

TOTAL IMMERSION

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TOTAL IMMERSION

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ABSTRACT

I totally immerse myself in the experience of painting and as I do, I am connecting with love, joy, and peace. My thesis project, *Total Immersion*, represents the need I have to understand who I am and the people in my life. My paintings have a whimsical state of mind because I am expressing music into my artwork. I choose the instruments of color and set the rhythm of texture that will sing the emotions the painting will express. I endeavor to make intangible experiences tangible through my art; to make the soundless, resound; the flavorless an explosion of taste, and the invisible seen. There is healing for me in this process and through my art I hope there is some healing for the observer as well.

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My heart is full of gratitude for the life changing opportunity I had to attend my graduate degree at Laguna College of Art and Design. Thank you, faculty and mentors for believing in me, supporting me, and encouraging me in my artistic journey as you have provided a way for me to thrive through this program. Thank you for sharing your knowledge, insights, and suggestions with me along each step of the way.

DEDICATION

To my wonderful family, my God, and my future family

To my family, thank you for creating the opportunity for me to pursue my dreams. I would not be the woman I am today without your love and support. Your unconditional love has taught me the importance of life that will carry with me for the rest of my life.

To my grandma, Donna Terese Emrich, thank you for introducing your passion for painting. I share this accomplishment with you, my angel in heaven.

To God, my Creator, for my blessed life and guiding me on the path I walk.

To my future family, I encourage you to always follow your passions with your heart, mind, and spirit.

EPIGRAPH

As we observe the process of natural growth, we become acutely aware of certain eternal principles upon which all growth is predicated. First, growth is the expected norm. It's the divine challenge given to each soul as it enters mortality. Our Heavenly Father expects us to use the great gift of life to enjoy and to celebrate this central truth. Because we have life, we can grow and develop and do some things on earth we cannot do anywhere else.

Only God's children have the capacity to direct their own growth. This means that we can use this time on earth to bring optimum growth and development because we have the power to make choices. It's not enough just to grow. Even the weeds and the biblical tares can do that. It is expected of us that we will shape our growth so that we will not be like Topsy (in Uncle Tom's Cabin) who 'just grewed,' but rather we will successfully negotiate the bumps and curves by enlarging upon our talents, by disciplining ourselves, so that our mortal experience brings us toward greater and greater mastery of those characteristics which make us worthy of association with the Divine.

Dwan J. Young, Primary General President
"An Invitation to Grow" April 1982 General Conference

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TOTAL IMMERSION

Every minute, every day, every year, I am *becoming*. I am constantly learning and growing to become my best self. The verb, *to be*, denotes presence of mind. It means to have, maintain, or occupy space. When I paint, I want to be present with myself in the moment and in the phase of life in which I find myself. *To come*, means to move or journey towards something with a specific purpose. It is inviting and positive to enrich the stage of life that you are experiencing. The past participle, *-ing*, means a product or result in an action or process (Merriam-Webster). It is what is happening. The happening is transformation. Therefore, *becoming* is the transition away from and into another form that I celebrate.

Whether it is positive or negative, I celebrate each phase of life, with love, joy, hope and peace. I paint to process my understanding of these transitions because I find myself so often so totally immersed in these experiences, I do not fully understand them. Immersion is the only way I know how to enjoy life. My thesis work, *Total Immersion*, represents the stages of life I am presently experiencing. I am painting what I know to be true in the moment I am painting. The best way I can do that is through being honest with myself. Honesty honors the experiences I have shared with those close to me. By painting these experiences, I am metabolizing them. They help me make the connection between what I have come *from* and what I am *becoming*. Thus, *Total Immersion* is the evolution of what I have become in love, joy, hope, and peace.

DESCRIPTION

While my work primarily focuses on the arch of womanhood, it is not intended to alienate men. It simply celebrates the experiences unique to women, and I desire my work to appeal to both. My artwork is a self-reflection of my internal landscape as it intersects with

my external landscape. Thus, it contains portraits (both of myself and others), still life paintings, and *plein air* pieces. The process of painting helps me repair wounds that I have sustained in learning to live and to love. I gain clarity through action and over time, it supports my pursuit of greater understanding and peace. As I have transitioned from a young woman into a woman who knows herself, I have also transitioned from learning to paint in my undergraduate program at Academy of Art University to becoming a master of fine arts at Laguna College of Art and Design. As each painting from beginning to end becomes, I have also become.

The majority of my art in *Total Immersion* and outside of it depicts female figures submerged in ocean water in the same way as *Endless Color* (2015) (Figure 1). This painting was one of my first underwater pieces and the largest one I had ever completed up to that moment. It features a woman arching her back floating at the surface of the water. Her body is reflected on the surface in abstract shapes creating a distorted mirror reflection. Endless colors of her reflection ascend above her. I like the juxtaposition of the ocean in the way that it is both very chaotic and peaceful. The symmetry of conflict imitates and represents my internal landscape. The place where the surface of the water meets the point of reflection and then intertwines the worlds above and below is beautiful to my eye. The dancing of color and light captivates me. With paint, I carve the figure into the duality of the world above and the world below to capture what they each reflect. The result represents how opposite feelings can co-exist in



Figure 1. Isabel Emrich, *Endless Color*, 2015, Oil on Panel, 60" x 48" | Sold

harmony. I find peace in that space between.

My most recent underwater painting, *Twisting of Color* (2019), is an example of the duality I am reconciling (Figure 2). This painting depicts a front view of a female torso laying parallel to the sea floor. The two worlds merge together to open the mind to memories, feeling of love, joy, and peace seeing the sky from below the surface. I pushed this piece further than I had in the past in that it contains visual imagery of the world above the surface of the water (i.e., clouds, trees, and the sunlight). The inclusion of such items in the composition represents a wider spectrum of possibilities for the figure and concrete possibilities that extend beyond what is captured in the reflection. Toward this interpretation, *Twisting of Color* speaks of beauty and allowing nature to reconcile both internal and



Figure 2. Isabel Emrich, *Twisting of Color*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 36" x 40" | Chloe Gallery

external conflict.

Compositions of women in the ocean water are self-reflections and self-portraits of my experiences of my life thus far. As my life continues to evolve, I know I will never stop painting them. They resonate within me and

within my audience. I am continuously

commissioned to paint them even while

embarking on endeavors to paint other subject matters. The bulk of my thesis work represents new subject matters because when I began graduate school at LCAD, I wanted to explore the voice of my work and produce more narrative art as well as strengthen my anatomy skills. I had a desire to paint more from life, observation, and imagination. It was my intention to be

able to have the skills and confidence to paint whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted to paint it and have the result still be characteristically me.

In order to manage toward those outcomes, I had to totally immerse myself in the process of painting. Consequently, I also had to face my personal and artistic weaknesses that allowed me the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone as an artist. As I painted with the intention to learn and grow, the outcome, oddly enough, became less and less important. The process became the experience of finding love, joy, hope, and peace. I purposefully began to choose challenging subjects that had meaning to me.

By focusing on learning, I have found other ways to communicate the duality of chaos and peace that I constantly feel as I mature. One of those ways came serendipitously through my self portraits. I had not intended for self portraits be a part of this thesis work, but I did commit myself to the challenge of making one for learning purposes. My first ever self portrait painting from life, *BE BOLD* (2018), was painted in one and a half hours (Figure 3).

My intention was to overcome my fear of painting myself from life, I did it quickly. The painting depicts me in a straightforward, almost confrontational pose, with no expression. I have to be honest. My anxiety was at my peak. Painting myself was like learning a foreign language. I was anxiously engaging with the work while being totally immersed in what I was doing because I did not know what I was doing. I was simply trying



Figure 3. Isabel Emrich, *BE BOLD*, 2018, Oil on Canvas, 9" x 12" | Private Collection

my best. Thus, I focused intently on describing every feature with bold blocks of color, and intuitively selected colors that felt right in the moment I was looking at myself in the mirror.

After I finished, I stepped back to observe what I painted. An overwhelming flood of emotion came over me and tears streamed down my face. I could see that I had painted my rawest, purest feelings. It captured my stress, sadness, and loneliness in that moment of my life. It was so shocking that I did not want to reveal my internal struggle to anyone or discuss the anxiety I was feeling about my future. So, I hid the painting behind other paintings in my studio. However, one day, a teacher came in and found it. The instructor feedback took me by surprise. I realized through our conversation that my audience could connect to this piece on a more personally beautiful level than my underwater pieces. Rather than on the surface, *pretty* level that some of my underwater paintings tend to accomplish, my self-portrait was deep.

Thus, instead of being totally immersed in water for the entire body of thesis work, I



Figure 4. Isabel Emrich, *Self Portrait*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 24" x 18" | Private Collection

found myself immersed in a staring contest with the mirror. *Self Portrait* (2018) began as a study to practice anatomy skills and accuracy painting from life (Figure 4). The painting is a three-quarter view of my face with two pigtail low buns on each side. My expression is natural. However, I painted my eyes with intense concentration. I used two light sources to paint the skin tone, one side is cool and the other is warm with no strong shadows as a challenge to focus on painting color shifts. The cool and warm contrast

resembles contradicting thoughts. I am wearing a floral print collard dress, and a gem brooch pinned in the center at the collar. The same floral print is covering the background which creates an illusion that my face is floating in floral pattern, lost in unknown.

During the process of completing this piece, I painted myself at the same time, in the same position, day after day, as often as I could. After a couple sessions in, I was timid and I began critiquing my skills and outcome again. I doubted myself, but this time I recognized it, I changed it. I started to see all the beauty I had within all that I was capable of making. I moved on to paint the background. Since I was totally immersed in the observation of myself, I decided to cover the background with the same floral pattern that was on my dress. The floral pattern was overwhelmingly bright and cheery, and in the painting, it is a sharp, noticeable contrast to the serious, determined, soul-searching expression on my face. When I recognized this contrast, I knew the painting was finished. I had reconciled the presence of chaos and peace.

Around this time, I began to recognize that always tend to replicate reflection, sculpt the form in paint, and use distortion to represent how the mind can find peace with its surroundings. I also began to detect a sense of reconciliation and healing in my soul after completing each self-portrait. The next self-portrait in this thesis, *Confronting Emotions* (2018), captures what it feels like for me to hold onto hope and fight through anxiety to feel peace (Figure 5). This painting is a life-size portrait with the torso in the center of the composition. I painted my figure directly facing the viewer, in wavy pigtailed, and a natural, soft expression on my face. The ends of my hair blend into leaves in the foreground. The leaves surround my form and transition from realistic cool colors to warmer lighter colors in simple abstracted shapes of same leaves behind the form. One flower is painted in the



Figure 5. Isabel Emrich, *Confronting Emotions*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 40"x 30" | Private Collection.

foreground in front of her stomach to plant the seed of hope within me. The color scheme of the painting is mostly cool: purples, turquoises, and greens, with accents of oranges, yellows and warm greens to juxtapose contrast to resemble anxiety. My mark making is bold, leaving a variety of different textures on the surface such as dry brush and glazes that look hazy to resemble my anxious mind coming through in paint form.

I followed my intuition of what I was seeing when I was selecting these colors to paint my face and body. I wanted to confront my emotions and the feelings I had trapped inside. I did not second-guess myself. I just painted. I felt weight on my shoulders, and I was fighting back tears in the process. I was seeking a way out, away from darkness and into light. Taking breaks through the process, I evaluated how I was feeling and what I was doing. Little by little, the chaos in my mind subsided and I felt calm. I portrayed this change in feeling through the way I painted my hair. On my head, the hair stands in dark contrast to the entire painting, and as the ends of the hair blend into the leaves it becomes closer in value to the rest of the painting. It represents the beauty that I found inside my mind to reframe the anxiety of darkness and hope in the light.

