



MY STORY

VISUAL TALES OF PERSONAL DISCOVERY, GROWTH AND IDENTITY

Gentileschi Aegis Gallery Association

gaga



ARTISTS

Ligia Bedenkop	Virginia Lukefahr
Lisa Mara Bell	Marguerite M. McCarthy
Patricia Cody	Loretta Medellin
Lara Hye Coh	Susie Monday
Ilina Colemere	Cindy Morawski
Laurel Cyrene	Thelma Ortiz Muraida
Shea Daniel-Youngblood	Elizabeth Payne
Chel Delaney	Virginia Ridgeway
Lesta Frank	Caroline Royall
Robin Gara	Bibi Saida
Hebé García	Vera Smith
Nancy Gerfers	Susan Michael Sørensen
Anna Gordy	Stefani Jobs Spears
Abeer Haddad	Maria Stidham
Katherine Lamb	Paula Sussman

CREDITS

Concept: Sylvia Benitez
Online exhibition design: Thelma Muraida
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MY STORY is an exhibition of narrative paintings. To create these pieces, GAGA artists had to journey through their personal life stories. Many of these works share early childhood memories that morph into present day. Other interpretations are more secretive, private and intentionally abstracted. Overall, the majority of the shown paintings are forthcoming, telling about and revealing growth, struggle, whimsy, delight and love. Some artists were even willing to expose their pain.

Take Lara Hye Coh, Ligia Bedenkop, Caroline Royall, Kathrine Lamb and Malena Stidham's work for instance. Their paintings deal with real personal struggle, sharing the darker side of life's passage into light. Hebé García presents a mélange of fractured faceless selves, adrift in a sea full of cacophonous lines. Susan Michael Sørensen and Paula Sussman even dared to take this one step further, choosing to address their current situations.

Other works are lighter in scope, full of happy memories and topped with twinges of wistful nostalgia. The delightful renditions presented by Cindy Morawski, Abeer Haddad, Marguerite McCarthy, and Robin Gara, give us both insight and a grin. Anna Gordy lures us with luscious color, tender embraces and fantastical bouquets, intentionally contradicting the sadness presented in her text.

Laurel Cyrene, Vera Smith, and Lisa Mara Bell chose to share a part of their life story by celebrating their heritage: stitching a quilt with significant life memories, webbing a weave of distant lands, or presenting a patriotic, yet recently widowed, urban mother. Nancy Gerfers, on the other hand, depicts a delightful progression, representing happy artistic growth. Virginia Lukefahr eloquently sums a full life up. She tells a story that pairs longing and loneliness with stability and tradition.

Thelma Muraida's self-portrait carries a protective feeling, coupled with wisdom and maturity; her headdress accepts the heavens. There, swirling in cosmic energy, are hidden personal story-telling markers—her life's stepping-stones. Lesta Frank, Virginia Ridgeway and Patricia Cody's work also demonstrates a maturity gained from a lifetime of myriad experiences.

Others chose to use a solitary symbol to represent their life's evolution. Shea Daniel Youngblood's *The Conscious Uncrumpling* just says it all. Elizabeth Payne's stand-alone horse reminds us of young girls' youthful horse-playing games, all the while bringing us full circle to that mature symbol of strength. Ilna Colemere presents her life's growth by using another time-honored icon — the connecting puzzle piece.

Loretta Medellin sticks to her abstract style, full of delightful colors and cartoon-like fantastic imagery. Initially, seeming as peaceful as a lava lamp, this story is full of chaos. Also exhibiting abstract work, Bibi Saidi captures the aftermath of World War II as seen through her remembered childhood eyes. More secretive and protective, Stefani Job Spears, Chel Delaney and Susie Monday chose to collage their story, summing it up with clues that one can only decipher if one takes the time to truly get to know them.

I was very impressed by the work GAGA created for this exhibition, both by the variety of creative interpretations as well as the artists' willingness to reveal themselves. Through this exhibition, I learned more about these artists than from the ten years of working with them. Funny, all I had to do was ask. All of us have stories.

