

THESIS

THE ARTIST AND HIS MODEL IN  
AN INTERIOR SPACE

Submitted by  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER  
OUR SUPERVISION BY JORGE LUIS VARONA ENTITLED THE  
ARTIST AND HIS MODEL IN AN INTERIOR SPACE BE ACCEPTED  
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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### THE ARTIST AND HIS MODEL IN AN INTERIOR SPACE

An exploration of visual, psychological, and atmospheric qualities of the figure in an interior space relative to other objects and figures. There is also consideration of the space in relationship to the canvas which the viewer occupies in observing the paintings.

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## DEDICATION

To my wife, Iliana, who posed for so many hours in sickness and in health, because she loves me and believes in me. She is my inspiration.

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The theme is the not so glamorous world of a dancer who shares her world with this artist and the dialogue that exists between them when painting from life. The paintings explore the figure, how it relates to other objects and to an interior space.

In Ballerina (Fig. 1) we are captured by the dancer's concentration as she takes class at the barre. We are aware of the intensity expressed by her face and her hand clenching the barre. I also make the viewer aware of the relationship between the head and hand, the feeling of space created by the enlarged hand compared to the head and what is painted in between. The room is not painted solidly but with an airy feeling. I have also manipulated the implied space in which the viewer is observing the painting. The barre the dancer is holding is usually attached to a wall. That being so, the viewer looks on from the location of the wall. The viewer is the wall, he occupies its space.

In The Model Sleeps (Fig. 2) we encounter a figure sleeping in a small room. She is painted in a foreshortened angle and the bed extends out of the picture plane towards the viewer. So the viewer is positioned very close to her. The figure is nude and the cabinets have nothing on them except a mirror. There is also a surrealistic quality in that there is a reflected window which should indicate the light source, but the light comes from another source. We are in this small room with the model and it is very quiet.

The Self-portrait (Fig. 3) investigates the space created between the artist and his reflection. We see the top then the bottom of the artist's foot reflected in the mirror. I express the space between the two. I also show how the back of the canvas reflects on the mirror and the space created between canvases. This illusion of a canvas will later become the finished painting we are viewing. These images are of two different worlds. Finally, by showing the leg which originates from outside the picture plane, the viewer is assuming the space taken by the artist as I worked. So, the reflection could be the viewer's.

Another World (Fig. 4) investigates the relationship of one figure to another in an interior. I lead you to believe it is a dance studio by dressing the figures as dancers but it is actually an interior invented by me. The poses are the same but the angles different. The models are the same but given different scale and emphasis on detail. The space between them becomes very important. The composition is on a vertical axis but where does the viewer's focus go? Is it to the tightly rendered head of the dancer in the background or to the loose and larger scaled head in the foreground? Do the figures communicate with each other or with the viewer? They don't look at us. The communication is within themselves as they contemplate their difficult world of dance.

The painting Without Hands, Without Feet (Fig. 5) poses the questions: What is a painter without his hands and a dancer without her feet? What is the world without the arts? It is difficult to exist as an artist in today's world. Society seems to cut the artist away from his work due to emotional and monetary causes.



The painting expresses the communication between the artist and his model. The artist's intense stare at his subject versus the world of the model as she poses. What does the time mean to the artist and what does the time of the pose mean to the model? Yet, without one the other would not exist in this painting.

The viewer's space in relationship to the painting is evident. The viewer is standing in the room in which the artist is observing and working. The painting also observes the difference between dealing with a full figure reflected in a mirror and the actual figure occupying space in an interior.

2 Paintings - 2 Realities (Fig. 6) is involved with an illusion of a painted canvas within the actual painting. Which part of the painting is reality and which is not? The images seem to fuse together; more so in one area than another. The painting expresses the visualization I encounter from observation of model to canvas and vice versa. The painting and the subject are one and their realities overlap. The relationship of one figure to the other becomes very important even in scale.

The purpose of painting the illusion of a palette is twofold. First, the viewer is standing in the space occupied by me as I painted. Secondly, there is the relationship of the paint and the physical quality of application on the illusionistic palette to the rest of the painting.