Anxiety is a reoccurring source of inspiration for me. My painting, *Transition into Light* (2018), was inspired from one of my first experiences with an anxiety attack (Figure 6). The painting depicts a close-up, tilted gesture of my face set at an angle. My right eye is up facing the sky and my mouth and bottom half of my right face is angled down at the ground.

My eyes are closed and my mouth is slightly open in a way that I interpret as exhaustion. A thick, dark shadow runs down the centerline of my face and small shadow lines wrap around it indicating a divide between the negative and positive thoughts. I selected colors that were complimentary to each other to create tension and applied paint with intention leaving thick globs of paint on the surface. I could not



Figure 6. Isabel Emrich, *Transition into Light*, 2018, Oil on Canvas, 18" x 18" | Private Collection

physically paint myself from life in the moment of anxiety. Therefore, I photographed myself during the attack to document it. Often, when I am in the middle of the attack, I go outside to get fresh air and sunshine. I stretch and engage in some deep breathing exercises to help calm me. I also massage my shoulders to release tension. During this episode, I went outside to stand under the trees to cool off because it was a really warm day. I noticed interesting shadow patterns on the ground and on my skin, and they reminded me of my underwater paintings. As the sun moved, a dapple of light made the shadows disappear and reappear over and over. The repetition calmed me. It formed a connection with my internal state of mind to release my anxiety and give me peace. The photos I took were then used as my reference to create my painting.

I chose to lay down high contrasting colors like orange and blue, purple and yellow, green and red right next to each other to make the painting chaotic and loud. Painting these color combinations gave me a headache but it was accurate to the experience. The color contrasted with the tired expression that communicated the conflict between chaos and peace

I experience during an episode. This piece reflects the beauty I find in my imperfections. Each of them sets me apart and makes me unique from another person. Owning who I am even in raw, unkempt moments is beautiful. The struggle to stay in the light and fight back darkness is challenging but always rewarding in the end.

Narratively, I built on this learning I was absorbing from my self-portraits. In my painting, *Contemplation* (2018), I portray the way in which I



Figure 7. Isabel Emrich, *Contemplation*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 40'' x 30'' | Private Collection.

sometimes perceive the younger generation to be unaware of the beauty around them and single minded (Figure 7). It began from an in-class assignment where we were painting a live model sitting on pillows. Her pose was relaxed, and she had a gazed expression starring out to space. This captured my vision to portray the duality of being totally immersed in thought. Recognizing this detail, led me to further into this new conceptually approach to my art. The class assignment was to learn how to invent the background to support our concept. I decided to put her in a garden with flowers surrounding her to bring a peaceful element to contrast her chaotic though process. I took a photo of my parent's garden to use as a reference. In doing all of this, I realized how to project and immerse myself into the narrative of a painting in which I am not the subject.

In my painting, *Internal Blossom* (2018), I began to paint simply by identifying an internal feeling (Figure 8). The painting depicts a close-up portrait of a female face, mouth closed, big blue eyes starring strait on at the viewer. A variety of different types of flowers



Figure 8. Isabel Emrich, *Internal Blossom*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 18''x 24'' | Private Collection.

and colors surround the face. Flowers to me are a symbol of love and beauty. They merge through the skin on the surface of the face and beyond in front of her, continuing to guide her onward through her journey of self-love.

Before painting this, I was struggling with self-love. I was comparing myself to others and

having negative thoughts about myself. Being a perfectionist, I am very self-critical. I recognized my internal struggle and decided to take action so I saw an energy healer. Little by little, I practiced self-care and overtime gained self-love. I have learned to love my imperfections over time. I have come to realize there is no one on earth like me, so why try to be someone else, when I can be me? I have come to understand self-love and positive self-talk will be a constant effort I need to practice for the rest of my life. From talking to others, I have realized I am not alone and self-love is a life long journey for everyone. I believe when we are on good terms with ourselves, we can then shine from the inside out and let others into our lives. In overlapping the flowers on my subject's face, I intentionally draw a connection from my struggle with self-love to the subject seeking her own version of it.

Flowers, therefore, have become a metaphor of self-love in this body of work. My painting, *Progression* (2018), describes a



Figure 9. Isabel Emrich, *Progression*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 36'' x 36'' | Private Collection.

female in portrait perspective with her eyes closed, a hand pushing back her hair, her chin up, and flowers painted all around her and on her skin to accentuate her gesture (Figure 9).

Similar to *Internal Blossom*, this painting focuses more about the progress of acceptance and transition. Every flower is a different kind of beautiful in varied color and pattern. I depict them delicate and unique like they are individual people. As flowers grow, they transition through different stages until they fully blossom and radiate with their own beauty. This painting represents a stage of that transformation. When I am being honest and vulnerable with myself at each stage of my life, I am becoming my best self. I am learning to love myself. I want the audience to connect with the confidence in this piece. Like a flower blossoming, this painting celebrates self-love, and it is a discovery I want my audience to experience, as they are becoming who they are meant to be in life.



Figure 10. Isabel Emrich, *Bundle of Joy*, 2018, Oil on *plexiglass*, 17" x 16" | Private Collection

Another example of metaphorical use of flowers is divulged in my painting, *Bundle of Joy* (2018) (Figure 10). This piece depicts flowers in a vase painted on three separate sheets of plexiglass to help create a three-dimensional form. The three sheets are slightly overlapping each other with a few inches in separation to one another. They create an optical illusion. From a far away, the viewer only sees the illusion of bouquet of flowers in a vase on one surface,

but up close they see the image broken up across three surfaces to create a unified image.

The idea began as I stared at nothing in particular and I thought about everything on my to do list and I felt very overwhelmed. I started to see the space moving and overlapping,

messing with my reality and changing my perspective. This was shocking and I explored what I was experiencing by sketching what I was seeing in the moment. After sketches, I bought flowers and painted them from observation with the same perspective I had in the kitchen. Distorting the viewer's vision to see areas of the flowers at different angles that did not make sense or line up to each other, fascinated me. I learned beauty is feeling joy when we change our perspective on the situation. Also, our broken heart over time gets glued together as we become stronger, like the three separate sheets of plexiglass. Our bruises and scratches from life's challenges are the unique differences that separate each individual from another, making every human unique and that is beautiful.

My painting, *State of Mind* (2018), is a female figure repeated three times with different expressions (Figure 11). They are embedded in trees. The leaves and branches are transparent on their skin overlapping the three figures. This painting portrays the different facial expressions and positions of the same



Figure 11. Isabel Emrich, *Different States of Mind*, 2018. Oil on canvas. 30"x 40" | Private Collection

women merging on top of one another with transparent paint, immersed in a tree. The tone of the painting is serious with determined expressions on the faces painted using darker colors and more grey cools. I wanted to capture the mixed emotions I was experiencing in the short amount of time, so I painted with energy leaving bold visible brushstrokes on the canvas, carving through the paint of the cheek to describe the leaves to portray the transparency. I believe each of us is strong and we are responsible for our own happiness. When we are in control, and doing things in our life that makes us happy, that is beautiful. In layering the

figures on top of each other, I am describing my interpretation of what it is like to live in the moment and celebrate the multi-faceted nature of it.

I took a turn from self-portraits to portraits of women in my life. My painting, *Sweet Olivia* (2018), is a portrait of my dear friend, Olivia, as she was sitting in a chair, fully engaged reading a book (Figure 12). Olivia was my roommate when I lived in San Francisco.



Figure 12. Isabel Emrich, *Sweet Olivia*, (unfinished) 2018, Oil on canvas, 36"x 36" | Private Collection

When she was visiting Laguna Beach, where my studio resides, I asked her to model for me so I could practice painting from life to strengthen my observation skills. I only had three hours to paint her, so I captured as much as I could in that time. I locked in a portrait of her quickly using thick juicy paint to describe her features. The painting began as a study, but after the three hours, I was satisfied with the

direction it was going, but I wanted to develop the painting further. I added a patterned wall in the background, changed the chair she was sitting on, added a plant in the foreground, changed her pants to a skirt, to all resemble who Olivia is: kind, gentle, creative, and wise. In reflection, I see this painting as a self-reflection of what I desired for in my life- an escape. I wanted to relax from all the stress I was feeling. The background pattern is a half-moon shape that is repeated over and over linking together. This portrays how Olivia is gaining knowledge from a book. I believe being educated and constantly seeking to learn is beautiful. I wanted to honor Olivia and celebrate the importance of taking time for ourselves to relax and learn.

In my painting, *My Angel* (2018), began as I painted my mom, Susan, from life in her kitchen (Figure 13). My mom is sitting at the table with flowers in a vase in the center of the table that she picked from her garden in the backyard. Above her is a chandelier that reflects the colors and light in the room. The chandelier and flowers are mirror reflections of each other in shape and a symbol of eternal perspective. I painted my mom between the two because she is a mirror reflection of that symbol



Figure 13. Isabel Emrich, *My Angel*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 48”x 36” | Private Collection

in my opinion. Behind her is a mirror with surrounding artwork from her four children that she calls, “The Emrich Gallery Wall.” In the mirror, you see another mirror on the opposite side that is reflecting my mother at the table with the paintings behind her and the vase of flowers in front of her. This mirror-to-mirror reflection mimics eternity because the objects you see in the reflecting mirror is endless. I decided to include environment to support Susan and her role as a woman, mother, wife, and friend. To me she is my angel, a truly beautiful woman, who is creative, supportive, spiritual, and pure. I desire to become the woman and mother she is. My mom is in the center with her children around her represented as symbols in the paintings on the wall. This is meant to convey how families are together forever. To me, this truth is very important, and I value it with my whole heart. Being able to live with my family forever even after death is a beautiful, happy thought.

My painting, *Living Spirits* (2018), started from a class assignment to paint the model from life and invent the background around her (Figure 14). The painting is a woman sitting

around plants, leaning back against a wall with taxidermy birds pinned to the wallpaper above her. The taxidermy birds reminded me that I believe all spirits will live forever even after death. I wanted to paint this truth into my painting, so I drew a child-like line drawing of a bird on her shoulder to resemble the spirit of the bird that is dead, is still living. I want to communicate this truth that I think is beautiful because it brings me peace and hope when I hear devastating news of ones death. I want



Figure 14. Isabel Emrich, *Living Spirits*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 30"x22" | Private Collection

to share this truth with others struggling with their loss of a family member or friend they know. Both of my grandmothers have died, I am hopeful I will see them again. By painting this concept, I am coming to peace with my loss for them and celebrating the precious gift of



Figure 15. Isabel Emrich, *Motherhood*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 60"x 48" | Private Collection

life that I find beautiful which helps me stay positive during life on earth.

My painting, *Motherhood* (2019), is inspired from the time I was with my sister, Brigitte, watching her nurture and feed her first baby son, Finn (Figure 15). She is lying on her side circling her body around him as she breastfeeds him sleeping on the bed. The comforter and pillows surrounding them is nurturing, mimicking Brigitte's *S* curve position around Finn.

