

"Death of Presence, Rebirthed Identity" Oil on linen on gatorboard 2019 11 x 14 inches

Thick Skins: Our Journey Towards Communal Healing

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Painting

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University of Alberta

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Artist Statement

My art depicts the multiple facets of my experience growing up in Brazilian patriarchal society. My practice focuses on reflections about the scarring that patriarchal society has imprinted on me and how it shaped my world views and self-esteem (Brown, *Not Outside the Range* 109); a small sample of the sustained (*insidious*) trauma women have to endure under patriarchy (Erikson, *Notes on Trauma and Community*, 185). Since I started living in Edmonton, I have felt more confident to delve into my past experiences from a new, more fruitful vantage point. This body of paintings is the result of working from the imagery of myself and from the model. I see our bodies as clay for me to digitally shape, distort, and scar; they bridge the gap between our experience of trauma (Erikson, *Notes on Trauma and Community*, 186). I am interested in the ways my relationships with the model provide me with tools for self-discovery and self-acceptance and how bonding through our shared trauma lays the foundation for healing (Erikson, *Notes on Trauma and Community*, 187-188). Additionally, I am fascinated by how those experiences enter the realm of Post-Humanism, Cyborg Theory and offer insights on what it means to be human. Through art, I engage in a cathartic process which I share in this exhibition.

A crucial step in my research process is developing a sense of rapport with the models. My main goal was to subvert the classical hierarchy between model and artist so the final image is the product of a partnership. I reach out to people in the Body Positive, Queer and Fat Positive Facebook groups in Edmonton as the first step: I post my research, image samples and my email for contact. Up until the beginning of 2017, I had the models come into my studio, where I would paint them from life and have an

informal conversation. There was no directing of their poses and they had absolute control of being nude or clothed. Respecting their boundaries was key to establishing trust and mutual understanding. The results inspired me to push further so I began to visit the model's house with their permission and to take photographs of their body with my camera. I had a list of questions I would ask them, and they would respond by positioning their bodies in a way that translated that response. Later in the process, I shared the raw images with them, and together, we compiled multiple photographs into digital collages, which I would then use as inspiration for the paintings. Incorporating digital manipulation in this process allows me to use the model's body in a holistic, wholesome way, instead of distorting said body to fit beauty standards. I seek the psychological truth of our experiences. At every step of the process, I am concerned with making sure the model has complete agency throughout the decision-making process, which is exactly what we did not possess when experiencing our shared trauma (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, *The Intrusive Past*, 174). In making these paintings, it is their pain and experience I am expressing through my brushstrokes.

This show offers a gendered take on the history of female representation from the perspective of a multicultural, biracial woman. Some of the paintings displayed are framed, some of them are not. The small oil paintings invite the viewer to enter a psychological space that will inform, guide and shape the common theme between the bigger self-portrait and model paintings. The work is auto-ethnographic and the imagery is both sexually explicit and exuberant, as a way to ask questions regarding identity, embodiment (as in the tangible physical presence of those ideas through paint) and (a timid depiction of) self-love.

As most traumas occur in private for women, exposing and exploring these stages of working through it is key to combatting the notion that real trauma is not only the scarring the effects dominant groups inside culture (Brown, *Not Outside the Range*, 102). The fixated, repeated aspect of traumatic memory is alluded to in the repeating imagery portrayed in my paintings as well as in their placement throughout the gallery (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, *The Intrusive Past*, 163-164). These are the result of “mute, unsymbolized, and unintegrated experiences” (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, *The Intrusive Past*, 167). By creating visual metaphors for these traumatic experiences, based on my own personal experience and the accounts of my models, I seek to transform traumatic memories into narrative language, thus giving the experience a place in time and history (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, *The Intrusive Past*, 176).

The bodies I paint and their scale seek to challenge the idea that fat bodies are unruly, desexualized, existing in a limbo of desire and repulsiveness. By painting at life-size or larger than life, the paintings create tension between the viewer and the subject. They reinforce the notion that large women are worthy of the physical and emotional space they occupy. As a woman and person of color, I feel I have a role to play in questioning the history of women’s representation in art history as well as in the history of oil painting.

