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About Men: A Retrospective into the Evolution of the Male Form through the Female Gaze

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ABOUT MEN: A RETROSPECTIVE INTO THE EVOLUTION OF THE MALE FORM
THROUGH THE FEMALE GAZE

A Thesis

by

LAURA BRISEÑO

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

December 2018

Major of Subject: Studio Art

ABOUT MEN: A RETROSPECTIVE INTO THE EVOLUTION OF THE MALE FORM
THROUGH THE FEMALE GAZE

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December 2018

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ABSTRACT

Briseño, Laura. About Men: A Retrospective Into the Male Form Through the Female Gaze.

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It is philosophized that subjectivity is founded on subjection, a subjection based on the viewpoint of the viewer. Through the centuries the idea of the male form has been transformed through various representations from the context of art, architecture, and culture from Ancient Greece (Classical period of 5th and 4th centuries BC) to Contemporary art (1946-present).

The purpose is to create an exhibition that promotes a female gaze on the representations of the male form through or in art. Examining how and why male forms are represented in the content we know them as of current curation, which brings about the idea that man becomes subject, and is seen as subject.

DEDICATION

The completion of my studies would not have been possible without the support of my parents, my father, Edelmiro Briseño and my mother, Frances Reyes Briseño. Thank you for your love and patience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I always be grateful to Dr. Robert Bradley, chair of my dissertation committee, for all his mentoring and advice. My thanks go to my dissertation committee members: Dr. Carlos De Souza, Paul Valadez, and Marcus Farris. Their advice, input, and comments on my thesis helped to ensure the quality of my intellectual work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is this very personal moment when one stands before a work of art. The room grows rapidly quiet, and we no longer hear the three-year-old child screaming moments earlier in the room. You, the viewer are in a dark void, where only the artwork and the viewer exist. In this moment, you are having a personal conversation to a certain extent, which is only limited by the thoughts of the viewer. The artwork and the viewer are connected. If the artist is successful in this moment of connection, the viewer will walk away with an idea or feeling. This moment is what we as artist spend our lives working towards, holding the viewer captivated.

I can recall the moment I walked through the Getty Museum in Los Angeles during the summer of 2016. It was one of those hot summer days that forces you to run into the exhibition room fanning your brow and adjusting to the light in the room. The classic white walls held framed silver-toned photographs of men, but not any men, Robert Mapplethorpe's men. I remember instantly connecting to these images of men expressing a juxtaposition to society's conservatism. Mapplethorpe had this pattern of pushing taboo desires by how he composed his subject within the frame, taking intimate close ups of buttocks and genitals. He focused his work mainly on men, and I found these images intriguing. I connected with his love of men, and felt an under layer of beauty. What makes a man beautiful, pretty, lovely, graceful? And why is the male form so alluring to the eye?

I could not help but pursue this thought further in my art practice. If I could look at men as flowers, then how has and is the male nude represented in art? Thus, the following is my retrospective on the nude male figure in art.

The Problem with Male Nudes

There is a moment for wanting change in how the human figure is represented in art. I struggled at first to conceptualize my thoughts and feelings towards which gender as the focus of my research before I settled on men. Through the centuries the idea of the male form has been transformed through various representations from the context of art, architecture, and culture from Ancient Greece (Classical period of 5th and 4th centuries BC) to Contemporary art (1946-present). It is an Artist's foundational training to focus on the study and analysis of the representation of the human figure. We look at how to understand the phenomenon of the existence of self in Man in a manner of exploration by application. Its Man's awaking of "actual self" which presents attributes that you believe you actually possess, or that you believe others believe you possess. It is a self-based concept to how we view the human body as one of the most prized themes. Man becomes the theme of masculinity with its brute strength and vitality, while Woman becomes the subject of beauty and mother. These ideas of labels form the philosophy of Judith Butler's subjection. Butler's subjectivity is founded on subjection, a subjection based on the viewpoint of the viewer. The viewpoint can be vocalized by how eye-sight is interpreted by the viewer on a work of art. Its interpretation has transition through cultural conceptions of gender identities, and responsibilities. This idea of gender, and roles we have been subjected to, and the power held over how we process each other's motives. Questioning how we treat the male nude in art, or as an art form.

Statement of Purpose

The male nude is in crisis today due to the history of its treatment. Popularity lacks due to a variety of social standards and economic backing. One could even say it is in a state of extinction as male artists continue to proceed in the focus of female nudes, and female artists attack back by controlling how they want the female nude viewed, thus painting more female nudes. I wanted to voice my own thoughts on this subject, but I didn't want to be another female artist painting female nudes. The attempt was to understand the imagery of masculinity through the decades in an attempt to redefine how the female artist can view the male form as feminine. Resulting in the application of this thought process to create a collection of art to be exhibited for the purpose of this topic, the male nude as subject.

