Texas Gothic

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Texas Gothic
Paintings by Taryn Uribe Turner

MFA Studio Art 2024 | Southern Methodist University
Texas Gothic
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Thesis submitted to the faculty of Southern Methodist University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree:

Master of Fine Arts- Painting

Committee Members:

Nishiki Sugawara-Beda
Melanie Clemmons

By: Taryn Uribe Turner
Dallas, Texas
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ABSTRACT

The emotional and the ecological combine to create my body of work titled, “Texas Gothic.” My thesis tells the stories of my oil paintings created through personal connections to a variety of landscapes, animals and experiences that share the setting of Texas.

Desire and regret take shape as animals and figures not fully formed or real. Unreliable narratives of the past are entangled with present tensions to create a painting that haunts and stalks. And yet, there is hope!

Through nostalgia and sweetness and burdens, my paintings confront a shrouded future. The contradictions of time passing are explored in my paintings in an effort to tame an ungraspable motion. I seek to capture fleeting moments and moods through layers of color and nuances expressed by brushwork. The undercurrent within my images meditates on the idea of being an artist and the struggle to embody the showmanship required.

My time at SMU as a graduate student has resulted in the development of my artistic practice and identity, culminating into the 2024 MFA Qualifying Exhibition and thesis research. Each painting in the Exhibition embodies the essence of the overarching theme of “Texas Gothic.”
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you for the feedback and the freedom to paint to my heart’s delight. Thank you to my committee members: Nishiki Sugawara-Beda, Melanie Clemmons and other faculty members that have served on my committee.
"'Last forever!' Who hasn’t prayed that prayer? You were lucky to get it in the first place. The present is a freely given canvas. That it is constantly being ripped apart and washed downstream goes without saying."

-Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

Moon Tower, oil on panel, 10 × 8 in, 2022 (Figure 2)
This document is how I spent my time during fall 2022 to spring 2024 in the Master of Fine Arts graduate program at Southern Methodist University. In these paintings, I explain the stories and creative references that inspired them. The majority of works discussed in this paper were featured in the 2024 MFA Qualifying Exhibition: *To Feel, To Mend, To Be*

*Sieve*, oil on panel, 8 × 10 in, 2022 (Figure 3)

*All paintings are mine unless otherwise stated.*
Installation shot at the Pollock Gallery for the 2024 MFA Qualifying Exhibition: *To Feel, To Mend, To Be*
TEXAS GOTHIC

The name Texas Gothic came to be while being on the verge of falling asleep. Barely awake, I wrote the title in my notes app. I also named a painting Texas Gothic similar to how short story writers may name their collection after one story. I wanted to emphasize the contrast and complexities of Texas itself while also aligning it to the term “gothic.” I use it to hint at a supernatural undercurrent to a landscape and linking it to a romantic yet macabre backdrop. I also utilize the aesthetic associations of mystery to link to my paintings.

I am made of places. I wanted to paint the environments that made me. The natural landscape of Texas and environments continue to live inside of people even after we move away or the landscape itself changes. I, also, am still navigating masculine myths, government actions and environmental degradation, relative to my own existence.

I begin with thinking of my ancestral history in Texas and Mexico and then to my upbringing in the Texas Hill Country. In the middle of it all, I am considering the differences between some of Texas’ major cities.
My initial research question was as simple as: become a better painter and see what themes arise. Animals, memory and family are what I use to create documents (oil paintings) that speak to being of a certain time and place.

The ultra-smooth panels remember the history of marks and light through colors. The contradictions of time passing are explored in an effort to tame an ungraspable motion. I want to remember the hope I felt when the answer was that everything happens for a reason and a part of a loving plan. It's hard to believe this now, and I personally want a contemporary "hope for heaven" as something to create. I am learning a history of making meaning through uncertainty, creating visuals that solidify the expanse. Sometimes my paintings serve as a mirror reflecting aspects of human nature that explore emotions or behavior or social dynamics, whether it be joys, struggles or vulnerabilities.

