Mitch Hobbs

Artist’s Statement

I am drawn to mastering what is difficult and this drive keeps me coming back to drawing and painting the figure. Each time the process of adding and subtracting marks becomes more familiar, but it is never easy. Each pose, each person, each delicate change sets off an entirely new discovery, which makes the entire process feel engaging and fresh again.

My favorite painters are figural artists. Lucian Freud’s ability to create flesh with oil paint is very inspiring. I am also influenced by the detailed engravings of Albrecht Durer and the portraits of Hans Holbein the Younger. Egon Schiele’s paintings and drawings have been inspirational as well. It seems that these painters were able to create works of art that *were* their models, not just *like* their models. In my work I wanted to capture the human form in detail with the same care that these artists had shown.

Everything including an individual’s mannerisms, emotions, beliefs, values, vices, speech pattern, facial features, body type, and other aspects come together to form someone that is both universally human and uniquely their own person. Whenever I draw or paint a figure I find that I walk away having experienced some of those different parts of that individual. The opportunity to focus on another person for a long time creates a sort of mutual understanding. Sometimes I am fortunate enough to capture a glimpse of the model’s personality. This is one of the times the process of painting and drawing the figure becomes most satisfying for me.

I chose oil and graphite because they are two mediums I am familiar and comfortable with. The decision to paint on copper was made for a couple of reasons. First, my dad is a sheet metal contractor. The business he and my uncle operate was started by my late grandfather, Mitchell Hobbs. As a kid, I remember visiting the shop and being surrounded by heavy pieces of metal. Dangerous equipment was operated by workers in thick jumpsuits. The welding and cutting of industrial materials was an overwhelming experience that has always stuck with me. It all felt important and intimidating. The decision to paint on metal is both a tribute to my family’s business and to my young fascination with the shop.

At the same time, copper is not an unconventional material to paint on. Many artists have worked on copper if it was available. It is a durable material that will hold up through the years. The copper is usually covered in gesso or some type of base coat—you would not know the painting was executed on copper unless you were told. Realizing that copper is a handsome material, I decided to paint directly onto the sheets without laying down any base coat. I wanted to expose the metal, putting its color, radiance, and reflective qualities to use.

Not all of my works here are oil paintings on copper. The small portrait of Richard was preceded by the graphite drawing. Sarah was also drawn before she was painted. The drawings were used to help me familiarize myself with the subject before executing the paintings. I also liked the idea of recording the models in different poses using a different medium. I mentioned before that people have different aspects to their personality and experience a broad range of emotions—these can affect the drawing or painting. By approaching the model again I hope to dig deeper into their personality. The painting of Matt was done mostly from life, over a number of sessions. I chose not to make any drawings beforehand in an attempt to have a more spontaneous experience.

The physicality of a mark is something that intrigues me. Paint can be applied thick or thin. Small marks can be made or more harsh and deliberate lines can be executed. Sometimes the paint is blended carefully and other times it is laid down with dramatic texture. All the different marks hold different qualities and expressions. I have attempted to use a number of different kinds of marks in my works here.