

1956. I was born in San Francisco, California.

1976. I entered the Jesuit Order.

1983. I completed a Bachelor of Art in Fine Arts at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California.

1983. I began teaching history in a Jesuit high school – and I stopped painting.

2000. I arrived at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York to begin a Master of Fine Arts in painting.

It has been a long journey back to the studio. Ages ago, men and women traveled great distances seeking salvation, peace, forgiveness, love or God. They were called pilgrims. Coming to Brooklyn was more than a journey across the country – it has been part of my own pilgrimage:

Seeking a new career and success? Maybe.

Seeking peace, love and God? Probably.

Seeking myself. Finally.

For the ten years since my ordination to the priesthood, I was a successful teacher at an all boys' prep school. I was secure and popular. My colleagues respected me, my student evaluations were excellent and I was a model of professionalism.

I was a mess:

My intellectual life was restricted to preparing lesson plans for my Western Civilization course.

My emotional life was shaped by the affection of my students.

The only painting I did was the scenery for the school plays.

And my oldest and best friend, the only person with whom I had ever really fallen in love, had recently died from a brain tumor.

And, oh yes, his name was Mark.

Firmly rooted, I was lost.

A popular public figure, much of my soul was hidden – even to myself.

Loved and loving, much of my heart was locked away – protected by

a mind that could outpace emotion,

a religious culture that had come to suffocate desire,

and a closet door that kept me in fear of myself.

I left the security and certainty of career and community to come to a place little known and where I was unknown.

From California to New York.

From being *the* teacher to being *a* student.

From the safety of podium and pulpit to the doubts and solitude of the studio.

It saved my life.

The paintings in this exhibition are the product of this pilgrimage – and they are witnesses to it.

They were formed by calculation and planning.

They were formed by accident.

They are about order and chaos; transparency and obscurity.

They are about change and transformation.

They are about tradition.

I am a priest.

I am a painter.

Two titles. Two professions. Two commitments.

Two traditions.

One body of work.

I use paint.

I use bread.

They are both companions on my journey. The sacraments of a pilgrimage.

Paint

Before I came to Pratt, paint was incidental to my painting. Not unlike a sailor who had been stranded on a desert island, when I first returned to making art after a hiatus of twenty years, I gorged myself on a feast of exotic materials:

wires,

baseballs,

eucalyptus pods, and

driveway sealant all found their way into (onto) my paintings.

I had fun: in a gesture both sentimental and defiant, I retrieved dozens of paint can lids from the school theater where I had for ten years done my only painting (always someone else's vision – the director's – and for someone else's benefit – the students') and used them in some of my first – and *my own* – paintings.

I also used pita bread.

Its round shape and organic imperfection appealed to me: so I glued them to canvases and painted them different colors.

I had never heard of Clement Greenberg.

Throughout the past two years, the former teacher began to learn and to pay closer attention to a tradition that was as old as gesso: to become a serious student of Painting.

I made a commitment to

the studio,

galleries and museums,

classrooms and libraries engaging the lives, thought and work of artists and critics,

and most of all, by being surrounded by men and women who take painting seriously, and who work with integrity and reflection,

I have come to realize that the fashioning of a painting is not a casual affair.

Extravagant materials stayed in their boxes and I began
to use paint alone. (And bread.)

It was a way to find order in an ocean of materials.

It was a way to take *painting* seriously.

It was necessary to take painting seriously.

Canvas

No longer a platform for an avalanche of materials, it became
the picture plane.

A place for:

Color

Form

Texture (...and the occasional warhorse.)

A place for:

Paint

Within this now sacred space

that which is controlled encounters that which is beyond control and free;

and chaos begins to relate to order:

to engage

to dialogue

to balance

and struggle.

Basic geometry

The canvas is square.

Within the square canvas, the primary shape

repeated again and again,

over and over,

is the pita circle.

The square is constant and uniform.

The circles are frequent – made of bread – they are varied in shape:

not perfect circles or spheres,

they are imperfect and organic.

One form tends towards precision and uniformity.

The other(s) subtly removes itself from precision.

Process

The arrangement of the forms/placement of the shapes is

sometimes calculated,

often, it is spontaneous and intuitive.

Sometimes the bread ends up where it lands.

The bread is a shape: a stencil, mold, barrier and shield.

I apply the paint:

Spray with a water bottle.

Pour.

Or like the first painters in their caves,

I blow the paint from a straw.

I remove the forms. And see. And respond.

I place the shapes again,

sometimes responding deliberately to what I see;

sometimes ignoring it completely.

Or both.

And then I repeat the whole process again.

And again.

And again.

Building,

Growing:

Layer upon layer

Surface upon surface

Color upon color

Texture upon texture

Circle upon circle.

Sometimes I discover clean, crisp shapes: order.

Other times, I find chaos: unplanned, unexpected.

And in this, there can be mud.

Or a beautiful surprise.

Materials

Acrylic paint dries rapidly.

I can wait for a layer to dry before another application of paint

or I can return to the process immediately and instigate

a mixing of paint

and color.

This yielded fortuitous interplays of color and form.

Or mud.

