

NAVIGATING NORMALCY

by

Krista Lynn Busacker

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Rollin Beamish

Approved for the School of Art

Vaughan Judge

Approved for The Graduate School

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Krista Lynn Busacker

April 2012

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LIST OF IMAGES

Image	Page
1. Navigating Normalcy (Installation View)	7
2. Navigating Normalcy (Installation View 2)	8
3. Rouged, 2011, Oil on Paper, 52in x 50in.....	9
4. Exposed, 2011, Oil on Paper, 52in x 50in	10
5. Preparation, 2011, Oil on Paper, 112in x 50in.....	11
6. Reflected, 2011, Oil on Paper, 112in x 50in.....	12
7. Filtered Site, 2011, Oil on Paper, 70in x 52in	13
8. Redefining, 2011, Oil on Paper, 94in x 58in	14
9. Redefining (Detail)	15
10. Redefining (Detail 2)	16
11. Uncertain Department, 2011 Oil on Paper, 96in x 114in	17
12. Navigating Normalcy (Installation View 3)	18
13. Navigating Normalcy (Installation View 4)	19
14. Navigating Normalcy (Installation View 5)	20
15. Navigating Normalcy (Installation View 6)	21
16. Navigating Normalcy (Installation View 7)	22

ABSTRACT

Our interactions with one another help to construct our sense of self by challenging us to question where we fit into our surrounding preexisting social framework. This can often cause an acute awareness of the self and its helpless reliance on the other for self-definition. It is this feeling of self-consciousness or awareness that I have tried to re-create in my work. By grouping images of our private preparation to be viewed by the public together with images of less than flattering presentations in public I try to create an environment where the viewer might question the governing deportment around them.

In trying to find a point of view to make work from, I naturally find myself drawn to questioning what I care about in my life and why it is important to me. In looking at myself I find that my most memorable moments in life, both happy and sad, have been with my family or with those to whom I am close. These are the people who have helped shape the person I am today. However, as time passes and separates us (as well as distance), I naturally start to question what happens around me more than I did previously as a way of finding my own view. This is particularly more evident when situations arise that do not always align with what I think to be the collective way of thinking. For example, when I found out my youngest sister who was still finishing school was pregnant, my first thought was, “what would people think of her”; and if that was my first thought I had to ask myself if I looked on the whole situation negatively. I knew that she was a strong person who would be able to pull through though situations that were bound to arise, however, I didn’t know if my opinion had changed or if I was afraid of others seeing her as a person who “had a child too young” before they saw how intelligent and driven she was. In other words what I have described is a bit of a dilemma of morals versus ethics or, the emergence of the ‘I’ or self from the social construction.¹ This emergence happens through various situations and occurrences in life and it is this feeling of self-consciousness or awareness that I have tried to re-create in my work.

When the “I” diverges from the collective ideas or morals of the majority that surrounds it, it is forced to turn inward and search for their point of origin and how it (the

¹ Butler, Judith P. (2005-10-01). Giving an Account of Oneself (p. 7). Fordham University Press. Kindle Edition.

“I) came into being within this preexisting context. Judith Butler points to a more specific timing of when this may occur when she discusses an account given by Neitzche:

“He remarks that we become conscious of ourselves only after certain injuries have been inflicted. Someone suffers as a consequence, and the suffering person or, rather, someone acting as his or her advocate in a system of justice seeks to find the cause of that suffering and asks us whether we might be that cause.”²

The implication of this is it takes a possibly negative jolt to become reflective upon ourselves, the example I gave above could fall into that category depending on how it was viewed. However, I would agree with Butler when she expands on this subject saying that the desire to know and understand may not always be fueled by a violent action and rather the importance in Neitzche’s account was the understanding that “I begin my story of myself only in the face of a ‘you’”³. The return to the other to define the self points back to the fact that we all enter into a pre-existing framework that we must negotiate and find our place within. This is reinforced when Neitzche refers to “a system of justice” implying that the framework has a certain structure and rules that apply to guide those that seek to understand. In this context the word “framework” could easily be replaced by a system of morals and ethics that guide our sense of right and wrong which could very easily be seen as the basis of all of our social “frameworks”.

