Lesbian Invisibility and Exploitation in Film

An Artistic Analysis of Lesbian Representation in *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

By
Lili A. Minato

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Prof. Gregory Poulin,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

June 2026

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments 3

Abstract 5

Introduction 6

Literature Review 8

Artistic Inspiration.....27

- Reference Images 27
- Inspiration & Influences 28

Portfolio 44

- Artist Statement 44
- Artist Biography 44
- Works 46

Self Critique 54

- Process Notes 54
- Reflective Essay 68

Appendix 72

Bibliography 101

Acknowledgements

I would like to give thanks to all of my friends, family, and co-workers who have supported me during this project, especially to those who graciously allowed me to talk through my ideas, paintings, and writings. That consistent and constant dialogue helped my creativity more than anything else did.

Thank you to my thesis advisor, Gregory Poulin, who not only gave me fantastic advice and critiques throughout my painting process but also graciously gave me both supplies and a space to work in. Your charitable nature supported me while I fought to finish my art pieces in the summer heat.

A very special thank you to my mother, Laura Minato, and my aunt, Teresa Minato, for looking over and helping me edit this entire document. An extra pair of eyes was super helpful, especially when it's being looked over by a retired teacher and librarian. You guys are the best!

Thank you to my girlfriend, Lauren, who was with me every step of the way. Thank you for listening to my ideas and rants, watching these films with me, coming to the studio to keep me company, and supporting me when I felt stressed. Another thank you for assisting me with the more technical side of the artwork. You are my anchor and my number one supporter, I love you.

Lastly, thank you to Gavin Keulks and the GSR Student Research and Traveling Fund Program. To Gavin, your support always uplifted me and gave

me the drive to finish this project strong. Gavin also pointed me in the direction of the GSR Student Research and Traveling Fund who gave me the funds to buy most of the art supplies used for this project.

Abstract

Lesbian film is a genre and medium that is filled with patriarchal influence and internalized misogyny. Through the use of traditional mediums, such as oil paint and mixed media, this creative thesis project will explore, analyze, compare, and contrast lesbian relationships, identity, and experience within two films, *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. Each painting in this body of work will represent one of the topics listed: love, society, invisibility, solidarity, or collapse. With these prompts in mind, these works will display figures, portraits, and landscapes that encapsulate the topic at hand within the film it's assigned to. Scenes from both films will be painted, and passages from *Immodest Acts* and other relevant writings will be included in the art as well.

As a lesbian who is educationally and recreationally ardent about both art and film, it is personally important to see accurate representation of my community on screen without the addition of negative societal standards and affects. By combining two of my greatest passions in this thesis, I hope to educate others through my own artistic lens on the importance of lesbian representation and history and how film has impacted and distorted it.

Introduction

Film is an incredibly important medium when it comes to relaying messaging and representation and it has been something I've been interested in for a long time. For years, I have been creating artwork based on the films and television shows I've watched and adored. After coming out as bisexual in early high school, I found queer culture in the media I consumed. Oftentimes, it was representation that wasn't necessarily good nor healthy. I still felt connected to such characters, even if they depicted my sexuality in a stereotypical manner. I drew and painted these individuals in order to directly connect myself and my sexuality with the characters I saw on my screen.

In my freshman year of college, I realized I was a lesbian. As my younger self did, I watched lesbian films and shows in order to feel connected to a community and to discover more about myself and my newfound identity. As I came to find out, lesbian representation is far and few between, and most of it is disturbingly inaccurate. There were many times where I sat down, excited to watch a lesbian film but by the end of the movie, I found myself disgusted. In recent years, there has been a drastic increase in media that includes lesbians. Most of those characters represented are also seemingly positive figures. That being said, the media continually only shows one type of lesbian, one that is feminine and white. There are always some outliers but the mass majority of lesbians in film these days fall under at least one of those categories.

Painting, along with film, is also an incredibly useful medium when it comes to storytelling and representation. By utilizing lesbian film protagonists as a subject in various oil paintings, viewers are able to distinguish unsuccessful and successful lesbian representation. With the help of books and articles about the subject, there can also be a conversation revolving around those who are never represented, like butches of color as well as general lesbian history. By looking back at my past, I am using a hobby that I adored in high school to relay important messages for and about those who share a similar identity to mine. The act of using visual mediums is done to relay messaging in a clear and concise manner, just as films often do. I look to represent people who are hidden and overlooked by society in a way that allows others to clearly see and accept their existence. While also showing where filmmakers go wrong when writing and creating lesbian characters.

Literature Review

Introduction

Present day, lesbianism is a normal and, more or less, a widely accepted sexuality. Before our progressive twenty-first century society, though, being a lesbian was quite taboo. The combination of this forbidden subject with religion and a homophobic and misogyny-filled society caused lesbians to not have a very rich history to look back upon. In a way, this is why the lesbian period drama is such a cliché. The lack of historical understanding and knowledge of the sexuality has grown and blossomed into current day filmography. In order to cope with the confusions associated with lesbianism, many films choose to only represent a certain type of lesbian, one that especially appeals to men. These women become dehumanized while other lesbians get no representation at all. This is a direct domino effect from the "sin that must not be named" mentality from hundreds of years ago.