Sylvia Benitez
President and Founder
The Gentileschi Aegis Gallery Association



LARA HYE COH

*Tackling the Dark Emotion Toward a
Wholehearted Life*

Oil on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

Since I entered Art Center College of Design when I turned 40, my life has changed drastically. My 20-year marriage with two kids ended abruptly. Upon graduation from art school, I made a career as a background painter/artist in the field of feature animation. I became an independent, modern woman, juggling job and single mom-hood.

No matter how hard I tried to convince myself I could function, sometimes life got messy and deep. It still does. From time to time, I got impatient and anxious. I had to go through difficult emotions like, shame, fear, vulnerability. I am now retired from the daily job and I have moved to a new place. I am trying to cultivate more gratitude and joy in just "being". I want to move toward a wholehearted life by embracing who I am.

I believe owning our story and loving ourselves through the process of life is the bravest thing. But so often the dark emotions still get in my way, keeping me from leading a full life. I like to courageously tackle the dark emotions by cultivating creativity, play, and rest, calm, laughter.



ABEER HADDAD

Humble Beginnings

Oil and clay on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$950

I grew up in an old town. Everything around me was historically rich, which fed my artistic mind with warm and earth toned colors from the setting around me. As I grew, my dream of becoming an artist grew along with me. When I was a little girl, I started my artistic journey drawing on the sidewalk with chalk. Years went by and in my adolescence and college years I would carry my easel around the old city and give my brushes the freedom to paint what my eyes saw and what my soul felt.



LAUREL CYRENE

Wrapped in My Grandmother's Quilt

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

My story is a sum of the influences who my grandmothers were, mother was and my journey to find my individuality and make the choices in my own life. I stepped out of what was expected as a young woman of me and did not stay in a secretarial position until marriage and children. Instead I broke out of the path I was on and joined the military.

Later I became a single mother leaving the military and being the first in my family to get my college degree. Later I married and became the mother of five children. Adopted one of my children from China after a late miscarriage. I became a young widow after my husband passed from cancer and I struggled raising my children by myself. Life was an adventure as I taught art, raised Arabian and paint horses, dogs and stayed on my six acres in Medina County.

Now my children are grown and I'm a grandmother. I hope my life has been a positive influence on my children and grandchildren as I pass on my link of love and experience in the chain of life. This is why my story was painted in my grandmother's quilt she made and inside the quilt are scenes of my life that defined me.



HEBÉ GARCÍA

This Is My Story

Oil on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$2800

What is my story? My story is one where many roads have been traveled and many mistakes have been made, albeit hand-in-hand with happiness and satisfaction. I am a Miami born Puertorrican, raised for the majority of my formative years in San Juan, PR with a brief stint in Louisiana, LA where I received a Bachelors in Fine Arts from Louisiana State University at Lafayette. I am a wife and the mother of two lovely daughters who lived in Ponce, PR for 28 years, before moving to the amazingly beautiful desert in northern Abiquiu, NM where I can immerse myself in my art.

I have had many hats along the way: daughter, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, sister, girlfriend, heart-breaker, confidant, enemy, friend, joker, dancer, perfectionist, trouble-maker, student, artist, charmer, lover, wife, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law, aunt, mother, provider, chauffeur, dictator, teacher, healer, counselor, tyrant, referee, drier-of-tears, chef, merrymaker, warrior, adventuress, survivor, storyteller, sorceress, provocateur, dreamer, and last but not least a grandmother. As Annie Lennox said: "All those plates are things I spin all the time."