Brigitte's facial expression is exhaustion and at rest

with her eyes closed and face embedded in the pillow. Her body gesture is protecting her son as he naps and her hand is wrapped around his body resembling love and care. I wanted to capture the special bond between them, so I decided to observe them and paint them from life. The linear quality shows the movement between their interactions as time lapsed. They were constantly moving, so I had no other choice than to paint quickly with thick and thin paint. There was no time to question what I was doing. I could only focus on describing what I was visually seeing. The colors I intuitively chose were bright and colorful because I wanted the painting to be a joyful celebration of motherhood. Watching Brigitte care for her newborn baby and nurture him joyfully is sacred and beautiful. It constantly reminded me of my deep desire to become a mother like she is one day. Beauty is caring for another person unconditionally.

My painting, *Tending to Earth* (2019), is a depiction of my mom, Susan, gardening (Figure 16).

She is crouched down embedded in flowers, replanting and arranging flowers around. One hand is



Figure 16. Isabel Emrich, *Tending to Earth*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 24”x18” | Chapman University

holding a flower and the other is holding a shovel about to dig and uproot a flower. She is wearing her big sun hat that is covering her face, only exposing her nose and lips. Beauty is constantly “tending to” better ourselves to become our best. From my experience, I have learned it takes time and effort to be consistent to develop good habits in order to break the bad. Working hard to achieve your goals takes time, consistency, patience, and dedication, and that is beautiful. I wanted the viewer to be close to the flowers and the action of my mom



Figure 17. Isabel Emrich, *Home*, 2019, Oil on canvas panel, 14"x 18" | Chandler Mankins.

uprooting and moving the flower be a reminder to take care of yourself. This represents my belief that women have the power to control and be responsible to take care of our life, our happiness, and our health.

Lastly, my painting, *Home* (2019), is a landscape view where the love of my life,

Chandler Mankins, grew up in Pismo Beach, California (Figure 17). The painting has a pathway leading up over a hill, and trees, surrounding the space, overlooking the ocean at sunset. He drove us in the tractor to our favorite spot to watch the sunset go behind the ocean vista. Experiencing this view gave me a glimpse of my future with him. It was a joyful moment that we shared together. I felt so much peace in that moment. As he held me in his arms, I felt at home. It was the first time in my life I felt this way about another person. Later in my studio, I had a deep desire to paint the view that we shared because of the impact the experience had on me. Beauty is being in the moment with the ones you love. Love is doing simple things joyfully. It is more important who you are with, not where you are in life. Relationships and love are beautiful.

In sum, *Total Immersion*, represents a state of mind to love unconditionally. It is a way of life, and the only way for me to live. It means to love with all your heart. Experience life to the fullest. Immerse yourself in learning from travels and other cultures. Wake up every morning with a heart full of gratitude for life. Chase the sun until it sets. Thank God for the day. Find balance in life. Live in health - physically, mentally, and spiritually. Accept change. Celebrate growth. Be patient with yourself during the lonely moments. Fight through

the fear until you can feel peace again. Listen and respect yourself with what you need. Be kind to one another. Serve others. Smile. Uplift and encourage someone if you see they are falling. Enjoy God's creation. Explore nature and connect with the animals. Live for adventure. Fix your mind on things above, then deep dive into your soul. Thus, *Total Immersion* is just that - a deep dive down into the core of my soul to find the love, happiness, and acceptance of myself. Life is a journey, and this is mine.

RESEARCH

I own a great amount of gratitude to my family and mentors that influenced me throughout my life. They have shaped who I am creatively. I am grateful for their willingness to share their passions with me and expose me to different creative outlets. They have always



Figure 18. Isabel and grandmother, Donna Terese Emrich painting, 2003

encouraged me to pursue my dream to attend art school and become a working artist in the art world. However, none of my influences are more guiding than the one my grandmother and great grandmother gave me. They were both self-taught accomplished painters. Through their influence I fell in love with painting too.

My grandmother was a vibrant woman who introduced me to painting (Figure 18). On my seventh birthday, she took me on the cliffs of Laguna Beach, and gifted me with my first easel, palette, acrylic paint, and brushes. She helped me set everything up overlooking the ocean. I still remember her voice as she exclaimed, "Paint what you see!" This was my first experience *plein air* painting. There was

awareness in the present moment in which she taught me to live. Painting opens my eyes to study my subject, notice its nuances, and live in its light. Her enthusiasm for the practice of painting taught me the essence of expressionism (Figure 19). It was less about perfection and more about capturing the expression of how you feel about a person,



Figure 19. Isabel with a painting, age ten, 2003

place, or situation through paint. There was no right or wrong in the act of creating. There was only love. The subject can be expressed whichever way I want it to be as long as I am looking with my whole heart. Her advice and encouragement gave me the freedom to interpret what I was seeing with expression in paint. I was able to communicate my internal landscape for the first time. It was my first taste of the satisfaction that comes from creating.



Figure 20. Isabel Emrich, *Young Girl*, 2000, watercolor on paper, 24"x18" | Private Collection

I had no idea what a pivotal moment in my life that was. It sparked my desire and gave me a clear vision that I wanted to create for the rest of my life and be a painter.

I continued to enjoy painting in elementary school at Vista Verde, where I learned about different artists and art movements. In particular we learned about Japanese Art, and then we painted our own version from that influence, as a result, I painted, *Young Girl* (2000) (Figure 20). I

began my pursuit to find continuous happiness from creating. Interpreting what I see, combining my feelings to express with paint was satisfying and left me wanting more.

As I reflect on my relationship with my grandmother and my development as a painter, I can see that I have developed my own distinct style that people can immediately identify. I am an expressionist painter. Expressionism is where forms derived from nature are distorted or exaggerated and colors are intensified for emotive or expressive purposes (Merriam-Webster). This is exactly what I do. I distort and exaggerate my figures and forms through color expressively.

My dad also encouraged expression. His love for the ocean has played a role on my creative attachment to the ocean. He is a surfer and ocean enthusiastic. Since I was a toddler my dad and my mom would take my siblings and I to the beach to enjoy the ocean and sunshine. Having grown up in southern California, the ocean has always been my backyard. Those beach days are fond memories of playing in the waves and building sand castles together. My dad would hold onto me the entire time especially when we could not touch the seafloor. The waves would be huge with a strong current. I felt safe in my dad's arms. When a set of waves came in, he would hold me and help pull me under huge powerful waves. Swimming deep under the ocean and fighting the powerful current was thrilling. I felt comfortable under the surface. I would swim down as far as I could go and open my eyes to look around. Coming up for air is refreshing and makes me feel powerful and confident. This experience has taught me to be fearless and enjoy God's creations. The ocean became one of my sources for comfort and it has evolved into a symbol of the clarity in my art.

At fourteen, I had a near-death experience in the ocean at Laguna Beach. I was caught in a current of a big set of waves that kept me under the surface for a long period of time. I

was in pain and received two distinct flashbacks of joyful experiences in my life before I thought I was going to die. I pleaded to God for help and my pain turned into peace while still pulled under the surface. The chaos of the waves mellowed out and I was able to shoot up to the surface for a gasp of air. This near-death experience combined with joyful experiences playing in the ocean influenced my desire to paint women swimming and floating in ocean water. It was meditative and I felt connected to God and heaven. For me to heal from this traumatic experience, I paint it. According to an article titled, “Art and Healing” on the Foundation for Art and Healing website, painting is encouraged in art therapy to help people process traumatic experiences and overcome them in order to heal. Over the decades, scientists have studied how creative expression has affected mood swings, attitudes, and emotional stability. Neuroendocrine pathways control physiologic results to reduce blood pressure, improve sleep patterns, and boost the immune system to promote a positive quality of life (“Art and Healing”). I am a testament to this fact because through painting my traumatic experiences, I have been healed.

In my art, I have explored the boundaries of the world above the water and below the surface. I have also explored connections between life and death, earth and heaven, mind and spirit. *Plein air* painting for the first time with my grandmother a decade before this experience, allowed me to naturally paint this experience in the same approach I once did, however, instead of painting what I saw, I painted what I felt. By expressing what I went through, my paintings help me appreciate life and be able to enjoy living and value the precious gift of life. During this near-death experience, I gained a deeper connection to my creator, God. I continue to trust God over and over throughout my life for strength. I also lean on my family, friends, and mentors for support throughout each stage of life. I believe

God is love. He is also nature and the creator of all things. I seek him daily for peace. He helps direct me and gives me clarity and direction. He is my source of comfort and hope that brings me joy. He has taught me to see the good in others and embrace the creator in every individual and living thing that I paint. I create because it satisfies my need for love and connection with God and those on earth and in heaven. It supports my spiritual and holistic health. I believe growth can be challenging at times and



Figure 21. Photo by Isabel Emrich.

involves hard work. I know as humans we are constantly growing. Therefore, I want to celebrate life at every step of the way joyfully. When I have a realization of the lesson I learn from my trial, I feel satisfied and it helps me overcome the next one and help connect with others that may be struggling also. I understand myself better and realize the process was worth the struggle because I felt God's presence with me every step of the way. In this way, I



Figure 22. Isabel Emrich, *Roses*, 2005, Acrylic and pencil on canvas, 14"x11" | Private Collection

see how nature is always changing and I am drawn to the unexpected forms, patterns, colors, and textures that surprise me (Figure 21). I incorporate nature influences into my art because it uplifts my spirit and makes me feel peace. In my painting *Roses* (2005) I was twelve years old and I have always loved painting nature for this reason (Figure 22). I channel the beauty I find in creation, make time to forge connections with others, share the truths I have learned, and let those truths serve my audience.

My dad shared his other passion, ceramics, with



Figure 23. Dan Emrich's ceramic bowls, Clay, 2016 | Private Collection.

me early in my life. He makes unique bowls, cups, and plates with bright color combinations that I eat from (Figure 23). I emulated this as a child by making my own clay sculpture bowls in the shape of animals such as a snake or elephant; I would always draw elephants too. I was so fascinated by animals and insects as a child. Sculpting them was my way of studying them and

indulging my fascination. Using my hands and little tools to shape and form them in clay afforded me a sense of intimacy with it as a being. Later in college, I studied sculpture and fell further in love with the way shaping a figure with my hands helps me understand the wonderful way in which the world was made by God.

Additionally, my mother has played a significant role in contributing to the way in which I express my creativity and spirituality. She has been a role model for me with my spiritual development with her example of makery, dignity, strength, and dedicated faith in God (Figure 24). As a seamstress, she makes all of her own clothes and bags. Growing up, she spent countless hours creating special event dresses inspired by designs she gathered from fashion shows or from pages she earmarked in her large collection of *Vogue* magazines. These magazines were main sources of inspiration. She has not missed an issue since 1988. Every month when latest arrived, my mother, sister, and I would huddle together, absorbing and



Figure 24. Isabel and mother, the outfit she sewed, and I at my exhibition: *Expression*, Skidmore Contemporary Art, 2018.

relishing in the art of high fashion on every page. The fabric store became our pattern and texture playground. Nothing was more exhilarating than wandering the aisles with her, imagining the combinations we could make together. I enjoyed watching her sew and make a dress or bag at night as I would draw or sew my own dolls. I was fascinated with the process and loved helping her. I would help cut her fabric or she would let me hold down the sewing pedal or thread the needle. She involved me in her creative process. She would also take my sister and I to the Gem fair every few months to select stones, crystals, and beads, which we would then use to string together our own necklaces. My mom would take me to pawn shops to admire vintage jewelry and vintage glass bowls and trinkets that she enjoys collecting to use around the house. My mom appreciates beautiful historic antiques. Through my mother's influences to exposing me to her passions, I have developed my aesthetics, which is similar to my mother's. My eye for adorning my subjects with pattern, shapes, texture, color, and lines burgeons from our time crafting clothes that manifested the inner beauty she was teaching us to cultivate. To this day, we still collaborate on designs.