The perspective in these paintings is usually from a higher angle than the model. It is an oriental perspective as in Pose and Rest (Fig. 7). Like oriental paintings where figures cast no shadows, these figures cast a slight shadow and appear to float between the floor/wall line and the edge of the table in the foreground. There is

a confrontation between the figures and the objects and between the figures themselves. The objects seem to have more weight than the figures and demand the viewer's focus. The emphasis between the figures is also different. The figure on the left is solid on comparison to the airy seated figure which is slightly moving.

In Waiting (Fig. 8) there is a somber mood expressed by the dejected pose of the dancer and the darkness that surrounds her. She is in an interior space awaiting a decision that will affect her future as a dancer. Others will decide if she got the part or not and that answer could come out of the dark doorway in the back. An object outside the picture frame casts its shadow on the painting. The enlarged hand is due to the fact that we are so close to her that objects become distorted and foreshortened. It is through this device that I bring the viewer into the painting.

The paintings deal with the psychological effects of an interior space. Something in the Room (Fig. 9) expresses this awareness. The room appears large and empty. The figure is facing away, hiding something from the viewer. The muscles of the back are intense, and except for the long hair the figure might be a man or a woman. There are dance "character" shoes on the floor but no feet to wear them. The robe she took off is hanging on the door. It implies animation and is reacting to the figure. The doors are closed or lead to an empty closet. The chair emerges out of the picture plane and the viewer is brought into the painted interior.

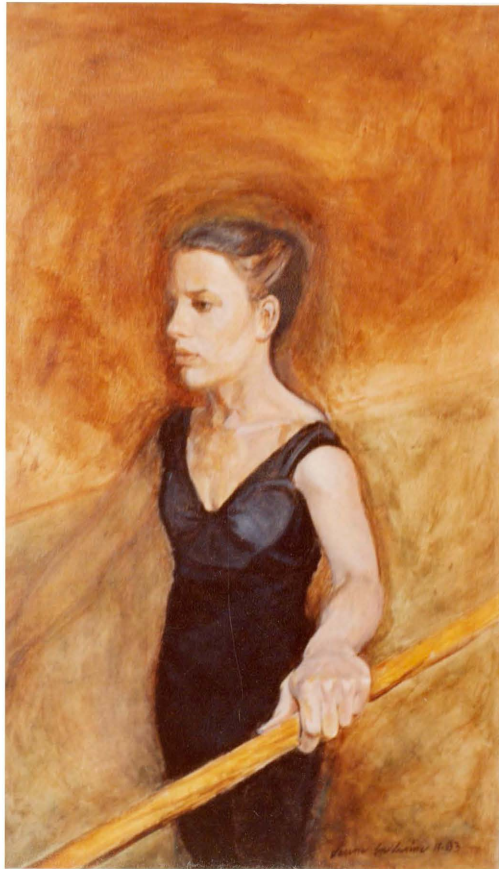
The size of the canvases is small in comparison to large scale abstract paintings. You can hold them in your hands and appreciate

the intimacy of detail. This is the manner in which I paint, holding the canvas on my lap with one hand and painting with the other.

The figures and objects are all done from life. I will not work the figure without the model as was the practice of Caravaggio. The interiors are done partly from observation and partly from imagination. This bond creates an aura of mystery and places the figure in an atmosphere of its own. The composition's ability to draw the viewer into the painting adds to the work as a whole.

The painting surfaces and their qualities are of significance. They are canvas and tempered masonite which are primed with gesso and given a thin ground of burnt umber. The oil on canvas has spring or bounce and the texture of the canvas soaks up the pigment, drying it quickly and allowing me to paint on top of it as I please. The paint application is rather thin especially in the early stages. The masonite is a sturdier surface and the brushstrokes seem to lay on top. It is harder to rework an area without disturbing the paint underneath. The smooth surface of the masonite also allows for more detail and my colors appear cleaner. The brushwork is all done with sable so as not to disturb the underpainting.

