

## **Moments Between: *Fleeting, Shifting, Passing Through*: An Exploration in Pastel**

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### **Abstract**

This research looks at how a specific artistic process, influenced by expressionism and documentary photography, transforms complex personal experiences into a unique visual experience. The artist examines the question: by working with pastel, how does the artist utilize expressive color and photographic detail to process memories and build a visual scrapbook that engages the viewer in exploring humanity and shared personal experiences? The methodology is a lively and flexible process. The artist uses their psychology background alongside the playful nature of pastel drawing to express the shifting qualities of personal memories and emotions. Photography serves as the starting point for references, often sparking curiosity and inviting a moment to be captured and brought to life. The research incorporates historical and contemporary examples, with an expressive use of color and intense, realistic detail. The work serves as a visual scrapbook capturing moments of vulnerability, grief, reflection, and connection in the artist's relationships and surroundings. This process demonstrates that making this raw content visible through specific material choices allows the work to transcend the individual's story. Art is more than a personal escape. It sharpens our daily experiences and draws viewers into a deep, shared human connection.

### **1. Introduction**

The exhibition, *Moments Between: Fleeting, Shifting, Passing Through*, contains a series of drawings created in the last few years of my studies. Drawing is my way of making sense of the environment around me. In this body of work, I process a range of emotions and experiences through pastel drawings. I explore personal relationships and reflect on experiences, both comfortable and uncomfortable. The title *Moments Between* refers to the fact that so much of life is in the in-between—the quality time spent with loved ones or the peace that comes with solitude. Often, the most talked about or hyped parts of life are the milestones or big moments. In this work, I also tried to talk about the smaller ones, or rather, the moments in between the big ones. Here, I share a collage of memories with the viewer, forming a scrapbook containing moments of vulnerability, grief, joy, love, and meaningful relationships. I hope that this work prompts the viewer to confront their own experiences and understand that art is an integrated process fundamental to our humanity.

I've chosen this direction because I've always loved observing the world around me and expressing my feelings through artistic expression. I see art as a therapeutic tool not only for myself but for others to connect and reflect on our individual but shared human experiences. In this research, I explore how to utilize expressive color and photographic detail to process memories and build a visual scrapbook that engages the viewer in exploring humanity and shared personal experience. In my process, I ask, How does the medium of pastel bring these moments to life?

### **2. Influences**

The wonderful Vincent Van Gogh comes to mind immediately when thinking of influences. Van Gogh's great use of color and texture is so captivating and beautiful. His portraits are often not incredibly realistic, but are full of so much life and depth. His portraits were often of himself or people close to him. His work is often emotional and

expressive through his brushwork and use of color. This body of work is heavily inspired by his use of color and expression.