Through my paintings, I want to foster an interconnectedness between humans, animals and the natural world. I hope to further explore environmental themes and raise awareness to the fragility of nature and the delicate ecosystems of our Earth. I often use color palettes with tones of particular places to evoke a harmony with the given location. Places such as South Texas, the Hill Country, or the Texas coast offer a blend of natural beauty and cultural richness, making them perfect for evocative color palettes. Over time, imagery has become more abstracted as I try to grasp the nuances of place. I want emotion, time of day and communion with others and the natural world to be felt.
I developed a subconscious pattern of depicting animal-like figures in situations of ambiguous distress or confinement. More recently, I have aligned myself to seeing animal hybridity as a more natural state of depiction, albeit more integrated and cohesive. The artist and writer, Leonora Carrington, created her own bestiary. She is an artistic influence that helps me to embrace both the visual and verbal. *The Giantess (The Guardian of the Egg)* began my curiosity on her subject matter. The background melts together land, sky and water. She described herself as a “female human animal” and had a shared sense of injustice with the flora and fauna. The egg in the Giantess’s hands holds potential to see the world as intertwined with the landscape.
I was gifted with a reproduction of *El Hombre (Man)* that has become a personal talisman of sorts for almost a decade. The rootedness of the figure reaching up towards the heavens indicates our rootedness in the earth with a striving towards something intangible.

“...landscape is both inside the body and outside of it, both part of whom we are and a thing apart. Persons and landscapes are entangled in a network of material and social relations providing both affordances and constraints for the performance of identities that always occur in particular material and cultural contexts. Landscape is thus an intertwining of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world... People are materially entangled and entwined with landscape and precisely because of that they are emotionally bound up with its past, present and future.”

-Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*
During the beginning of my MFA, I kept yearning to hold or “tame” subjects that I could not control into paintings. I have been pictorially wrestling with a haunting sense of loss and a visceral homesickness. Through animal bodies, ambiguous figures and personal symbolism, I was trying to find an escape from isolation, paranoia and futility through the process.

*The Parade* is a perfect example of the frustration and disease I felt. The setting is from the annual Matagorda Bay Bird Fest in Palacios, Texas. Bird Fest offers an opportunity for festivalgoers to visit nearby marshes and observe local bird species. Most importantly, the festival aims to increase ecological understanding and environmental stewardship. One of the most popular events is a bird parade where paraders of all ages dress as birds and walk along the shoreline of the old fishing town. They are becoming their landscape. In the painting, I have obscured the procession of participants marching along the shoreline. I used a rag to swipe the paint in exasperation, but the result led me to redefine what my version of “finished” is. I love the animal hybridity and the feeling that something is not quite right.
The chase for the golden nut. The squirrel body is lit up from the prize. The tiny heartbeat burning with frenzy turned phantasmagorical. The squirrel knows what to do.

In the exhibition of “To Feel, To Mend, To Be,” I’ve Got It! begins my section of paintings. I was inspired by the squirrel that napped on the tree beside my summer window everyday. It depicts a squirrel, lit up from the inside and glowing with a vitality and fervor for its goal: the nut. It is captured in a night vision-like rendering using an exposed layer of underpainting that glows from transparent oil paints, such as my favorite, Indian yellow. The animal body is contrasted by a Prussian blue mixed with Burnt Umber/ Burnt Sienna background. Even in the darkest of night, the animal is led by instinct to what it needs.

I did not arrive at grad school with an identifiable art style. I was exploring recognizable themes; however, I had just started to seriously make paintings just over a year before applying. I was frantic in my obsession to “catch up.” I just wanted to be a better oil painter. I wasn’t sure what I was trying to reach or catch. I have many aspirations, but I was exhausted by the broad goal of finding my visual voice.
In *Malformation*, due to a deformation on my face affecting my blood vessels called a venous malformation, I wanted a bursting center that would be the energy force. I named it due to being born with my left side of my face skewed and tinted purple. I related it to eating a mango because as I grew up, the venous anomaly felt like fruit trapped in my cheek—a perfect flat sphere that felt like a slice of plum.