ILNA COLEMERE

Network

Adult

Youth

Childhood

Acrylic, wooden blocks, cardboard puzzle pieces on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$250 ea

"Network" reflects the architecture of my life, like pieces of a puzzle. The first panel of white, depicts the innocence of childhood. Early awareness of the world appears as small blocks of knowledge, laying the foundation for future experiences. Netting connects experiential growth flowing between childhood and youth. Over time the blocks developed multifaceted layers of memories, people, sensitivities, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, and discovery. The yellow of intelligence, coats the second panel. Some blocks have grown, others discarded and still others are born of novel inspiration. The third panel is the blue of serenity. The netting provides a transition between the years of my youth and the richness of enlightenment I associate with my senior years. The netting throughout the three panels reflects the colors of each block illustrating the melding of growth, knowledge, sensitivities and spirituality existing throughout my life. As a composite, they are my network.



VERA SMITH

ROOTS: My Grandmother Adrienne

Oil on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

My Grandmother, Adrienne, whom I never met, lived most of her life, including WWII, in the Dutch Indies, a country now called Indonesia. She came from a line of Dutch protestants on her father's side and on her mother's from another Dutch family and Javanese one. She was an accomplished pianist and an avid reader of history and historic novels. She loved all animals and nature. She grew up close to Mount Bromo National Park and lived her last years in the Netherlands in a home on a property with a forest, which was and is unique in such a small country. Her generation prized a European Education above everything and I am sure she must have witnessed quite some prejudice.



THELMA ORTIZ MURAIDA

Vida de milagros

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

My life is a story of *milagros*/miracles. As they slowly revealed themselves over time, they begin to find their expression through art — my true voice. It is a story that weaves the lines and textures, shapes and colors of my cultural surroundings into a web that connects my past, present and future. It is a story filled with visual memories that touch on many emotions using images and symbols. These memories are my *milagros*.



LISA MARA BELL

Young Widow, Single Mother

Acrylic/Mixed medium, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

"Young Widow, Single Mother" is my means to preserve a letter of love my mother wrote to my father, twenty years after his death in an auto accident. Only to be found after her death. This is lasting love, deep feelings, emotions... and the picture she drew of him. I've traced her writing and the image she drew of my father. Photo of mom in cap and gown is a photo of a pencil drawing by my grandfather, Alexandro D'Ascenzo, of his daughter, Lisa Mara.



NANCY GERFERS

In the Beginning

Acrylic and colored pencil on panel,
24 x 24 x 2 in.,
\$500.00

Contained

Watercolor on paper adhered to panel,
24 x 24 x 2 in.,
\$500.00

Bold Butterfly

Mixed media collage on panel,
24 x 24 x 2 in.,
\$500.00



I chose to depict how I saw the stages of my art life as like the stages of a butterfly. At first, I was the typical kid who colored in the lines and observed my family and the world in all its detail. I developed my art even then as I was not at all athletic and got recognition at school for my drawing ability. Then, as I grew into a young adult, I looked to watercolor as my expression. Still very tight, I liked making representational objects and keeping it real. Like the bag and the cocoons, I was restrained in my work and didn't let loose until I discovered the freedom of collage and that I could capture the essence of something without fully articulating it. This was very freeing and allowed me more exploration in color and composition than I had ever experienced in watercolor. I still do watercolor but now take greater risks and don't fight the flow as much. Free like a butterfly? I sure hope my art continues to grow in this direction.



SUSIE MONDAY

The Road

Textile on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$600.00

This stitched textile collage pieces together bits of colorful trimmings from previously finished art quilts; now — I find it hard to realize -- a 22-year journey since I quit my last “real” job at age 50. My life is a pathway defined by making and creative practice, a path that curves and comes back to center, one that disappears amid the sky and hills and lets me discover the mysterious order as I go along.



CINDY MORAWSKI

Bicycling with my Cat Zip

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$350.00

Growing up on a farm, one of my favorite childhood memories involved riding my bicycle with my orange cat Zip. I had a wire basket attached to the front of the bike so Zip could sit inside and enjoy a smooth ride. I have always loved animals. My journey with animals started years ago during my childhood on a rural dairy farm in Western Pennsylvania.