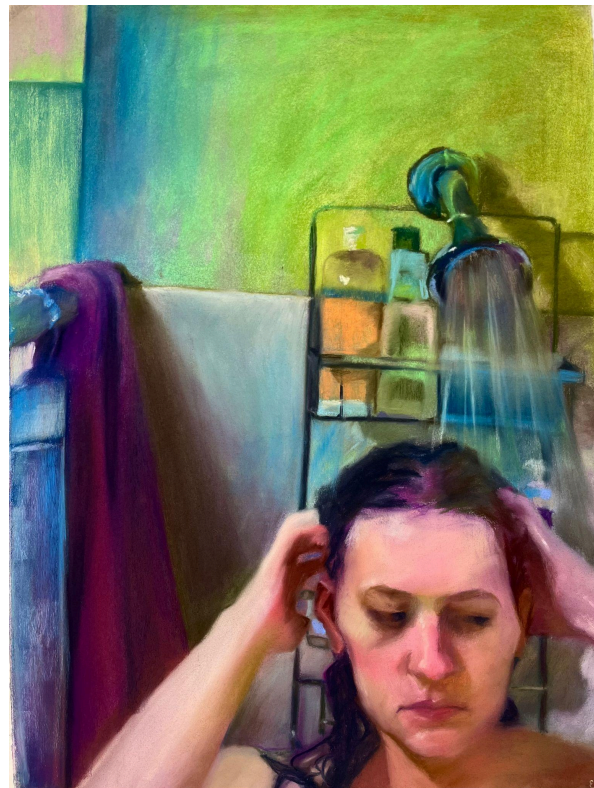


Van Gogh, *The Night Cafe*, 1888

At the beginning of my journey with photography, I learned of the great street photographer, Vivian Maier (1926-2009). I found her street photography and self-portraits so honest and captivating. She was a prolific photographer and took dozens of photos; however, her work was not discovered until 2007 in a storage auction, a few years before she died. She became a viral phenomenon after her discovery, and her work has become very well respected. She took many self-portraits, often photographing her own shadow or reflection. She was a deep observer and conveys real human understanding and playfulness in her images. She captured the bizarness and incongruity of life. Her work was really inspirational to me in how I photograph for my compositions and how I think about things conceptually. She combines realism with abstraction in the way she composes her images. I feel similarly about how I capture the world around me in my work.



*Self Portrait, 1954*



*Wash, Rinse, Repeat, 2025*

I often use my own photographs and memories of family as inspiration and reference for the work. Alex Beck, an illustrator and painter, uses a combination of old photographs, real life, and found images for his works. He often



looks for photos that are a bit off or strange. He depicts familiarity set in an unfamiliar context and layers color to achieve this. He sees every painting as a living thing, and it is incredibly evident in his work. He paints the mood and asks the viewer to respond to his work as a conversation with another person rather than merely viewing the work. That is also what this work aims to seek: conversation and connection.



Alex Beck, *Double Converse*



*Je ne sais pas*, 2024



### 3. Process

Photographs are used as a starting point, but the drawing process brings the image to life. Memories inform the style and energy of the piece, whether it's looser or more specific and rendered. Depending on how I'm feeling, the drawing process can be long and pensive or quicker and more spontaneous. Layers of pastel embed my every choice and decision, creating a final product rich in color, energy, and emotion. Rendering life's complexities can require great attention to detail, though there must be room for chaos and passion.

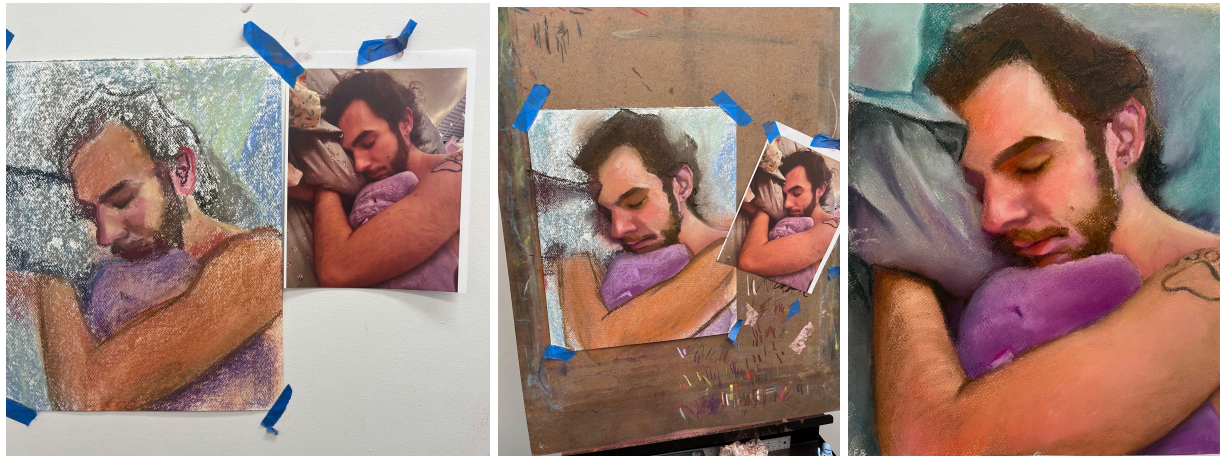
I find the artistic process endlessly fascinating and entertaining. It ebbs and flows and can be a very deep and pensive process at times, and then quick and spontaneous at other times. Inspiration for my art comes from looking at what's right in front of me. I see something that grabs my attention, and photography serves as the starting point for references, often sparking curiosity and inviting a moment to be captured and brought to life. I then spend time editing and tweaking the photo to find the right light, color, or size, although the art does not constrain the photo. Multiple photos are sometimes used to add more visual interest and dimension to the composition. My work exhibits intense realism, with features rendered with precision and in close detail. Yet, unnatural or almost surreal elements, along with distortions of color and light, juxtapose this realism. I dedicate my time to making the subject look lifelike and accurate to their likeness. I often tear down certain aspects of the photo and use the pastel medium to layer color and play with light in a meaningful way. Mood is achieved through the use of color. Color relationships strive to be harmonious and appealing. Another aspect of the medium is its buildable nature. The ability to layer and layer and take away adds spontaneity and energy. People are complex, and rendering them requires a sense of precious detail and care, but there is also a bit of chaos and passion to it. The work seeks to be expressive of one's personality and nature.