My mother also has a penchant for photography that has shaped the way I see my experiences in life. She was constantly taking photos and documenting the life of our family as we grew up. She always has her camera with her taking photos of us at sport events, family trips, and significant occasions. I would always borrow her camera to take photos as well. She taught me how to use her camera and she would be encouraging for me to take photos as well. I enjoyed looking through the tiny lens to compose what I wanted to capture. It made me realize I was most interested in documenting experiences of people in their environment, nature, and the beauty in the world. The experiences I remember most after the matter have always challenged me to stretch my progress as I continue through life. The

lessons I learn always influence my paintings. She taught me how to edit photos and select the best ones that captured the subject.

In college, I took a photography class that taught me skills to improve my photos. This has helped me learn how to compose photos to be able to use them later as references for paintings. I also enjoy taking photos with my GoPro®, an underwater camera, when I am exploring in the ocean, that later I use as a reference to paint (Figure 25). I enjoy photography, modeling, sculpting, sewing, designing clothes, and making jewelry as hobbies that I continue to implement into my life as creative outlets.

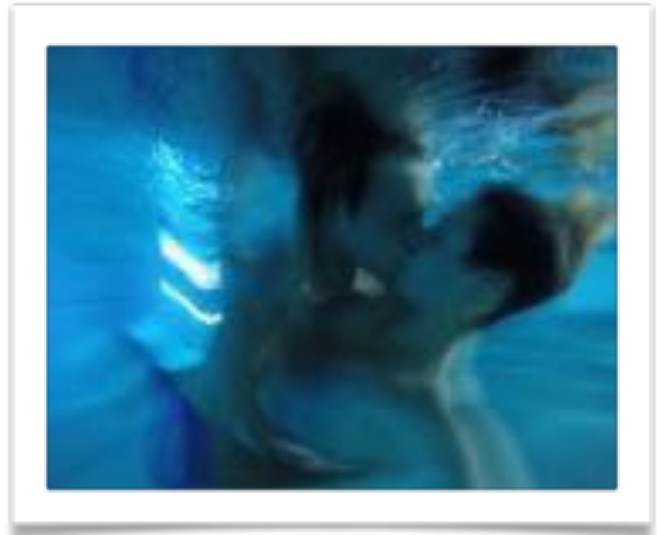


Figure 25. Isabel Emrich and Chandler Mankins, Taken with GoPro®. 2019.

However, my favorite creative outlet has always been painting.

My interest in the Art Nouveau movement, which is characterized by curvilinear motifs derived from natural forms, began from my love for high fashion design that my mom exposed me to at a young age. From the 1880's, the Art Nouveau evolved from the British arts and crafts movement as a reaction to Victorian-era decorative art. The movement was inspired from Japanese art that are known for using wood-block patterns (Augustyn). Art Nouveau goal was to influence all artists to think of design differently and to allow beautiful things to be accessible to everyone. In 1895, designers began to use natural forms and symmetry to create garments. Some countries focused on delicate and intricate floral while others used the long lines with simple bold colors (Wolf).



Figure 26. *Mom Sewing in the Kitchen*, 2019 |
Photo by Isabel Emrich

When I was younger, my mother would spend time with my sister and I looking through *Vogue* Magazines. It exposed me to current fashion trends and heavily influenced my interpretation of lines and patterns in painting reflecting those found in Art Nouveau. My mom is a pattern enthusiastic who has always made her skirts and dresses from intricate bold fabric patterns (Figure 26). She mixes and matches

different patterns to wear on a daily basis. From her influence, I have developed a love to mix and match patterns and overload my outfits with my personality. My mom made my clothes growing up, and she would make my sister and me dresses using bold fabrics and put our hair in big colorful bows. Our style and taste continues to evolve with common similarities as the fashion styles evolve. My aesthetic taste has always been the Art Nouveau movement that embodies organic shapes.

For similar reasons, I admire artist, Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), who represents the Art Nouveau movement. In his painting, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer II* (1912), he applies the Art Nouveau styles with natural forms and structures, particularly the curved lines of plants and flowers (Augustyn) (Figure 27). I admire the whimsical manipulation of patterns paired with color and shapes because it resonates with my anxious thought process and



Figure 27. Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer II*, 1912,
6'3"x3'11" | Photo by Isabel Emrich



Figure 28. Isabel Emrich, *Girl Indigo* (unfinished), 2019, Oil on canvas, 48''x24'' | Private Collection.



Figure 30. Detail *Girl Indigo* detail, 2019, Oil on canvas, 48''x30'' | Private Collection

my love for fabrics and nature. My painting *Girl Indigo* (2019) illustrates similar aspects to the Art Nouveau Movement (Figure 28). I have painted a wide variety of flowers in a whimsical pattern surrounding a portrait of my friend, Jenn. Similar to Klimt's painting, I paired floral designs with the portrait in my painting. Some flowers are painted transparent with a flat line drawing similar to the Japanese influence and



other flowers are painted with opaque paint that render the

Figure 29. Vincent van Gogh, *Almond Blossoms*, 1890, Oil Paint, 2'5''x3'0'' | Van Gogh Museum | Photo by Isabel Emrich

form of the petals. Vincent van Gogh's painting, *Almond Blossom* (1890) is an example of the Japanese art (Figure 29).

When Japan came in contact with the Western world, cubism and impressionism from European art influenced Japanese artists. Cubism was a twentieth century avant-garde art movement that originated from European art. Cubist artwork is described as objects broken up in abstracted non-identifiable forms with no viewpoint making the objects look flat (Contributors). Similarly, I flatten forms and use patterns

in areas of my paintings as well flattening the leaves and flowers with line quality (Figure

30). I will paint Jenn releasing butterflies from her hands as they are beginning to swarm in the flowers around her. This painting leads into another one of my paintings called *Arranging Flowers* (2018) that I painted a girl sitting at a table arranging flowers in a similar quality of line drawings to indicate objects (Figure 31). Around her I will paint an excessive



Figure 31. Isabel Emrich, *Arranging Flowers* (unfinished), 2019, Oil on canvas, 30''x40'' | Private Collection.



Figure 32. Isabel Emrich, *Divergent*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 48''x30'' | Sold

amount of floral patterns that intertwine together to create movement. This is a jumping off point that still resembles similarity to my underwater paintings, such as *Divergent* (2019) (Figure 32). The Art Nouveau movement and Klimt's paintings grounded my affinity for fashion design, patterns, shapes, lines, and colors and sensory details that I incorporate into my paintings. They became the foundation for the provocative way I have been refining my ability to combine patterns with my figures and forms.

Another artist I admire is French Artist, Henri Matisse (1869-1954) for his color choices and his original draftsmanship to depict reality. He was part of the Fauve Movement in 1905, which is a group of early twentieth-century modern artist whose works emphasized painterly qualities and strong color over the representational or realistic values retained by Impressionism (Tikkanen). In his painting, *Woman with a Hat* (1905), Henri



Figure 33. Henri Matisse, Photo of Isabel and Painting, *Woman with a Hat*, 1905, Oil paint, 2'8''x2'0'' | San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

paints his wife Amelie's face teal green (Figure 33). Studying artist Henri Matisse and how he developed the technique divisionism, which is big brush strokes next to each other to create a pattern. He places colors of similar value next to each other to create interest and a soft effect without blending the two colors together (Locke). In result, he painted figures



Figure 34. Detail of *Confronting Emotions*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 40"x30" | Private Collection

unrealistically in color that gave me confidence to be expressive in my color choices and find my own distinct draftsmanship. Similar to Matisse, I applied what I learned and made it my own when I painted skin color, unrealistically, to evoke emotion in my painting, *Confronting Emotions* (2018) (Figure 34). I still paint form and a range of values to paint the figure realistically. In addition, I developed a style to paint figures with unrealistic colors that naturally developed from painting several series of figures underwater prior to this painting. I applied similar color combinations to the skin, as you can see in my underwater painting such as *Kiss Me* (2018), a female three quarter portrait view at the surface of the water where the water line begins above her nose (Figure 35). I have also explored different color palettes such as my painting *Seeking Forward* (2019), which is the same image as *Kiss Me*, but I changed the color palette to explore how color effects emotions (Figure

unrealistically in color that gave me confidence to be expressive in my color choices and find my own distinct draftsmanship. Similar to Matisse, I applied what I learned and made it my own when I painted skin color, unrealistically, to evoke emotion in my painting, *Confronting Emotions* (2018) (Figure 34). I still paint form and a range of values to paint the figure realistically. In addition, I

developed a style to



Figure 35. Isabel Emrich, *Kiss Me*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 24"x36" | Sold

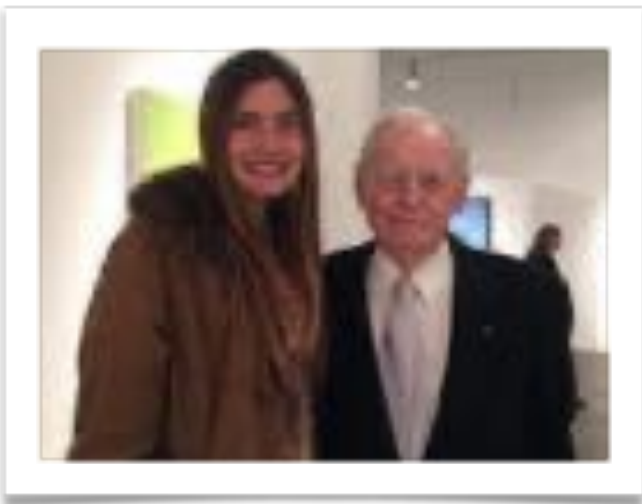


Figure 36. Isabel Emrich, *Seeking Forward*, 2018. Oil on canvas. 24"x30" | Sold

36). However, paintings *Kiss Me* and *Confronting Emotion* are expressed differently with the way I developed the paintings: one from photo reference and the other from life. The colors I selected to paint *Confronting Emotions*, were the colors I saw in my flesh when I was painting myself from life.

At the moment, I had anxiety and I wanted to convey my internal landscape externally with paint and color. There are similarities with color combinations of blues, oranges and greens, both painted with thick paint and complex color combinations. I chose to paint a range of realistic areas and abstract areas where the figure distorts into natural elements such as water and plants to heal the internal state of mind from my past experiences.