My interest in studying traditional painting techniques has led me to research the works of Velazquez, Rubens, John Currin, and Goya. As a painter, I strive to utilize such techniques as I formalize my own contemporary questions. Jenny Saville and Lisa Yuskavage have also inspired me in my choice of subject matter as well as its relationship with the picture plane. In my material research, I have come across

Benjamin Bjorklund's portraits and figure paintings. They instigated a quest to grasp a deeper understanding of the relationship between form and meaning and a desire to marry classical techniques and contemporary materials.

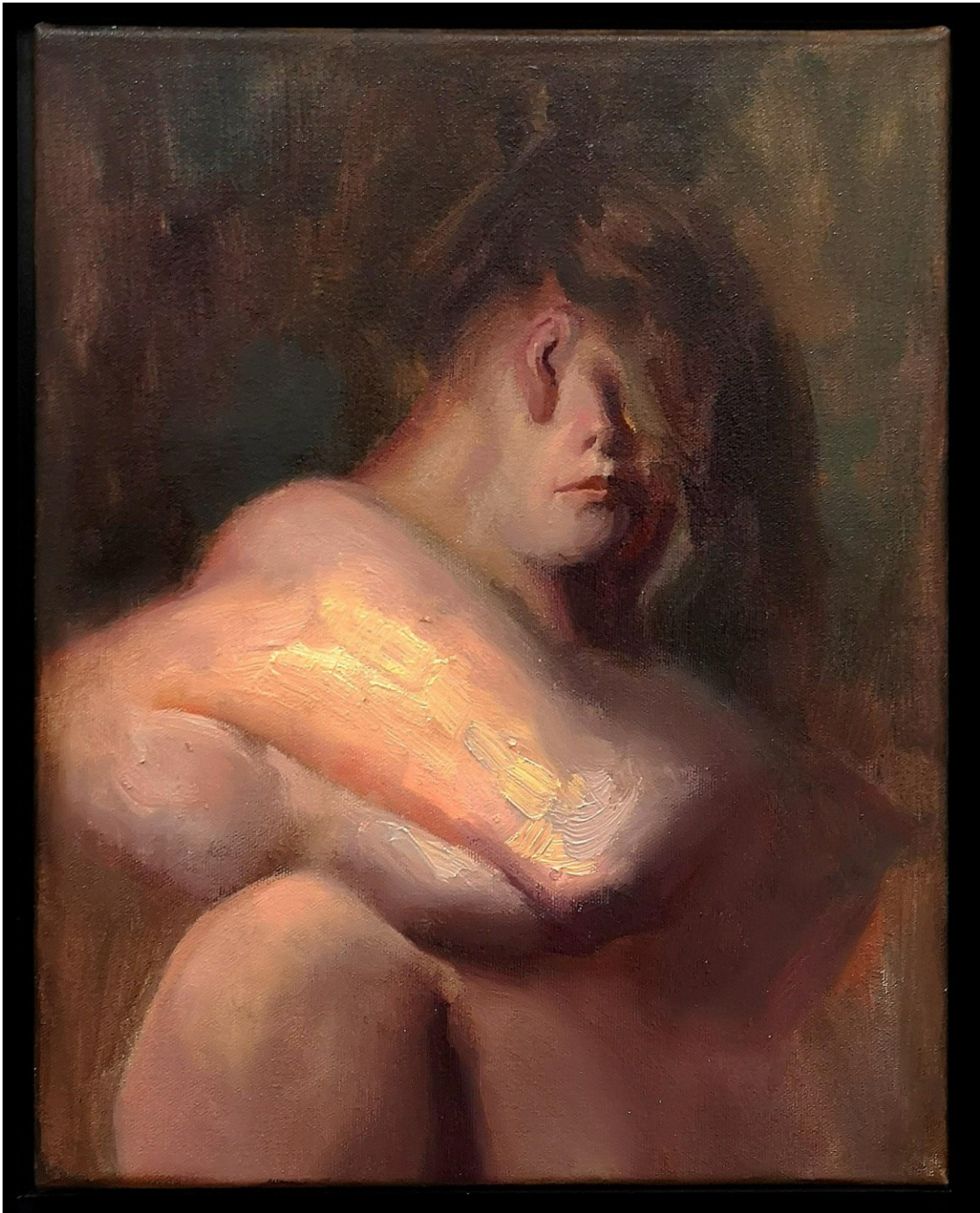
Referenced Readings:

Brown, Laura S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 100-112. The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Van der Kolk, Bessel A., and Van der Hart, Onno. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory." in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 158-182. The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community." in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, 183-199. The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

<http://www.tamiresparafineart.wordpress.com/>
<http://www.instagram.com/tamirespara.art/>



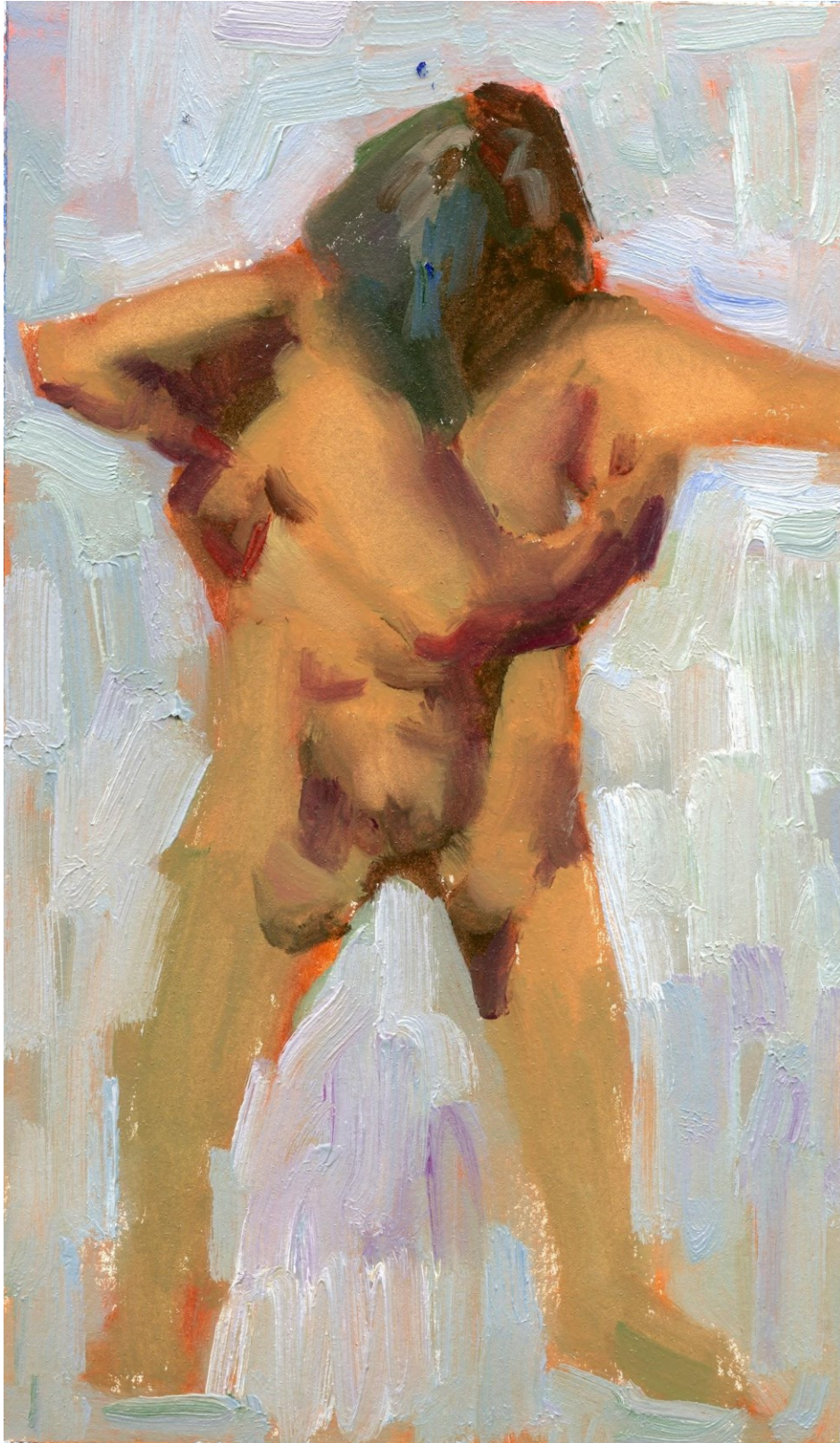
"Ominous Subtlety of Flesh" Oil on Canvas 2019 11x14 inches