Process photo of *La-La Land*, 2025

While researching the artistic process, John Dewey's work came up. His ideas about the process and function of making art seemed important to discuss. His theories are very interesting and inspiring to me as an artist. John Dewey's goal in his aesthetic theory was to rebel against the more traditional view that art is something separate from everyday life. He saw art as a process that is fundamentally connected to ordinary human experience. Dewey believed art isn't an escape from reality. Instead, it sharpens our understanding of it. Art gives new meaning to what we already know. It can be an intensified experience, but it's not separate from everyday life. We can see examples of this perspective in Van Gogh's work, like *The Bedroom* or *The Night Café*, which transform everyday spaces into emotionally charged experiences through harsh color and perspective. These works don't distance us from life—they deepen our connection to it. In this body of work, the artist creates moments that are emotionally charged or tender through the use of color and perspective. The focus is on everyday subjects, like familiar places and people. By expanding on certain details, this work aims to bring subjects to life in new ways.

Dewey talks of this process of “doing” and “undergoing” in *Art as Experience*. He argues that this rhythmic process shows the harmony between the creative production of the artist and the perception of the viewer. For Dewey, an artwork is not simply a finished product; it is the result of an active process involving planning, selection, clarification, simplification, and other ways of organizing. This process is evident in how I make my work. I often sketch thumbnails and use my medium of pastels to layer/glaze color or to tear down and take things out. Everything is blendable or able to be covered, which gives me plenty of freedom and time for the work to evolve. However, the color stains the paper, so all the choices I make are embedded in the piece. The experience of this undoing and doing eventually turns into a final image that shows an active experience with the piece. The viewer can retrace this process and see that things have been built up and color has been continuously glazed to create tone and depth. Layers of pastel embed my every choice and decision, creating a final product rich in color, energy, and emotion. Dewey believed that the experience and the making of art are processes involving a sequence of responsive acts that contribute toward the objective fulfillment. I am making choices in my work, and the viewer can read that, and it adds to the experience.



Process and evolution: *Mason Sleeping #1*, 2025

Dewey believed that artistic experience is internally integrated and that we can only separate its emotional, practical, and intellectual parts in reflection. He argues that rather than learning from experience, we learn by reflecting on it. Experience is not just the doing but also the undergoing and reflection of that action. Both the artist and viewer participate in this cycle of doing and undergoing: imagination and effort are used (doing) as well as receiving and taking in the energy of the work (undergoing). There is also a sort of unity in artistic experience. In creating art, the content and the form are not separate. The work is a relationship. It doesn't exist as a separate object but rather as a connection between the object and the person experiencing it.

#### 4. Results

My show included 14 drawings arranged in a purposeful layout to give the viewer the necessary time and space to take in the work. I tried to create a sort of pockets or groupings of pieces based on things like color temperature, emotionality, and size. Arranging these pieces was important to me because it could easily become jarring or awkward if certain pieces were right next to each other. Arranging the gallery this way created an experience for the viewer that was a cohesive journey that made sense both visually and emotionally.



Gallery exhibition, November 2025

## **5. Conclusion and Reflection**

This body of work has been extremely therapeutic and cathartic for me. I've been able to grieve, reflect, relax, and just express myself physically and emotionally. I learned so much more about my process as an artist and feel like I've grown a lot with the work. Allowing myself to play and explore was vital to my enjoyment and motivation in art making. I feel so much closer to myself as a result and have been able to connect with other artists and viewers. Dewey's research helped put a philosophy behind what I was trying to say and brought forth a lot of clarity in my work. This work is a visual collage of my life, and I hope others find meaning and catharsis in it as well.

## **Acknowledgements**

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