Opening a conversation as to where we should start bringing about changes in our cultural perspective, therefore understanding that we are not restrained to the functioning narratives we play as humans. But more importantly we should celebrate human as human and not as gender by creating works which blur the lines of cultural stigma. The following is my research on creating an art practice which uses applications and provides a retrospective of works which celebrate or question the idea of subject of the male nude.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Defining Eyesight

The Cambridge dictionary defines eyesight as the ability to see. The question is how do we use our eyesight to interpret what we are seeing? And more importantly, how do we use our eyesight to view a work of art? Our use of eyesight determines how we examine what we are seeing. So how do we “see” art? And is there a process or practice in which the viewer should follow in order to view a work of art? I spent a long time processing these questions as I went from lecture to lecture in various galleries. Sitting in group discussions and artist panels discussing a work of art before us like one sitting at a dining table picking away at the bone. Many practices were similar, and yet I feel the best one came from an interactive touring at Art Museums Sessions at LACMA. The museum provides sessions to build a community of understanding by constructing meanings from a work of art in a group setting. A safe and open environment is created by the museum curators, as a small group sits before a work of art. In March of 2018 I joined one of these small group discussions to look at the work of Mark Bradford’s 150 Portrait Tone (2017) at LACMA.

150 Portrait Tone is based on an idea for a work that Bradford conceived after the fatal shooting of Philando Castile by a police officer in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in July 2016. Castile, a nutrition services supervisor at an elementary school, was shot after being pulled over in his car

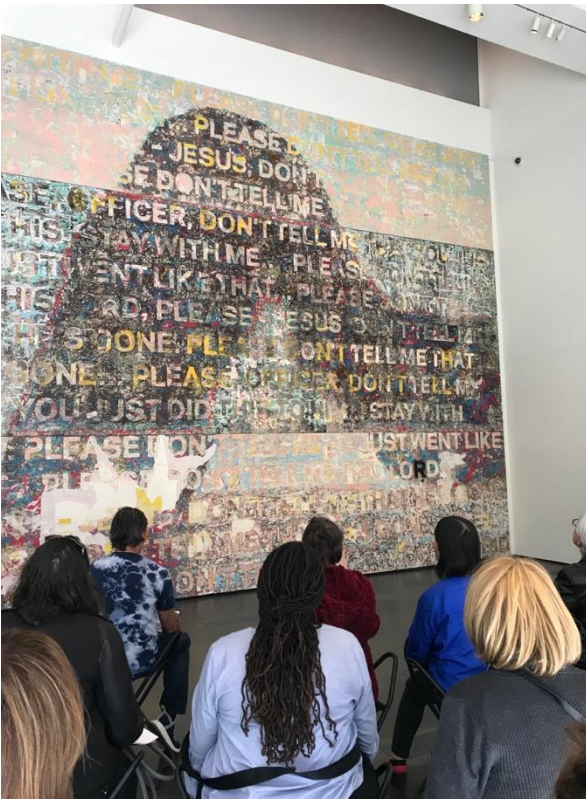
—an incident that was live-streamed on Facebook by Castile’s girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, who was sitting in the passenger seat next to him (King 2017). The large-scale painting is a response to the treatment of life in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. It follows Bradford’s stylization of the mural-size compositions, which contain elements of both abstraction and realism. His pattern of layering paint over text renders the words of the victim almost illegible. And the use of pink acrylic mimicking the flesh color tone from a Crayola box, which is now obsolete, questions social concepts of skin tone. Yet before the viewer can interpret Bradford’s work, the viewer must learn how to see.

A systematic Museum practice is therefore taught to our small discussion group before we even began to talk about the work. I will now share this practice, as it helps prepare the viewer’s eyesight. The steps are as follow:

First you will clear your eyesight as you stand in front of the art work. Simply close your eyes for a few seconds, thinking of nothing. Then slowly open them, letting them absorb the art work as a whole picture, taking no longer than five minutes before once again closing your eyes. This time think about what you just saw, spend about ten minutes in your thoughts processing the art work you just saw. Now open your eyes, and this time take a full thirty minutes fine tuning your eyes to every detail of the work. Close once again for the final time, and let your mind search for understanding in what you have just studied in the art work for another ten minutes. Now as you quietly contemplate what you just saw; do you feel you understand or connect with the work of art? Are you now “seeing” the art work in front of you in a very different light?

Museum practice dictates that we should be spending at minimum of forty-five minutes studying a work of art. I doubt that in this day in age of cell phones and internet the average person spends more than five minutes focusing on a work art. This becomes problematic when one

considers the amount of hours an artist invest into their work vs. the amount of time the viewer views the work. Eyesight becomes more than just seeing, but a meditation of connecting the eyes and the brain to create an experience. How we determine the outcome of such experience is solely based on our personal background and system of values. Thus, eyesight in art is more than just “seeing,” but a compilation of factors based on the individual viewer.



[Figure 1. Group discussion in front of Mark Bradford, 150 Portrait Tone, 2017, at LACMA. photograph by author 2018]

Analysis of the Eye

So you’ve mastered how to “see” a work of art, and you maybe wondering “what now.” The next step as the viewer is to analyze what they are seeing in a work of art. There are two view points to analyzing one’s response based on emotion and conceptual thought. When we write or verbalize our emotions from a work of art, we become Art critics. We base our emotions off of a structured formulation which steams from foundations in elements and principles of design. Unlike

the Art historian who's writings are a theory of historical studies. The stylization is more objective and documental in recording the art work. In *Art History and Art Criticism*, John Turpin best sums up the battle between Art historian and Art critic as follows:

Let it be said at the outset that there has often been an atmosphere of distrust between art historians and art critics. Art historians may argue that their work is permanent, thought of critics ephemeral. There is an institutional difference in that most historians are in permanent academic posts in universities and technological institutions, while critics are usually regular or part-time contributors to periodicals, newspapers and television. There is often a psychological difference too in that art historians, like other academics, value the detached, objective pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and view the critic as a special pleader for trendy artist, or worse still, as a paid retainer of a dealer (a continual for phenomenon). On the other hand, the critic sees himself more in the hurly-burly world of action - an apostle of light between the artist and a dull-witted public. In social terms, the difference is sometimes presented crudely, as between right and left: the historian is an established figure in his ivory tower of so-called objectivity, without any moral commitment, thus by implication a supporter of the status quo, while the critic is the prophet the new, more socially-aware tomorrow - shocking the bourgeois - celebrating the artist as the 'true legislator' and seer. Some critics would perhaps see themselves as emotionally closer to contemporary artists than to art historians today (Turpin 17).