Why the emphasis on the figure? Visually and emotionally it is very challenging. It directs its focus on being human and the search for my humanity. It has a personality and animation of its own. There are as many ways of expressing the figure as one can imagine and each one is new. Finally, I must deal with the model staying in the pose, allowing me the time to paint her, finding the pose again after breaking, and confronting her everchanging emotional levels. This union creates an intense working atmosphere which will hopefully surface in the painting.



**Fig. 1. Ballerina - oil on canvas - 14" x 24"**





Fig. 3. Self-portrait - oil on canvas - 20" x 27"

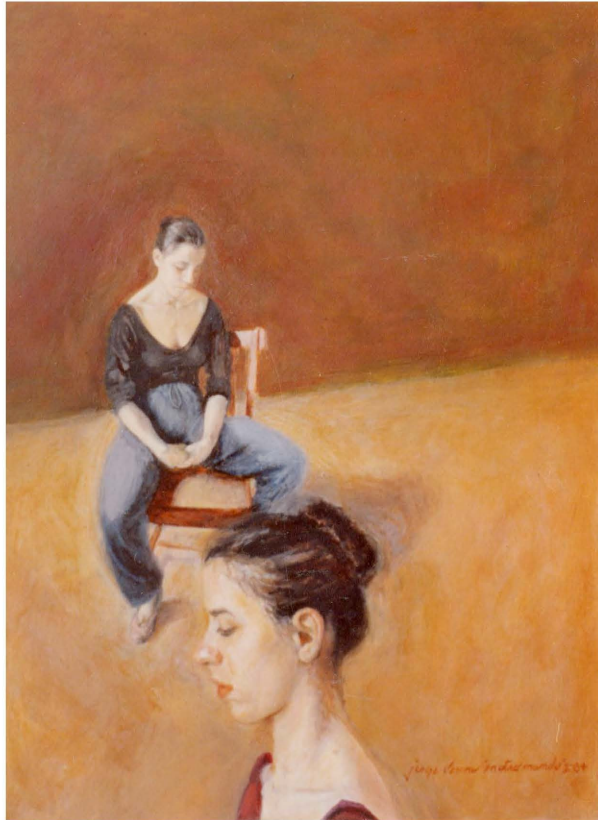


Fig. 4. Another World - oil on masonite - 12" x 16"



Fig. 5. Without Hands, Without Feet -  
oil on masonite - 15" x 24"



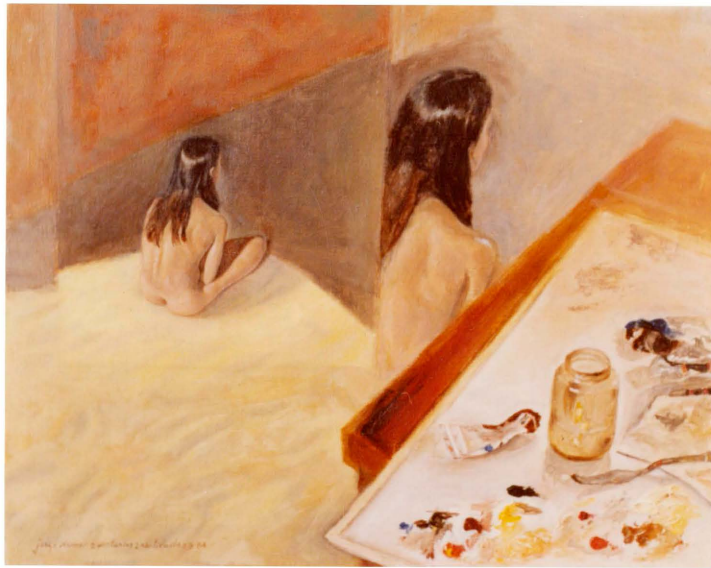


Fig. 6. 2 Paintings - 2 Realities - oil on canvas - 16" x 20"



Fig. 7. Pose and Rest - oil on canvas - 20" x 28"



Fig. 8. Waiting - oil on canvas - 18" x 24"



Fig. 9. Something in the Room - oil on masonite -  
24" x 36"