

Artist Statement

Aaryn Lee

The impetus to create started as a need to feel the materials with my bare hands and to discover what they were capable of doing. As an inquisitive child, exploring art was a natural process, yet it remained at the superficial level only touching the aesthetic side of creativity through collage techniques, craft, and mark-making. As my life progressed, I was faced with many hardships, and my work began to shift to a deeper, darker investigation of identity, self-worth, perception, and healing. I explore the intersection between my internal energy and the external influences that have percolated throughout my life by creating mixed-media abstract pieces with or without figurative graphite drawings. My work satisfies an innate desire to physically feel the materials while communicating vulnerability. The main theme that is prevalent throughout my work is fragility. I have faced much adversity and trauma throughout my life, and it is consistently explored through an intuitive, open process. Over a decade ago, I left a volatile world to navigate the world as a young, single mother. At the core, my work is the visual record of the many fragments surrounding my story.

My most recent body of work combines mixed-media abstraction with and without figurative drawing on panel. The pieces tend to be organic in composition, somber in mood, and touched with the muted overcast tones from my hometown of Portland, Oregon. Chance dictates my process, and the work grows as I react to the formation of shapes, negative spaces, and textures. I prepare wood panels with a mixture of gesso, acrylic ink, and stain. After establishing the groundwork, I build up several layers with an array of materials including, but never limited to, tissue paper, transfer paper, gouache, acrylic, gold leaf, oil stick, and graphite stick. I then deconstruct the work by sanding and/or scraping away areas to expose the underbelly of the piece. This process repeats multiple times until the work effectively communicates fragility and tension. Life is a series of layers being built on top of each other, but the foundation and history is too significant to ignore and mask. There is beauty in the past despite how ugly it is because the present and future were built upon it. My goal is to mimic the trials and tribulations of life through my art while exposing hope and beauty that may have been hidden within.

Over time, my need for a vehicle to heal from the many obstacles and traumas I have experienced in life developed alongside my craving to physically create with my hands. The intersection that my work crosses through is the ongoing conversation between a yearning for control and perfectionism in an imperfect and unpredictable world. Juxtaposing realistically rendered portraits and figures with abstraction signifies the inability to be perfect in an uncontrollable setting. While I use a variety of processes and materials in each body of work, the underlying issues are consistent throughout my practice.