While I agreed with much of Turpin's ideology on art historians and art critics, I highly doubt critics would enjoy the idea of being related to contemporary art. For instance if we look at one of the most influential art writers of the twentieth century, Clement Greenberg who is known for propelling Abstract Expressionist painting, in particular the monumental work of Jackson Pollock, to a leading position in an international postwar art world, we discover his formulation

based on historical ideologies of art. In Greenberg's *Critical Essays on Art and Culture* he defines art through eyesight concentrating on formal models of classical training in a work in order to judge that work. So the focus becomes understanding shape, line, color, and composition as a means to dictate a work of art as art. Greenberg further states in his essay on *Abstract/Representational art* as:

Art is a matter strictly of experience, not of principles, and what counts first and last in art is quality; all other things are secondary. No one has yet been able to demonstrate that the representational as such either adds or takes away from the merit of a picture or statue. The presence or absence of a recognizable in this house no more to do with value in painting or sculpture up in the presence or absence of a libretto to do with value in music. Taken by itself, no single one of its parts are aspects decides the quality of the work of art as a whole. In painting and sculpture this holds just as true for the aspect of representation as it does for those of scale, color, paint quality, design, etc., etc.

It is granted that a recognizable image will add conceptual meaning to picture, but the fusion of conceptual with aesthetic meaning does not affect quality. That a picture gives us things to identify, as well as a complex of shapes and colors to behold, does not mean necessarily that it gives us more art. More and less in art do not depend on how many varieties of significance are present, but on the intensity and depth of you significances, be they few or many, as are present. And we cannot tell, before the event-before the experience of it-whether the edition or subtraction of conceptual meaning, or of any other given factor, will increase for diminish the aesthetic meaning of a work of art(Greenberg 133-134).

More specifically, Greenberg's standards created a problematic system awarding traditional techniques over non-traditional applications. For example Caroline A. Jones explains Greenberg's sort comings by expressing his misuse of eye-sight. Jones response is as follow:

The obsessive disembodiment of eyesight was not historically inevitable, all the same-the analytic tool of the visibility is not meant to dilute the contingency of the History Greenberg entered and produced. But the again, neither is it a question of Greenberg's individual proclivities (although those come into play). Greenberg's disembodiment of the Eye, its gaze and its I, perform certain functions that enabled other cultural practices to continue smoothly: "the conditions pertaining to visibility are not the way in which a subject sees: the subject who sees himself a place within visibility, a fun action derived from visibility (as in...the place of any observer in any prison system). From Greenberg's own perspective, he was merely "describing things as they were." As they were, it must be emphasized, from his perch in the visibility. He insisted to the end that he had no "brief" for abstraction, that he actually preferred representational painting (he himself painted landscapes and the occasional still life). He argued that his criticism merely attempted to elucidate quality and "our modern sensibility" in the art of his time. Greenberg's articulated critical subject was "a place within visibility," an Eye constructed as such by the type of abstract paintings that it took upon itself to explain. We can't find our way out of such a chicken-egg conundrum: we can only enter its loop at various points and describe its modes of replication (Jones 12).

This leads us into how we interpret our own eyesight of a work of art. Understanding that most of our own concepts of criticism stem from Greenberg's ideology and less from that of other art critics like Harold Rosenberg for instance, who at the time in the 1960's felt the canvas was merely a surface in which the artist presents an action. I felt it would be easier to explain my own thoughts on how ones' eyesight is relevant to ideas on subject by focusing on Greenberg, and this

analysis of a fixed notion to how art quality is justified based on the representation of the figure in the art work. I feel that it is important to note how Greenberg defines the figurative form in art as it transitions into abstraction. For instance Greenberg criticizes the idea of abstract representation in reference to human self as follows:

The picture has now become an object of literally the same spatial order as our bodies, and no longer the vehicle of an imagined equivalent of that order. It has lost its “inside” and become almost all “outside,” all plane surface. The specter can no longer escape into it from the space in which he himself stands; on the contrary, the abstract or quasi-abstract picture returns him to the space in all its brute literalness, and if it deceives his eyes at all, it is by optical rather than pictorial means, by relations of color, shape, and line largely divorced from descriptive connotations, and by “situations” in which foreground and background, up-and-down, are interchangeable.... often we cannot distinguish centers of interest within the abstract picture’s field and have to take the whole of it as one single, continuous center of interest, which....compels us to feel and judge it in terms of its over-all unity to the exclusion of everything else (Greenberg 136-137).