The interest I took in modern interpretations of Expressionism was further influenced by encounters with artists like the San Franciscan American painter, Wayne Thiebaud (1920-living). Wayne's style is grouped with movements such as Pop Art for his banal subjects (Wainwright). While running through the San Francisco airport one day trying to catch my connecting flight, I ran past a painting of his that stopped me in my tracks, it was the first time I saw his artwork in person. I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Wayne Thiebaud and receive feedback on my painting (Figure 37). I admire his painting *Valley Streets* (1920) that



I saw recently at his exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Figure 38). His color choices and compositional patterns in his work caught my attention. I stood so long admiring it through the protected sheet of glass that I nearly missed my flight. It was the first time I had

Figure 37. Isabel and Wayne Thiebaud, Skidmore Contemporary Art, 2016

encountered his artwork. This painting stood out to me because of the way in which he used the composition, colors, and textures to depict what city dwelling is like in San Francisco. I was living in San Francisco at the time. Therefore, I understood his decision making to interpret the feeling of the landscape. He exaggerated reality by changing the size of the hill in relation to the building to create an optical irony of their differences and to exaggerate the reality of the streets downtown. Each element works together to translate the experience of living



Figure 38. Isabel and Wayne Thiebaud Painting, *Valley Streets*, 1920, Oil on canvas, 48”x60” | The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



Figure 39. Isabel Emrich, *Dance with Joy* (unfinished), 2019, Oil on canvas, 72”x36” | Private Collection.

in an apartment on a hill in downtown San Francisco, which I experienced. Similarly, I use my GoPro® camera to exaggerate the reality of proportions.

This is evident in my painting, *Dance with Joy* (2019) that is still in the drawing beginning stage (Figure 39). The figures feet are small and heads are large because of the top view angle the photo was taken with a GoPro® that creates a fish-eye perspective. My intention was to emphasize distortion. I wanted to create more energy in the movement of the women dancing around sunflowers.

As I further investigated Thiebaud’s work, I

found that I also liked him for his thick paint application. In his painting, *Confections* (1962), Thiebaud intentionally explores his subjects by tastefully rendering the subject’s surfaces with bright colors and tangible thick strokes to evoke the taste buds of the viewer looking at



Figure 40. Isabel and Wayne Thiebaud painting, *Confections*, 1962, Oil on canvas, 16" x 20" | Collection San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Byron R. Meyer

the cakes he painted ("Wayne Thiebaud") (Pincus) (Figure 40). I want the viewer to feel connected to my artwork by seeing the energy of my soul through my paint application (Figure 41). I exaggerate aspects of my painting to help create a feeling just like Wayne did with the streets. I want my audience to feel the passion and care that I do about my subjects that they may be reminded of their own experiences and passions in their life.



Figure 41. Detail photo of *Confections*.

have a distinct expressive style

but similar boldness in their paint application and color choices. I remember when I first encountered the art of photorealistic, contemporary painter Chuck Close (1940-living) at the San Francisco MoMA and the impact it gave me seeing his larger than life portrait paintings such as, *James*, 2004 (Figure 42). He is a realist painter that focuses on painting portraiture. He paints hyper-realistic until he became paralyzed later in

In addition to Wayne Thiebaud's

influence on my art, other artist such as Chuck Close, Euan Uglow, and Lucian Freud additionally helped with my development in paint application. They each

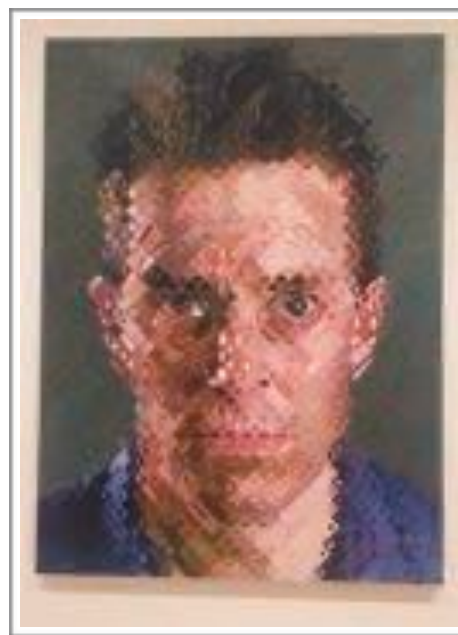


Figure 42. Chuck Close, *James*, 2004, 73" x 58" | Oil on canvas | Photo by Isabel Emrich at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2016.



Figure 43. Euan Uglow, *The Wave*, 1989-97, Oil on canvas, 19.5”x39.5” | Private Collection.

his career in 1988. Close suffers from the neurological condition prosopagnosia that makes it difficult for him to recognize faces and he started to see color in fragments of shapes. From far away the painting is realistic, but as you walk close up, the image is broken down into abstract circles and dots.

This concept of combining realism and abstract visual qualities has influenced the way I want my paintings to look. The aesthetic quality of Close’s styles of painting, helped pave the way for the development of the inkjet printer (Biography.com Editors). I paint with the intention of creating this illusion, so that the viewer can be surprised and feel gratified when they discover a textural quality they could not see from a far. It draws them in, to get closer, to look at my painting. Seeing Chuck Close’s larger than life paintings helped me find a balance to capture this duality with paint in my subjects.

Similarly, there is a British painter, named Euan Uglow (1932-2000), who’s style combines Contemporary, Realist, and Observational art. In his painting, *The Wave* (1989-97), he has strong compositional design and uses precise measurements (Figure 43). He uses big

flat open shapes of color to depict transitions (Groff). My teacher taught me the importance of Uglow's painting/drawing method to help me with my approach as I was learning to paint the figure from observation. My teacher explained how he uses measurements and double checks his proportions over and over to capture accuracy during the process of painting (Groff). I was intrigued by this method and the mathematical approach. When I look at his paintings it reminds me of sculpting. Connecting my sculpting influence from my Dad, I gravitated to Uglow's approach and apply it to my process. I have always enjoyed sculpting with my



Figure 44. Detail of *Thankful Mind*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 40" x 40" | Private Collection



Figure 45. Lucian Freud, *Reflection Self Portrait*, 1985, Oil on canvas, 20" x 22"

hands and he helped me see how I can sculpt my paintings with paint and brushstrokes as you can see in my close-up painting of *Thankful Mind* (2018) (Figure 44). He paints from life with delicate observation and intensity to capture each shift in plane with different color and value temperature shift. I see my subjects the same way as I paint each plane of value and color with a different color brushstroke to model the form. When you step back and look at my painting, all the brushstrokes next to each other come together to look photorealistic.

British painter, Lucian Freud (1922-2011), is another artist that has influenced my outlook to observational painting. He is known as a Surrealist and Expressionist and falls into both Contemporary and Modern interpretations of Realism. I discovered him from a teacher shortly after I started my first attempt to paint, *Self Portrait*, from life. I observed his

painting, *Reflection Self Portrait* (1985) when I was frustrated during the process of painting it (Figure 45). I looked through a book filled with his paintings with intentions to learn so I can apply the teachings into my *Self-portrait* when I resumed painting it. I spent two hours studying his paintings in his book absorbing as much as I could to give me insight that I can apply to my own painting. Analyzing how he sculpted the figure with paint, gave me a blueprint of confidence to not be self-critical in how I apply paint, but to enjoy the action of applying it (Figure 46). After jotting

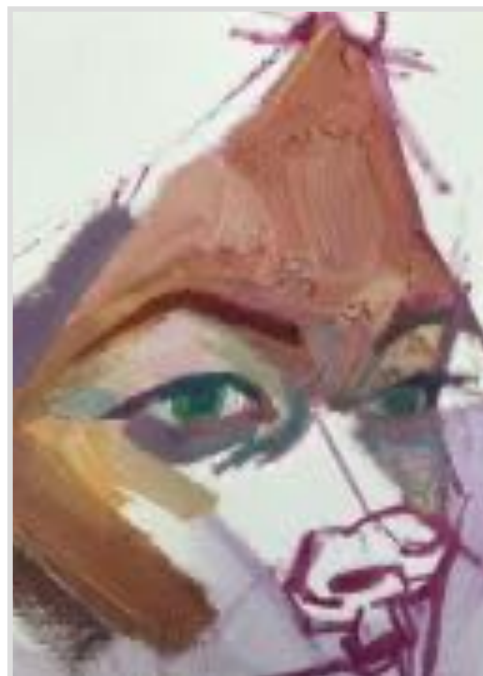


Figure 46. Beginning Stage of Painting a Portrait, 2018

down notes, my frustration to paint from life turned into love and appreciation. I was able to get into a positive mindset to embrace how I was observing myself from life and apply paint to canvas confidently to describe what I was seeing with no judgment as to how it will look. I was able to come to peace with myself to love how I was painting and fully enjoy the process of interpreting.

My first creative outlet was *plein air* painting when I was seven. It made me fall in love with expression because I was able to do it through paint and it brought me so much joy. From the first time I did it, I was hooked and wanted to paint for the rest of my life, it became a fact that I needed to do it for my happiness. I knew painting was the best way for me to express and when a brush was in my hand I felt I was being heard and my artwork was capturing my internal emotions. It has always been a dream of mine to go *plein air* painting in Europe and to visit historic museums to see paintings particularly from the Renaissance and Impressionist movement. While studying at Academy of Art University from 2013-2016,

I studied *plein air* painting in Florence, Italy for three months in the summer of 2015. While there I traveled all over Europe and saturated myself in art and culture, which has played a significant role in my creative endeavor as an emerging artist. The exposure influenced my interpretation of Expressionism.

Returning back to San Francisco for my senior year of college, I began to experience anxiety in my life. Connecting my stress triggers to visible paint on canvas made me feel that I was being heard. The oozing of paint blending together calmed my anxious mind and freed my racing thoughts. In addition, I was playing division two, collegiate volleyball all four years in college. I was traveling for games, double practices a day and limited time to paint. Balancing volleyball, my stress, personal life, and classes forced me to paint fast because I had limited time to paint for assignments. I developed a loose expressive style over the years. The tactility the paint application turned my chaotic feelings into ones I could control. Therefore, I continually gained more confidence to apply paint expressively.

Growing up I loved to paint, however I would get frustrated very easily if my drawings of figures and objects were inaccurate. My perfectionist personality had a desire to learn to paint/draw subjects realistically as you can see in my drawing that I did from life when I was fourteen years old (Figure 47). I have always appreciated the skills to paint realist and admired hyper realistic paintings. Before attending Academy of Art University where I learned all my painting skills, I was able to paint



Figure 47. Isabel Emrich, *Self Portrait*, 2007, Graphite on paper, 8"x 11" | Private Collection.

what I wanted but I did not have the formal training I wanted. Once I began taking classes and learning different techniques my realistic rendering skills improved. Realism combined with my expressive style has always felt most natural to me to paint.

Similar to the way in which environment in San Francisco peaked my interest in Art Nouveau, the historic architecture in the Netherlands, France, and Italy provoked my interest in Classical Realism and Impressionism that I have always wanted to see in person. While in Amsterdam, I was able to visit the

Rijksmuseum. There I saw many artists from the Impressionist movement and in particular my favorite painter, a Dutch-post Impressionist painter, Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Gogh's paintings stood out to me most the way he painted subjects not realistically but still identifiable with a lot of energy and movement, which gave me insight that a painting can have combinations of art movements, realism and abstraction, as you can see in his painting, *Sunflowers*

(1887) (Figure 48). I have always heard about him, but

it was not until this moment I really saw his paintings in person and realized how iconic his style is. I was mesmerized looking at his paint strokes and color combinations. He helped me



Figure 48. Vincent van Gogh, *Sunflowers*, 1887, Oil on canvas, 37"x 29" | Van Gogh Museum.



Figure 49. Vincent van Gogh, *Self Portrait as a Painter*, 1887-1888, Oil on canvas, 25"x 20" | Van Gogh Museum.

realize paintings are not photos, they are paintings, and should evoke emotion of the artist's internal landscape and it does not have to be completely realistic.