VIRGINIA LUKEFAHR

Through the Window

Oil on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$500.00

The plant represents the continuity of life. The photos evoke my past. The paints, brushes and easel speak to my present and my grandchildren show the way to the future.



ROBIN GARA

Childhood

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.,
\$450.00 ea

As a child, I remember being amazed by so many things: colors, patterns, clouds in the sky, and changing seasons. I spent hours playing make believe, writing plays, designing sets, usually by myself (my stuffed animals were my audience). I included the photo of me as a toddler with a toy phone to represent how I was constantly receiving information and taking it all in. Information became stored memories that I am now working to access through my art.



SHEA DANIEL-YOUNGBLOOD

The Conscious Uncrumpling

Oil on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

"The Conscious Uncrumpling" tells the story of a life coming open to what is.



CAROLINE ROYALL

Origins

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.,
\$600.00 ea

Light and obscurity, the beauty of the transience of things, the impermanence of life when perceived are both enlightening and obscure. Painting brings me closer to acceptance and peace.



BIBI SAIDI

Born After the War

Watercolor on paper on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$500

I was born in Frankfurt, Germany after WWII. My childhood rambles passed by heaps of rubble, around blocks of destroyed homes, through bomb craters in playgrounds. My first grade in elementary school had 51 students, because only a few classrooms had been patched up. The collapsed gym walls showed traces of firebombing. A child sees but does not understand. Only memory can comprehend.



LIGIA BEDENKOP

Transformation

Oil on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$1500.00

Growing up on the northeast coast of Brazil, life was simple. There was no fear because I didn't have anything to lose until I did! Then I lost everything, and my world turned upside down, everything changed except the inner fire that I kept burning. The turmoil raged for a long time until I learned to accept my path and like a supernova my life was transformed. Today I live with fears, yet they don't dictate my decisions. I move on knowingly nothing is forever, patiently threading along with eyes wide open.



LESTA FRANK

Surrendering the Past

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$500.00

I have lost interest in the story of my story.
I feel the energy of life force within and all
around me.

I respond to that with color, expressive energy,
and the lusciousness of paint quality. The
world disappears, the creative state be-
tween waking and dreaming turns on.

There is nothing left but the present moment.

I once had the privilege of hugging Amma,
the "Hugging Saint".

I saw a huge book in my head, filled with
pages of my personal history.

She set it on fire and it burned to cinders. I
joyously said goodbye to my past.
She knew what I no longer needed.



MARGUERITE M. MCCARTHY
Becoming

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

My self-portrait is based on a photograph taken by a friend. When the picture was taken, I was a college student in the midst of discovering a passion for painting and printmaking. This painting refers to a pivotal moment in my life, as I began to dream about becoming a professional artist and art educator.



PATRICIA G. CODY

Living in Color

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$400

I grew up in the Northeast; my earliest childhood memories are of nature and spending time outdoors. I loved watching the seasons change; I was fascinated with the process. As a teenager I spent a lot of time studying about decorating and design. In college I studied fashion design and illustration; I was inspired by color, texture and fabric, which is still what I bring into my paintings today. I married young and found myself in Okinawa which was lacking in vibrancy. I spent two years yearning for home. After we returned home, I soon found myself in Texas being a single mother of two kids. My pursuit of painting and expression with color had to take a back seat to motherhood. After I retired in 2014, I was able to return to painting. This "Living in Color" work is defined by vibrant colors in multiple layers to share my color vision.



MALENA STIDHAM

Overcoming Depression - A Trilogy: My Dark World The Challenges Reaching Happiness

Mixed media, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

My inspiration was based on so many women, including myself, that left their home countries, escaping our childhood memories of poverty and scarcity. This is reflected in the first painting (bottom) that portrays a crying child in a dark world.

Portrayed in the second painting, young adults must work hard to overcome all the challenges that life in a new country presents to us. Learn a new language while working to earn a living are just a few examples of the challenges we face.

As women, we strive to provide for our children a life different from our own, giving them a happy memorable childhood. This is reflected in the third and last painting (top) of this Trilogy.