The idea that the abstract artist is looking at the subject in a more non-binary concept opens a path for future interpretations. We can take this idea and push it further into the topic of male and female nude forms in art. Through history the representations of male and female figures has been based on the relationship of the artist and the viewer’s eyesight, more importantly the term gaze. The popularity of what and how the figures in the nude are represented is a response to social values. I feel it’s very important to in the next chapter to discuss the term gaze and its relationship with the male artist/viewer and the female artist/viewer in more depth. By discussing the topic further one can begin to understand how the figure should be represented moving forward in art,

which is what my research is supporting, the ideology of using our eyesight to see beyond the subject, therefore the artist is able to represent the nude male form in a non-binary concept.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Gaze

The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation (Freire 36). In art, there comes a point in which once the eye is open to how we are viewing the subject, we can no longer hide from a relevant truth, that which the gaze. That is to say, that to gaze is to analyze that which is presented before an audience. The gaze is then broken down into categories by who is looking.

In feminist theory, the male gaze is the act of depicting women and the world, in the visual arts and literature, from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. The male gaze has three perspectives: (i) that of the person behind the camera, (ii) that of the characters within the representation, and (iii) that of the spectator (Male Gaze 2018). The feminist ideology proceeds and is supported today by societies continued support of female nudes in art, magazines, advertisements, and movies. The popularity of the female nude dates back to Christian art's denigration of the female body, with the fall of Eva, women as desired flesh representing sin. In art, female nudes are overwhelmingly longitudinal, anchored to the horizon, to nature, to earth-and to bed. The bed serves as a sign of a eternal submissiveness for a woman's having led Adam astray. As such, the bed in art often

represents less the site of mutual pleasure and in love than a place for the punishment of females, the locus of sanction revenge (Leppert 82).

While the ideas behind the concept were present in earlier uses of the gaze, the introduction of the term “the male gaze” can be traced back to Laura Mulvey and her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” which was published in 1975. In it, Mulvey states that in film women are typically the objects, rather than the possessors, of gaze because the control of the camera (and thus the gaze) comes from factors such as the as the assumption of heterosexual men as the default target audience for most film genres. The scopophilic instinct (pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object), and, in contradistinction, ego libido (forming identification processes) act as formations, mechanisms, which this cinema has played on. The image of a woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) Gaze of Man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favorite cinematic form-illusionistic narrative film. The argument returns again to the psychoanalytic background in that a woman as representation signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat. None of these interacting layers is intrinsic to film, but it is only in the film form that they can reach perfect and beautiful contradiction, thanks to the possibility in the cinema of shifting the emphasis of the look. It is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in the voyeuristic potential from, say, striptease, theater, shows, etc. Going far beyond highlighting a woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself (Mulvey 26).

A spectacle in the continuation that the female nude is the most represented form in art in this construct. This ideology is not meant to create a negative of the male gaze, but more of an

understanding of the male gaze so that a conclusion of dehumanization or a distorted representation of the male nude of itself is not what the viewer sees. Before we move towards discussing the female gaze, the idea of Feminism is not to oppress its male counter parts, but to shed light on a topic. Mulvey revisits her essay years later, and the following excerpt is a revised outlook on the male gaze:

There are obvious ways in which changes over the last four decades have left the essay, as it were, high and dry and clearly rooted, that is, in its own moments and with only residual relevance to today. For instance, the film culture of the 1970s, to which ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ belonged, was defined and unified by utopian desire to fuse radical aesthetics with radical politics. However, this belief in the possibility of progress, also so formative for the early years of feminism, failed to survive the setbacks of the 1980s as Margaret Thatcher’s election in 1979 inaugurated a new era of neo-liberal economics, with its attendant brutal and political implications. Furthermore, 16mm film which was, to my mind in the 1970s, the technology of a new radical and feminist avant-garde went into decline and is, by now, almost completely extinct. Finally, the viewing conditions (a darkened cinema, a collective audience, a fascinating screen). On which my visual pleasure theories depended, have been replaced by so many other modes of spectatorship that even the surviving ‘theatrical experience’ has itself changed (Mulvey 30).

It is important to note that Mulvey is able to alter her personal ideology, but also that the revision supports the foundation of the term gaze as by the idea of audience. How we “see” is so dependent on the experience of emotion, but that emotion is completely guided by the response of the audience. You have only been able to see the female nude in art as what has been guided by its audience. Few studies have focused on the construction of masculinity in elite visual culture and even fewer on the dynamics of the male gaze in relation to male bodies. In part, this is due to the

way feminist theory has tended to concentrate on the psychosexual and political implications of a male subject's active gaze on a female object. This is where Feminism continues to ask questions. Hence, the rhetorical question asked by the film theorist E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the gaze male?" has the unintended consequences of implying that the gendered dynamics of looking are reducible to the relations of empowered male subjects and disempowered female ones (Solomon-Godeau 9). Thus, if this states true, why and what has happened to the male nude in art?

