

Catalog for Ground Beneath My Feet

Cherie K. Bauer M.F.A. Painting Thesis Exhibition

Savannah College of Art and Design

***Numbers found next to the paintings correspond with the numbers in the catalog.**

1-4.



ALS Series. In 2005, my husband was diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis). In the *ALS Series*, each painting consists of multiple layers of mark making over which thin layers of color are added to define the figures and the background. The colors are not arbitrary; they symbolize the emotional journey of the victim and those who witness their struggle. The disease starves their muscles; the body begins to fade away. The effort to try to maintain some kind of normal physical activity becomes exhausting and dangerous. Falling is common resulting in broken bones that are difficult to treat. The victim is made aware that they have a FINITE amount of energy. His mind is clear, eyes focused, hearing intact; his anger keeps him on his feet. I used the mark making to create an energy field that underlies the image. The intensity of the color speaks of the heightened emotions of his fear and anger. The confined architectural space holds the figure captive. Orange and blue walls, green carpet, purple trim, shine through the vestiges of his fading figure. He stands on the ace of spades a card from the hand he was dealt, a nod to the implement which later will be used to bury him. My dear husband Jack passed February 4, 2010. After you lose someone to ALS, you are overcome with a numbness that paralyzes you. There is grief, but also a release from the emotional journey you have lived through.



5.

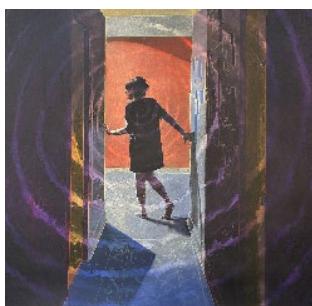
Gratitude. Just before he passed, Jack went skiing one final time. The Lounsbury Adaptive Ski program at our favorite ski area, provided equipment and support. The ability to go tearing down the mountainside was so liberating for him he was euphoric for days. I cannot help but feel that Jack would agree with Oliver Sacks when he wrote of his own impending death.

"I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return. Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure." Oliver Sacks, "Gratitude", page 20

Adaptive sports are beneficial both physically and psychologically. LASP instills a sense of achievement, independence and inclusion in its students' lives.

LASP offers lessons to people with virtually all disabilities, both physical and cognitive. The operative word in this program is 'adaptive'. If someone wants to ski, the dedicated and enthusiastic Lounsbury volunteers will do everything they can to find a way to get them out on the slopes. The focus is always on what a student can do, not on what they can't. A single lesson usually involves two instructors and sometimes three depending on the severity of the student's disability and the type of adaptive ski equipment required.

Both *Gratitude* and *Grabbing On*, #14, have been donated to the **Lounsbury Adaptive Ski Program**. They will hang in the LASP chalet at Holiday Valley after the close of this exhibition.



6.

Journey East, speaks of my journey through grief. The metaphor of the passageway, that narrow, dark, confined space of the past leading to a liminal threshold, bathed in the light of a bright sunrise. It sums up for me, the darkness of a life of grief and loss transitioning to light through the metaphor of hope and grace.

- The spiral rotating in a counterclockwise direction is the journey of self-discovery. It's about diving deep into your inner world, confronting your fears, and uncovering your authentic self. The inward spiral encourages you to slow down, reflect, and connect with your higher consciousness.
- Bare feet indicate the sacredness of the journey.



7.

Kabin Magic I took refuge at our Kabin, so named using K for my family name, Kuhn. Sitting on the back deck in an Adirondak chair, I put my head back, closed my eyes and breathed in the forest all around me. The silence of the woods at midday is palpable. It is a deep silence that facilitates reflection and meditation. In that silence I contemplated all that had happened thus far, it seemed incomprehensible that my husband, mother and father were gone. Yet my children, their spouses, and my partner brought their light and joy into my life. Looking down, I noticed the forest leaves had created a quilt of sunshine and shadow that covered me as I sat musing. I began to reminisce about the Kabin and its significance for me and my family." Excerpt from my MFA Thesis, *Ground Beneath My Feet*.

This painting is a vanitas. The leafy shadows are indexes, cast from trees that are no longer there; they represent the fleeting presence of those who are no longer with us.



8.

Looking Up. I went out to New Mexico to stay with my brother, Rick and his partner Lawrence. It truly is the land of enchantment. You can feel its seismic history and see the marks and footsteps of humanity that have inhabited the land for millennia. Rick is what I call a spiritual nomad. Together with Lawrence, he has sought and found the divine across the globe from isolated Himalayan monasteries of Nepal to Machu Pichu's sacred platform, to the slopes of the great Denali in Alaska. When I am with him, I feel the healing presence of his spiritual world, nourishing and restoring.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
 Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
 This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
 The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
 It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

William Wordsworth



9.