In Vincent van Gogh's painting, *Self Portrait as a Painter* (1887-1888), he used muted colors with dashes of bright color throughout the entire painting (Figure 49). In my interpretation, it portrayed a focused artist in a somber mood. Seeing how Gogh was able to evoke these feelings in his own style motivated me to do the same with my paintings in my own style. I was curious and it gave me the urge to apply more emotion and mood through my use of colors. Looking at Gogh's paintings, helped directed my thought process to focus on a specific color palette to support my internal emotion I am striving to portray. There is thought of a connection between



Figure 50. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889, Oil on canvas, 2'5"x3'0" | Van Gogh Museum.

Gogh's agitated mindset and the agitated atmosphere in his work (Lynch). From this, the colors that I chose for my self-portrait reflect my state of mind. I chose peaceful colors, blues, greens, light violets, yellows, and ranges that felt calm.

I also admired the way he depicts movement, with directional paint strokes and linear lines to create a spinning quality, as you can see in his painting *The Starry Night* (1889) (Figure 50). *The Starry Night* depicts the view from the east-facing window of his mental health asylum room at Saint-Remy-de-Provence, just before sunrise, with the addition of an idealized village. He is successful the way he captures his view of reality through his expression (Lynch). Looking at Gogh's paintings, helped directed me to apply paint expressively to release the tensing I had trapped inside me. Vincent van Gogh said that the only time he felt alive is when he was painting (Fox). The reason Gogh feels alive when

painting is because he is experiencing an increase of dopamine in his brain. It has been proven that painting creates happy feelings similarly to when humans fall in love (Fox). I experience joy when I apply paint which results in an energetic movement in my application.



Figure 51. Isabel *plein air* painting at Giardini di Villa Bardini in Florence, Italy, 2015

Art therapy focuses on abstract forms of communication that helps reduce stress, heal from trauma, increase self-esteem, be aware of your feelings, and calm the mind from anxiety (Frank). Painting is therapeutic for me to process the challenges I face.

Once I arrived to Florence, Italy, I began *plein air*

painting every day (Figure 51). I would allow myself to paint

unrealistic with colors to help

evoke the emotions I was feeling

in the moment similar to Gogh. I still referred to my classical training to paint the right value but when selecting colors, I went off my intuition and this allowed me to paint quickly without overthinking what I was doing, just allowing me to enjoy the experience. After my intentional attempt to do this,



Figure 52. Isabel Emrich, *Leather Market*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 9"x12" | Private Collection.

I surprised myself when I



Figure 53. Leather Market in Florence, Italy, 2015

Painted the leather market early in the morning from life, which resulted in, *Leather Market* (2015) (Figure 52). In comparison to my photo of the Leather Market, the color contrast in comparison from reality to the colors in the painting is proof how my color choices are a response to my emotional response from that experience and it shows

how I applied my learning from looking at Gogh's



Figure 54. Isabel Emrich, *Green Rocks*, 2015, Oil on panel, 48''x 36'' | Private Collection



Figure 55. Isabel Emrich, *Motherly Love*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 24''x 18'' | Private Collection.

paintings (Figure 53). The colors I used were completely different from reality, and I created a painting in my own style. I realized I was an intuitive painter. My natural intentions are to exaggerate reality slightly by using bright colors but still keeping realistic aspects.

While still in Florence, Italy, for my *plein air* study abroad, I was able to go see the painting in person, *Birth of Venus*

(1480) by Italian painter Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). It was a joyful moment admiring the gold shimmer on the painting

surface, that illuminated the figure and reminded me of swimming in the ocean and seeing the sunshine through the water and on the skin. This led me to paint, *Green Rocks*

(2016) when I returned home (Figure 54). The pose of the woman lying on her side on rocks underwater reminded me of the gentle pose of Venus. I admire the beauty of Venus and the

feminine quality she resembles with grace, love, beauty, and vulnerability. Her gesture is humble and gentle with her hand

placement, while also confident how she is standing. I further the idea of feminine beauty that was originally sparked by *Birth of Venus* in my thesis painting, *Motherly Love* (2019) (Figure 55). My intention was to capture similar feelings as the painting *Birth of Venus* represented but in my own way.

I was also able to see Italian artist Michelangelo's masterpiece sculpture, *David* (1501-1504) (Figure 56). It was breathtaking to witness the magnificent sculpture in real life and look closely to see the beautiful detail in the muscular forms he sculpted. It helped



Figure 56. Michelangelo, *David*, 1501-1504, Marble Sculpture, 17'6"x5' | Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, Italy | Photo by Isabel Emrich.



Figure 57. Isabel Emrich, *Female Torso*, 2013. 18" tall | Private Collection



Figure 58. Isabel Emrich, *Slithering Snake*, 2015, Copper, Brass, Quartz Crystals, 8"x 11" | Private Collection.

when I paint. Similar to the way in which the pose of *David* depicts confidence, I created *Salty Flow* (2016), which depicting a powerful female figure swimming confidently underwater (Figure 60). I want my artwork to be bold and convey strength and power like the *David*.

Seeing Michelangelo's artwork at The Vatican was mesmerizing to see how he painted narrative stories and it motivated me to try to paint narrative paintings as well. In

solidify my interest to sculpt form whether it is in a sculpture, painting, or jewelry form. I am fascinated to the detail of plane shifts on surfaces. It reminded me when I sculpted the beautiful form of the female body, *Female Torso* (2013) (Figure 57). When I made a necklace, *Slithering Snake* (2015), my attention to surfaces was challenged further when I used my hands to manipulate the structure of the metal to aesthetically arrange the metal and

stones together (Figure 58). Through creating in different art forms, I solidified my approach of free forming in the process. I paint in a sculptural way as you can see in my close-up photo of the female torso in my painting *Contemplation* (2018) (Figure 59). Dappling in other art forms helps me improve the way I see form and describe it



Figure 59. Detail of *Contemplation*, 2018



Figure 60. Isabel Emrich, *Salty Flow*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 36''x 36'' | Sold

addition, viewing the Siena Cathedral in Italy informed me more about narrative paintings. The excessive amount of patterns, color, and textures resonated with me and made me feel immersed in history and religion that I later have applied a similarity of excessive patterns in my paintings (Figure 61).

This experience helped me translate my own experiences by totally immersing myself into the present.

Narrative art illustrates or tells a story. It explains self-explanatory events from daily life or those drawn from a text. It links to history and the beginning of expression through visual imagery (Bacigalupi). All my figure paintings are a single figure in an abstract space. I wanted to take on the challenge to paint multiple figures doing an action in an identifiable space. His influence motivated me to



Figure 61. Siena Cathedral, Italy, 2015



Figure 62. Isabel Emrich, *Dance with Joy*. Thumbnail Sketch, 2019, Graphite on paper, 14''x 11'' | Private Collection.

challenge my skills to paint something I have never done before. I have embarked on this challenge to paint, *Dance with Joy* (2019), which depicts two female figures repeated dancing in a field of sunflowers (Figure 62). I am still in the process of painting it, as I have never painted a multi figure before. I have learned when I look to other artist, it sparks a desire to challenge myself to embrace growth during my journey to become my best.

My family influences and the passions they have shared

with me since I was a child shaped my aesthetics as I embarked from my nesting home to explore the world and expand my understanding of different cultures and art movements. After attending Academy of Art University, I had classical training that I needed and took it further into my Master of Fine Arts program at Laguna College of Art and Design. I found and fortified my expressive voice. With expanding my knowledge on historic artists, I have been exposed to many different subjects, styles, and approaches that I have adopted bits and pieces here and there to form my own style to support my artistic voice. Knowing who I am helps direct my approach to the different methods I approach to painting.

METHODOLOGY

Everything I paint is personal and has a connection to my internal state. I paint the process and modes of creating. The birthing of an experience and the transition of letting it mature to become. Each painting is a snapshot moment of my interpretation of the change and time of life I am witnessing. I am fascinated by the transitions and find them beautiful. Whether it is a sunset I am witnessing warm up my skin and transform my surrounding landscape golden and watching the colors fade to darkness, or seeing over time a woman become a mother and nurture her baby as they grow older with her husband. These tender moments in life have immense value that I pay close attention to and want to honor in my artwork. I give complete credit to my Creator, God, for every moment that I treasure. I am celebrating life for what it is gratefully. My paintings are a continuous cycle of beginning to ends from infinite experiences of learning and embracing life in the now.

My creative process begins in collaboration with my Creator of nature, God. In this spirit, I listen to the beat of my surroundings and dance in rhythm to the vibration it sends through my soul. I am a portal linking creation with my Creator. The process in which I

transport an idea into fine art never changes, but because I am an intuitive painter, it is my nature to vary my approach to the subject depending on what I feel I need to communicate. Therefore, the approach I take ranges from studying a subject in long pose or short pose, painting in *plein air*, using a photo reference, to drawing from imagination/abstraction. As a result, my artwork is expressive and representational. I paint subjects realistically with expressive techniques in response to what I am feeling from my experiences. I translate and transfer experience.

Bouncing around living situations has influenced my approach to making art. As I have grown as an artist, I have learned to be more and more adaptable and versatile. Any place can become my studio. My creative environment is my portal into the spiritual. It opens wherever my essential supplies and references find me. They are the keys and directions to this other world in which I am entering. I know I am there when the physical world fades and the spiritual, creative space opens up. In this way, I become the portal for my audience, transporting them towards a feeling, a memory, and a sense of possibility or healing through my art. I connect with them spiritually; meet them in that space, and we bear witness of each other's experience as a result.

In order for me to thrive in constant transit, I find that my mind, spirit, and heart must be in unison. God is in my creative environment and when I am aware of that, he becomes my portal to a place of creation in any space. When I am in communion with God, I can be the portal for others. Wherever I go, I am aware of God in my surroundings and when the spark of inspiration comes to me from him, I follow it to create in that moment. I am constantly tuning into my five senses when I am in nature, paying attention to the details for

this reason. In this way, inspiration is constantly around me. Whether I wake up hearing birds singing, I smell a beautiful blossomed rose on a walk, or seeing a colorful sunset at the end of my day, the beauty of nature brings me joy. I appreciate these joyful moments that I experience when I connect with nature throughout my day. These moments that make me feel something deep and refreshes my mood inspires me as an artist.

In studying the becoming stages of life, I am seeking to understand the relationship I have with myself, and the people in my life. I value relationships and long for connections. Life is chaotic. By painting my experiences, my relationships, and my travels, I feel grounded, peaceful and safe. I find healing and clarity to understand others and myself. Painting helps me make sense of the world I live in. To capture this understanding, I dissect what I am seeing and interpret how it is making me feel. I do not strive to paint what I am seeing in a hyper realistic way, but rather use paint to sculpt the feeling of the moment in a way in which others can relate and share. I stand for myself and strive to become my best by following this deep need to understand and accept where I am at in my life. During the physical act of painting, I gain clarity and therefore understand the purpose of my intention of what I am painting. I do not have all the answers, I am just trying to process my understanding of who I am in the world by valuing my relationships, learning from others, and my experiences to better myself and help those around me.

My supplies are crucial because without them I cannot create. Until recently, I had never had a fixed studio space to create. Since it has always been important for my supplies to be portable, at minimum, I am always carrying some combination of a sketchbook, a pen, watercolors, color pencils, and my camera. A condensed version of my studio with all the

supplies I need are all packed in a backpack ready to go. It holds a variety of oil paint tubes,



Figure 63. Isabel Emrich in her MFA studio at Laguna College of Art + Design, 2017-2019.

brushes, painting knife, portable easel called a *pochade* box, tripod, paper towels, sketchbook, pencil, paint thinner, and a canvas. I take this backpack with me everywhere I go, in my car or flying to a different location.