The Male Nude

Unfortunately, the male nude is not fairly represented in art because of its audience. The fact that in most instances, when concerning painted nudes of both sexes before the twentieth century was explicitly, if not exclusively, a male audience. To be sure, women saw such images, though their access was sometimes more limited by comparison to that of men, but most nudes were not painted either by or for women. Men painted them and other men paid for them, also organized, and largely controlled the sites where such images could be viewed. There were needs addressed by representing nude men for men - but with a price to pay (Leppert 161-162). What is this price to pay, you may think it is a monetary value, but the fact is that man, more specifically males' feel that society dictates men should be representations of power. They are the descendants of cave men hunting woolly-mammoths, with their pungent testosterone odor and right to property. For the male to have access to the sight of the female nude serves as a confirmation of male power, if only imagined. Access to the sight of the male nude is more complicated. If nudity is associated with shame, it is likewise associated with sexuality. Yet to be looked at sexually used to be consumed are taken by sight. Not for nothing is the gaze-the stare-said to be penetrating. The look as such is constituted wholly within the history of gender relations. For one man stares at another man, and the two are strangers, a confrontation is likely: "what are you looking?" Might be the

query, uttered as a challenge, unless there is an unspoken sexual interest that they share. The stare, in other words, functions-and is by men expected to function-as a challenge, and the historical consistency of this fact is evident in Western literature dating back to the end ancients (Leppert 162). Therefore, that to be a heterosexual male gazing upon a nude male brings about stigmas of homosexuality. This is best understood when viewing art, as women tend to feel a bit more comfortable gazing at a male nude than men do, for instance I can recall standing in front of Michelangelo's David at the Academia Florence in the summer of 2017. I was one of the many dozens of tourists standing in a hot room acknowledging the body of the ideal man represented as a fourteen-foot sculpture. David's body is enormous, heroic, physically perfect, and powerfully sexual, as if Michelangelo demands we acknowledge David's male agency as pleasurable to the sight (Leppert 163). We are constantly looking up at the pleasurable sight and confined to the small intimate gallery space, in which the male viewer has no other choice but to be confronted with the male nude. A man is forced to not only stare at the male nude, but to come to the realization that they are being looked at by others as they look, breaking the taboo. Michelangelo's David becomes a mode in our conversation as relevant because it represents the past and present conflicts of the male gaze. It is almost disconcerting how much the male gaze is now processed. The male body as a spectacle is one of the most powerful means of consolidating masculinity. In essence, men are culturally forbidden to take pleasure in the look of the body of their own sex, though they are culturally required, at least in the present moment, to make their specific bodies pleasurable sights to themselves and, presumably, to women (Leppert 164).



[Figure 2. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), David (1501-04), marble. Florence, Galleria dell' Accademia. Photo taken by author.]

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Artist Response

A lot is owed to Michelangelo's skill in representing the male nude. There is an inner dialogue he is able to converse with his audience, which invites one to look at one's leisure. It is this invitation to look and enjoy, which I believe is the basic foundation to presenting the subject as something more than just male or female. There becomes a transformation of a very personal relationship between the artist and the viewer in which the viewer is the audience to a love letter. I owe much appreciation in the studies I received in Firenze, Italy. Especially, to the quiet moments of reflection on the works of Michelangelo. In these conversations, I developed a love and understanding in the importance of working with the male form. Thus, the following is my response to the handling of the male nude via an exhibition of work titled About Men.

I began by examining Michelangelo's drawings, knowing of how his David was so impactful to the male attributes of pleasure. I discovered an interest in the Uffizi compositional drawing of the Battle of Cascina, figure 7. The drawing was executed throughout in a very soft, black chalk (Hirst 44). The male forms are drawn in a left to right compositional formation, but more impactful is the content of the drawing. For there is no battle scene, we aren't comforted with man impaling other men in brute force on a battle field, but Michelangelo chronicles one of the few episodes in medieval warfare that involved mass male nudity. In 1364 the Florentine army, at

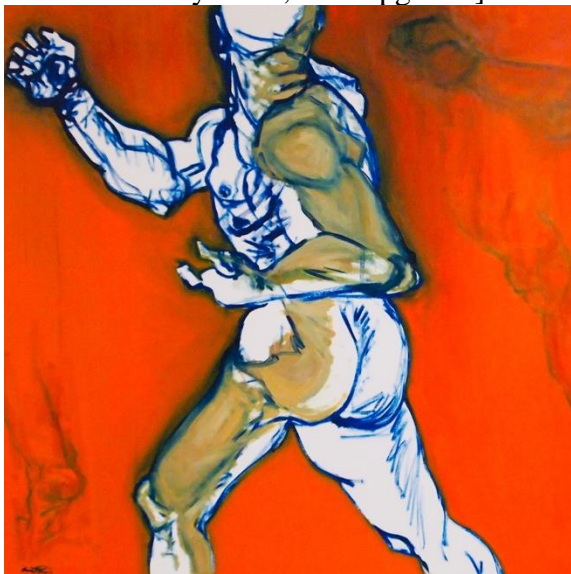
war with Pisa, camped at Cascina by the river Arno and, because it was a hot summer day, the men got undressed and went for a swim instead of constructing fortifications. When the alarm sounded they all had to rush out of the water and go to arms. It is this moment of intense drama, with nudes heaving themselves out of the river and rushing in all directions to grab clothes and weapons, that Michelangelo chose to depict (Jones 2011). Michelangelo's nudes display the tonality of graceful muscles in a motion of relaxation to urgency through his use of line and shading. Figures 2 and 3 are the studies of two male nudes intended to be inserted into the main drawing. I couldn't help but notice a quite rhythm in the forms as they presented a process of development. With sections of the male nude still in line form without shading, the composition of the works speak with the idea of transformation. My response to these works was to paint in oil two four-foot-by-four-foot paintings, figures 5 and 6, replicating the sketches using a limited color palette to emulate this idea of the male form coming into being. The acknowledgment that the form is male, but also so much more, it is a human in transition.