In the painting, **Sole Survivor**, my partner David was literally born again. His figure appears to be materializing out of the water, lying on a beach of blood-soaked sand. His body is laid out on the Baroque diagonal countering the sinister diagonal of the waves and his right arm, the hand of which was so badly burned. The colors of the sky and sea are the colors of early dawn, when the light is pure and new, a new day, a new life. Two black birds sitting on David's chest are the shadows of the souls that were lost. That is a personal image for me. When family members have been near death, I see black shadows flying through whatever space I happen to be in. They are comforting not threatening, as if to say, there is nothing to fear. The Dove, that supernal emissary that out of the blue appears at the critical time, takes flight and fades into the atmosphere. My cat, Linus, keeping vigil, stars out at the

viewer. He was my solace and comforter during this time of trial. I do not know what I would have done without his fuzzy warmth, loudly purring in my ear. I lost Linus May of 2023, after thirteen years of togetherness.



10.

In The Evening. This photographic reference was taken in the early sixties, by my late brother, Peter. The extreme pollution of water and sky at that time made for spectacular sunsets the like of which are not seen today. The text is from the evening prayer I read to the family at my brother's passing.

In the Evening

O Lord, support us all the day long, until
the shadows
lengthen, and the evening comes, and the
busy world is
hushed, and the fever of life is over, and
our work is done.

Then in thy mercy, grant us a safe lodging,
and a holy rest
and peace at the last. *Amen*

Book of Common Prayer 63

"Merely to remember something is meaningless unless the remembered image is combined with a moment in the present affording a view of the same object or objects. Like our eye, our memories must see double; those two images then converge in our minds into a single heightened reality."

Documents of Contemporary Art: Memory. Edited by Ian Farr. Published by Whitechapel, London and The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts 2012. Page 33.



11.

Love and Loss, we stand together as a family, hands linked facing the sun, wind and pounding surf that foretell of challenges yet unimagined. This painting speaks of time, memory, love and loss, my father, my mother and dear brother became voids. Their loss, never fades, the emptiness will always be with me. I think Oliver Sacks expresses it best when he writes,

“When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate – the genetic and neural fate – of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death.” Oliver Sacks, “Gratitude”, page 19.



12-13.

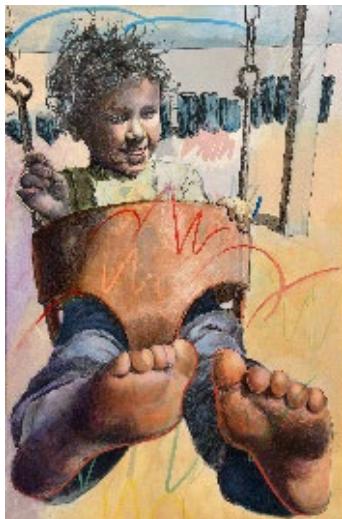
After his diagnosis, my brother, Pete and I spent a good deal of time together going through family slides. No one had looked at them in 45 years. One set pertained to a very special family vacation to Nantucket when I was seven and he was thirteen. The weather was rotten, rainy and 50 degrees every day. We wore the same outfit every single day, purchased at the local hardware store by our parents in a desperate attempt to keep us warm. Each day our clothes became sodden with saltwater and rain. Each night our parents would hang them by the fire to dry. By the end of our stay our clothes reeked of saltwater, woodsmoke and pine. After Peter passed in November 2022, I kept thinking back to our time together looking at photos and the images of Nantucket resurfaced repeatedly in my memory. I have taken our favorites and painted a series, ***There is a Memory That Lingers***, and ***Sunshine and Shadow*** that are dedicated to him.



14.

Grabbing On. Both my daughter's sons are autistic. Jack, or JJ as we call him, has ADHD with anxiety. His body has too much energy so if he is not moving, he is stimming. At school, until recently, his desk "chair" was a ball so he could bounce at his seat. He obsesses over time and schedule. He absolutely must know what happens when and how long that will be. Thankfully now, he can tell time, and that allows for some negotiations when the time schedule hits a snag. Crowds of people and loud music trigger his anxiety response which can be quite dramatic. Being older, he has learned how to manage some of these problems on his own. Otherwise, a big hug from his mom, dad or Nana helps.

Skiing is our favorite activity as a family. *Grabbing On*, shows JJ literally grabbing on to the help offered by his Lounsbury teachers. Reaching past all the distractions that are a part of his life. Here he can concentrate on what he needs to do to stay upright and safe.



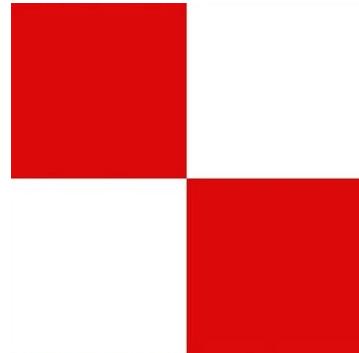
15.

The Eloper. Graham is far less verbal than his brother. He is a physical actor, his body taking the leading role. You never know what Graham will do next, and I think Graham doesn't either. My daughter describes this behavior as eloping. Graham's body takes off to do something like swing on the rings, jump on the trampoline, roll in the dirt or splash in the puddles. Graham just goes along for the ride. This could be seen as a tragedy of sorts, but

Graham is the sunniest, happiest child I know. He loves to laugh, has an impish smile which he uses to full advantage and a great sense of humor that he employs nonverbally by striking poses or, his favorite, making faces. He is far more sociable than his brother and takes interest in his surroundings when he is focused on what others are doing.