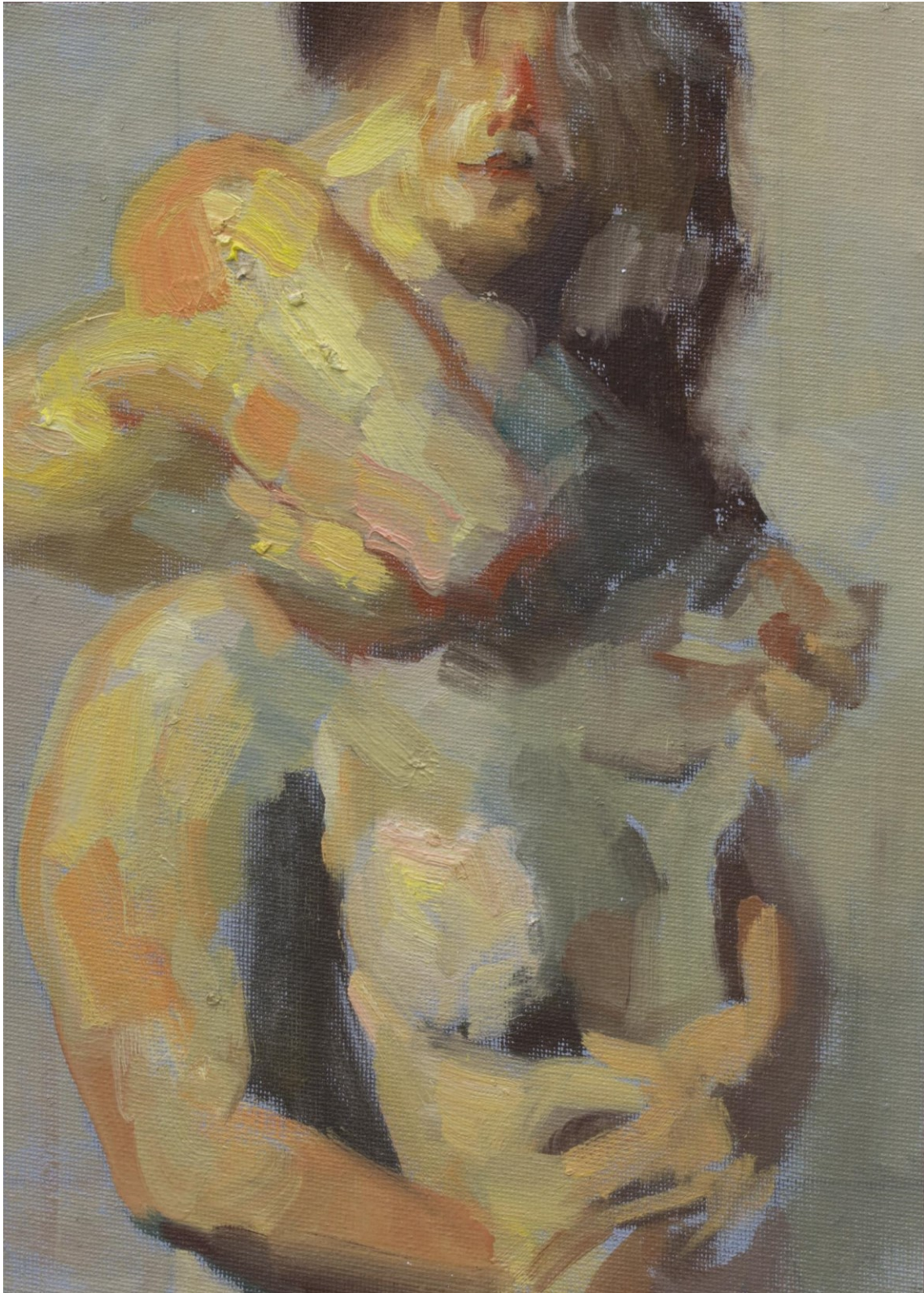
"The Flesh That Carries Me" Oil on Canvas 2018-2019 (in progress) 69 x 41 inches



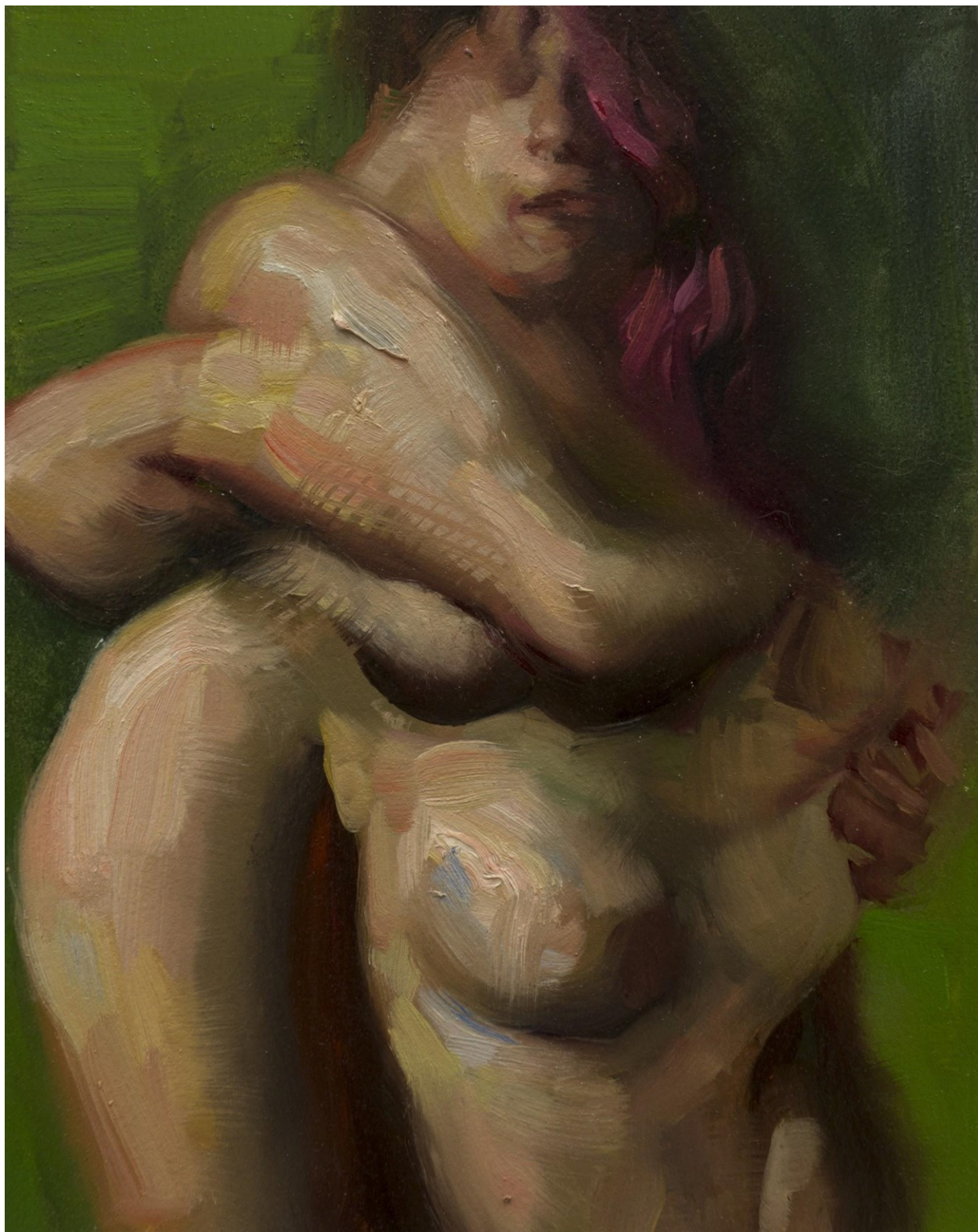
"Duality of Self" (diptych) Oil on Canvas 2018 60x48 inches



"Hanging Flesh" Oil on Arches oil paper mounted on cradled Masonite 2018 9½x 7 inches



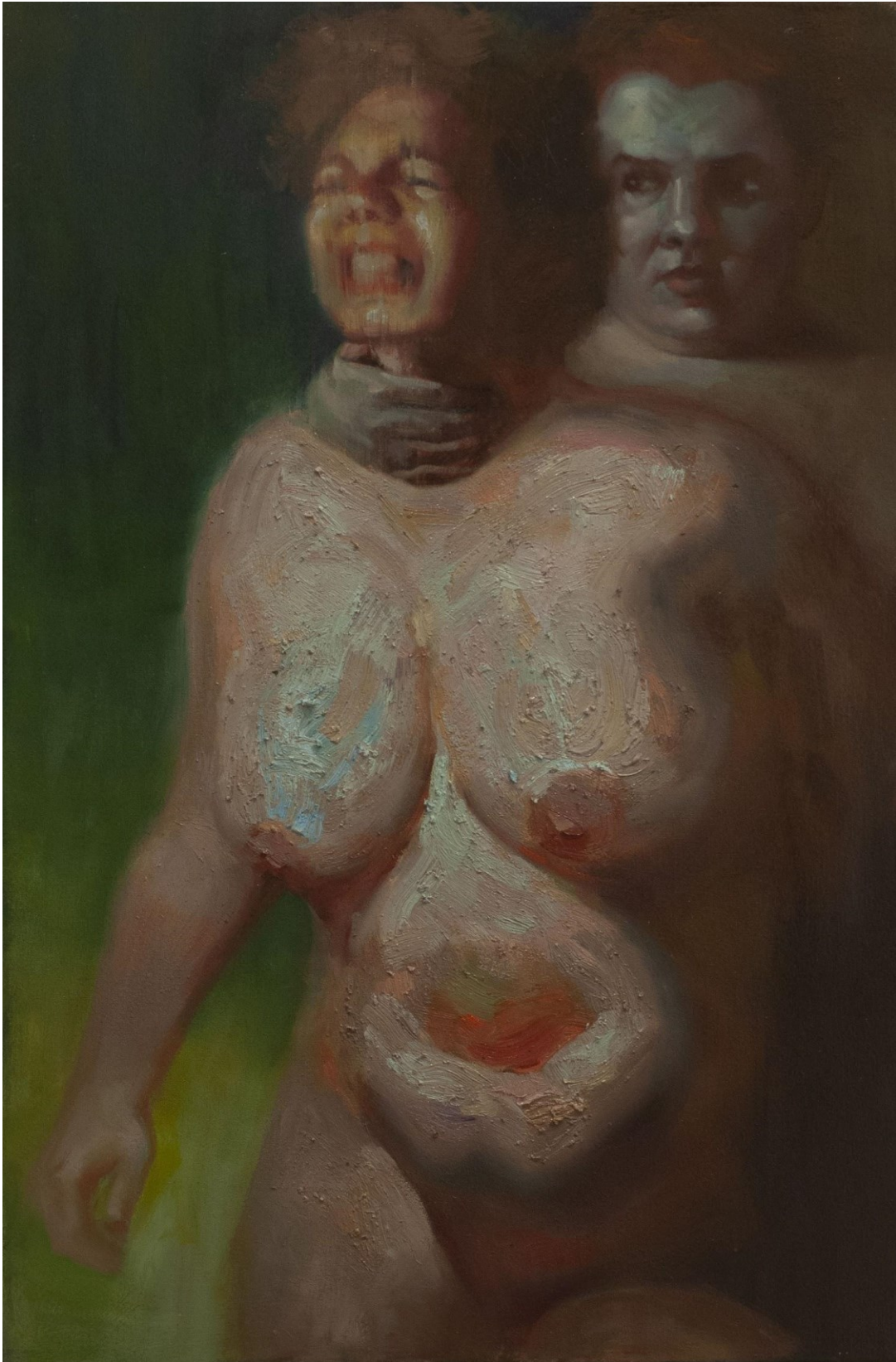
"Birthed From Tenacity Oil on canvas mounted on cradled panel 2019 9½x 7 inches



"The Flesh They Inhabit" Oil on Arches oil paper mounted on cradled Masonite 2018 10½x 7 inches



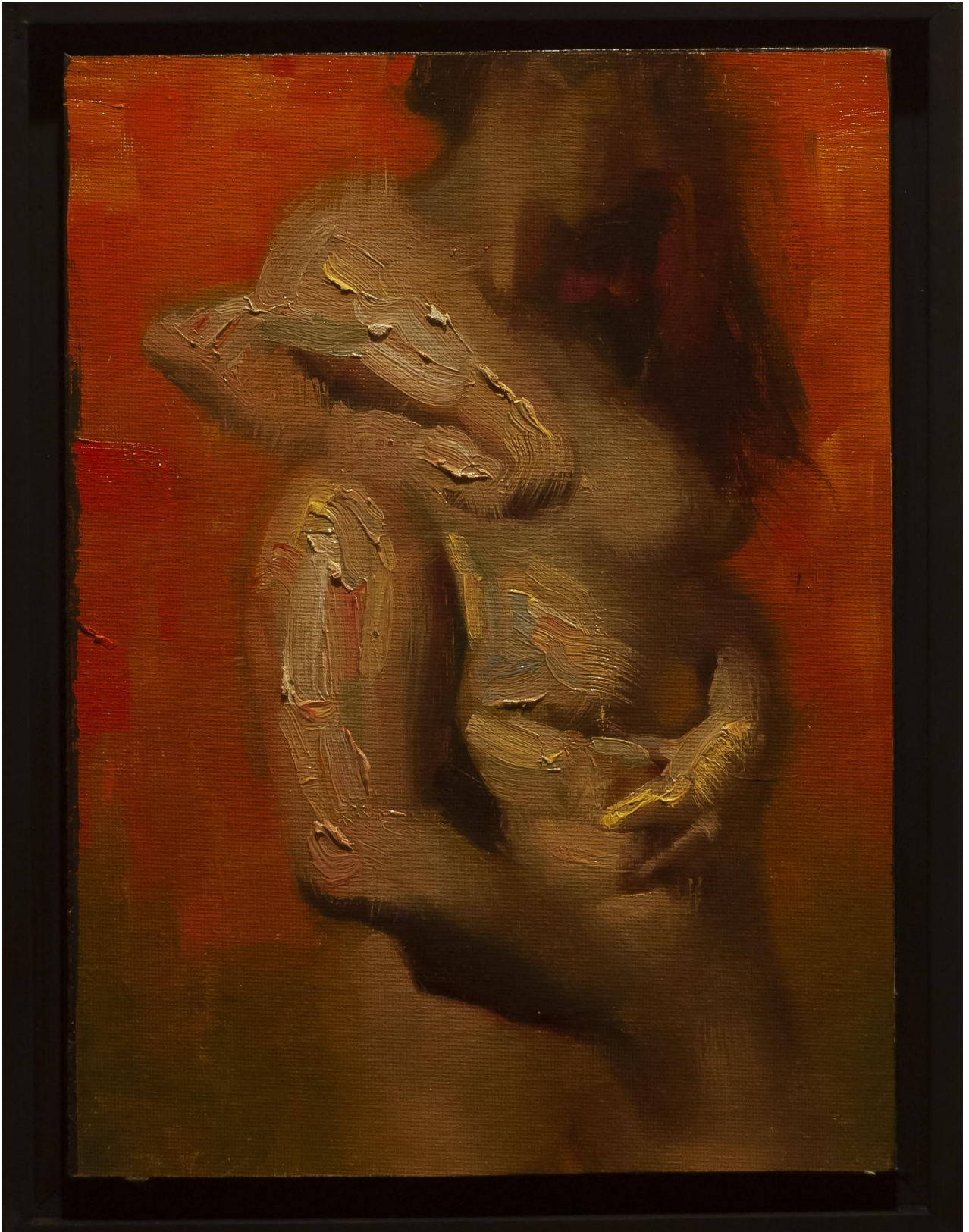
"Bodily Limitations From Within" 2018 Oil on Arches oil paper mounted on cradled Masonite
10½x 7 inches



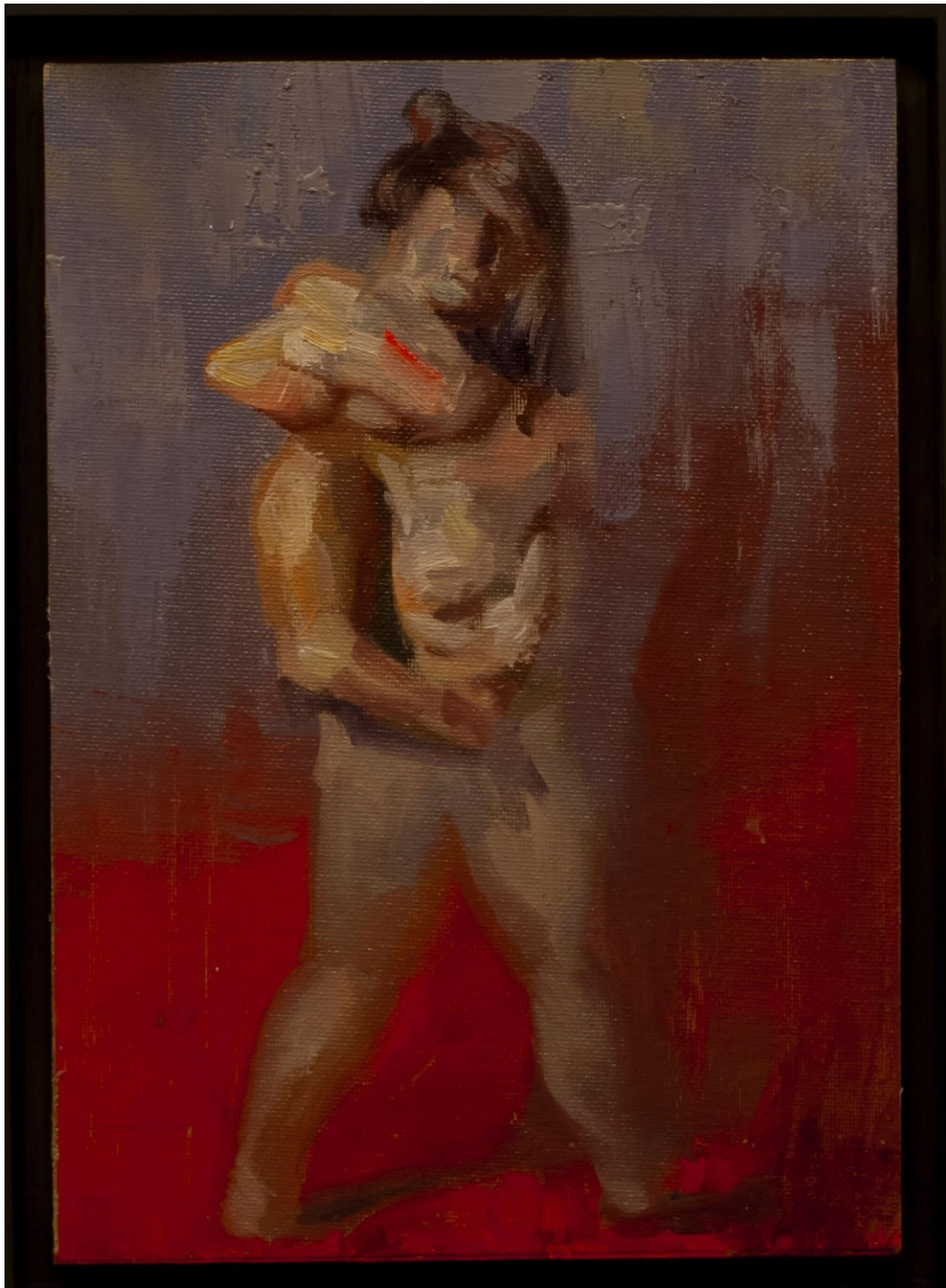
"Dwelling in the Depths of Hate" 2018 Oil on canvas 24 x 36 inches



"The Depths of Oneself" 2018-2019 (in progress) Oil on Canvas 41 x 59 inches



"Look Beyond Flesh" Oil on canvas mounted on cradled panel 2018 9½x 7 inches



"Unmanaged Self" 2019 Oil on canvas mounted on cradled panel 9½x 7 inches





Installation views at the Fine Arts Building Gallery