Lesbians have never truly been accepted into society, unless as a fashion statement like the 1990s 'lesbian chic,' and it all derives from a lack of historical background and education. Silence has been integrated into the lesbian identity; invisibility and uncertainty caused by a lack of formal history and the subsequent misrepresentation in the media. This history and examination is amassed and used as a perspective to analyze two films that have yet to be compared on an academic scale: *Benedetta* (2021) and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019). Here,

positive and negative lesbian representation can be examined in the context of actual films, one of which possesses harmful representation while the other maintains the opposite.

Lesbian History

The introduction chapter of *Immodest Acts*, a book by historian Judith Brown who specializes in the Italian Renaissance, offers historical context as to why lesbians have such a poorly documented past, "The conceptual difficulties contemporaries had with lesbian sexuality is reflected in the lack of an adequate terminology. *Lesbian* sexuality did not exist. Neither, for that matter, did *Lesbians*," (17). The seventeen page introduction is jam packed with quotes and references from influential priests and philosophers as they scrutinized or simply ignored the queer women of their time.

Misogyny is a key factor to blame when thinking about the lack of knowledge and terms associated with lesbians, "Another reason for ignoring lesbian sexuality was the belief that women, who were thought to be naturally inferior to men, were merely trying to emulate them," (11). Some men during this time felt that it was natural for women to want to become the "better sex," so lesbianism was frowned upon by them but not necessarily a huge concern, especially compared to sexual relations between two men. Other men, though, felt that lesbian sex was the worst form of sodomy, "the waste of the male seed was thought a worse offense against the laws of God and nature than was the

misuse of the seed or reproductive organs of women," (12). Whether men at the time perceived lesbianism to be insignificant or because they found it to be the most vile act against God, the sexuality was simply not talked about. Truly, the only time it was socially acceptable to be discussed was when a lesbian was being punished, and sometimes it wasn't even talked about then, "Consequently, while men found guilty of sodomy were to have their crimes read aloud in order to deter others, sexual relations between women were better left unmentioned," (20).

Patriarchal influence, widespread Catholicism, and a lack of scientific knowledge, led not only to misunderstandings associated with lesbian sex, but also a lack of history. There were hardly any labels associated with queer women and those that existed, like Fricatrices or Tribades, didn't really stick. The sexuality was simply thrown under the term sodomy alongside male figures hoping that it would keep the concept under wraps. Women were unable to represent themselves during this time and the only people who were documenting lesbians were men who either ignored or chastised it. As Brown eloquently writes at the end of her introduction chapter, "Crimes that could not be named, thus, literally had no name and left few traces in the historical record. The contradictory notions that Western Europeans had about women's sexuality made it impossible to discuss lesbian sexuality openly, if at all," (20).

This lack of historical knowledge has seeped into our current day media as lesbians and queer women search for proof of their alleged past. This has

blossomed into a cliché entitled the lesbian period drama, a genre of film or book that has been exceedingly popular in recent years. In an article by lesbian scholar Linda Garber titled, *Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance between Fact and Fiction*, there is discussion of the lesbian period drama in the book world. Garber notes that fictional lesbian historical novels provide some non-fiction historical context, which they then use to integrate lesbians into a space where they weren't previously acknowledged or accepted:

> "For most lesbian historical novelists and filmmakers, the nuances of scholarly historiography do not seem to matter much; at least, they do not hinder the storyteller's progress. Donoghue distinguishes between writers "who make it all up" and those who research "desirous of having some historical reality," but she notes that it's "often best to only find a few" facts, since they can "spur" but also "fetter" the writer. All contemporary novels, irrespective of genre, include a statement designed to protect their authors and publishers from liability, declaring the books works of fiction, "any resemblance to actual events or people" being "coincidental." About a third of lesbian historical novels also include author's notes explaining their stories' grounding in historical fact, raising the question along with Donoghue of the role of the intervention performed by lesbian historical fiction "at still a relatively early phase of digging up—or shall we say creating" the lesbian past," (131).

Historical fiction allows for lesbians to be imagined in a space that they were once banished from. It fills in the missing gaps within lesbian history, "Writing lesbians into recognizable—even cliche—versions of the past seems to intone, "We exist, we exist, we exist."" (137). It opens the door for visibility in a time period where sapphic women were invisible.

The history of lesbianism is something that lacks context and material. It's not a well-researched or well-documented past and many historians don't find it worthwhile to look into. The invisibility caused by this unstable past has evolved into historical queer media. As stated previously, lesbian period dramas are often based on real events but sapphics are added into the equation with the assumptions that some lesbians must have existed during that specific time frame. These novels are attempting to rebuild the unfinished history of lesbians, they are trying to turn the community visible and prove that gay women existed and loved during a time where they were heavily condemned.

These fictional historical lesbian novels have metamorphosed into film, where lesbian period dramas have rapidly taken up space in Hollywood. As stated in Dartmouth Masters student Abigail Dollries's article: *Lesbian Period Dramas: The Significance and Limitations of Historicizing Queer Narratives*, "Placing these narratives in the past adds an element of forbidden love to the relationship of the film's characters — it depicts intimacy that must go unspoken and sexuality necessarily

repressed in the face of social norms. It would seem then, that period film offers a landscape for the reestablishment of a lost queer history. Rendering these stories visible on screen asserts that sexual difference is not a modern construction and that heteronormative order is not an inherent condition of society," (132). Lesbian period dramas open up and offer to change the past, to grant love and acceptance between two women when it was forbidden. Sadly, they are also a product of our time, selective representation, trauma, and oversexualization plague such films in a way that makes them difficult to be taken seriously as a quality rendition.

Lesbians in Film

Historical lesbian films have taken up the space that was once filled by their novel counterparts. These movies are often not based on real events and harbor themes of sex, love, and tragedy. While they were once a new and upcoming genre, lesbian historical dramas have quickly become very oversaturated in the media and viewers are starting to notice their flaws, "While a surge in the production of lesbian period films increases visibility and representation on screen, the genre is met with more criticism with each new release. In combating the historical exclusion of queer women's stories, these films often still center around upperclass, white, and traditionally feminine characters. The overwhelming dominance of this genre has left little room for diverse perspectives," (131). These

films, once made to empower and represent lesbians in spaces where they hardly existed beforehand swiftly developed into something extremely exclusionary.

As stated in *Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s*, an article written by Ann Ciasullo, PHD, “The body or image that is invisible is the “butch,” a figure that I consider better able than a “femme” body to challenge mainstream cultural fantasies about lesbianism,” (578). The historical lesbian drama isn’t the only genre representing lesbians in such a white-patriarchal way, most films exclude butches, lesbians of color, and poor lesbians from the equation.

The feminine-presenting lesbian in these films comes from the rise of the ‘lesbian chic' in the 1990s. Feminine lesbians were digestible for people who were getting used to seeing these women on screen. They looked like any other woman and they could be easily sexualized and romanticized by straight men and women alike. Lesbians who were white, upper class, and femme were monetized and made into a product of sorts. They became a fashion statement that was no longer associated at all with the sexuality. Thus, lesbians who didn’t fit into such categories continued to be hated and chastised by all, “Mainstream culture is thus giving with one hand and taking back with another: it makes room for positive representations of lesbianism, but the lesbian it chooses as

"representative," decoupled from the butch that would more clearly signify lesbianism for mainstream audiences, in effect becomes a nonlesbian, or, as Rosanne Kennedy puts it, an "absent presence." Thus, in the same moment that mainstream culture (re)presents the lesbian, challenging her long-standing invisibility, it reinstates that very invisibility," (600). In *Lesbian Brides: Post-Queer Popular Culture* by Dr. Kate McNicholas Smith and sociologist Imogen Tyle, there is a quote that states: "While lesbianism had previously been associated with second-wave feminist rejection of oppressive forms of femininity, it was now reworked as a "chic" identity," (321). The popularized femme lesbian became a heterosexual figure, the feminist and queer associations were watered down to a pale sex symbol icon.

The 'Lesbian Chic' is still alive today in lesbian media, especially in historical films. Lesbian period dramas, while not only representing the lesbian image popularized by the 'lesbian chic,' are deeply rooted in patriarchal values. These films display queer women experiencing various degrees of bigotry for the sake of historical accuracy. Since these women are living during times of unacceptance, they have to experience such unacceptance. This could range from homophobic remarks to torture to death. Dollries's *Lesbian Period Drama* eloquently states, "As soon as these queer relationships attempt to reenter the sphere of society and leave these pastoral settings, however, they cannot be maintained. Sexual

expression between two women is outside the normative order and therefore cannot coexist with the mandates of a male-dominated society," (134). Lesbian period dramas often end in a negative light. The two women are split apart, sometimes by men, by death, or by their own decisions because of the societal atmosphere at the time. There is no way for lesbians to receive a happy ending because the primitive society wasn't made for them. While these directors are very strict about their historical accuracy, they are often very lenient when it comes to lesbian sex scenes. A concept that's normally inaccurate and is even more so when put in a historical context.

Sex Scenes in Lesbian Period Pieces

The sex scenes displayed in historical lesbian films range from explicit to non-existent. Both of these extremes are equally harmful to lesbians and play into hurtful stereotypes. The male gaze often infiltrates lesbian spaces which introduces oversexualization and queer-coding into the conversation. There is a correct way to represent lesbian sex that is not exploitative but sadly, lesbian period pieces, especially those directed by men, tend to either sexualize or desexualize. Surprisingly, both issues seem to stem from how lesbians are represented in the porn industry.

Many queer films tend to depict lesbians sex scenes in a way that reflects how they are represented in porn. This is done to cater to straight

men because these scenes are familiar and play into fantasies they may already have. In a study done by Maria Soto-Sanfiel, PHD, and Adriana Ibiti, PHD, titled *Lesbian Sex in Mainstream Cinema and Audience Enjoyment*, there is a quote that states, "Many heterosexual men reveal that these scenes remind them of recurrent personal fantasies of having sex with two women (encouraged by pornographic movies)," (556). The same article also shares how over-the-top lesbian sexuality in film can actually be used as a way to entice audiences, "The representation of lesbian sex in mainstream movies attracts audiences to the cinema, acts as a lure and works effectively as a persuasive strategy," (572). Explicit lesbian sex scenes entice men to see films but they also use physical and verbal language seen in pornographic movies. It makes the sexuality very digestible and familiar for those not part of the community. Lesbians become dehumanized by being represented as a symbol of sex. There is no relationship or love between two women, just glorified sexual acts often with the end goal of male pleasure.

On the other end of the spectrum, lesbian period pieces can also be very unsexual. These films are more likely referred to as 'queer-baiting' movies. There are two female characters who may yearn for one another but they don't officially get together. The word lesbian is often never used in these films and if it is, it's referred to as a dirty word. In *Carnal Fantasies: Embodied Spectatorship of Queer, Feminist, and Lesbian*

Pornographers by film director Ingred Ryberg, the author states that, "Lesbian desire is confused with identification [...]. Homosexual lesbian desire is reduced to homosocial women-identified female bonding, to a wish to be like the other woman. This wish is devoid of sexual aim since desire is 'swept under the rug' of sisterhood, female friendship and the mother–daughter bond," (168). The women in these films are often really good friends, or two people who admire one another. They might even hold hands and possibly kiss but no sexual activity will occur between the two of them.

This idea of non-sexual romantic entanglements could originate from a fear of misrepresenting lesbian sex because of the prevalence of lesbian porn. Directors, who often are not part of the queer community, may want to represent these women correctly but they end up fully desexualizing them with the fear of oversexualizing them. Similarly to films that identify with lesbian porn, this desexualization ends up stripping lesbians of their identity. Sexuality often relates to sex, so when lesbians are represented without that sexual drive, they end up falling under the cliché of two women who are just really close friends. Both issues can be summarized in a quote by scholar of film, media, gender, and sexuality studies Maria Pramaggiore from her article *Fishing for Girls: Romancing Lesbians in New Queer Cinema*, "Lesbian relationships and lesbian sex are

communal and individual, subjects of constant scrutiny, definition and redefinition," (69).

This idea is also represented in *The Lesbian Intimate: Capacities for Feeling in Convergent Media Contexts* by Dr. Sarah Cefai, "Able to communicate through hand gestures, gait, facial expressions, body language, and dress, the closet gave (in)visibility a second skin. This second order of visibility, the realm of the aesthetic, was able to express gay life—a life different from that which heterosexuality made it possible to represent," (241). Queer-baiting films offer queer-coded characters who represent bits and pieces of the lesbian identity but the characters are often fully heterosexual. Many of these films have been later adopted by the gay community as stated in *Exploitation Cinema and the Lesbian Image* by author and lecturer Anne Crémieux, "Recontextualization — can act to resignify and reclaim those past products, creating or revalidating their status as lesbian or queer, making visible the invisible," (9). Some members of the community may find relatability in these films but in our progressive society, they are a sad excuse for lesbian or overall queer representation.

The oversexualization and desexualization of lesbians in period films are dehumanizing in different ways. They equally stem from lesbian porn and successfully separate the lesbian identity from the lesbian sexuality. The identity is very much associated with social justice and when the

abundance or lack of sexuality is presented, it disconnects the two from one another which, ironically, devalues the history built by lesbians and the struggles they have overcome. Lesbian period pieces were made with the goal of creating a past once forgotten but it sadly adopts elements to either cater or appease heterosexuals. To sum it up in another quote from Ryberg, "We don't have to take the 'sex' out of lesbianism to argue that lesbian sociality tends toward other women in ways that are more than sexual, or even more than solely about desire. Lesbian bonds can involve orientations that are about shared struggles, common grounds, and mutual aspirations, as bonds that are created through the lived experiences of being 'offline' and 'out of line.' To be orientated sexually toward women as women affects other things that we can do," (169). The connection between two women is complex and is usually difficult to be understood by men. This is why many male-directed lesbian films rely on stereotypes and things seen on the most popular lesbian media, i.e. porn. Some of these films end up becoming cult classics with the queer community, but at the end of the day, those movies aren't authentically representing the lesbian experience.

How It All Connects: *Benedetta* (2021) and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019)

Benedetta (2021) is considered a very controversial film. It is sexually explicit and extremely blasphemous. It's based on a real lesbian

nun, Benedetta Carlini and is loosely based on her life where she was allegedly plagued by visions of Jesus Christ and Satan. The film is a period piece and it takes place during the 17th century in Italy. The movie depicts many lesbian media mistakes that are listed above. *Benedetta* indulges porn-like lesbian sex scenes, which are incredibly inaccurate. The two women are white and feminine. Benedetta comes from a rich household while her partner, Bartoloma, does not. Lastly, the film ends with tragedy as Benedetta leaves Bartoloma to return to the city that tried to kill her. There are also scenes of torture and homophobia. In the original story, those persecuting Benedetta didn't care about her lesbian sexuality because her fabricated visions were more important, "It is likely therefore that the stiff penalty Benedetta received was not linked primarily to her sexual transgressions but rather to her monastic status, her claims to miraculous behavior, and her notoriety," (135).

Benedetta represents two lesbian women who routinely experience emotional and physical pain, "In the case of explicit mentions of queerness and sexuality, characters are prohibited from fulfilling their desires or fully realizing their identities out of fear of disrupting a normative order. The trope of a sad, or at least ambiguous ending, is frequently taken up by these lesbian period pieces despite their production outside the era of Hollywood censure," (138). The cliché sad-lesbian-ending is central in this film, and is also mentioned in the quote above by Dollries. This is another way of

silencing lesbians and conforming to heteronormativity. The women may get together but it lacks validity since they don't end up together.

Benedetta, a film directed by a man, exhibits all of the listed issues with lesbian period dramas. It does not contribute to lesbian culture and lesbian identity in a way that is constructive. Funny enough though, this film does have a queer following and some lesbians do enjoy this movie. Relating once again to *Exploitation Cinema and the Lesbian Imagination*, "Such displacements transform films that may have prompted queer people to protest in the past; they are being re-read today with a new imagination, largely freed from the political context in which they were made," (2). A lack of representation has caused lesbians to evolve to appreciate even the smallest amount of lesbianism on screen. This is why lesbian period dramas are so popular despite the plethora of issues. Historical lesbian films rewrite the past with queer characters and they are often entertaining, for many, this is enough. *Benedetta* offers a complicated lesbian relationship but they do so in a way that's catered to male audiences and heteronormativity.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire is also a lesbian period film. In some ways it is very similar to *Benedetta*: it takes place during a similar time in Europe and the two sets of women led similar lives and had comparable power dynamics. That being said, there are also many differences between the two films. While representing the negative aspects of the period piece

genre, it is still a film made *for* lesbians. Starting off, the movie is directed and written by a lesbian, Céline Sciamma, who, therefore, understands the lesbian experience. Already, this film has a jumpstart compared to *Benedetta* which had no lesbian influences besides the book it was slightly based on.

Now, the main difference between *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Benedetta* are the lesbian relationships depicted in it, specifically the emotions and sexual drive between the two groups of women. *Benedetta*'s lesbian relationship is very sexually driven. Benedetta and Bartoloma don't really have full conversations. They mostly focus on mutual protection and sex. In contrast, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* tells the story of two women who first become friends which develops into romantic love. They are very emotionally connected and, while sex is important, it isn't the main reason they are together. In *For a Fluid Approach to Céline Sciamma's Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, world-renowned scholar Michèle Bacholle quotes the director, "Sciamma claims that she "tried to craft a film to explain that 'I love you' is always something that you say in the future. [...] It is about creating this new dynamic, proposing another image of love. It is not about possession or separation; it is more about being open,"" (148). The emotions in *Portrait* introduce something rarely seen in film: it's intimate, it's understandable, and it's real. Lesbians can relate to this film and so can anyone who's ever been in love. While other lesbian films try to make

lesbianism palpable to a widespread audience by dehumanizing them, Sciamma does so by humanizing them.

The thing *Portrait* does the best compared to other lesbian period dramas are the sex scenes. There is nudity and there is sex but it isn't a lure to watch the movie, it just is part of Marianne and Héloïse's life, "In that scene their being naked is just a fact," (152). Sciamma uses a classic fade to black techniques when sex scenes do occur, she does not allow us a voyeuristic view of the two women. She does not exploit lesbian sex as a taboo topic, she showcases the beauty and intimacy associated instead, "Sciamma respects the women's intimacy as sex always occurs off screen, but toys with her viewers' conditioning to male-gaze in a close-up scene that presents two fingers entering a slit that turns out to be the fold of Héloïse's armpit 'penetrated' by Marianne," (148). The male gaze is very prevalent in *Portrait* as it is with all films but Sciamma uses it to her own advantage. She displays the patriarchy but she, herself, is not affected by it. This film does not dilute itself to be acceptable to a global audience, it is instead honest. Patriarchy affects these women but it doesn't control the filmmaker. The society of the time is accurately depicted without it being emotionally traumatic to the queer viewer.

The two strikes that *Portrait* receives is its lack of overall representation and the inclusion of a sad ending. The relationship is broken up by the end of the movie but the love between the two women is

still alive, “Married Héloïse chooses memory of their love over a doomed encounter and in this respect follows suit on her interpretation of the Eurydice myth one night, on the island,” (153). The film ends on a sad note but it is a realistic one for the time period, it is not done to bring lesbians down or to devalue their relationships. Sciamma actually proves time and time again that the love between the two women is real and deeply emotional. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* has its flaws but it is a lesbian period drama that represents lesbians just as they are, two women trying to find love during a time where their relationship was strictly forbidden.

Conclusion

While lesbian period pieces are often affirming and are able to represent lesbianism during a time where they were practically invisible, in recent years the genre, specifically in film, has become oversaturated and unrealistic. These films often represent lesbians as either oversexualized or desexualized figures and their relationships are very two-dimensional and inaccurate. These movies only ever represent lesbians that are white, feminine, and upper middle class. Once and awhile a film will show a lesbian that is in poverty but butch lesbians and lesbians of color are almost never seen on screen. Both *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Benedetta* are lesbian period pieces that only display the stereotypical

women listed above but still, one film is a much better representation than the other.

Where *Benedetta* falters, *Portrait* excels; historical lesbian films that show lesbians as humans who experience a range of emotions and feelings instead of sexual or celibate icons are ones that harbor good representation. The key to quality depictions is relatively simple but it is one that can make heterosexual audiences uncomfortable, which is why they are not often exhibited. Those who are brave enough to represent lesbians in their truest form, like *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* are the films and directors that are important for and to the lesbian community. Some sapphic films that do not fall under this category may weasel their way in as cult-classic hits but will never receive the respect and acclaim that is associated with quality lesbian films.

Artistic Inspiration

My paintings follow the plots and characters of *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. These movies are filled with interesting and complex thoughts, feelings, and messages, so much so that I made it a goal to fit as much symbolic imagery and language into my pieces as possible. This required a lot of focus on the composition of my artwork, a skill that I consistently struggled with. Because of this, the art I found most inspiring were those with intriguing compositions and a range of imagery throughout. I didn't necessarily connect with a specific artistic era or artist when researching inspiring works, it was more about which pieces I was drawn to.

Reference Images

All of my reference images were directly taken from each film. While watching both *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, I took notes on which scenes I felt were most important to express through painting. I ended up with a large amount, which I narrowed down to only the most important moments and scenes. These were ones that I felt related to the topics I had previously chosen to represent lesbian struggle. The scenes were then combined with one another to fully represent the selected meaning. After creating a collage from my chosen images, I would then add

on any object, shape, or figure that I felt best represented the prompt, this would help inspire the finished composition for a painting. For example, the black bars painted in this work were not originally in the scene, even though most of the image is directly taken from *Benedetta* (Figure 39). The black bars symbolize the invisibility felt by Benedetta and Bartoloma.

This became my main routine when creating my paintings. It allowed for visual consistency between my pieces. My finished works are semi-realistic in style, usually depicting a figure, building, or fabric accompanied with either painted or physical collaged elements. The reference photos taken from the films allow for a structured and understandable scene that's accompanied by a mystical quality that comes from the counterpart collage of the paintings.

Inspiration & Influences

The goal for my body of work was to accurately portray and represent plot points and moments in the chosen films and how they impact lesbian and non-lesbian viewers and their overall contribution to lesbian media. This consideration led me to paint in a semi-realistic style. I have consistently found myself drawn to renaissance hyper-realistic portraits, which fit the time periods of *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. But I knew that the style would be too difficult and too time consuming for me to attempt. I still wanted my paintings and their

messages to be extremely clear, though. I didn't want any form of abstraction to confuse the viewer and allow the meanings of each work to be contorted. That is how semi-realism became the style I consistently worked with, one that I am very acquainted with.

As stated previously, composition was also something that was extremely important to my projects. The paintings that inspired me were ones that were able to create crowded yet interesting compositions packed with meaning but not confusing or congested. These pieces are also painted in a semi-realistic style and are by artists that aren't necessarily extraordinarily famous. While influential painters obviously inspire me, this project had me searching for works that were created by people who I could almost call my peers; art that was made recently and shared in a virtual space. Here, I was able to find artwork that I connected with and felt was able to inspire bits and pieces of my own paintings.



Untitled (2023)

I felt very drawn to this work because of its use of colors, textures, and symbols. It is just a page in a sketchbook but it still provides a range of interesting figures and storylines. I have always felt connected to figurative works, especially while working on this project, and this piece displays an abundance of figures. Other works by this artist continue to be figurative

and colorful in nature, something I wanted to achieve with my own paintings. The gestural and quick nature of this untitled work, just a practice sketch in a sketchbook, was also a reminder to continue to be productive and efficient with own paintings. Something so beautiful can be achieved in ways that don't require months and months of laboring work. Sometimes quick and gestural brushstrokes and shapes speak volumes compared to minute details that barely reflect in a larger piece. This work shows transformation and connection between women in a way that I wanted to attain in my own personal artwork.



A Kinder Death (2024)

This work is a great example of both the composition and symbolism that I hoped to achieve. The painting is dark yet warm, another appealing atmospheric quality. The artist was able to combine tons of symbolic imagery into this work without making it too crowded. Utilizing clothing and jewelry as a mode of conversation and description was something that stood out to me greatly. The background and foreground utilize open space in order to include other objects of importance.

The make-shift frame created by the underground bones at the bottom of the image was also of great importance. It adds complexity to the paintings, opens up the possibility of a story or a personality trait of the main figure that draws one into the work. This piece represents everything I wanted to include in my own work, it successfully creates an interesting visual story without losing the quiet and atmospheric quality of the background and character itself.

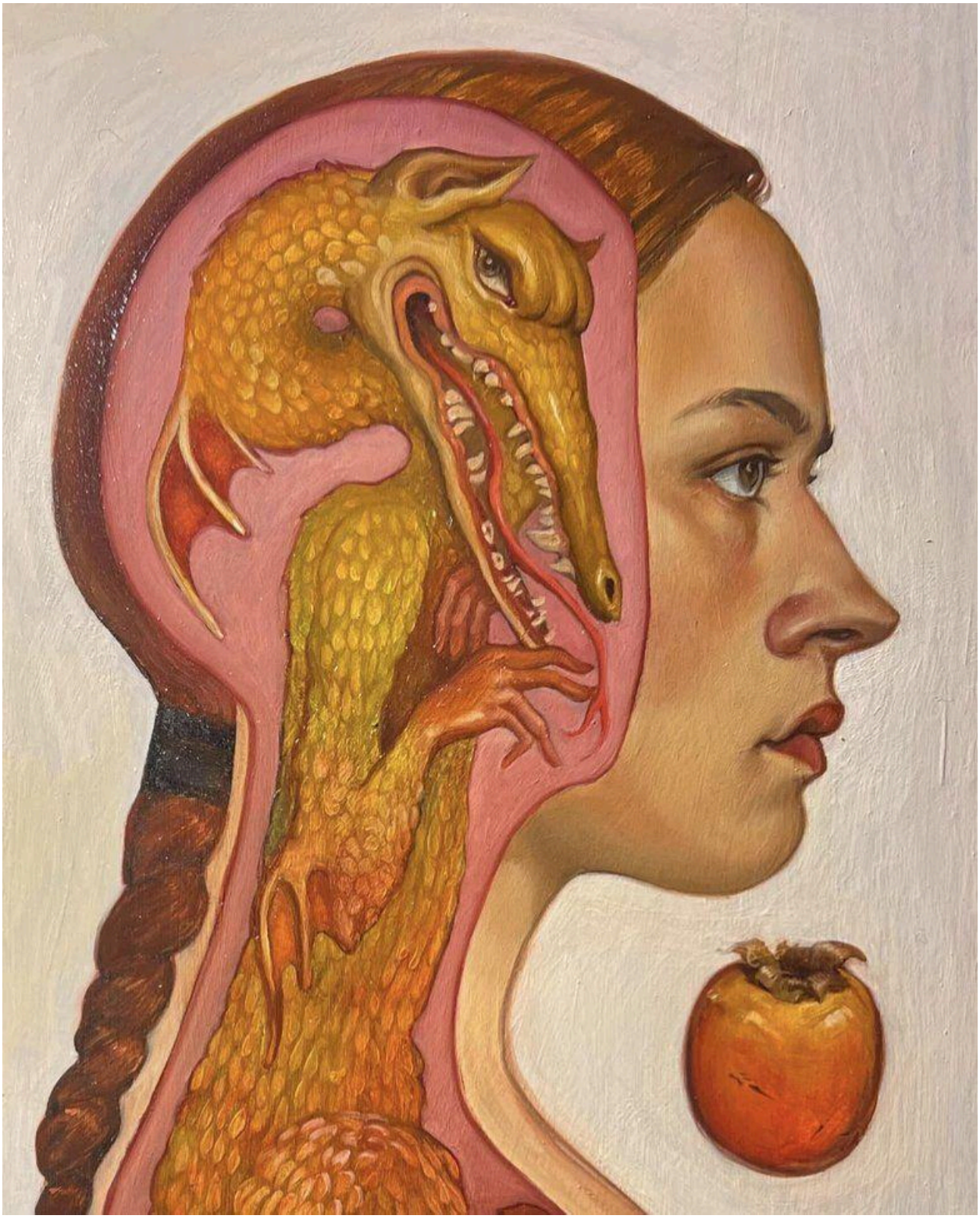


Creature Comforts (2020)

This piece is so colorful and magical. It was a great reminder to myself that it is okay to combine both abstracted and semi-realistic imagery. Oftentimes, it actually makes the artwork more interesting to look at. This painting is crowded but in a way that is coherent. The objects and

cats scattered throughout the work lets the viewer gaze into a slice of life. It also gives clues into the personality of the main figure.

The main thing that drew me to this painting, besides the delightful warm colors, was the use of texture. This work displays a range of textures. There is the thickness of the paint as well as the paper-like quality of the clouds. This inspired my own use of texture in my works and reminded me of the importance of it. Texture uplifts the interesting imagery and makes it even more intriguing. It also makes the work feel otherworldly, which is already supported by the unusual animals and shapes in the painting.



Wait Here (2024)

This is a very proper oil painting, similar to the ones I painted for this project. What drew me to this painting was the realism combined with the unusual fantasy imagery along with the subtle use of texture. There's an appealing juxtaposition in this work, one that opens the viewer up to a possible story. If the creature inside of the woman is hypothetically her evil side or evil thoughts, what does the fruit represent?