When the opportunity allows me

to have a fixed studio space, I have the freedom to arrange my space however I choose to. I

have a basket where I store all my paints. I also have oil pastels, watercolor paints and

pencils, and charcoal pencils in my studio. I use a big ceramic pot that my sister made to

store my brushes. I find that having sentimental pieces and homemade artifacts in my studio

are important to me because they represent my values and aesthetic. I have two giant easels

in my studio, with a chair to sit and paint or I can adjust the easel and stand and paint

depending on my mood (Figure 63). I have rulers of different sizes to grid out the

composition on my surface if I choose to, or I will free hand draw out the composition. I have

multiple mirrors in my studio so I can look at my paintings through the mirror reflection to

recognize any corrections I see, or I practice painting or drawing from life. I prefer to paint

with natural lighting so I keep my curtains open.

If I am painting at night I turn on the ceiling lights and my portable spot light that is adjustable. My studio is filled with all of my paintings in progress and I work on multiple paints at a time, jumping from one to another. Some finished paintings remain on the wall as

goals to finish my paintings. I add lots of plants and keep small trinkets in my studio that remind me of my family and friends. Knowing and keeping them close helps me feel “at home” and therefore safe to create in my space even if I am all by myself. I have all my supplies with me in my studio always ready to create.

Along with my supplies, I also need a reference in order to paint. My reference is the visual scene from life that I am gravitating towards that sparks the fire of inspiration within me to recreate it. My reference can be anything from a person, an experience, an object or a landscape view from life or a photo I have taken. Usually it is a combination of all that drives me to paint it, it is my way of processing reality. I collect my references wherever I go documenting my experiences I have daily, whether it is through a photo, a pen and paper, a word or thought, it can all be used as a reference for a painting.

Painting from Life

My painting, *Motherhood* (2019), is a typical example of how I paint from life observation (Figure 64). It was a memorable moment seeing my sister holding her first baby shortly after she gave birth. I stayed with her as she nursed him. Witnessing the bond between my sister and her child form in front of me was miraculous and made me compelled to paint it. This bond was a reminder how much a baby relies on his mother for survival, comfort, and growth. I wanted to capture the beauty in this life observation,



Figure 64. Isabel Emrich, *Motherhood*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 60” x 48” | Private Collection.



Figure 65. Isabel Emrich, *Brigitte and Finn*, 2018, Graphite on paper, 12"x9" | Brigitte Mackay.

but there was a particular challenge in this subject matter. For starters, when I typically paint from life, the subject stays still for a long period of time. With this situation, my nephew, Finn, rarely sat still since he is barely one year one. He moves constantly even as he is napping every afternoon next to my sister as she is nursing him to sleep. I had to test out the experience to see how long Brigitte and Finn would stay still during this time. The sketch lasted twenty minutes before they moved. I knew this would require hard work and patience,

resulting I would have to paint fast.

I knew I wanted to paint them life size to capture the reality of them and the bond. Once I decided what point of view I wanted to paint, I sketched the interaction during the time I will paint them to work out the composition on paper before I started painting. You can see in my twenty-minute drawing, *Brigitte and Finn* (2018) that was my blueprint before I started the painting (Figure 66). This sketch gave me confident in myself that I would be able to capture the interaction with paint over the course of time. I knew my speedy painting skills will work towards my advantage for this painting, and I will have to follow my intuition (Figure 67). I viewed this challenge as a learning experience. I stayed consistent to paint them during the same time of day to keep the lighting consistent.



Figure 66. Isabel Emrich, Drawing stage of *Motherhood*, 2018, oil on canvas, 48" x 60" | Private Collection.



Figure 67. Detail of *Motherhood*, 2019

I started every session with a quick outline sketch in paint for placement on the canvas. I would look at my sister and her son and ask myself: *What color am I feeling?* Then I would dab my brush in that color and a dip in oil to dilute the paint. Between every twenty to forty minutes, they shifted. Instead of getting frustrated and stopping, I would dip my brush in a slightly different color, for example scarlet red, and kept drawing what I was seeing (Figure 67). I never was able to finish a single pose. Therefore, I continuously changed the colors every time they shifted to help me distinguish the movements. I continued to render the painting this way, covering the canvas piece by piece over the course of two months until I felt the painting accurately captured the feeling of the evolving intimate bond between a mother and child. After painting, *Motherhood*, I realized during this process I was capturing time also. I was only able to paint in short increments of time and all the shifts added up later and eventually created the feeling I wanted to capture.

Plein Air Painting

My approach to *plein air* painting always begins by exploring a particular location. Typically, my *plein air* paintings are my quick small studies that I usually spend about an hour on because the light changes quickly causing shifts in shadows and light shapes. If this happens, I will start the painting on location (Figure 68). Then I will finish it up in my studio using the reference photos I took on location such as *Golden Hour* (2019) (Figure 69). Using



Figure 68. Isabel *plein air* painting on the Ranch, Pismo Beach, California, 2019.

both the photo and my beginning stage of the painting as references, I then have a good direction to complete it.

In my painting *Arch to the Sea* (2018), was painted beginning to end on location at the Montage Cliffs in Laguna Beach (Figure 70). As I was walking along the cliffs and saw a beautiful harsh contrast of light, value, and color where the sea and arch cliff was, I knew I wanted to paint the vista. I could visualize the painting so I stopped to get all set up and ready to paint.

I had taken out my sketchbook and drew quick thumbnail sketches of compositions. Once I settled on the best composition, I took a photo of it to reference later in the event I would need it. I started with a general line drawing and then began to add big blocks of color, separating the shadow and light shapes, painting dark to light, thick to thin paint quality, which is a general rule I follow (Figure 71). I, then, added the mid tones and finally the highlights building up thick opaque paint. I used big brushes and lots of paint to translate what I was feeling and experiencing. The lighting changed so



Figure 69. Isabel Emrich, *Golden Hour*, 2019, Oil on



Figure 70. Isabel Emrich, *Arch to the Sea*, 2018, Oil on canvas panel, 5" x 7" | Private Collection.

quickly, therefore, I needed to paint faster to capture my interpretation of what I was seeing in the short amount of time. Once I felt the painting expressed the initial feeling I was drawn



Figure 71. Isabel *plein air* painting in block stage of *Arch to the Sea*, Montage, Laguna Beach, California, 2018

to from the landscape I saw in the beginning, I knew the painting was done.

Studio Work

Most of my artwork is completed in my studio.

Anything that is intriguing me and makes me

happy during my everyday life I will take a photo

of and it may potentially lead to a painting. I also

enjoy free diving and taking pictures of my friends,

family, and myself when I am underwater with my GoPro®, which is an underwater camera.

I love documenting experiences as I joyfully explore new territory. Later, I upload all the photos to my computer and I go through them selecting the strongest pictures that I feel will translate into a painting.

For example, in my painting, *Environmental Dream* (2018), I had selected two different photo references to help me develop the final painting (Figure 72). The green colors I selected to use were inspired from exploring the oceans in Thailand, as you can see

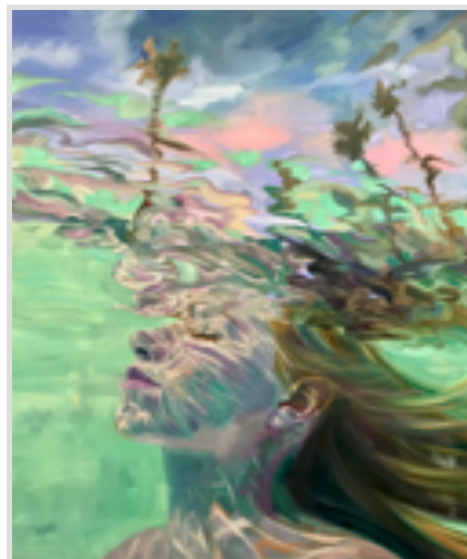


Figure 72. Isabel Emrich. *Environmental Dream*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 48" x 36" | Sold.

in the photo reference (Figure 73). The other photo with the figure was photographed in a pool after my trip because I was not able to get one exact photo of what I wanted for my

envisioned painting from Thailand (Figure 74). Looking at both photos as references, I started drawing a general outline and then I applied paint, dark to light. While continuously looking at both of my reference photos for guidance, I remembered



Figure 74. GoPro ®, Mel in a Pool | Photo by Isabel Emrich, 2018.

my feelings that I felt in the moment in Thailand to help me paint my vision. I continued to paint until I was happy with the result. I did not copy the photo references perfectly, I used them as a starting point to then add my own expression of interpretation to the painting by changing the colors and exaggerate the *Chroma* to help communicate my love and excitement until I was satisfied.



Figure 73. GoPro®, Ocean at Phi Phi Island, Thailand | Photo by Isabel Emrich, 2017

My painting, *Sweet Olivia* (2019), is another example of my process to develop a painting in my studio (Figure 75). Olivia visited my studio and I began painting her from life observation. I painted her reading a book in a chair. I only had three hours to paint her. I captured as much as I could in that short amount of time (Figure 76). Once she left, I began to



Figure 75. Isabel Emrich, *Sweet Olivia*, 2019, Oil on canvas. 36" x 36" | Private Collection.

further develop the painting slowly over time using my imagination. I followed my intuition and with trial and error I made drastic changes until the painting felt right. When looking at the painting, I felt the background needed to be darker to contrast her face so I added dark ultramarine blue. Then I changed the shape of the chair she was in. I added a plant in the foreground to show depth. I made the book smaller and changed her pants into a skirt. During this process, I wrote down characteristics of Olivia to apply it to the painting. She has her own kerchief business so I decided to paint one on her neck. I added multiple patterns and objects from my imagination to help strengthen the painting and portray Olivia.

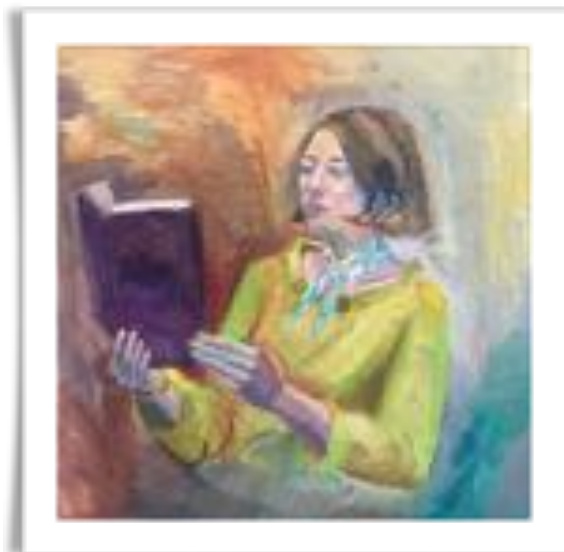


Figure 76. Beginning Stage of *Sweet Olivia*, 2019

Some experiences are not intended to become paintings, but they do. This was the case for my painting, *Different States of Mind* (2018) (Figure 77). I was visiting my friend who happens to be a photographer. She took photos of me jumping on a trampoline



Figure 77. Isabel Emrich, *Different States of Mind*, 2018, Oil on canvas. 36" x 48" | Private Collection

expressing different emotions using my hands, facial expressions, and gestures. After she sent me the photos, I was inspired seeing the photos she took. It guided me to the thought that our emotions are constantly changing during the different stages of life. I picked three different expressions from three photos she took and I

decided to use them as references for a painting. I overlapped the three photos in Photoshop and adjusted the opacity (Figure 78). I composed by adjusting the lighting, color, and crop to design the composition. I decided what canvas size is best with the subject. I printed out the photo, bought the canvas, and took it to my studio to paint.