As a child, I was always asked if I had a black eye or if I was punched in the lip and I would hide. In middle school, I had about five surgeries where I had to cover my face for long periods of time due to swelling and bruising. When stress aggravated the pulsing in my veins, my face would swell and deform. In the painting, I tried to emulate "Descent into the Maelstrom" by Edgar Allen Poe. The more time I sat with the painting in an unfinished state, the more I could project thought into the bright center, like a black hole.
Sometimes my process includes sifting through my bounty of journals where I have collaged written poems, drawings, quotes, and a huge document of things that have happened to me and/or are important to me. It is nice to know all that compilation is good for more than my own benefit if others get to see the results of it.

In one of those journals, I found my reflections on *The Consolation of Philosophy* written by the Roman statesman Boethius. He wrote this manuscript to console himself in prison while awaiting execution for several charges, including treason, around 524 AD. Experiencing a “Book of Job” moment by losing his wealth, family, and hope, he is approached by the manifestation of Lady Philosophy. She urges him to push away Lady Poetry’s paralyzing hold on his emotions. Back in 2018, I copied down the following quote:

“...she gently laid a hand on my breast and said: ‘There is no danger. You are suffering merely from lethargy, the common illness of deceived minds. You have forgotten yourself a little, but you will quickly be yourself again when you recognize me. To bring you to your senses, I shall quickly wipe the dark cloud of mortal things from your eyes.’ Then, she dried my tear-filled eyes with a fold of her robe.”
The book still resonates when I am in a different context but in a similar emotional position. It was a lesson on leveraging my woes and thinking rationally about the past, present, and future. Since then, I have been around Fortuna’s wheel several times. The Wheel of Fortune is a visual representation of the passage of time for me.

The Lladró Figurines of Mary and Joseph brought me back to trying to not mess them up as I reorganized their bodies countless times. I would often end up dropping and disfiguring them. I found them on eBay recently. The layers in my painting were important because the panel I used soaks in the history of each brushstroke, making me more aware of how my actions build up. Curiously, I wanted to provoke the wheel of fortune through the inevitability of change. This whoosh can be hot and alive.

These frail figures are impervious to depth and become porcelain under fire. It reminded me of having a hard time not being able to relate to music and writing for a little while. I was wary, getting older, that experiences and connections aren’t new and shiny anymore.
This is a steady, yet awkward piece. An unmade bed with the detritus of a scrappy morning mixed in with the bed sheets. I fell asleep like this before I painted it. I wanted to depict a grief or mourning of parts of how my life was and who I was. It’s also the feeling like I can’t wake up for the life of me and feeling so incredibly heavy. Feeling like I had to perform in order to do what I love. Like this is a fruitless endeavor if I’m not in your face flaunting how amazing I am. In order to succeed as an artist, I feel compelled to proclaim my identity is significant enough to be acknowledged. It feels like an impossible task to me. Joan Didion says writing is a hostile act. It’s imposing your view onto others. It doesn’t feel right.

I just want to rest my head on something. I couldn’t move myself to perform, thinking about art and using colors and brushstrokes to create a visual. However, there is a drowsiness in feeling like nothing is based in text or fact—that it’s all up in the air. I can’t sink my teeth into my own thoughts.

The burden of uncertainty had borne into a big, awkward bird that hovers and flaps. The position of the figure is also like someone in reverent prayer. This is how my mother prays. It is an indicator of humility. When I see that she takes care to get into the kneeling position, despite the effort it takes, it leaves us receptive to what may or may not happen.
In an undergrad seminar: “Human Place in Nature,” the students around the table were asked what our most striking memory of being in nature was. We ALL answered places that we have traveled to, most commonly, a foreign location. It was a revelation to me, feeling guilty of denying the landscape of my home. Many of us felt some shame, even those from suburbs or the city. Not many people have the privilege of living alongside a distinct landscape, and the ability to walk freely without repercussions. Even architecture is another space of exploration and being.

The poetic naturalist, Aldo Leopold, in *A Sand County Almanac: and Sketches Here and There* is attuned to the environment that lives alongside him. Being aware of your surroundings, where you live, is the forming of community. As an artist, I want to bring out the beauty of a place while recognizing that we are connected to our environments.

William Cronon’s essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” is that there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. Humans had to be taken away in order to produce the image of a virgin landscape. We have to see ourselves and the architecture as part of what we believe is lost to us.