Within my work I try to echo this with the portrayal of perfecting or examining the self in the mirror performing various activities as a way of looking at how we confront ourselves everyday in relation to our social framework. For most people there is

² Butler, Judith P. (2005-10-01). *Giving an Account of Oneself* (p. 10). Fordham University Press. Kindle Edition.

³ Butler, Judith P. (2005-10-01). *Giving an Account of Oneself* (p. 11). Fordham University Press. Kindle Edition.

something that we will always question about ourselves every day. Typical concerns may include one's hair, job performance, relationship obligations and many other conversations one has with themselves in the mirror or through silent conversations in their own head. My concern with my paintings of the 'private' space is that this self-consciousness and acknowledgment of this social structure is exposed to the public, as the public viewer is the one who takes the place of the mirror. For instance we all know that certain contexts within public domain demand certain types of dress or preparation however, what if what we want to believe about the individual as a universal is impossible to fit within these social regulations. An example of this would be the 'universal' belief that we should be confident in what we look like naturally but then finding that the social system has already defined what that acceptable 'universal' natural is (thus showing it was not universal to begin with). If you don't fit this standard then you must work in order to prevent yourself from standing out or accept that you will be looked upon as the odd one (which may not always be so bad). These private space images explore routine and the mask in an attempt to meet social, appearance standards, and to find acceptance within a group.

The images created in relation to the private mirror works, reference a more public space. However, the people are depicted doing activities that we may find distasteful or repulsive in some way within the context of the setting. Empathetically, we may relate to having similar experiences in our lives. While we may recognize what is happening in the public space is most likely not acceptable for that context according to our ethical code of conduct, it is still possible to relate to the humanity of the situation.

These paintings add another dimension to the private space images as a grouping of work. The private images show an exposed attempt at control while the public images show our inability to truly control all aspects of how we are seen by others.

This is an important fact that is reflected in Slavoj Žižek's book *Violence*, where he discusses the violence of 'neighbor'. In using the word neighbor he is referring to neighboring cultures that contain different value systems and beliefs. I see this in relation to my work in that, as I mentioned earlier, we all enter into a pre-existing social framework, but this framework is not as universal as it may seem (especially if you are a part of a large social system). Žižek states that the neighbor may be seen as an "intruder, someone whose different way of life... disturbs us, throws the balance of our way of life off the rails."⁴ He suggests that the solution to understanding the neighbor must also be "supplemented by the attitude of 'getting-out-of-each-other's-way' by maintaining an appropriate distance, by impending a new 'code of discretion.'"⁵ However, this code is threatened when attention is given to differences, rather than continuing with 'polite indifference' to the neighbor, such as was the case with the Danish cartoons in 2005. As soon as Western civilization gave attention to the 'other' within the cartoons, the cartoons were seen by some Muslims to be representative of the Western world's view of Islam as a whole and the cartoons became a condensed representative symbol instead of about a

⁴ Žižek, Slavoj (2010-04-01). *Violence: Big Ideas/Small Books* (p. 59). Macmillan. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Žižek, Slavoj (2010-04-01). *Violence: Big Ideas/Small Books* (p. 59). Macmillan. Kindle Edition.

specific event.⁶ In trying to voice a view of the ‘neighbor’ the Danish cartoons were eventually reduced to a single symbol, which Zizek compares to language, “reducing it to a single feature... destroying its organic unity.”⁷ In this view, it seems that Zizek’s approach of staying at a distance is the only way to maintain a relationship with the neighbor without the risk of reducing them to their differences or stereotypes.

An example of this idea of neighbor in my work would be the painting of the Asian woman picking her nose amongst a crowd in an Asian country, and while western culture would view that as unthinkable in public, for some of these countries it is not considered quite as disgraceful⁸. The decision to accept or ridicule it is left to the viewer.

I think that what Zizek describes as happening in a displacement of cultural systems also happens when an event disrupts a moral or value system on a smaller scale and in fact if you look at cultures where religion is strongly tied to the culture itself morals and values are directly tied to the heart of the culture and are one and the same. I would want the viewers of my work to notice the complexity that goes into the forming of our own sense of self as well as how we view others. It is my opinion that through this process of deconstruction we might better understand our own place within our social systems and hopefully become more accepting to the events that do break the mold of our standards.

