

Kiley Van Note*Undergraduate Student*

These paintings are a recollection of narratives from individuals that I have encountered throughout my life who have influenced my art, and are a part of my journey towards self-discovery. In recent years, my focus has grown closer towards the working class. Their daily lives are meant to teach the viewer about an uncelebrated part of humanity. By painting them, I honor their position and acknowledge their presence as a person rather than being seen as someone who is just meant to serve.

My concept of addressing the working class first developed when I made a series of paintings of my grandfather's boots. They were meant to show a personal narrative of what kind of work day he would face due to the mental and physical deterioration as he ages. Viewers stated they related to the boots in a personal way. I felt compelled to continue this idea and create a visual language with the audience about subject matters that many working class people confront daily.

Shortly thereafter, my family and I were faced with the dilemma of my father's health issues caused by years of working in the food service industry.

As I grew up, my relationship with my father was strained because of his absence; he worked long shifts as a line cook. However, seeing my father sink deeper into depression during his lapse of work, or lay helpless in a hospital bed after surgery, allowed me to see him as a human being rather than a parental figure. Since his recovery our relationship has changed. Creating paintings of my father's story has allowed a better understanding of one another, he as a provider and me as an artist.

My father's personal struggles provoked a need to dig deeper into the working class and focus on areas such as race, class, gender, age, and identity. Through my research

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I have discovered that my father is like millions of people throughout history who have toiled at a job, but received little respect. Even though I did not hold a place in the food industry, my personal experiences of working in customer service also granted me insight into the perceptions of others that a middle-class worker faces. A co-worker of mine once told me about interacting with customers in her workday, she said, “I don't care if they dislike me as long as they're not dismissive of me.”

The painting process is a chance to confront society's commonality, and counterbalance it with my own perception and sense of justice. The paintings, with their colors, lines and marks are complex and involved, much like the people's stories I choose to narrate. My method is to first take a photograph of the person, and then transfer it to canvas by drawing as well as mapping out colors with an under painting. This under painting, although covered over, mirrors the complexity and hidden psychology of each person I paint. Lastly, as the brush moves and the final image emerges so do the character's persona and a reflection of what I see as their true colors. Specifics such as name, age, and class are elusive, however their body language, the setting and the expression on their face are meant to depict an account that goes far beyond surface level readings. I leave it to the viewer to wonder if they would recognize this person in a store or a restaurant. Also, I wish for the audience to have an acute sense of awareness, and confront some of realities of humanity, when faced with these paintings.



Soles 2 [Series], 2008, Oil on Canvas, 2' x 3'

This painting was part of a series of images of my grandfather's work boots to which he was going to dispose of, until I believed they carried a sense of nostalgia and represented him as a person. This perspective was to represent him looking at the boots.



Deep Surrender, 2008, Oil on Canvas, 3'x4'

This painting was a scene I would often catch my father doing on a series of nights after he would get home from work. My focus here was to capture the feeling of physical and mental exhaustion from a laborious job.



Much of It Cannot Be Undone, 2009,
Oil on Canvas, 3 ½' x 6'

This painting was painted during a time where my father had spinal surgery due to work-related injuries. He spent duration of time in the hospital and I felt the need to capture this traumatic event in our family.



Life is Good, 2009, Oil on Canvas, 3 ½ x 5'

This painting was to represent my father in his work environment after post-operation and return to work as a cook.

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