[Figure 3. Figure study for the Battle of Cascina, Haarlem, Teylers Museum. From Hirst, M. Michelangelo and His Drawings. Yale University Press, 1988. pg. 121]



[Figure 4. Figure study for the Battle of Cascina, Haarlem, Teylers Museum. From Hirst, M. Michelangelo and His Drawings. Yale University Press, 1988. ph. 122]



[Figure 5. Laura Briseño (1982-), Study of Man I, 2017, Oil, 48"x48" Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 6. Laura Briseño (1982-), Study of Man II, 2017, Oil, 48"x48" Photo taken by author.]

Michelangelo's drawing of the bath scene further conceptualizes an idea of voyeurism as we watch the nude male at a most vulnerable moment. It was important to explore this idea by focusing on how the figures were layered within the composition. I began first by focusing on the center of the image and stacking the figures by creating contrast-using color in varieties of skin tone within the painting, figure 8. Romanticizing an idea by compacting these nude males to make the viewer digest the sensuality of men. In figure 9 the male forms become about a color relationship, using rich reds and yellows set into a green background, the viewer is made aware of the sculpture like nude males. I wanted the viewer to explore the painting longer, and felt that by using color to detach from reality, it leaves one open to fantasy. The male viewer is able to look without the sense of taboo. In the last response to the drawing, figure 10, I continue in exploring color relationships by use of contrast, but this time the composition is completely manipulated from the drawing. The figures are not complete, and appear complete, there is an emphasis on motion of strength in a moment where there should not be. An idea of symbolism of numbers and the pattern of three form a triangle, representing woman, the feminine.



[Figure 7. Bastiano da Sangallo, Copy after the Battle of Cascina, Holkham Hall, Earl of Leicester. From Hirst, M. Michelangelo and His Drawings. Yale University Press, 1988.]



[Figure 8. Laura Briseño (1982-), The Bath, 2017, oil on canvas, 48" x 48" Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 9. Laura Briseño (1982-), Golden Bath, 2017, oil on canvas, 48" x 48" Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 10. Laura Briseño (1982-), Three, 2017, oil on canvas, 48" x 48" Photo taken by author.]

From Three I found myself studying the male form, attempting to translate its visual appeal, for the question that kept arising was ‘what type of form?’ How should the male form be represented, if Michelangelo was looking for the perfect body, how did the male form transform. We can take a look at Academic teaching, as developed at the main European courts in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially in France’s royal academy- Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, founded in 1648-made the study of the male nude the foundation of the training of the history painter. The young artist had to learn the canons of antique and Renaissance art by making drawings and engravings of ‘authoritative works, then by sculpting in the round. Only at the end would he work from living models. This wariness of the model is a leitmotiv of the modern period (Artega 60). Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) *Nude Study of a Man* best represents this technique, or *Patrocles*, 1780 (figure 11). Striking in its presence, its evocative power dramatized by the light, going much further than any simple preparatory painting, represents a shift to Neoclassicism. With the hair merging with the dark background the model loses all individuality. A sense of narcissism as the figure chooses not to invest with the viewer, but understands they are being watched by someone. I took this studied and played with the idea that what if the darkness was another figure, and what if the composition of the center figure lost his individuality not only within the painting (figure 12), but within a landscape of himself, of men. The concept of still working in threes, I felt the need to address opening this thought of self, of an internal desire.



[Figure 11. Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) *Nude Study of a Man, or Patrocles*, 1780, oil on canvas, 122x170.5cm, Cherbourg-Octeville, Musée d'art Thomas-Henry. From Arteaga, A. *The Male Nude*. El Viso, 2014, p60.]



[Figure 12. Laura Briseño (1982-) *Acedemia of Man*, 2018, Oil, 48" x 66" Photo taken by author.]

Desire

When we look at desire, it is not intended as a response to how the female nude has been represented as sin of flesh, or maybe it is in the sense of dealing with homosexuality. There is this envy of freedom of flesh in which the male on male composition reflects erotic thoughts. I researched Robert Mapplethorpe's Photography, for his use of a precisely composed and framed subject could make any image, even one that was flat-out erotic, into paradigm of the classical. In tuning his "conservative" artistic means toward a radical end, Mapplethorpe shifted and even redrew the long established boundary lines of social and aesthetic mores. In addition, in the final analysis, was the point (Martineau 269). He opened up the possibly for male to view male, and influenced a structure for the female artist to follow in the stylization of the male nude (figure 13), as this very elegant, soft, sensual, feminine form. Yet, the discovery of women's erotic fantasy by women themselves, according to Sarah Kent, a British art critic, formerly art editor of the weekly London 'what's on' guide Time Out, remains in a stage of infancy. Kent adopts a feminist stance

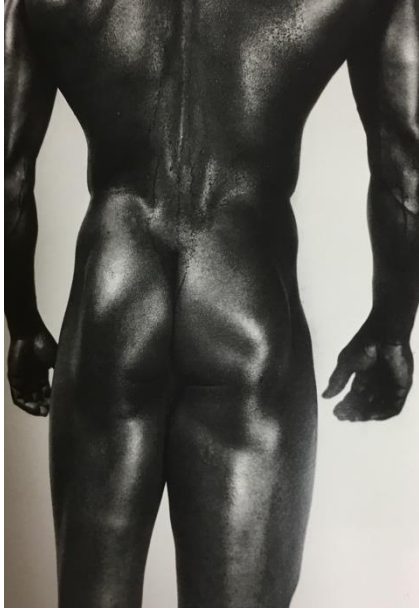
and has stated her position to be that of “a spokesperson, especially for women artists, in a country that is essentially hostile to contemporary art.” Self-censorship and traditional prudery are still too over powering. Kent believes that until women succeed in replacing male projections with their own images, descriptions and analyses will female sexuality be recognized as independent, constructive and creative. “The question for the woman artist is not therefore simply a matter of reversing roles, so that she can ape the man, borrowing masculine attitudes and the images, which give expression, she must gripe towards a language that will bring her own feelings into consciousness.” (Weiermair 9). This change in the attitude by the female artist becomes so closely connected to homosexuality, that it becomes difficult to distinguish the difference between the genders of the artist. The following images (figures 13-18), are representations of presenting the male form as described.