Figure 78. Photoshop Reference Photo for *Different States of Mind*, 2018

Layer after layer I applied paint until I was satisfied and my idea was visually seen on canvas.

Overview of Methods

Whether I am painting from life, *plein air* or in studio, I always begin by asking myself- *What do I want to say? How can I say it?* I journal and begin composing a painting. I say a prayer of gratitude and ask for guidance and focus to be able to capture the inspiration and feelings I want to portray in my artwork. This gives me the peace and confidence to begin. I then carefully start drawing the composition onto the canvas, listening to music as I am concentrating to capture the shapes accurately. I refer back to my initial vision of inspiration from nature or a specific person to help me tap into my intuition of what the painting needs. I take breaks to get a fresh vision of my subject and I adjust the drawing if it is needed.

I always start my paintings with an overview line drawing of the placement of my subject as you can see in my beginning stage of my painting *Speak up* (Figure 80). Other



Figure 79. Beginning Stages of *Speak Up*.

times if the detail is too intricate and I am painting it large scale, I will use a grid method to transfer the drawing (Figure 81). This technique is used to speed up the drawing process and to create a higher chance of accuracy. Second, having the drawing locked down on canvas before I start painting gives me confidence to be free forming in my expression and not hold back when I apply paint in a sculptural way when developing the painting. As I continued to apply paint to cover the canvas, I make changes, continuously checking my proportions, as needed until I complete the final painting. I find my rhythm and get in the zone when applying paint. I turn up my energy and begin to mix the colors and apply the paint to my dance of expression. It also allows me to apply unrealistic colors and be creative in creating different texture. I do this by twisting my brush, applying different pressures to the surface, scraping paint off, laying thick paint on top of wet runny paint, carving a new color of paint on dry surface and so forth the application is endless.

I enjoy the free forming expressive part of my creative process where I tend to disrupt identifiable representation with blurring edges and applying paint in an unformed matter to go against the structure of the object. This is where my abstract quality of painting comes in. I paint as a response of my



Figure 80. Example of Using the Grid, Commission of *Green Rocks*, 2019

feelings to my subjects, letting go of the outcome. I destroy parts of my painting by editing the image and making choices to cover realistic areas I have already painted to create a feeling and emotion I want instead of being literal with what is visible, for example *Emerging* (2019) has disrupted areas in the face from hints of flowers (Figure 81). Parts of my paintings are realistic and have volume that shows form and other parts are unidentifiable. Over time, this layering of linear elements has caused me to flatten objects and surfaces while still modeling form in a realistic way. This technique developed when trying to capture movement of bodies moving positions resulting to disrupt the space. I am using shapes and color to communicate. I use patterns and abstract shapes with color and application to blend into and out of the subject, exploring space and depth. By doing this, areas of my painting become abstract and other areas are realistic. It allows the subjects to totally merge into one another.



Figure 81. Isabel Emrich, *Emerging*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 5" x 5" | Private Collection.

My paintings are colorful because that is how I see the world. I do my best to paint the color I am seeing realistically, however, it comes out more vibrant and exaggerated. I naturally exaggerate color and intentionally leave it because color makes me happy. I see color before I see value. I pick the color based off of how I am feeling and what I am seeing but then I double check if the value is true to life. As long as the value is correct, I am satisfied. The color is my interpretation to how I am responding to the subject and how it is

making me feel in that moment. I believe when I look at the subject I am trying to analyze what I am seeing and try to understand what it is. I look beyond the visual appearance and follow my intuition. My mood has an effect in the color I choose to select in the moment. Everything I see has meaning and life to it by existing where it is. I try to honor it by painting what it is with my joy. It is my nature of who I am to see things in a positive way so I choose to portray that by selecting bright colors. I paint my subjects as close to life size as possible because I am most comfortable painting large scale and I want the viewer to be immediately engaged with the scale, colors, and application of paint that describes the subject I am painting.

When I apply paint, I am communicating. I am describing what I am seeing and feeling and I want the viewer to hear me through my visible marks and paint application. I paint with thick marks because I like to see the result of my application on the surface. It is part of my language when expressing. It reminds me of sculpting thick glops of clay as well as frosting a cake, which is luscious and creamy that satisfies my appeal. I follow my intuition in every decision by interpreting the color and how I apply paint is my response to my subject. I paint quickly as if I am having a conversation with my subject. I mostly paint on white canvas, sometimes wood panel, but I am not picky with the surface because I paint so thick and create my own textures during the painting process. Sometimes I paint over old paintings and let the under painting show through the top surface. The value changes do not distract me. I leave parts of the under painting showing through if it is the correct value. I love seeing the history of paintings. I utilize space by painting every part of the canvas with intention. I will sometimes paint less thick with less detail and other areas with more detail

and more paint depending on what I want to emphasize in the painting. Other times I will paint bold and loose, leaving out information. I enjoy the mixture and contrast of realism and abstraction. Giving the viewer areas I want them to understand clearly and other areas indicating ideas for them to solve. Depending on the subject, I will approach the painting in different ways, responding through my color choices and paint application. This balance allows me to communicate my experiences and feelings that resonate truthfully.

My method stems from my emotions and how I translate it through paint. How I arrive to the final painting changes depending on the situation and what I am painting and what sparked my desire to paint it. The challenge to arrive to the final product is satisfying and leaves me hungry for more. It sparks my curiosity to try new approaches to keep me engaged. I celebrate the moments of growth during the process. My color choices and brushwork will always remain the same. To sustain my portal, I must return back to the state of mind with my key and map to be able to continue to create and get to the final product. The progress of my artwork coming to life is validation that my creative environment is where I allow it to be. Each final painting is the end of that small portal. I have many portals because they change depending on circumstances. I never let anything stop me from creating. I am always prepared to create and let my portal open by using my key and map to channel my motivation and desire to create over and over again until I have a final product.

CONCLUSION

All of these paintings have taken me on an emotional and psychological journey that captures what I am becoming as a woman and artist. They developed from my personal experiences and shared experiences that help me celebrate life joyfully during the becoming

stages of my life. I am manifesting my spiritual, emotional, and internal state of mind in tangible things. In being present and being physical with my paint application, I have learned and I am continuing to learn how to articulate my internal landscape. I paint fast, thick and often with a lot of color because it makes me happy. Applying paint in this way feels amazing and satisfying. It is a physical way for me to express myself in a healthy way. It releases my stress, worries, anger, frustration, joy, love, and cravings. When I am expressing in painting, I am present and in tune with trying to channel my pure spirit into physical tangible paint. When I paint fast I am able to trust my intuition and be present. I don't overthink what I am doing, which allows me to be free and express without order. Each painting is a portal to my soul. I am painting my beautiful life and the experiences I have. Although my paintings are different from each other, collectively they focus on my love for life and what I find beautiful through my lens of expression.

Vincent Van Gogh said it best, "I am seeking, I am striving, I am in it with all my heart. I am on a continuous journey of expressing what I know to be true. While seeking love and joy from my own life experiences and through the connections I make with those around me." In the last two years I have done what I set out to do, totally immerse myself in learning and embracing the growth from uncomfortable challenges that I have overcome while in Graduate school. I have deepened my understanding of who I am. I have gained a closer connection to God, my family, friends, and my surroundings. I have strengthened my technical skills, strengthened my critical thinking skills, and gained tremendous confidence in myself. I love who I have become. I have the skills to confidently paint whatever I want. I also have the skills to paint any subject I may find challenging. I have found my voice in my brushstroke and through my decisive color choices that I can confidently express my internal

landscape through the various methods I have developed. I have the confidence to paint wherever I want as long as I have my map and key because I am the director of my visions creator of my paintings. I have become a free forming artist that knows my voice and communicates it to the world for them to absorb and resonate with joy. I feel gratitude and I am totally immersed moving forward because I have the tools I need to be able to have the freedom to express my artistic visions as I continue to grow into the beautiful flower I have been planted to become by God.

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APPENDIX



Plate 1: Isabel Emrich, *Confidence*, 2017, Oil on vellum, 8"x 11" | Private Collection.



Plate 2: Isabel Emrich, *Speaking from the HEART!* 2018, Oil on canvas, 60"x 36" | Private Collection.



Plate 3: Isabel Emrich, *Boat for Two*, 2018, Oil on panel, 5"x 7" | Bob Carroll



Plate 4: Isabel Emrich, *Divergent*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 48"x 30" | Sold



Plate 5: Isabel Emrich, *Kelsea*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 14"x 11" | Private Collection.



Plate 6: Isabel Emrich, *Ocean Floor*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 36"x 24" | Private Collection.



Plate 7: Isabel Emrich, *Investigation*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 9”x 12” | Private Collection.



Plate 8: Isabel Emrich, *Three Palms*, 2017, Oil on panel, 9"x 12" | Private Collection.



Plate 9: Isabel Emrich, *Lookout*, 2018, Oil on panel, 5" x 7" | Chandler Mankins.



Plate 10: Isabel Emrich, *Self Portrait at Sunset* (unfinished), 2018, Oil on canvas, 24"x 20" | Private Collection.



Plate 11: Isabel Emrich, *Tree of Life*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 30" x 20" | Private Collection.



Plate 12: Isabel Emrich, *Crystal Clear*, 2017, Oil on three sheets of plexi-glass, 32"x 30" | Private Collection.



Plate 13: Isabel Emrich, *Hand Sewn*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 24"x 18" | Chapman University



Plate 14: Isabel Emrich, *Spring Blossoms*, 2018, Oil on panel, 6"x10" | Sold



Plate 15: Isabel Emrich, *Calm Brilliance*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 48" x 48" | Sold



Plate 16: Isabel Emrich, *Ocean Embrace*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 40"x30" | Sold.



Plate 17: Isabel Emrich, *Joey*, 2018, Oil on panel, 10" x 14" | Private Collection.



Plate 18: Isabel Emrich, *To the Point*, 2018, Graphite on paper, 14"x 16" | Private Collection.



Plate 19: Isabel Emrich, *Tornado* (unfinished), Oil on canvas, 2017, 48"x 72" | Private Collection.



Plate 20: Isabel Emrich, *Tension*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 30" x 40" | Private Collection.



Plate 21: Isabel Emrich, *Queen of the Sea*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 30" x 40" | Private Collection.



Plate 22: Isabel Emrich, *Do Not Blend In*, 2017, Oil on canvas panel, 7" x 9" | Private Collection.



Plate 23: Isabel Emrich, *Sam*, 2018, Oil on canvas panel, 14" x 11" | Private Collection.



Plate 24: Isabel Emrich, *Spinning*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 8" x 10" | Private Collection.



Plate 25: Isabel Emrich, *Jenny*, 2018, Oil on canvas panel, 9" x 12" | Private Collection.



Plate 26: Isabel Emrich, *Peculiar*, 2019, Oil on canvas, 9" x 12" | Private Collection.



Plate 27: Isabel Emrich, *Dumbledore*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 11" x 14" | Private Collection.



Plate 28: Isabel Emrich, *My Soulmate*, 2018, Graphite on paper, 11" x 14" | Chandler Mankins.

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