VIRGINIA RIDGEWAY
Cloudy

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$800

I try to walk every day. My walks are in my neighborhood and I muse over the mockingbird song, the dove coo, the deer, occasional fox, armadillo and coyote. I especially find clouds to be a muse and take photos of clouds nearly every day. When thinking of my story, I found that clouds have been a big part of my paintings.



PAULA SUSSMAN

Life

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
\$800

My painting is about structure, deconstruction,
and life cycles.



SUSAN MICHAEL SORENSEN

Story of Me

Acrylic and mixed media on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

In life we never truly know what to expect. We buzz along day to day, thinking we have some sort of control over our destiny through our good deeds, our relationships, our love. Then the worst thing possible happens... and we go flying off course into agony. Dedicated to my soul-mate, Harold Peter Sorensen 1956-2019.



ELIZABETH PAYNE

Standing Horse

Oil on canvas, 12 x 12 in.
\$200

In 1993 I moved from Brooklyn, New York to the country in South Texas, land of the horse (at least for now). This painting is based on an image of a bronze sculpture by Edgar Degas (formerly De Gas). The statue has an attenuated tension that I admire.



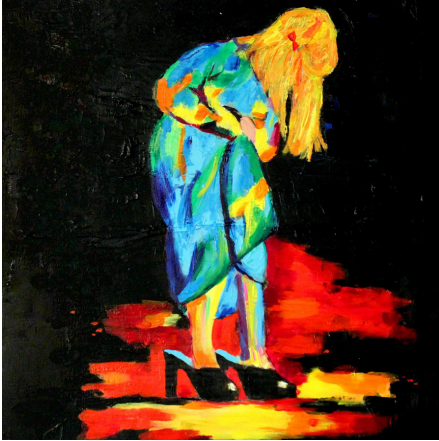
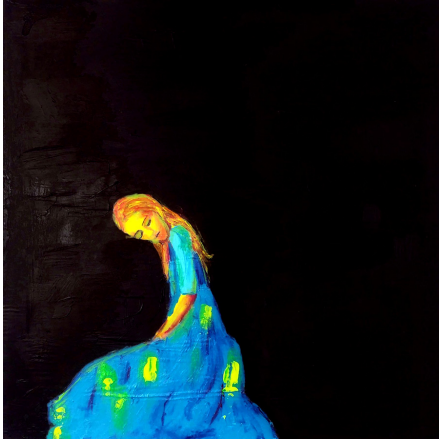
CHEL DELANEY

Two Ply

Mixed media on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

During the unrelenting summer of 2020, each pull of the dry mashed cellulose was often accompanied by some tears and questions: Does this sneeze mean I have covid-19? Will unnecessary killings ever end? What am I doing to the climate?

A constant of daily life, facial tissue is an ubiquitous staple of my household consumption; and layered within its decor packaging are my various daily mantras and concerns.



KATHRINE LAMB

Finding our Colors:

Discover

Losing

Create

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

\$330 ea

They were never really our own, were they?
These bodies, the female ones, given to us by our
mothers with strict instructions - smile, always.
You are both pretty and smart, they said, and so we
had to be both.
Love yourself, they said, while we watched them
pinch the soft skin on their own bellies and give
disapproving looks to their mirrors.
And we wanted to love ourselves, and we were pretty
sure we did, and we waited impatiently for the
beauty they said was within us. Our selves, our
colors.
Then as the colors did emerge, we belonged to the
boys. And boys will be boys, and boy, were they
ever boys - and they picked us like apples.
We were told it was us, it was desire, and we were
supposed to want it. We were too much and
needed to be more.
More pretty, more easy to love. Because being loved
was the only acceptable goal.
And so we fell short, we ran empty, we faded. It was
us, we thought. Our colors weren't bright enough.
We are women, hear us roar, but we are so tired of
screaming.
"ME TOO", we said, and we rose to find our own
freedoms, our own beauty and our own colors.
Perhaps freedom comes when our desire is no lon-
ger to be desired.
When the other voices become distant and we hear
only our own, when we find that our colors are
our own to create.
And sister, are they ever beautiful.