[Figure 13. Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), Robert M Thomas, 1987, Photograph. From Martineau, P. Robert Mapplethorpe. Getty Publications, 2016. pg 136.]



[Figure 14. Suzanne E. Pastor (1952-) untitled, 1982, Photograph. From Weiermair, P. Male Nudes by Women. 1995.]



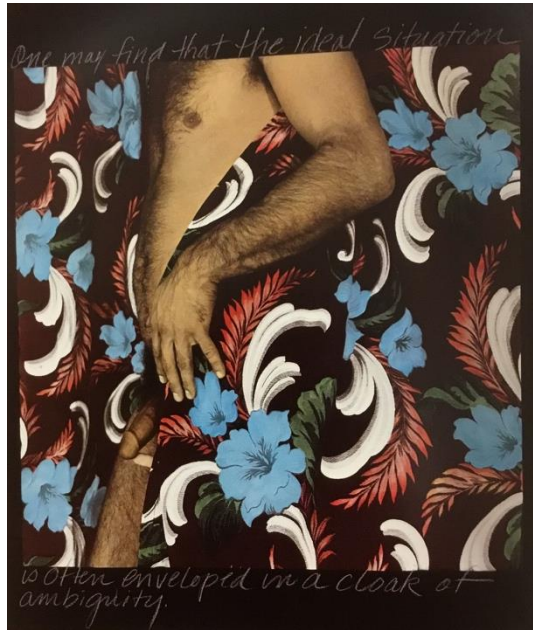
[Figure 15. Dianora Niccolini (1936-), untitled, 1981, photograph. From Weiermair, P. Male Nudes by Women. 1995]



[Figure 16. Tim BIANCHI (1945-) Plate 4. From Bianchi, T. Out of the Studio. Saint Martin's Griffin, 1992.]



[Figure 17. Tim BIANCHI (1945-) Untitled. From Bianchi, T. Bob & Rod. 1996. Pg 84.]



[Figure 18. Barbara DeGenevieve (1947-2014) true life novelette 15: The allegory. From Weiermair, P. Male Nudes by Women. 1995]

These images are visually sensual compositions serving the intent to change how we should be 'seeing' the male nude. They translate into personal moments the artist themselves are experiencing; this continues the support in the male nude as a subject which becomes admired in its most venerable state. We notice this in Tim Bianchi's work, (figures 16-17), as the love and joy; he has for his subject is shared with the viewer. In Bianchi's approximations of happiness, there is the challenge to develop a trust between ourselves and the subject, which would allow their feelings to exhibit themselves as naturally as possible, as he tries to capture and frame those feelings. Like chasing butterflies with a very small net seems an apt analogy (Bianchi 1996). It is in those moments of the bathing scenes he creates a deeper understanding, looking past the sex fantasy to a comradeship between the men, luxuriating in a dialogue of action and repose, a *alfresco* version of Plato's Symposium. In the compositions, the figures swim into each, and the bodies become electrically charged to explore in rough terrains. The dialogue is beauty and strength intertwined, where the audience cannot determine its start or end. I further explored these ideas in my works (figures 19-20), by creating compositions of pairs and their emotions by use of color. There are floral notes present, and yet the work reminds me of a well-tailored men's suit.



[Figure 19. Laura Briseño (1982-) A Study of Two, 2018, Oil on canvas, 48'' x 66''. Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 20. Laura Briseño (1982-) A Moment of Two, 2018, Oil on canvas, 48'' x 66''. Photo taken by author.]

The Ideal Form

At times during my research and practice, a few questions came to light on the form of male I presented to date. My male nude's figure is constantly muscular and elongated, not stocky and weighty. My male mentors questioned if such figures were factual representations or idealized fiction. Moreover, I began to understand the importance of explaining the sources of such bodies. Thus, I began pulling from my personal vocation, as a theater technician, having spent the last twenty years of my profession working backstage in Wardrobe and as a Costume Designer. I can recall the countless conversations between close friends and partners, exposing personal values on relationships with men, and on viewing men. The theater is such a stage, and those that manage the mechanism of its product nurtures it with love, and strength, and passion, that they live such lives between the borders of subject. I felt that the male forms I painted should develop from those characters I met through my path. This meant that my subjects came from a musical and artistic background; they were the rhythm of long lines. I took this opportunity to look at the works of photographers who photograph dancers, for the nature of the beauty of muscle. The balancing of

fragility and strength through poses almost inhuman to the eye. We see this visual expression in figures 21-24, the nature of movement. In figure 25, I response to the photographs by weaving the figures together like layers of thread. The male nudes sketch and pull in odd directions, moving the viewers eye about the canvas form form to form like a dance, for its all purely theater.