The Texas border has been a site of family and story and land that has been stripped and cut over time. Those acres are where family members have developed their whole person-hood which are now fenced through and slowly sold off. I have memories, but mostly from a distance. I know that the land was our family. Painting connects me to that connection, knowing it’s this desire that makes the connection.

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I have many memories of looking for arrowheads, fossils and quartz. Any dirt will do, but there is the cracked earth at our family ranch on the Texas border, in Laredo. Many of my relatives, dead and alive have sifted through dry creek beds looking for things left behind from whoever was there when it had water flowing. Wishing I could participate in this history more, but painting is close enough. Cultural identity can be full of contradictions, longings and reliant on stories and images. Sense of place is especially important, especially if one’s ancestors had direct connection with a specific landscape and identity within.

The cinematic nature of my grandparents’ relationship made an impression on me—reading their letters in scrawled Spanish of forbidden love and balcony rendezvous. A plane crash in Mexico ended my grandfather’s life and left my grandmother forever sad. My abuelo was mythologized with charreada trophies and iconic vaquero pictures. They were much of what remained of him to me since I never met him. I found drafts of my own romanticized letters, realizing I sought the myth. Perhaps some experiences are slight reenactments, overlaying others’ stories with personal narrative.

A painting can sometimes stand stronger against a memory or picture. In Texas Gothic, I originally thought a man in an old polaroid was my grandfather, Marco. However, it actually is his son Marco and his cousin Leo. Both of their fathers met untimely, tragic deaths. In the painting, there is a feeling of legend to figures, their stories and their time period. I liked the thought of asserting a mastery over darkness. I became preoccupied with the verb of disappearing, one state to the next. Areas obliterated and becoming enmeshed in the brush. When I read One Hundred Years of Solitude, the overlapping of stories and family reminded me of my own vision of my family’s past—memory on memory.
The painting, *I Dare You* is derived from a photograph of my mom’s siblings messing with a snake at the family ranch in Laredo.

The figures could be a teacher and student. The sweeping movement of land through brushstrokes and tones is shifty. As I painted this, I recalled watching the movie “Like Water for Chocolate,” and it inspired the runaway horse and women in different roles. The setting of that movie seems to picture a time and place my family lived through. My great-uncle Leonidas was the municipal president of Mapimi, Durango during the Mexican Revolution. He was paraded down streets with revolutionaries. Juana Lopez, another revolutionary, rescued him from his fate because he had exonerated her husband accused of treason. She gave him a horse to escape on.
There is a display of “playing” deer at a relative’s Cherry Springs Ranch, near Camp Wood in the Texas Hill Country. I saw the painting, *Punishment of a Hunter* by Paulus Potter (c. 1600’s) and I also saw the TV series “Outer Range,” where the taxidermized animals come back to life and rampage. My family tells the story of my great-grandfather being listed in an edition of *Great Hunters of the World* with his picture. He had an ongoing hunt with a Kodiak bear in Alaska. Once he finally shot the bear through the heart, they both died at the same time.

*Freezer Burn* relates to the overwhelming frozen state I have felt since moving to Dallas. Any sense of burning with passion or fervor for projects or hope has been dashed like leaving something in the fridge for too long. *Fence Hunters* represents the scavenging for remnants of myself and the sustenance that fuels me. These deer are suspended in a frozen stance, like caught in a flash from a camera.

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HILL COUNTRY

Winchester is the main road in my “neighborhood.” North Barcroft Estates is a winding grouping of homes on plots of land with acres between each other. My dad wanted to keep our land wild and thriving without us maintaining it much. My mother once told me that my first prayer was for the developers to please not knock down the oaks and cedars on properties down the road. I always feel better around trees and feel fortunate that I was able to experience a childhood knowing that anything could happen just past the tree line.

Our house is off Winchester street, on a small road named Dillard just outside the town of Bergheim. At the dead end, we have to unlock a chain and open it up each time, dragging it through the caliche. The house is down a hill into what I see as a bowl in the land. Our cars always splattered in caliche residue from going down the hill. My parents bought it when they moved from Laredo. They thought it was the perfect house with the driveway encircling a large oak tree. When they toured, the oak appeared to be dead. I’m told my dad saw one small green leaf and decided to invest in the land. I’ve always known it as thriving.

