I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way—things I had no words for” (Georgia O’Keeffe). I could not have conveyed this sentiment any better as I am drawn to the shapes I create between the positive and negative in my work, and the colors I use, in an almost spiritual way. The shapes created, the swirling lines of color that find their way into the background spaces and the tree branches, and the color combinations that are created, come from my soul. They are rarely planned ahead of time, but rather ideas that come from within as I start to paint and find myself speaking with God as I do so.

I admire Mark Rothko’s ability to paint what appears at first glance to be simple shapes with a single color, but upon closer inspection reveal a great use of color and
application which create wonderful emotional experiences for the viewer. In the book “Writings on Art” the artist states that “Painting is just as natural a language as singing or speaking. It is a method of making a visible record of our experience, visual or imaginative, colored by our own feelings and reactions and indicated with the same simplicity and directness as singing or speaking” (Rothko 1). I agree whole-heartedly with this quote. The paintings I have created over the past three years have very much been a visible record of my experiences and emotions. As such I find the completed images speak very directly to me about the personal experiences I was dealing with when I created them. Hopefully this translates to an emotional experience between the painting and onlooker as well.

One contemporary artist whose work I admire is Olga Nazarkina. Olga, an artist who also uses trees as subject matter, uses composition, color, and other added elements to represent emotion in her work placing emphasis on human suffering and how to work through it. Unlike Nazarkina though, I am not seeking to show a way out in my images. The creation of the images themselves is the way out for me. Through the process of painting I feel less burdened by my sorrow and pain and more aware of the beauty in my life. This translates into my paintings displaying more light and negative space representing the hope I am finally beginning to see around me.

Aside from the emotional content of my paintings, my religious beliefs come through in my work as well. There is a direct connection between what I create and who I am as a person. Unlike some artists who seek to create art that shocks and awes and crosses boundaries and beliefs, I am seeking to simply represent my life and values through my art. I am not trying to preach to the viewer by any means. As I draw and
paint my emotions and beliefs are transferred to the canvas, and through the creation of
art, I develop a deeper understanding of my own religious values and beliefs. Am I
making "religious art" per se? No, I am not. Does my religiosity come through in my
work? Yes, it does. Not because I am putting religious imagery in my work but because
my religion is a part of me and everything I do. Thus, it’s a part of my art regardless of
whether or not that idea is noticeably apparent to the viewer. "Aesthetic expression is a
way of keeping us human by reminding us that we are created in God’s image, that we,
too, have the capacity to be creative. By exercising that capacity, our learning takes us to
deeper levels of meaning..." (Eusden, John, and John Westerhoff III 80). Furthermore,
art is man’s signature, an expression of both himself and his Creator that weds him to the
universe. The author of Sensing Beauty stated it this way: "the importance of art is that it
imitates us, through its own aesthetic structure, into a new world of meaning." (Eusden
67).

An elaboration of my belief that religiosity is apparent in my work is evident in
the written reflection I made upon finishing my painting titled “Awakening” (see Figure
1.2). I had just finished the painting and had backed away from the image to reflect on it
from a natural distance. It was then that I was flooded with emotions and thoughts about
my Mother and God waiting for me at Heavens gate. The feelings were so overwhelming
that I could not shake them and had to write them down. I wrote about feeling that I was
standing at Heavens gate, and it was beautiful, bright, and inviting, and I could feel the
presence of my loved ones past waiting in the center. What a glorious end to a
tumultuous period of sorrow, healing, and self-discovery as I journeyed through my
Mother’s death and my inexperience with paint. I had finally created a painting that
filled me with pride and accomplishment, and which also left me feeling that it was okay to close this chapter on my journey of sorrow and to move on. Through my artistic endeavors I had an intimate meeting between self, God, emotion, and the universe- truly remarkable experiences that I can not wait to encounter again as I begin painting the next set of journeys in my life- whatever they may be.
Figure 1.1 Lori Taylor, Sorrow, 2006, oil paint on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

Figure 1.2 Lori Taylor, Awakening, 2007, oil paint on canvas, 48 x 60 inches
Bibliography:


