

Drew University

College of Liberal Arts

Expression Through Depiction:
An Analysis of Aesthetic vs. Contextual Qualities

A Thesis in Studio Art

by

Méa Rose St. Amour

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Bachelor in Arts

With Specialized Honors in Studio Arts

May 2020

Abstract

In this thesis I analyze what it is that makes a work of art expressive, and how this expression can be translated across art forms. I utilize music, poetry, and the visual arts to explore this. Frank Sibley makes a distinction between aesthetic and artistic qualities, which I use to analyze expression. I refer to them as aesthetic and contextual qualities. Aesthetic qualities include the purely sensible components of an artwork, such as line, rhythm, or movement. The contextual qualities include any surrounding information relevant to the artwork, such as the title, reference to a historical event, or known symbolism. I have created two collections of illustrations based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem *The Day is Done*, and Frédéric Chopin's *Prelude No. 4 in E-minor*. These two collections of illustrations explore the ways in which aesthetic and contextual qualities play a role in translating expression. I place these three art forms on a scale ranging from contextual to aesthetic, based on the idea that language is our primary form of communication. I consider poetry to be the most contextual. I place non-lyrical music furthest towards the aesthetic as this is the most abstract or least literal of these three art forms. Lastly, I place the visual arts in between because of our reliance on visual symbols as a secondary form of communication. Beyond these classifications I relate what it is like to work from these sources. While working from the poem I was compelled to depict expression using aesthetic qualities. Conversely when working from the music I was inclined to use contextual symbols. This suggests a tendency to create work that relies on contextual qualities when working from an art form that is heavily aesthetic, such as music, and to make work using aesthetic qualities when working from a highly contextual piece such as poetry. I draw a parallel between the dependent relation of these two qualities, aesthetic and contextual, to that of Beauty and Truth, as discussed by both Hans Urs von Balthasar and Leo Tolstoy. I conclude that the aesthetic and the contextual rely on each other, in the same way that the beautiful and the true do. For something to be beautiful it must be true. Likewise, truth needs beauty for truth to be embodied and understood.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Artworks.....	6
I. <i>The Day Is Done</i>	8
II. <i>Prelude No.4</i>	16
III. <i>Birds as Leaves</i>	20
IV. <i>The Three Transcendentals</i>	22
Analysis.....	23
Conclusion.....	27
Images.....	30
Works Cited.....	46

Image List.

- (Figure 1) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Wings of Night*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 2) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Lights of the Village*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 3) Méa Rose St. Amour, *As the Mist Resembles the Rain*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 4) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Banish the Thoughts of Day*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 5) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Corridors of Time*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 6) Méa Rose St. Amour, *To-night I Long for Rest*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 7) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Songs Gushed from His Heart*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 8) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Through Long Days of Labor*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 9) Méa Rose St. Amour, *To Quiet*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 10) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Rhyme of the Poet*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 11) Méa Rose St. Amour, *As Silently Steal Away*, 2020 charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.
- (Figure 12) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Of Hesitation*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in.
- (Figure 13) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Of Sorrow and Change*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in.
- (Figure 14) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Of Conclusion*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in.
- (Figure 15) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Birds as Leaves*, 2019, charcoal on paper, 10 x 7 in.
- (Figure 16) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Three Transcendentals*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.

Introduction

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy, which includes a wide variety of discussions that include such disparate topics as whether art is definable, why we create it, and what its purpose is. In my thesis I will be discussing one small portion of aesthetics, namely the expressive quality of art, analyzing its capabilities and limitations. To do so, I will be utilizing both a poem by Longfellow, entitled *The Day is Done*, and Chopin's *Prelude in e-flat major*, along with my own works. In Longfellow's poem he is making use of the English language to describe the feeling of the close of a day. Beyond this however, he makes use of the formal qualities of poetry, such as rhythm and rhyme, which evoke in us some response. This aids in our understanding of his inner mind by expressing something beyond language. Likewise, Chopin uses the formal components of music that allow for the listener to understand something of what he is trying to say. He does so even without the addition of verse or lyric to his piece.

In my work I draw inspiration from both the form of Longfellow's poem and the semantic meaning of his words. To illustrate these stanzas I make use of both of these—the formal and the semantic—to suggest different states of being. One theory of art discussed by Frank Sibley is the distinction between aesthetic and artistic qualities. Aesthetic qualities are the purely sensible experience of an artwork, and artistic qualities are the contextual aspects surrounding the artwork. Artistic qualities can be as simple as the title of a work, or reference to something already in existence, or a symbol which already holds a known meaning. Stephen Davies argues that *aesthetic* qualities are internal to a work, while *artistic* qualities are external to a work. In his book, *The*

Philosophy of Art, he states that “Aesthetic properties are usually characterized as objective features perceived in the object of appreciation when it is approached for its own sake” (Davies, 51). He continues: “They are directly available for perception in that their recognition does not require knowledge of matters external to the object of appreciation” (Davies, 51). Artistic qualities, on the other hand, he describes as “art-relevant, non-aesthetic properties” (Davies, 52). As Davies discusses in his book, there is a divide in thought between the aesthetic theory and the philosophical account of art. The aesthetic theory claims that a work could be considered by only its sensible qualities while the philosophical account of art claims that there is more contextual information required for the proper appreciation of an artwork.

In my thesis I am considering whether we can gain some *artistic* knowledge directly from the *aesthetic* qualities. Can we find the meaning ingrained in a work through just its formal or aesthetic components? Does the lack of information provided to the viewer¹ when the context is de-emphasized impede the expression? My work explores both sides of this argument. However, as Davies warns, where aesthetic stops, and contextual starts, is not the most clear-cut divide. In my work I will be exploring the limitations of expression through aesthetic and artistic (or contextual) qualities evaluating their ability to evoke a specific state of mind in the viewer. For the sake of clarity, from this point forward, I will refer to “artistic” qualities as “contextual” qualities, as the words aesthetic and artistic are often used synonymously in colloquial language.

¹ I will be using the term viewer throughout to refer to the audience of a piece whether visual or auditory

This thesis will consist of two main bodies of work as well as two additional pieces that I will bring into the conversation. The first collection of works will explore the relationship between poetry and the visual arts. The second grouping will do likewise with music and the visual arts. In order to understand the connection between these three areas: poetry, music, and the visual arts, it is important to define them in some way, or to identify the ways in which they are similar, as well as what sets them apart. Susan Langer, in her book *Feeling And Form*, describes music as an art of time as opposed to the visual arts which she describes as an art of space. Poetry uses language aided by form to create rhythm. It is a step between music towards visual representation as it paints a mental image. I find working from poetry, which is comprised of language, somewhat more straightforward than working from a piece of music. I believe that this is because language is our primary form of communication. The piece of music I chose includes no verse and thus lacks the context that the poem offered through language. I found that the lack of contextual qualities in the music made this much more challenging to translate into visual works of art.

Although musical interpretations can be more difficult to relay across mediums, they are no less deep, only harder to interpret. Thus, working from music presents an altogether different challenge of translation than poetry does. To begin creating visual works based on a score, I find myself first reverting to language to describe what the music portrays. In my first collection of works, based on Longfellow's poem, I am partially abstracting the image by choosing subject matter from his stanzas that could appear somewhat ambiguous. Lights through mist, or a darkening sky, are images that

are not as readily apparent to the viewer as, say, an image of a house, which already holds many connotations. I am taking a literal translation and obscuring it. In my work based on the prelude by Chopin however, I am working from a predominately aesthetic source and am utilizing subject matter which provides context. Thus, there is a progression occurring in opposite directions in the translation of these two bodies of work. Working from the aesthetic source of music is driving me to be more contextual and working from a contextual piece of poetry I feel compelled to create works that are based in aesthetics. In the poem illustrations I am inviting the viewer to ponder what they see and allowing the form to express. In the musical illustration I am being more forthcoming with the subject matter. Although I am aware that both are working from my own association, this is helping me to examine the strengths and weaknesses of both aspects of a visual piece, the form and the content.

Artworks

Before providing an explanation of the works, I will offer an explanation of the materials I chose to depict them, as well as some technical decisions that went into their creation. In the series based on Longfellow's Poem, I have left some area of each piece in its original state. There is something about blank paper that is peaceful and full of the idea of beginnings. We can break a drawing down into many things. A drawing can be broken down into single points on a page together equaling a subject, or lines crossing and creating denser portions. In this series I have chosen tones to aid in my depiction. Darkness, represented by the charcoal, and light, represented by the empty paper, work

together to represent some image or expression. In order that the paper itself be the luminescence, I chose not to add any tone lighter than the paper. On a similar note, I do not include any compressed charcoal that would have a reflective quality. Instead I use vine charcoal because of its matte appearance and fluidity. Working on paper with charcoal is not as definite as ink on paper. However, there is still a finite nature because the charcoal is never fully removed from the paper. It allows me to change and move the tone around the paper to a certain degree, but it is limited in a way that oil paint is not. The paper takes on a new texture after the charcoal has been spread or worked into the paper and dictates the texture. Because of this, most of my conception of a drawing has to be completed in my mind before I set out to work on a piece. If I am at odds about a small detail or a compositional decision I use a small piece of paper to sketch out an idea to access the visual differences that result. For the three pieces based on Chopin's prelude I am working on a larger scale on a white paper but am still working with charcoal. However, in some of these images I am allowing the line to take part, instead of relying entirely on shades of light and dark. This is due to the fact that line can sometimes represent more symbolically, while tones can sometimes help to obscure an image. The style is somewhat dictated by my intention of creating the first series of Longfellow's poem in a more abstract way, and the second of Chopin's Prelude in a more literal way.

I. The Day is Done

This poem, entitled “The Day is Done”, is Longfellow’s description of the day falling into night. It speaks not only of the beauty of the night but also of its sorrow and of the hardships of the day, as well as its fullness. This poem seems to give a voice to what is in the innermost recesses of the soul. I was compelled to consider each stanza on its own as I felt that their depth deserved to be observed singularly. At the time of re-discovering this poem I was considering new ways in which to work. Previously many of my works were strictly drawn from observation and I wanted to attempt to draw from somewhere else to allow for a new and possibly more expressive mode of communication. The subject matter I chose stemmed from imagery and allegory in Longfellow’s descriptive language, some of which I knew would appear rather abstract without context. This partial abstraction is important as it allows for the viewer to spend more time searching the picture. If they settle on what it is depicting, then this gives the work some contextual qualities. If they do not make a decision about what they believe they see, it is my hope that the aesthetic qualities can lead them to an understanding of the stanza as well.

First Stanza (Figure 1)

“The day is done, and the darkness
Falls from the wings of Night,
As a feather is wafted downward
From an eagle in his flight.”

The first stanza is about the movement of darkness. This piece is in homage to his description of the feeling of darkness descending weightlessly over the light. I considered the literal depiction of an eagle's feather but decided instead to depict its movement in darkness rather than to use the imagery of a feather itself. This simplistic piece is intended to evoke similar experiences of falling night to an onlooker—and not only the recognition of it, but also the feelings associated with the night and its movements: a state of peace, of conclusion, and of rest.

Second Stanza (Figure 2)

“I see the lights of the village
 Gleam through the rain and the mist,
 And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
 That my soul cannot resist.”

In the second stanza, Longfellow describes a phenomenon which is not easy to explain. He describes the feeling that a visual experience throws him into. I worked backwards from the state he was put in to imagine the aesthetic experience which he was enveloped by. He references very specific imagery but it is not so much about this imagery as it is about the effect that the lights through the mist have upon his soul. My illustration is a depiction of the visual experience he refers to as well as an interpretation of the state that this experience propels him into. The image focuses only on the lights as seen through the mist. It leaves out any other visual imagery that may detract from the state of his overwhelming sadness this scene fills him with. Why this phenomenon that he addresses in this stanza occurs is to me a mystery. How is it that something we

witness can have an impact on us that surpasses explanation and can seem untraceable? The lights are not themselves sad, and mist is not longing. However, Longfellow gazes through the mist and towards the lights and is filled with sadness and longing. Is this connection between aesthetic experience and emotional state something that happens in the mind—the misfiring of neurons or the associative memory? Is this a question science can answer, or is it something Cartesian in thought and beyond the physical brain? René Descartes suggested that there was something beyond the brain that did not belong to our physical world, such as the soul. Perhaps Descartes would have argued that the soul was what was moved here.

If Longfellow stood and looked out at the village and felt this way, and he was able to capture that in his writing, is it at all possible to take these words and put them back into the visual realm so that the viewer looking at the artwork could have a similar experience to Longfellow's? Tolstoy believed that, "A work of art is then finished when it has been brought to such clearness that it communicates itself to others and evokes in them the same feeling that the artist experienced while creating it" (Tolstoy, 51). I allowed the associations I made while reading this stanza to influence the visual language of the illustration in order to capture this same experience. For example, the long linear lines extending up and down to me have a feeling of both reaching and falling and address the idea of continuum in a way that I associate with the state of sorrow.

Third Stanza (Figure 3)

A feeling of sadness and longing,
 That is not akin to pain,
 And resembles sorrow only
 As the mist resembles the rain.

Many of the visual elements from the previous piece carry into this illustration, in part due to the physical form of the scenes. In both stanzas Longfellow includes the imagery of the mist. Here I am experimenting with how the form (line, direction, weight) could contribute to the image in a way that may not be possible for the subject matter. This stanza describes in even finer detail the experiences which are occurring as well as those that are not. He specifies that this feeling of sadness and longing is not akin to pain and resembles sorrow only as the mist resembles rain. Because of his complex distinction in this stanza I felt the necessity to attempt to depict something which would illustrate this relationship. I am depicting the resemblance that the rain has to the mist as opposed to depicting mist, alone. The change in tone and the streak of light are symbolic of longing.

Fourth Stanza (Figure 4)

Come, read to me some poem,
 Some simple and heartfelt lay,
 That shall soothe this restless feeling,
 And banish the thoughts of day.

This image is based on the aging page of the book from which I first read this poem. The page is brittle, and the edges have begun to darken. The images in this series

are not meant to be fully abstract with no relation to familiar forms, although it may appear this way in some. Each of these images has a relation to something familiar or recognizable. However, I chose to portray each stanza in a visually simple form. This third image is intended to portray simplicity, to address the idea of aging and to evoke some soothing experience through its aesthetic qualities, through the gradation of light into darkness. In my work I am using shade as metaphor. The light from the poem is slowly pushing to the edges the heavy thoughts of the day represented by the more dense charcoal towards the periphery. Although the symbolism suggested above could be classified as contextual qualities, I am exploring how these contextual qualities could be translated through aesthetic form within the piece itself. Throughout these works I am testing the idea of aesthetic and contextual qualities and their relation to each other.

Fifth Stanza (Figure 5)

Not from the grand old masters,
Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through the corridors of Time.

This is an illustration of the corridors of time which Longfellow references. There is a feeling of grandeur in his description, and also of a timelessness, or interconnectivity between times. This is something that I explore in my work frequently. Time is often perceived as distance from something. For example, we tend to think that the further back something occurs, the less relevant it becomes. I am often asked why I have chosen to work from inspiration from the past. To me however, this fact is almost

irrelevant as it is not the date that inspires me but the work itself. I find the fact that we are able to be moved through time this way to be something which makes my practice shared. Although these authors may no longer be living, I find the connection no less fulfilling. My depiction is an expression of time using corridors. The corridors curve and echo one another. Their curvature makes it impossible to see clearly either forward or back. The reflective quality on the ground is meant to confuse our perception, and to resemble how time is reflected. Although time is sequential, I do not view it as linear but instead as something circular like the seasons.

Sixth Stanza (Figure 6)

For, like strains of martial music,
Their mighty thoughts suggest
Life's endless toil and endeavor;
And to-night I long for rest.

While considering this description of longing for rest, I allowed my own associations with rest to lead this piece. The moon is like a promise of rest at the end of each day. Despite the chaos or length of the day, the night cloaks it in a soft black. As described at the beginning of the poem, in this stanza the darkness has engulfed the day. The night only shows things in values and shades and each thing is made equal in chrome. The bright yellow flower is the same as the light grey stone. The world is quieted and simplified even down to its hues. Even the color has laid to rest, and the moon in the sky is the only true source of light.

Seventh Stanza (Figure 7)

Read from some humbler poet,
 Whose songs gushed from his heart,
 As showers from the clouds of summer,
 Or tears from the eyelids start;

What stood out to me the most in this stanza was the idea of an overflowing of something that could not be contained. In this stanza Longfellow connects the imagery of a rain cloud and an eye. I am contemplating how a combination of imagery can further obscure the representation. I have made the cloud a lid-shaped form and combined the gushing water with the cloud and the eye. This piece involves complex imagery which makes it rely more heavily on the form rather than the content to be understood.

Eighth Stanza (Figure 8)

Who, through long days of labor,
 And nights devoid of ease,
 Still heard in his soul the music
 Of wonderful melodies.

In this stanza Longfellow describes the poet that he wants to hear read, the poet who through toil hears music. In this illustration, the road with no end represents the idea of the seemingly endless day. The sun burns high in the afternoon sky. But the birds still dance and sing. The birds are meant to represent the soul of the poet. The fields represent his work. The road connotes the continuum of his life. Through working out this piece, memories of Millet's frequent imagery of workers in the field definitely influenced the content. As this piece is slightly more representational, I chose to simplify it as much as

possible. This resulted in its geometric quality, which contributes to the starkness of this reality of repetition. The geometry of this landscape is an aesthetic component contributing meaning beyond the symbolism.

Ninth Stanza (Figure 9)

Such songs have power to quiet
 The restless pulse of care,
 And come like the benediction
 That follows after prayer.

Here I depict snow, snow which fills the air and obscures the horizon. The only sense we have of what is left on earth is the fragments of trees that are not yet covered. This is the snow that muffles all sounds and falls so soft that the whole world seems slowed down. This phenomenon of snow when the world is covered all in pure white is a natural occurrence of this moment, a visual representation of what Longfellow refers to in this stanza. Visually I want the empty space to become full in the mind of the viewer—for them to see it not as empty paper but instead as full of this snow. In order to do this I depict only its effect on the tree and the absence of a horizon.

Tenth Stanza (Figure 10)

Then read from the treasured volume
 The poem of thy choice,
 And lend to the rhyme of the poet
 The beauty of thy voice.

I often wonder whether a poem should be read off of a page and into one's mind, or whether it should be read into the air and enter the mind through the ear. In this stanza Longfellow is asking for the poem to be read to him; he is making the choice that he would like these words to float to his ears. In the image, I am depicting leaves which float down from their branches. I have arranged them in pattern to mimic the rhythm of poetry.

Eleventh Stanza (Figure 11)

And the night shall be filled with music,
 And the cares, that infest the day,
 Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
 And as silently steal away.

I began to think about the analogy made in poetry and the sometimes very literal descriptions of things that aid in our understanding of complex ideas. In the last stanza of this poem, which I find particularly beautiful, Longfellow animates the idea of our slow progression into the unconscious or into slumber by describing our thoughts as travelers calmly embarking.

II. Prelude No.4

My intention for the three drawings based on Chopin's prelude is to rely on contextual qualities. Therefore, I have chosen not to obscure the subjects in my depictions. I am allowing the images to remain transparent; the depictions are straightforward. As humans we sometimes stop searching after we think we have struck

upon the meaning of something. It is my hope that the viewer can see beyond the literal subject matter and uncover the state that I am trying to emulate within the piece.

In contemplating what it is that contextual qualities bring to the work, I begin to think again about the associations we have with the world around us. While working with what is an aesthetic quality, I am working with what feels like a subconscious association—something very subtle, such as the weight of something, or the direction of a line. I am relying on that to provide meaning or translate an idea. However, while working with the artistic or contextual qualities, I realize that the connections which I am drawing from rely more on what feels symbolic, something that is understood to be a certain way already. When we see a depiction of a lamb we think of gentleness and innocence. When we see a lion we think of might and majesty. These animals have become symbols of something so that when they are depicted they carry a meaning, whether or not the artist intends this. It is challenging to change these notions about these subjects without changing the subject itself. For example, if one tries to depict a fierce lamb, it is likely that much would need to be changed about the animal to decrease the soft exterior and the innocent face. It is possible that some of our notions of certain symbols are culturally imposed upon us rather than intrinsically felt. For example: does the majesty we feel about a lion somehow come to us through its giant mane or, is our association passed on through other ties in literature? Are our associations with power and the patterns of behavior of a lion connected to that of a ruler? Wherever these contextual associations are formed they appear more prominent than the aesthetic qualities. However, I am unsure of whether the contextual or the aesthetic communicates

to the viewer in a more precise way. This may have to do with the artist or the viewer or the piece itself.

I have broken Chopin's prelude into three segments (figures 12-14) to illustrate the progression of the piece. I interpreted the musical expression into language which I used as inspiration for my symbolism. In the beginning of this prelude there is a softness, a stillness, and a hesitation. When I began to think of what these words embodied, the image of a deer came to mind. I depict the deer in a way that the viewer can understand what they are seeing (Figure 12). I am not abstracting it. I am allowing the deer to symbolize these thoughts and hopefully, through these associations, translate the expression of Chopin's prelude. The posture of the deer in representing these thoughts is important; often the body language of an animal is more descriptive than the animal itself. This deer is depicted with its head lowered. It is not on high alert. It is calm, but as all deer, never loses the caution which makes it so hesitant. A deer is not timid; it has a nobleness to its hesitation mirrored in the beginning of Chopin's piece of music.

The foliage surrounding the deer can be seen as darks and lights, the dark leaves representing the minor notes and the light leaves representing the major notes, as on a piano. I am in no way mapping the notes mathematically, only trying to capture something of their gesture. The moon and the setting of the night are to represent the solemnness that the piece has throughout. I am choosing in this illustration to obscure the landscape by leaving out depictions of a background which could detract from the symbolism in the forefront.

In the middle part of the prelude there is a growing sorrow that reminds me of the aching sensation that can sometimes accompany change. I sometimes experience this when I consider the passing of time. The changing of seasons, and particularly the season of autumn, often makes me contemplate how nature each year begins to decay and change. The leaves leave the trees and the blooms all wilt. I felt that to symbolize this it was best to use a tree, not only because the tree changes with the season, but also because the tree is witness to change itself (Figure 13). There are some trees that have lived through generations. I depict this tall tree as a symbol of change and of sorrow. The same moon appears in this image, only higher in the sky and smaller to the eye. This tree is deciduous and has lost almost all of its once numerous leaves. Its branches are of climbable distance so that the tree is almost ladder-like. The viewer, looking on, might imagine that she could climb up to the moon. The night here is not still, as in the first image. There is wind in this sky, depicted by the direction of the charcoal. Again, in this image the tree is central to the piece and any other landscape imagery is omitted.

In the third and final portion of the prelude there is a sense of death and of conclusion—not only in the sense of something completed, but in the sense of something understood: a realization of something, a kind of clarity, an acceptance of an idea. The tone and rhythm of it seems grave or heavy. I have depicted this with the image of an ocean (Figure 14). Water in its vastness and depth I find to be symbolic of ideas that are far bigger than our minds can understand. However, water is also something we are so familiar with, it even makes up most of what we are. Although we are not acquainted with each drop in an ocean we have an understanding of it as a whole. Water is one thing

we never grow tired of observing and we never stop contemplating and coming to new understandings while meditating upon this element of earth. In the night the waters are calm. This parallels the graveness of this part of the piece. Once again, the moon still lingers, now even higher in the sky. Another symbol I am portraying here is the clearness of water which parallels the clarity of conclusion.

III. Birds as Leaves

In addition to these two collections, there are two additional pieces I would like to consider as they shed light on the translation between the aesthetic and the contextual qualities: *Birds as Leaves* and *The Three Transcendentals*. The first of these is a watercolor of birds in the limbs of trees which appeared to be its leaves (Figure 15). This piece was selected by a composer to use as inspiration for a musical composition. When I went to hear his piece performed, the composer prefaced the performance with an explanation of how it reminded him of a poem by Robert Frost, and how these together had inspired his compositional piece. I was excited that he had made this connection as Robert Frost has long been a favorite poet of mine. This inkling of something communicated through the piece inspires me. It is challenging to delve into these unknowns, to create and not know whether what I create can relay what I intend, but certain instances such as these give me hope. This relationship between art, poetry, and music I find to be fascinating. I have been asked why I am working from the works of other artists and not from my own experience. It has to do with the relationship that this shared consideration creates. The fact that this poem or this music resonates with

something in me makes it not a singular experience but a shared experience. I am working from other compositions because I am inspired not just by what is evoked in their work, but by the fact that it is shared. I hope to uncover this communal component—how an artist can translate something to someone through verse, rhythm, or image and possibly present an experience. There are some who would argue that we cannot know for sure how anything is actually received and thus this capacity of art to communicate can never fully be tested. I would argue that, although one cannot know for certain that something is not lost in translation, or that someone may be incapable of feeling the unique experience of someone else in a full way, there is at least something like the reflection of an experience.

I question the degree to which something is able to express a *specific* state. One way to test this would be to see the work's reception amongst its viewers. For example, imagine you have multiple works of art in one room. There are two musical recordings and two paintings, each painting is based on one of the pieces of musical scores. If we suppose that the artist really tried to emulate the experience they felt the composer was trying to evoke, would the viewer be able to pair the pieces with the corresponding music? How specific could this become? How many pieces could you introduce at once before it was all confused? If this test was successful it would suggest a certain accuracy in the translation of art across genres. Although this approach might lead to a more quantifiable answer, the nature of this approach is more akin to solving a puzzle rather than being moved by a piece in a natural way, or drawing a connection unprovoked. Had I given the composer three poets and asked him to choose one to keep in mind while

working, the experience of him making this connection would not seem like the product of understanding, it would not reflect the idea of the shared experience.

IV. The Three Transcendentals

Hans Urs von Balthazar describes the three transcendentals of Ancient Greek philosophy—Truth, Beauty, and Goodness—as sisters. He does so in such a moving way.

We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past -- whether he admits it or not -- can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love. (Hans Urs von Balthasar, 18)

In *The Three Transcendentals*, I illustrate the importance of beauty and the consequence of the rejection of beauty he describes. Beauty is inseparable from her sisters Truth and Goodness. Because of this, when she turns in banishment she necessarily brings Truth and Goodness with her. This image is an attempt to illustrate the departure of Beauty. Truth knows that she cannot stay. Beauty takes her hand and Truth turns to Goodness who lingers last, hoping to stay. Beauty leaves in devastation, truth in resignation, and Goodness in hesitation.

Tolstoy also references these three transcendental qualities and interdependence, applying them to the definition of art. “A perfect work of art will be one in which the content is important and significant to all men, and therefore it will be moral. The expression will be quite clear, intelligible to all, and therefore beautiful; the author’s relation to his work will be altogether sincere and heartfelt, and therefore true.” (Tolstoy, 54). He calls all works which do not address these qualities equally as imperfect works. The prose of both authors are contextual and my illustration is an aesthetic and contextual depiction of this relationship of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness which they both address.

Analysis

I am exploring art’s ability to evoke some specific expression. I argue that there can be an expression translated by some formal qualities requiring limited contextual or symbolic imagery. For example, we can understand a musical piece without a title, a poem without knowing the life of the poet, or a visual piece without full understanding of the subject matter presented. However, I do acknowledge that more context may provide a fuller or more specific experience. Another challenge is that although the intention of the artist may be clear to the artist, it may not translate to the viewer. My works, based on my experience and associations may completely miss the mark for someone else, because the associations I have formed might not align with any other person. Is expression bounded by shared association or is it something common to human experience? I argue that the formal qualities aid the understanding of the contextual qualities, even though expression may be reliant upon the associative memory or the

artist's experience. In my work based on Chopin's piece, I try to use contextual qualities in my work to explore how they can evoke expression. Humans are creatures who like to find meaning. We are drawn to what is familiar and comforted by what we can understand. While we may find meaning more easily when comfortable with the knowledge of the subject and symbolism of the piece, we may also find the meaning in work that we do not at first comprehend because we are searching for this meaning.

Each individual has a unique existence; no person is in the mind of another. Because of this we cannot know for certain the thoughts of someone else. Even if we could live a parallel life to someone, there would be no way to know how the experiences you share are processed by the other person and the nuanced impact they can have. One thing I explore in my work is the translation of experience through various art forms. Longfellow's poem resonates with me in a way that transcends all the differences of time and position and connects me to this poet in the most human way. Longfellow discusses his state of mind in such a successful way that the reader is able to almost see through his eyes and be engulfed by the same experiences that he is. Is there some identifiable quality that translates this expression?

There are objections to the idea that one can discover any root of expression. The art critic Clive Bell (1881-1964) points out that to believe everyone would be moved by Longfellow's poem in the way I am may be erroneous. If this is so, then no translation of a work can be accurate.

At this point it may be objected that I am making aesthetics a purely subjective business, since my only data are personal experiences of a

particular emotion. It will be said that the objects that provoke this emotion vary with each individual, and that therefore a system of aesthetics can have no objective validity. It must be replied that any system of aesthetics which pretends to be based on some objective truth is so palpably ridiculous as not to be worth discussing. We have no other means of recognizing a work of art than our feeling for it. (Bell, 17)

Bell later decides that as each person is moved by different works, the one and only thing in common between art which moves people is the significant form. This he describes as the aesthetic way in which an artist combines form to create some expression. It would seem that he is making an argument for the aesthetic qualities being of more importance than any contextual qualities. This makes him a proponent of the formalist movement. Bell's belief that the formal qualities are the only expressive component of a work of art implies that a work of art devoid of all context (if this is possible) would still remain expressive on its own. Does this mean that the works I have made, devoid of much context, can still be understood? Bell, I think would argue that they could be. However, I am skeptical that the formal qualities are the only expressive thing about a work of art. I have made the works relating to Chopin's piece in a different manner than those translating Longfellow's poem in order to uncover some of my ideas regarding what it is that makes a work expressive of a particular state. For these pieces I rely on symbolism and make no attempt to hide or obscure subject matter.

In making both collections of works I had a particular intention of testing the aesthetic and contextual limits. However, in creating *Birds as Leaves* and *The Three Transcendentals* I did not have these intentions. I think it is interesting to consider that these two works turned out to have some combination of the aesthetic and contextual qualities. For instance, the inspiration to create the image of the three transcendentals

stemmed from the description of them as sisters. This is a seemingly symbolic piece based on contextual information but I began to think of ways that this could be represented by form leading me to amass these silhouettes together and to use the line of their posture and the tension in their connection to evoke some aesthetic experience in the viewer. As a result, the final piece holds for me both form and context.

In the watercolor piece, *Birds as Leaves*, I was driven by a certain mood that looking up into the trees that day evoked. It was this visual or aesthetic experience of nature that led me to create this piece. The composer tied it back to poetry, a more contextual art form, and then into music, a more aesthetic art form. He described the sensation he got from visual components of my piece and he translated these qualities across media. For example, the greys in the sky led him to compose the piece in a minor tone. This back and forth of context vs. aesthetics seems to be a pattern in this relationship of translation.

Poetry, the visual arts, and music are three distinct forms of art, but each have the unique power to inspire each other. I believe that this is because of the truth that they uncover and so boldly tell. Sometimes this truth is simple and quiet and sometimes it is profoundly complex and overwhelming. Curiously, some works have the ability to take on both of these roles and depict something seemingly simple in a profound way or to simplify something complex. Perhaps there is something that happens through the translation between art forms that can aid in our understanding of an idea.

Maybe the aesthetic qualities reach something inside of us and tend towards the biological perspective of art. The only thing we have to bring to a piece to understand it

is our own humanity. On the other side, perhaps it is the culture we are raised in and the connections we make between things that provide us context to a work. It may be that not all art has to reference something beyond itself. Perhaps it does not have to be anything other than an image expressive of some state of mind. Or perhaps to make this claim is too bold as everything stems from something and so must in some way be referential. Even an abstract painter who intends his work to be non-referential still chooses his colors to work with and these already have cultural associations, whether or not the artist wants them to. I would like to believe that an artwork can stand alone without even a title to lean on. However, I do acknowledge that this aid can help the viewer to understand a work of art. I wonder if the descriptions of my works give them context that brings them to a better understanding? Does that context give them stronger meaning than without it?

Conclusion

This analysis of the aesthetic and the contextual qualities has allowed me to form an understanding of how different art forms make use of both of these qualities. I have found that of the three forms I address in my thesis, music, poetry, and the visual arts; music, devoid of verse, relies most heavily on the aesthetic qualities. Poetry includes the most contextual qualities. The visual arts lie in between. I have concluded that we can place an art form on the scale of contextual to aesthetic based on how it translates expression. The further it moves from our common or most comfortable form of communication such as language, the less contextual and more aesthetic it becomes. It is

also possible then that the further an artwork moves from the contextual the easier it is to be misunderstood. However, one can write a description of the way that they felt, and the reader can get this precise description. But, it is also possible that a painter can portray something specific, in an abstracted way, and the viewer can also understand this.

Because the understanding of the contextual can be common to those who share the language, maybe the aesthetic is a more nuanced or less common language. Perhaps this is what allows for different insights than we can receive using our own language in the same way that learning a new language with words beyond our own broadens our understanding.

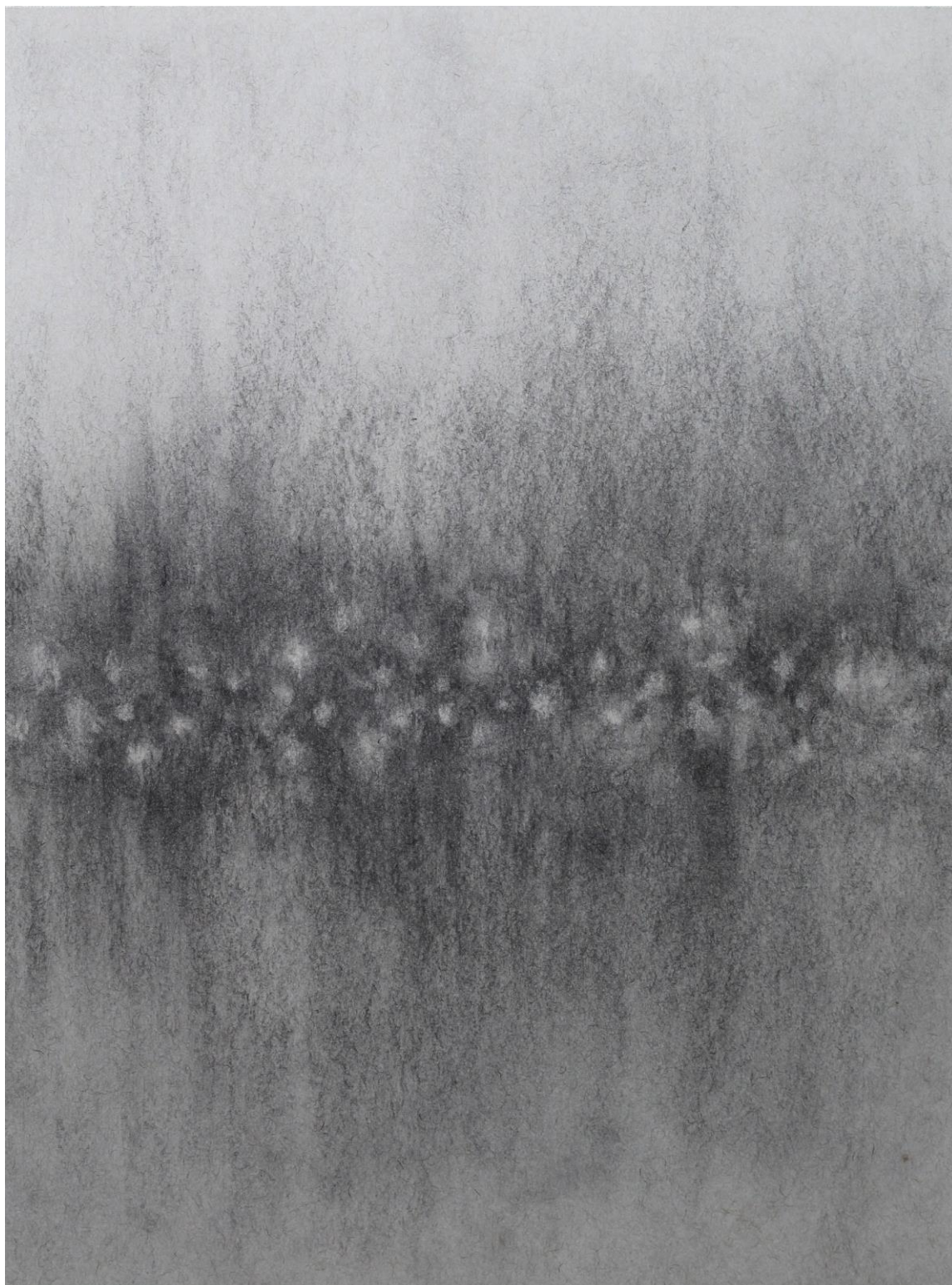
While creating work that is based heavily on the aesthetic qualities such as the prelude, I find myself contextualizing them in an effort to relay meaning. When I was working from a source such as the poem, I found myself creating works which rely on aesthetic qualities to express. Either there is an inclination to translate between these two qualities, to contextualize the aesthetic and to make aesthetic the contextual, or this is a result of the visual arts landing on the scale in between music and poetry so that, to illustrate music the work necessarily takes on more context because it moves away from the aesthetic towards the visual and to illustrate a poem one has no choice but to move away from language towards the visual. I argue that there can be an expression translated by some formal qualities which require limited contextual or symbolic imagery. I have also found that an artwork cannot exist without aesthetic qualities, in fact this very idea may be an impossibility. However, the extent to which they rely on contextual qualities may vary, yet still be expressive. The prelude is just as expressive as the poem.

There is a connection between the contextual and the aesthetic in the same way that there is a connection between the true and the beautiful. The contextual cannot exist without the aesthetic and the aesthetic cannot help but to include the contextual. I believe that Tolstoy would agree that their connectivity is what creates art. With only the contextual you may have the truth, but if lacking the aesthetic form it has no beauty to represent it and can only be a ghost of the truth. Where there is truth and beauty, goodness follows which is for Tolstoy a perfect work of art. “Art begins when a man, with a purpose of communicating to other people a feeling he once experienced, calls it up again within himself and expresses it by certain external signs.” (Tolstoy, 38)

Images



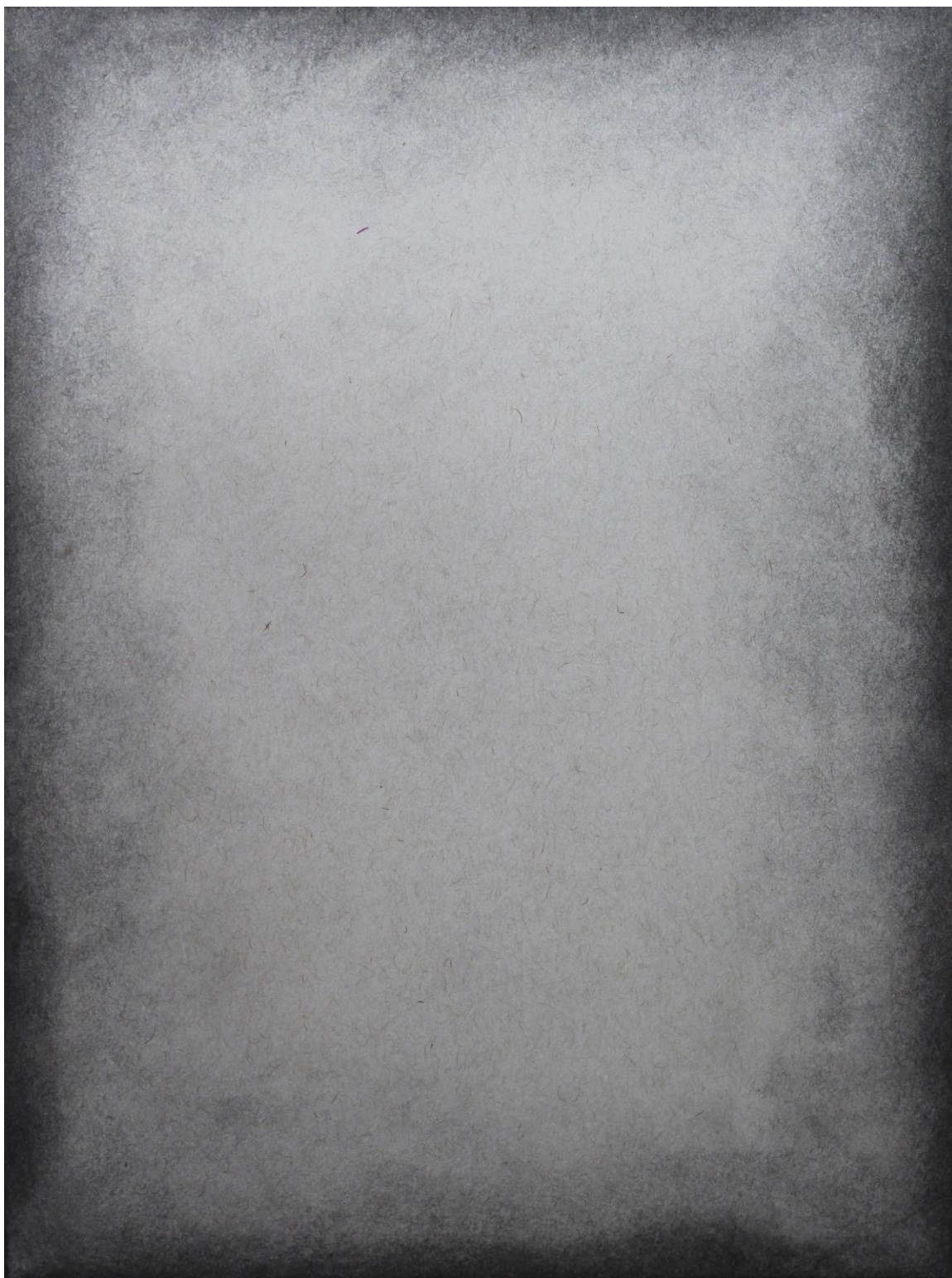
(Figure 1) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Wings of Night*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 2) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Lights of the Village*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 3) Méa Rose St. Amour, *As the Mist Resembles the Rain*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



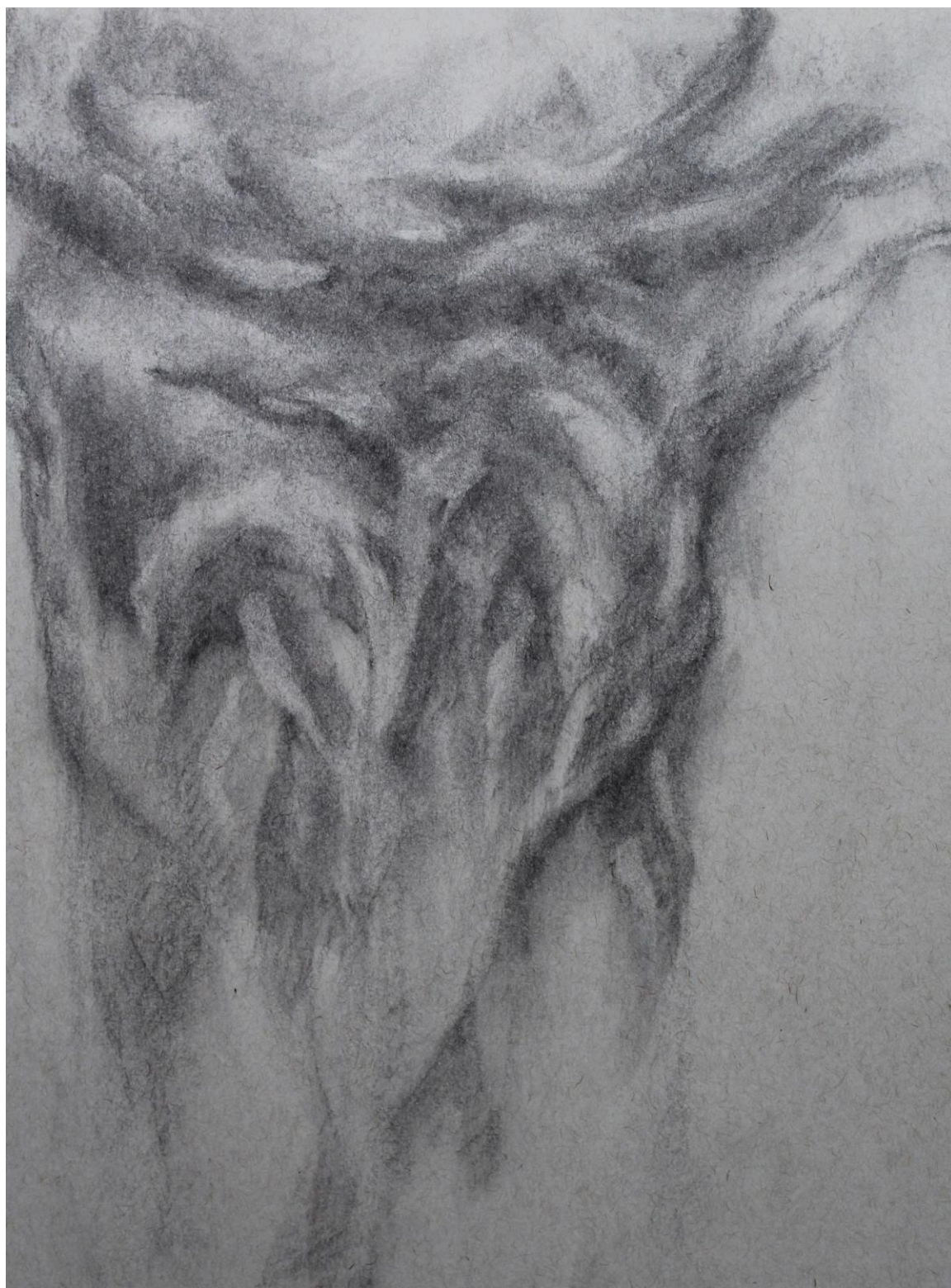
(Figure 4) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Banish the Thoughts of Day*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 5) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Corridors of Time*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 6) Méa Rose St. Amour, *To-night I Long for Rest*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 7) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Songs Gushed from His Heart*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