[Figure 21. David Parsons, Denise Roberts. The Parsons Dance Company, 1988. From Ewing, W.A. Breaking Bounds. Chronicle Books, 1992]



[Figure 22. Flipper hope, 1994. Greenfield, L. Airborne. Chronicle Books LLC, 1998.]



[Figure 23. Peter Weiermair. Poetic, 1990. From Ziolkowski, J. Walking the Line. Bruno Gmünder Verlag, 1992.]



[Figure 24. Rousseau, F. Men in Motion. Universe Pub, 2009. pg. 37]



[Figure 25. Laura Briseño (1982-), Men in Motion, 2017, oil on canvas, 66" x 48". Photo taken by author.]

Queer Man

There is no escaping homoeroticism when the viewer is looking at the nude male form. As previously stated, the traditional values of conservatism implicate a negative response in the viewer when 'looking' at such a subject. However, there is truly nothing demeaning or distorted in viewing the nude male figure. There is an enlightenment in the resistance of censorship of such an idea in shaming the viewer. Having the artist celebrate the human form, and sharing their love with the viewer. This love of self crosses gender, and redefines subject has an experience, and an expression of being. As we make our way forward, we are evolving, and this shows in the fashion world, where male figures are dressed in sheer fabrics, figure 26, or have make-up painted faces. In *Dust* magazine the lines between what we see as male and female blends away to what appears to be a fresh-faced man who appears angelic, figure 27. In *Queer Zines*, we read articles about Ricky and Billy discovering pleasure and understanding how to dress in an appearance to invite the male gaze. A night at the theater brings the drag queen Taylor Mac, and his radical costumes covered in glitter as he sings show tunes and talk's politics, figure 28. These men are not afraid, and yet they still hide behind layers of glitter and fabric. The following are works that influenced my final response to the male form. My use of painting on silk and paper, with elements of stitching and beadwork to create translucent paintings of the male form, figures 29-34, are meant to question the layers of men. To paint muscular bodies on a delicate canvas, I am almost creating a collage of a drag queen. For what if all men are drag queens, and we only need to take a moment and look past the layers.



[Figure 26. Gucci Ad, 2018. From Dust Magazine, Seeds Project. Germany. 2018, Vol 13.]



[Figure 27. Uma Wang. Sergey wears jacket, 2018. From Dust Magazine, Seeds Project, Germany. 2018. Vol 13.]



[Figure 28. Mac, Taylor. “A 24-Decade History of Popular Music.”. 2018. Los Angeles, Theater at Ace Hotel.]



[Figure 29. Laura Briseño (1982-), Dust, 2018. Beads, gold leaf, glitter, paper, thread, oil on silk, 48” x 48”. Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 30. Laura Briseño (1982-),
Zines, 2018. Beads, gold leaf, glitter, paper,
thread, oil on silk, 48” x 48”.
Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 31. Laura Briseño (1982-),
Mr. Bubbles., 2018. Beads, gold leaf, glitter,
paper, thread, oil on silk, 48” x 48”.
Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 32. Laura Briseño (1982-),
Leaping, 2018. Beads, gold leaf, glitter, paper,
thread, oil on silk, 48” x 48”.
Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 33. Laura Briseño (1982-),
Wrestling. 2018. Beads, gold leaf, glitter,
paper, thread, oil on silk, 48” x 48”.
Photo taken by author.]



[Figure 34. Laura Briseño (1982-). Alfresco, 2018, crystals, glitter, oil on canvas. Photo taken by author.]

I believe that through the developments of my work, I am able to blend masculinity and femininity as a non-gender pacific identity. This transformation of looking at the male nude as beautiful, and something so much more closely identified to what is female essence within the form, is translated through texture, glitter, and flowers (Figure 34). Exploring these ideas of beauty via sculpting textures in the moving male figures, I really wanted to create a work reflective of the journey I have taken through my research. It is my hopes that the viewer walks away with a more open understanding towards the subject, the male nude, and how to view that subject in a different context from what society has labeled the male nude as I, an artist, understands. In addition, I hope that my research opens a conversation to the female artist to expand on new solutions in representing the male nude in art, so that in the future representation of both figures is balanced in the gallery. For there should be nothing to fear in representing or viewing the male nude in art.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Laura Briseño is an artist with a strong textile background in design. She has spent the last 20 years of her career traveling and working for companies such as Cirque Du Soleil and Franco Dragone. Productions include Cirque's MJOne (LV), Iris (LA), Corteo (touring), and Franco Dragone's House of Dancing Water in Macau, China. She's designed costumes for Sierra Repertory Theater's MacBeth, and managed the costume shop of Montana Shakespeare in the Parks. A member of I.A.S.T.E. Local 768 of Los Angeles, California, with productions including Wicked, Phantom of the Opera, and Hair Spray. She is a multi recipient winner of the Alamo Theater Arts Council Globe Award for Costume Design for productions at the Woodlawn Theater and San Pedro Playhouse in San Antonio, Texas. She has a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley in December of 2018, and a BA in Fashion Design from the University of the Incarnate in May of 2005. Her research is focusing on the narrative of the nude male form, and the color relationships presented in context of composition from a female perspective. The idea comes from personal conversations and experiences living and traveling. She currently resides at 1100 Hidalgo St., Mercedes, Texas, 78570, and you can email her at laura.briseno.arts@gmail.com.