16.



Danger Flag

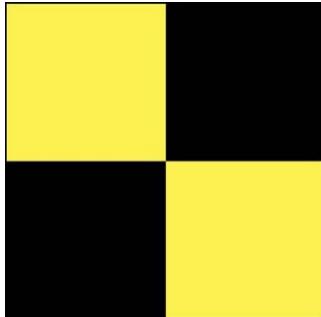
Turning Point. For thirty-five years, my late husband, Jack, and I and eventually our children, would hitch up our little boat and drag it to regattas all over the country to compete. From mid-May to late October, it was our ritual and our lifestyle

From my history sailing I have experienced this kind of event. I know the tenuous hold the three riders have in controlling their vessel as it careens off the canvas. The interface of the water propels them forward, unstoppable. At this critical moment balance is key. The three riders stay close to each other moving like one body. The driver watches the mainsail, waiting for that split second when he can throw the boom over. Any miscalculation by any one of them and they will end up in the water or worse. For me, the thrill is intensified by the fact that my two children are in this boat. Interestingly too, the riders have no idea of how imperiled they appear. They are focused on their maneuver, and we are left to contemplate their fate. I am reminded of what John Ruskin said of Turner's marine paintings: "namely that both ships and sea were things that broke to pieces."

I planned for *Turning Point* to be cut and folded. The folds add dimension to the painting, giving the viewer the opportunity to walk through and be surrounded by the image. The cut outs amplify the action. I worked on this painting taped to a horizontal surface.



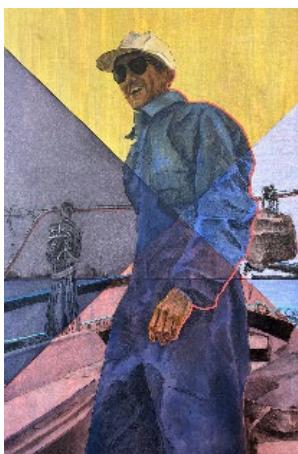
17.



One Minute Flag

One Minute, features my brother-in-law, Bob, who at the time of making this painting had been diagnosed with stage four Pancreatic cancer. There was little time left for him. I created a scenario out of the reference photo that features the starting sequence of a race. Balance again plays a key role. The weight of the riders is positioned together and evenly distributed from side to side keeping the boat level, allowing for the best sail trim and the most speed. The forward crew adjusts the jib sheet, and the timer calls out every 10 seconds, then every five seconds, then the nerve wracking 10, 9, 8, 7,6,5,4,3,2,1. Time's up! My brother-in-law, Robert Bauer passed June 28, 2025.

One Minute, starts with painting the signal flag, in reverse on the back of the Yupo paper substrate. Approaching this side is like painting on glass, I chose to apply the yellow in thin vertical strokes, with the black in thin horizontal strokes. The entire backside of the painting was painted Quinacridone red magenta. When turned over, the underpainted flag vibrated with the tension of strokes and background color. By adding very thin layers of transparent white, Azo yellow and mixed transparent black on the front side I built a surface that projected both sunlight and gloom. The boat, rig and figures rendered in charcoal, allowed for the layering of pure transparent color on top. This application gives the painting an ephemeral quality, as if the figures, boat and all might evaporate before our eyes. The movement from sunlight to gloomy darkness gestures to life's sudden changes.



18.



Sudden Death Flag

Sail On is both a memory and a memorial. The reference photograph was used as a memorial memento at my husband's visitation and funeral. Years earlier, we helped transport an ocean-going sailboat through the Weland Canal to Toronto. We had narrowly escaped disaster as a large storm squall had overtaken us. The photo was taken just after we made safe harbor, thus his bright smile and the foul weather gear. This image epitomizes my late husband's love of sailing. It is one of the memories of all I have left of our life together.

For the painting, *Sail On*, the signal flag, Sudden Death, plays an important role. Painted on the reverse side in vertical and horizontal strokes, then covered by a layer of blue, it is the epicenter of the composition, always leading the viewer back to the figure. The under drawing in black and white charcoal, is made up of scumbled lines of different thicknesses to imply texture to the surface of the painting. Colors from the translucent color wheel are layered in on top of each other creating rich pure tones without covering up the drawing. The results give the painting depth and complexity inviting contemplation of the figure's relationship to the signal flag, Sudden Death. The boat, a symbol of safety amid danger, carries its rider forward to the future. The bright thin red line of fate a signifier pointing out that although the figure has survived there are more storms await.



19.

Ground Beneath My Feet is a sublime memory. Set on Nantucket's famous Surfside beach in 1962. The figure, me at the age of 7, watches as the water sweeps away the ground beneath her feet. She stars down transfixed, afraid to move. She is held in place by the firm grip of her parents, which in the painting, have become mere shadows, since their passing many years ago. There is an underpainting of an Amish quilt called Sunshine and Shadow, alluding to my ancestral heritage.