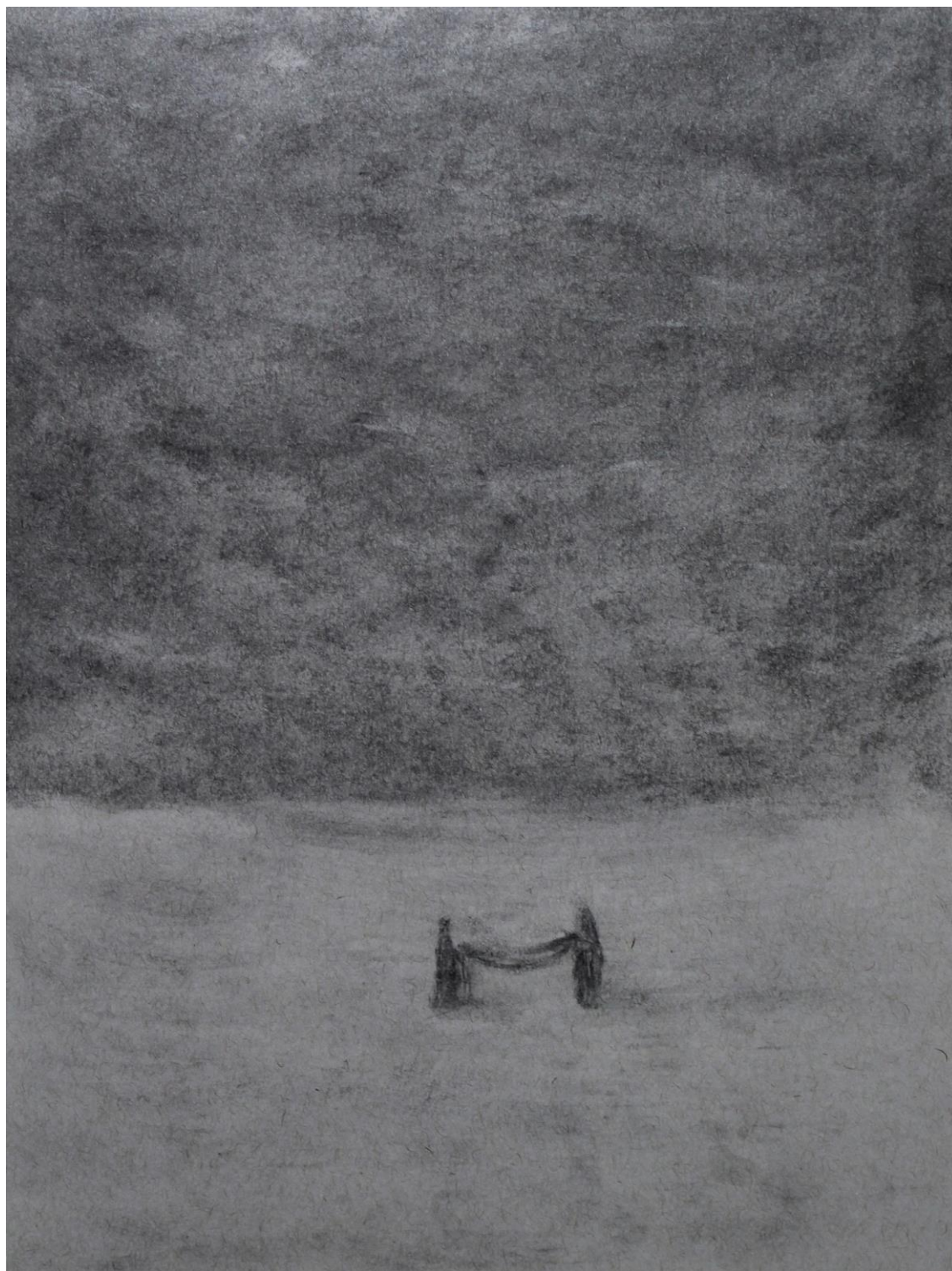
(Figure 8) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Through Long Days of Labor*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 9) Méa Rose St. Amour, *To Quiet*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 10) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Rhyme of the Poet*, 2020, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 11) Méa Rose St. Amour, *As Silently Steal Away*, 2020 charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.



(Figure 12) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Of Hesitation*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in.



(Figure 13) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Of Sorrow and Change*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in.



(Figure 14) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Of Conclusion*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in.



(Figure 15) Méa Rose St. Amour, *Birds as Leaves*, 2019, charcoal on paper, 10 x 7 in.



(Figure 16) Méa Rose St. Amour, *The Three Transcendentals*, 2019, charcoal on toned paper, 12 x 9 in.

Works Cited

Chopin, Frédéric Prelude Op.28, No.4 in E Minor.

Clive Bell, *Art*. London and New York: Chatto & Windus, 1981.

Langer, Susanne K. *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*. 1953. Print.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *The Waif: a Collection of Poems*. John Owen, 1845.

Sibley, Frank "Aesthetic Concepts," *Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), 421-50.

Stephen Davies, *The Philosophy of Art*, Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 2016. Chapter 3,

"Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art," 49-79.

Tolstoy, Leo *What is Art? and Essays on Art*, translated by A. Maude. London: Oxford

University Press, 1930.

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. 1: Seeing*

the Form. Vol. 1. Ignatius Press, 2009.