1 Caliche is a road base made of limestone and other mixed crushed stone that are solidified together through calcium carbonate. It can also be a soil layer that gardeners struggle to dig through because plants struggle to grow through it. Our family ranch on the Texas-Mexico border became a supplier of caliche.
When I finished this painting, I could almost hear the crunch of dried grass in the clearing surrounding my childhood home. Unruly and patchy, I envied kids in town that trampled on lush St. Augustine grass that rivaled carpet. Dipping in bare feet on our land resulted in sticker burrs and the graze of grasshoppers. My poor dog Comet, a Yorkie, often had to endure us untangling the burrs from his little paws.

We still own the house and property, but with only infrequent visits, it is fading away. The light the Saltillo tiles cast on the high white walls during the golden hour is a warmth I’ll only know there.

My parents recently moved to a newer house 15 minutes away. On a recent car ride to Amarillo, my cousin kept going on and on about what a shame it was that my childhood home is wasting away with no one living there. As a contractor, he can see the timeline of a house. In some areas of the Hill Country, dilapidated structures spot the landscape and weeds tangle over wooden barns in pastures. They all have the same sunken look. However, I wanted to depict our home signaling the motion of time fading the house structure away. The grass remains.
“what else was that feeling of contained force, ready to burst forth in violence, that longing to apply it with her eyes closed, all of it, with the rash confidence of a wild beast? ...She felt a perfect animal inside her, full of contradictions, of selfishness and vitality.”

-Clarice Lispector’s 1943 novel, Near to the Wild Heart, comparing the protagonist to “a little egg”

The wisps of caricatures in this painting are a line-up of Winnie the Pooh stuffed animals, Easter edition. I was bound to our 14-acre property, miles away from downtown Boerne and miles away from friends. On the rare occasions we had people over was our annual Easter celebration. Relatives, friends and neighbors would honor the tradition of piñatas and cascarones. We would journey into the woods to explore while the adults hid the cascarones then they would signal with a conch shell sound or whistle that the “hunt” could begin. I looked forward to the gathering for months knowing we would have people visit our far-out property.
My Island, My Friends
oil on linen, 51 × 43 in, 2023 (Figure 18)
The island in the bottom section of My Island, My Friends is the same yard where Egg Hunt took place. With no siblings and an overprotective father and beyond full-time working mom, I wasn't allowed to bike, walk nor go anywhere past the perimeter of our property. My father was dealing with his own anxieties with leaving the house. Feeling marooned on our yard and house, I waited years and nearly vibrated with anticipation for college. I even remember writing, even if I don't make any new friends, at least I will be able to bike.

It was in Austin I found my people and spaces of belonging. I fought for it and achieved it to make up for relative isolation. The themes of absence and presence are central to many of my paintings.

The figures are a collection of dead memories made tangible. A trophy case of sweet things past and memorable. A celestial moon face hovers above the birds. The cardinal is for my cousin, Marisa– really all birds are for my cousin Marisa. She loved anything red to the point of obsession. Cardinals and lady bugs remind us of her. She was dying while I was beginning my life. The guilt follows me for not being present during that time. But through reminders I see and look for, I know she is always with me. I have talked with a professor about my love for Rilke and how Letter’s to a Young Poet and his other poem collections resonated with me when my cousin Marisa died. The numbness of voices and the awareness of both positive and negative spirits are portrayed in this painting and in several of my other artworks.

The monk parakeets remind me of Austin and the surreal experiences I had there. My friend and I would often recount interactions we had, voicing them like short stories at our apartment at the end of the day. Not unlike the encounters in Richard Linklater’s movie Slacker with its collection of Austin characters, it was a comfort knowing the rest of the night could be a new memory sparked by spontaneity, listening to music, or just studying.

A friend once wrote to me, comparing me to a red-winged blackbird. This refers to a different version of myself. At my Duval Street apartment, woodpeckers nested in the courtyard. This embodies the time I spent after graduating from college. Many people still lived in Austin, and I made more friends from working and being a part of the community. I was the most content there with neighbors and familiar haunts. I had hope and saw people who took care of each other.