⁶ Zizek, Slavoj (2010-04-01). Violence: Big Ideas/Small Books (p. 60). Macmillan. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Zizek, Slavoj (2010-04-01). Violence: Big Ideas/Small Books (p. 61). Macmillan. Kindle Edition.

⁸ Virtual Tourist, 1994-2012,
http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/Japan/Shizuoka_ken/Yaizu-968386/General_Tips-Yaizu-TG-C-1.html

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Image 1 – Navigating Normalcy (Installation view)



Image 2 – Navigating Normalcy (Installation view 2)

Navigating Normalcy

Krista Busacker



Image 3 – Rouged



Image 4 - Exposed



Image 5 – Preparation



Image 6 - Reflected



Image 7 – Filtered sight

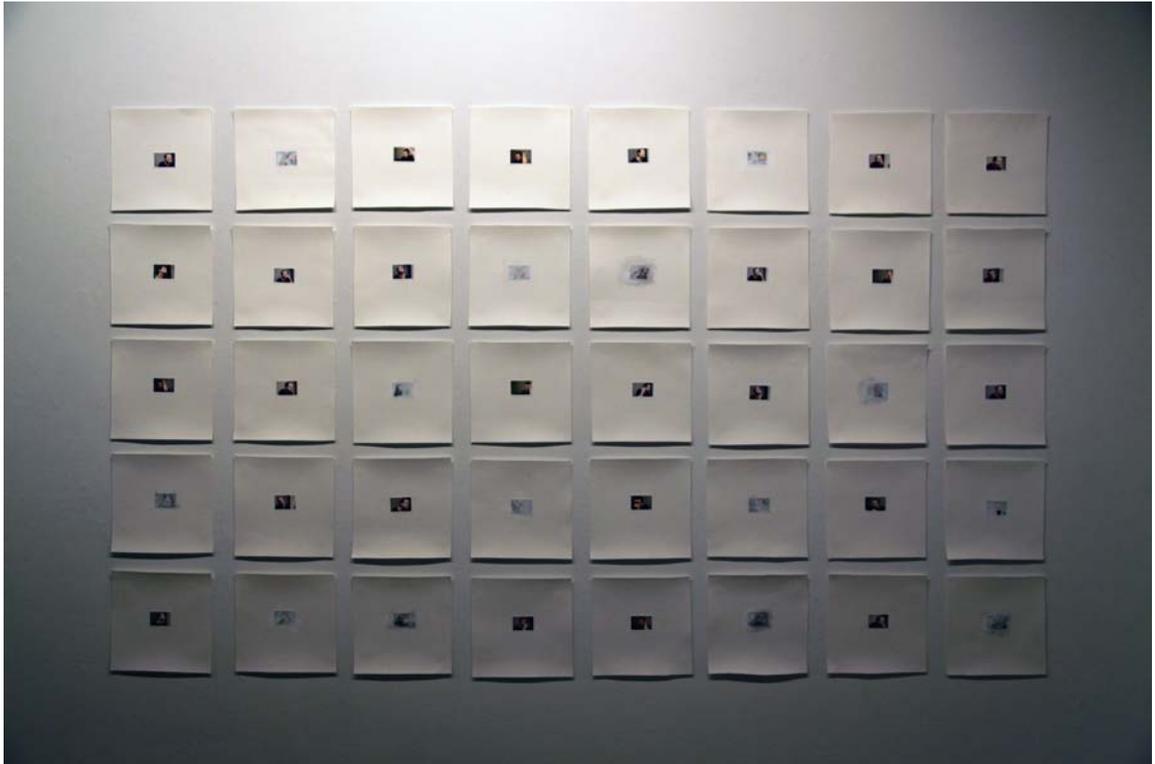


Image 8 – Redefining



Image 9 – Redefining (Detail)



Image 10 – Redefining (Detail 2)



Image 11 – Uncertain Department



Image 12 – Navigating Normalcy (Installation view 3)



Image 13 - Navigating Normalcy (Installation view 4)



Image 13 – Navigating Normalcy (Installation view 5)



Image 14 – Navigating Normalcy (Installation view 6)



Image 15 – Navigating Normalcy (Installation view 7)