I use different mediums, both matte and gloss, so there is no single finish.

The amount of pigment that saturates the medium,

and the amount of water that dilutes it, affects

the intensity of the color

and the opacity or transparency of the surface.

Sometimes, I think that a neutral area of the canvas needs a flash, or jolt of intense color.

Sometimes, I carefully plan to place a gloss finish next to a matte finish.

Sometimes, I calculate and plan and measure.

Sometimes, I reach for the nearest open bottle of medium.

The application of various materials provides room for both order and chaos.

A particular and important epiphany of order and chaos in these paintings is

The Drip.

A frequent actor on these canvases.

An easy tool: sometimes too easy.

It serves as an effective linear counterpoint to the pita-circles.

It brings both order and chaos.

Order:

How and where it begins are in my control:

The amount of paint in a certain place;

Its density, viscosity and intensity.

Its life and path:

How high do I raise the canvas from the horizontal?

For how long?

How dry is the paint before I start?

Chaos:

A drip is a drip. Controlled by its own internal mechanisms and the laws of physics and chemistry, it finds its own way.

Here, my level of comfort with chaos confronts me. I seek to watch the interplay between order and chaos, and to find something in the tension between them. Ultimately, I am uncomfortable with chaos.

Order and chaos are not equal partners on my canvases. In my life.

Order continually outmaneuvers chaos.

With a water bottle at the ready, I have killed many a drip that has dared to go its own way. As a painter (not to mention, as a person) I have learned to trust the power of order and control. Controlling my use of materials – and later, my use of color – cleared the way for me to make new discoveries – and to grow. I have yet to trust chaos in the same way. Still, I am learning:

One evening, I hung a wet painting on the wall of my studio and went home.

I allowed the materials to be – without me.

I came back the next morning. The best painting I did all year was when I was not even there.

I am learning to trust chaos.

I am learning to trust.

I am learning.

And I am learning to paint.

There are many differing and opposing views as to what is or is not a painting.

It was a discussion that was new to me. As was the suggestion that painting had died around the time I was born.

I began to listen. To absorb. To learn. To question.

I learned that painting was not just an activity: it had a history; it mattered to people.

In critiques, I heard painters speak in almost reverential tones
of the picture plane
and how form and color and light
could breathe and come to life on a surface
– or how they could be lost, buried and suffocated there.

I wanted to learn that respect.

I wanted to take the making of a painting seriously:
to find out where I stood in relation to the committed painters
who I had studied;
and with whom I had studied.

It was a matter of discovering my place in a tradition.

Bread

Being part of tradition was not a new experience.

Respect for tradition had formed and fashioned much of my life.

In some ways, tradition had defined my life.

I came to Pratt to become a painter because the contours of my life
– formed and fashioned by religious tradition alone – had become
too frustrating,
too limiting,
and just
too painful.

If my relationship to the tradition of painting was a process of *discovery*:

coming to understand what it means to be a painter,

my relationship to the traditions of my church is one of *recovery*:

coming to terms with

what I have ignored,

what I have feared,

and what I most deeply value.

My religious tradition offers proclamations and teachings that have

perplexed, inspired,

troubled,

and wounded me.

My relationship to this tradition mirrors what I find in my paintings:

conflict and harmony,

clarity and obscurity,

order and chaos;

layers of discovery,

mud,

and beauty.

I believe in the possibility of beauty, and that it is born

as much in chaos as it is in order,

in struggle as it is in submission,

in questions as much as in answers:

in the unfolding of layers of (my) human truth.

I use bread not as a personal gimmick. For me, and for my tradition, there is no more sacred element. Along with wine, it is a symbol and an occasion of mystery and the sacred – the central element used in the Eucharist of the Catholic Church. In this fundamental ritual, Catholics believe that the Transcendent becomes real in the material and very ordinary presence of bread and wine. I use bread in my painting because it is familiar, it is important – and it has been a means to seek something beyond myself. It is not an accident that I work on my paintings when they are flat on a table – it is as if I am working on an altar.

The work of my life

on the studio's table and

the church's altar

involves bread.

It is about transformation.

And it is about tradition.

Bread is at the very heart of my tradition.

I was raised, formed and ordained to find in bread a means to salvation.

I still do.

But my personal pilgrimage has moved me to place along side of bread another

material that has served as a source of salvation:

Paint.

Three years ago, I wore a black suit every day and had a clearly defined and esteemed role with which to fill it. And my heart was empty.

Today, I am rarely certain or confident of what I am doing and my once black shoes are covered with paint – and I have finally been able to catch a glimpse of my soul.

REFERENCE LIST

John of Damascus, Saint. 1980. On the Divine Images: Three Apologies Against Those Who Attack Divine Images. Translated by David Anderson. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

1.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	36" X 36"
2.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	24" X 24"
3.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	24" X 24"
4.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	24" X 24"
5.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	36" X 36"
6.	Untitled	acrylic and pen on canvas	36" X 36"
7.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	36" X 36"
8.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	36" X 36"
9.	Untitled	acrylic on canvas	36" X 36"
10.	Untitled	acrylic and pen on canvas	36" X 36"