I’ve sequestered myself on an island not unlike the fences I grew up within, far away, forbidden and withdrawn. I saw one of my friends from then at a restaurant here in Dallas while having dinner with a visiting artist. I had not seen friends from this group too often. I was bitter when I literally saw a group of them the next day at the UT stadium in Austin. It had been years. I couldn’t help but feel like I’ve killed my friends. They are dead.

It would be to my benefit to embrace my life now. I keep myself emotionally distant. Feeling much like a teenager in my disillusionment and alienation, I recalled the last page of The Catcher in the Rye, “Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody.”
I was looking at the contemporary French artist, Alexandre Lenoir and British artist Peter Doig. Back when I had young tumultuous emotions, I always wanted my meaning to speak and narrate. Now, I want a picnic gathering of whatever I find meaningful at the time to provoke something visually stunning. Stories and visuals go hand in hand for me. Lenoir’s images escape and hold the feeling and light of a certain time of day and place.

I am reminded that I make paintings to resonate through my formal choices on a surface. I want my canvases to live with people who have attached a meaning to a piece. My memories are fleeting and can turn into something else.

Gustav Klimt’s landscapes also appealed to me as they obscure the line between realism and abstraction. The bold compositional choices bring a feeling of being enveloped into the scenery. Light and form are one encompassing piece.

SPRING RENEWAL
I lived near the Guadalupe River. I’ve seen this river through historic floods and sunshine, with groups or alone. The title, *I Saw Daylight in Your Eyes*, is from the outlaw country singer of legend, Blaze Foley, in his song “Picture Cards Can’t Picture You.” Tone and hue explore light and, in the distance, the muted surrounding creates a kaleidoscopic atmosphere.

I wanted harmony in movement and fluidity through the watercolor-like application. This is how I remember swimming on my back and seeing the sunlight through the trees. It also was how I remember grazing the mossy pebbles from my bare feet as well as seeing the tiny rapids from hard, little roots. The perspective kept changing as I worked.
The name *Dark & Divine* came from a spousal dedication I found at the San Antonio Botanical Gardens. I thought the sentiment was timeless and evocative. This painting has its inception in looking through or past a tree line. I once saw a white barn owl come and land on the tree line of my childhood backyard. I stared for a few precious seconds and saw it whoosh back towards its realm of dark foliage. I like the thought of a threshold to transcend between.

I would sit at night after my parents fell asleep on the top of the deck stairs of my Bergheim home and had a view of my backyard’s threshold. I would think I could communicate with the treetops by how the leaves would sway through the tempo of the wind. It would be like a supernatural exchange to me. The stars were abundant and shooting stars would often appear.

A second and more definable inspiration comes from a night at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. We were doing an Ana Mendieta burning ritual and in a field with her silhouette. In a receptive state of mind after the ritual, I looked up to see a swirling wall of lightning bugs. I scaled a nearby fence, the sight inescapable. I heard my name called and saw that I was the last one due to being entranced. It was remarkable. Both experiences alight the same spark that gives the future a more welcoming light.
Mustang Island is a strip of land off the Texas Gulf Coast, the main town being Port Aransas, Texas. I often would spend the whole day digging and building elaborate cities of castles with a cousin and family friend team. We would often find tar if we dug down far enough and bury ourselves in it. The oil rigs are always in sight from the shoreline on Mustang Island.

When I’m nervous, I just want to dig or pick grass, grappling at the ground. This painting was created from many layers. It began with a Sargasso seaweed circle and the dark, droopy sand where the waves meet land. I wanted to embrace the in-between of blocking people out yet also of young girls working together and building a permeable barrier to let the seawater in with a swirling motion. I painted darks on the top layer in a frantic mode. I thought I ruined it, the oils becoming muddy. It felt very emotional being so exhausted while creating this piece. I was nauseous from feeling inadequate and wanting to return to when I was out in the sun often. Then I utilized the palette knife and started scraping past the mud to reveal the vibrancy again, and I ran with it.
In conclusion, I remember one of the most beautiful moments of my life. I was making a new friend, they were in the trees, and I was walking around in the water looking for rocks. We both looked at the same time to see this puddle with more butterflies of different colors than I had ever seen. We both smiled. Everything was a game of signs.

These moments are the fleeting heartbeats that create sense of hope. I wanted to go beyond looking at my own experience. However, my cloud of malaise couldn't let me see past my own emotions. I wanted to remember moments in time where I could connect with others and the earth because this is how I've seen and conceptualized my own timeline. As I drive through Texas now, it's undeniable how much changes with time and gets reworked for the worst. However, I hope we associate more of our own idea of time and self into the land we walk upon and share.

“Because I know that **time is always time**
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice”

-T.S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*


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APPENDIX

Taryn Uribe Turner
SMU Graduate Brochure

Written by Elizabeth Crook: American novelist specializing in Texan historical fiction. She recently received the 2023 Texas Writer Award in recognition of her contributions to Texas literature.

There’s a tenacious attachment to land—especially Texas land—in Taryn Turner’s paintings, and it is not merely an emotional attachment, but literal, so that even what appears to float freely, such as the island in her painting *My Island, My Friends*, suggests attachment to the greater firmament at the base. The birds in this painting are not in the air, but laid out in a row on the land, or from a different perspective—perhaps under the land, as if buried upright. In some of the paintings the attachment appears macabre and unsettling, the ground appearing to swallow the figures and pull them under. The horse in *Moon Tower* is partially submerged, and the poor steer in *What Now* is almost lost to the mud while the ranchers attempt to extract him. He is, it appears, going under.

In nearly every painting there is this same issue with boundaries between earth and air, or rather what is below and what is above. In *Texas Gothic*, the dark brush at the base partially conceals the image of men on horseback. The men are elevated not only by being on horseback, but by standing upright on the backs of horses, as if attempting to rise as high as they can above the brush. There’s playfulness in their postures, but also danger—a fall appears inevitable. “I liked the thought of asserting a mastery over darkness,” Taryn says about this painting. “I became preoccupied with the verb of disappearing, one state to the next. Areas obliterated and becoming enmeshed in the brush.”

We see this crossing of boundaries in other aspects of Turner’s paintings. There’s a blending of humans and animals—people dressed and parading as birds in *The Parade*, and animals carousing as if they are human in *Freezer Burn/Fence Hunters*—a disquieting depiction of taxidermized deer leaping out of the darkness.

And always, in these paintings, we notice the animals. They’re in almost every image—if not in the foreground, then lingering in the background, such as the runaway horse in the vibrant *I Dare You*. Live animals, dead animals, dead ones posed as if alive in taxidermized status, stuffed toy animals, balloon animals, spirit animals crossing the boundaries between life and afterlife, dream and reality. In *Hubris Required*, the spirit bird flaps eerily over the bed where a form appears to kneel in prayer.

Many of the paintings impart a feeling of toying with danger—a game of risk such as the horsemanship in *Texas Gothic*, where we feel that at any moment things might go terribly wrong and the figures will lose their elevation above the darkness. We sense the danger with the casual posture of figures too close to the snake in *I Dare You*, the wild tusse in *Call Scramble*, and the powerful strangeness of *Struggle*. The artist herself is occasionally present in these paintings, appearing in the background, isolated, a mere observer such as she is in *The Inn, The Whip and the Stars*. Even as the focal point in *Egg Hunt* she seems somewhat lost in herself, her eyes vaguely settled on something beyond. Throughout, there’s an aura of isolation, as we see in *Gotta Catch Up*, and in the figures standing apart on the dancefloor in *Slow Night at the White Horse*. This perception of aloneness in many of the paintings makes the occasional sporadic flashes of unfettered joy—the bright colors of the water and fluttering butterflies in *We Both See It* and the exuberant angel from *Little Theatre in the Woods*, all the more intense and captivating, taking the viewer by surprise.

– Elizabeth Crook
Artist Bio:

An oil painter and '24 MFA Studio Art candidate at SMU, Taryn graduated in 2019 from The University of Texas at Austin. She triple-majored in History, Art History and Anthropology in the Liberal Arts Honors program. After rediscovering her childhood devotion for making art, she received an A.A. in Studio Art from Austin Community College in 2021. Taryn was awarded a full scholarship to attend Southern Methodist University as a graduate student in the Meadows School of the Arts.
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