

A Rabbit's Place in the Story

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Abstract

The purpose of this collection of works was to explore the relationship between sentimentality and its effects on topics such as growth, change, and storytelling. I have always considered myself to be someone who gets attached to things very easily, so it was no surprise to me when it began to crop up in my work. Through the use of rabbits as a recurring subject and a personal symbol, viewers would have a chance to see and connect with the art before associating it with me. My work can be based heavily on my experiences, but feelings like uncertainty, joy, or grief are universal, and my goal is to have those broader feelings associated with my work before my feelings, specifically, are.

The work that I have chosen for this publication acts as a culmination of my four years at Millersville, where both my skills and my interests have grown, in and out of class. Along with other recent work, these paintings put the idea of narratives and sentimentality center stage, themes that I've come to see as complements to one another. For every place or thing or person we are sentimental towards, there is a story behind them.

The first series of works, *A Final Gathering* (Figures 1-3), is made up of three oil paintings that focus on preparing for and celebrating change. I created these works in the fall of 2021, the first semester of my senior year, when the realization truly started to creep in that many of my peers and I were going to be graduating soon. I wanted these paintings to reflect that. Details throughout the series hint at the

coming of winter, such as the collection of fallen leaves and the bare trees in the background. I see the change from autumn to winter like I see the change from student to graduate; we can't stop the seasons from changing, and we can't stop the looming end to our college careers. Though big changes can be seen as daunting—including by myself—I decided to celebrate it through these pieces, having the rabbits engage in one last party before the seasons shifted and winter arrived. Over the past couple of years, bunnies and rabbits have become recurring personal symbols for me, so I chose to depict these animals in the narrative as opposed to humans. Having human-like animals and a bright color palette help give the series a more playful attitude.



Figure 1: *A Final Gathering (Collect)*, 2021, oil on canvas

Figure 2: *A Final Gathering (Prepare)*, 2021, oil on canvas



Figure 3: *A Final Gathering (Celebrate)*, 2021, oil on canvas

The use of this symbol is even more apparent in the second series, with *Summer Vinyl* (Figure 4) and *Discontinued* (Figures 5). Sentimentality is a big part of these two paintings. I inherited a ton of vinyl albums when a pair of grandparents passed, and over the following summer break I took the opportunity to clean off a few and test them out. I wanted to capture that moment in the first painting, with a rabbit, in place of me, surrounded by stacks of albums. The idea of swapping my image out and replacing it with a symbol is a way for me to distance myself from the painting without completely cutting me off. This is still my experience, my room, my record player, my bright orange hoodie; however, with my face

absent, viewers can examine what is happening in the piece without getting hung up on the fact that it's my story, or my grief.



Figure 4: *Summer Vinyl*, 2021, acrylic on canvas

Figure 5: *Discontinued*, 2022, acrylic on vinyl albums

This painting was originally a standalone piece, but a few months later I began working on a response to it. I picked a few of those same albums that I was cleaning before and painted hints of interiors on them, sometimes so zoomed in that you can't really tell where you're looking. Floor tiles, a bucket catching rainwater, and a heavy shelf cover up portions of the black spirals, each one a memory of two houses two different pairs of grandparents used to live in. I no longer have access to either of these places, so, like the first painting, I wanted to capture them as I remembered them. I was also careful to leave the paper ring of the vinyl unpainted so that the writings that were scribbled there so long ago were still visible, a reminder of where

they came from. Even though the imagery isn't specific at first glance, the names in ballpoint pen add to the intimacy of the work. They were owned by someone, once.

The past few years have been difficult in more ways than one, but being able to compare the work I was doing then to the work I'm doing now is always a little satisfying. I can't tell what the future holds when it comes to the direction my artwork will take, though I'm sure the themes I played with in these series will linger with me for a while. After all, I am nothing if not a very sentimental person.