STEFANI JOB SPEARS

Inadvertent Adventures

Mixed media on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

El Paso, Hattiesburg, Las Vegas, Carson City, Las Vegas, Plainview, Amarillo, Canyon, Fort Worth, Texarkana, San Antonio. My story. The short story.

As I became older I realized that art had been my salvation. The phenomenal effect it had on my life had to be shared. Teaching visual art for thirty years was my passion. To this day, I continue to be thrilled, amazed, grateful and contented with the process of making art.

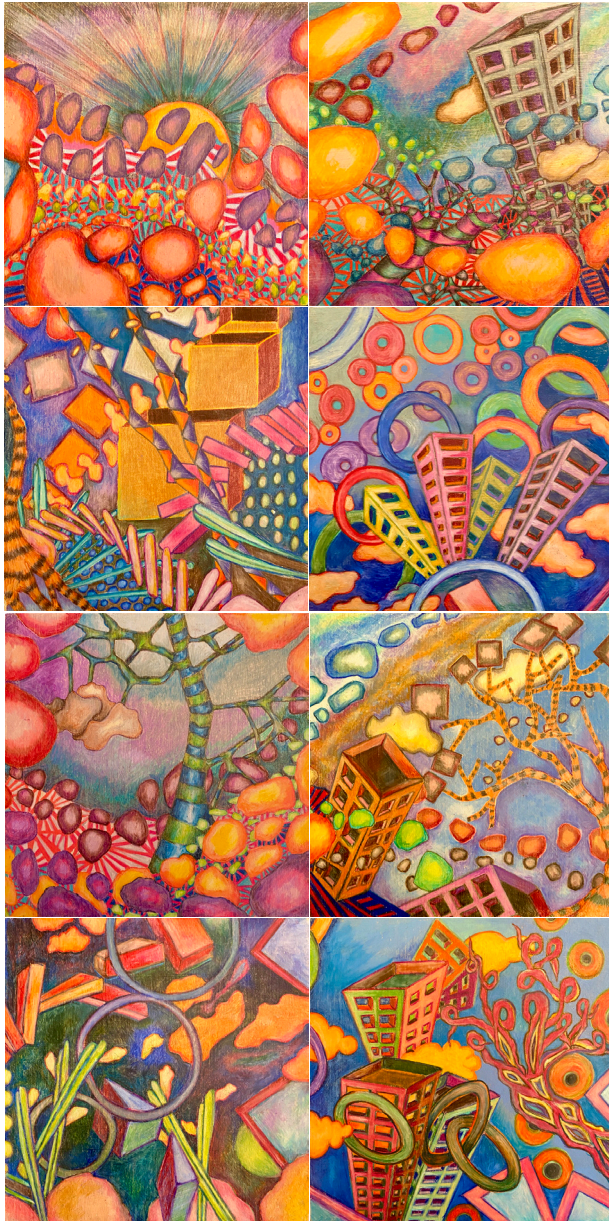


ANNA GORDY

I'm With You

Acrylic on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 in.

My parents divorced when I was very young. I was my mother's only child, and so I spent much of my time in my room with my books, records, and dolls. From my very first memory, I have felt a deep and pervasive loneliness. But I have come to realize, I was never really alone. I was with me the whole time.



LORETTA MEDELLIN

Eight Days a Week

Mixed media on panel, 8: 8 x 8 in. cluster

This is a grouping of 8 pieces that are a beginning but not an end. It begins with the piece on the left as the sun begins to rise in welcome. As it continues it becomes a story of transformation. So it is with my life as an artist. One that began with a more literal narrative but as my timeline continues it begins to transform into a more abstract interpretation.



For more information about GAGA and GAGA Artists, please go to
www.gagaart.org