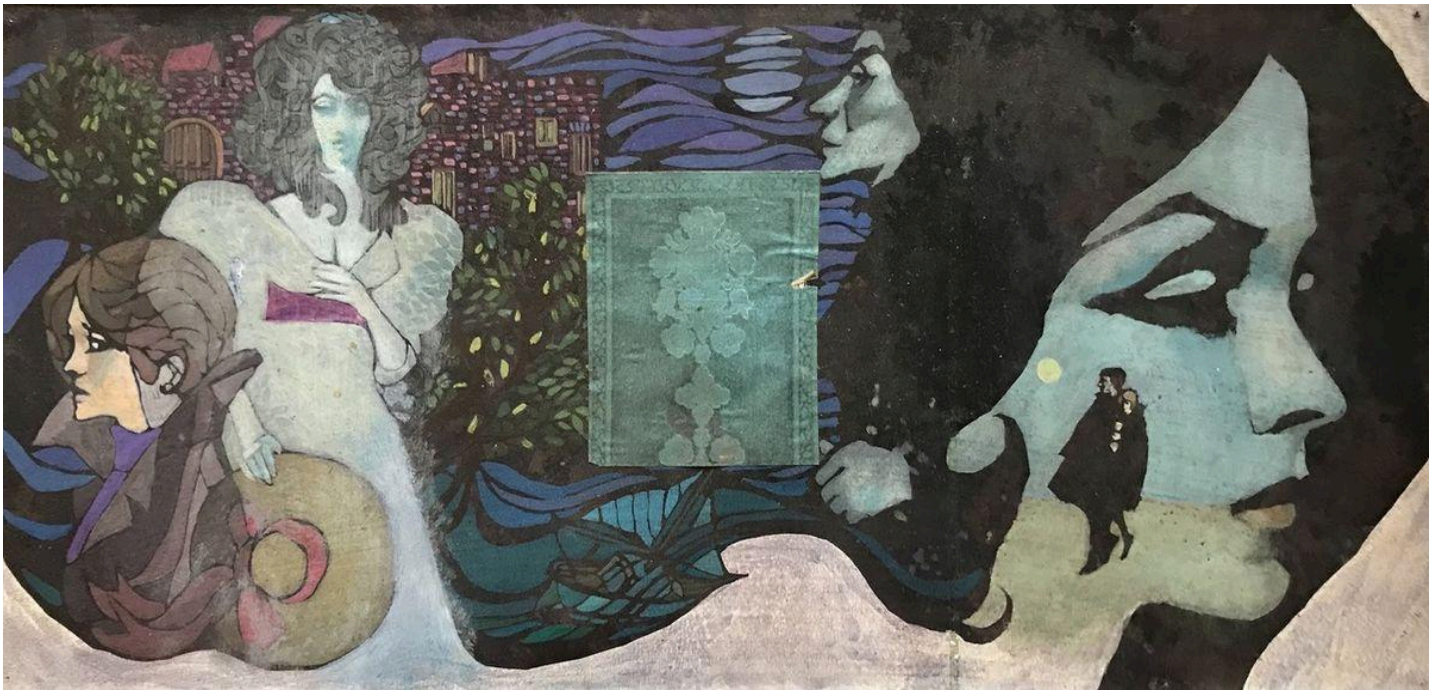
The work is simple yet complex. It is another example of how composition can impact a painting. There are only three entities in this piece but together they generate something very intriguing. Mixed with the warm colors and slight textures, this painting produces an interesting storyline with realistic yet fantastical visuals and symbolism that must be analyzed to be understood. The work leaves you wanting a sequel to satiate the need.



Untitled (2020)

This artwork of birds and masks portrays a graphic novel-like story structure without the assistance of words. The artist used frames within frames to create a portal to different worlds along with a close-up of the main character. I love the colors in this painting but I am most drawn to the composition. It is another excellent example of a complicated and busy piece that still presents the ability to be understood.

There is a complex story within this artwork, one that focuses on the importance of the sun, moon, and stars. Along with wildlife and anthropomorphic personhood, there is also the use of different textures and designs that present almost a clashing background. This work exhibits many things I personally wanted to bring to my own artwork. It also shared things I hadn't thought about yet, like geometric shapes mirroring natural wildlife imagery.



Rebecca (1968)

This artwork, in contrast to the other work on this list, is actually a painting from the 20th century, one done supposedly for a book or newspaper by a husband and wife. I love how this work flows, there is a lot of conflicting imagery in this artwork but it still moves together like an ocean wave. This work is very cool colored, again in contrast to the other pieces exhibited. That being said, the color palette is extraordinarily appealing and inspired some of my own color combinations, like in my work: *No Spine* (Figure 110). I am normally more drawn to warm colors but this piece inspired me to work outside of my comfort zone.

Rebecca also displays a range of imagery, textures, and mediums. There are a wide variety of women in this piece, which connects well to my

own work, alongside paintings of waves and buildings. It almost reads like a scene of a town or multiple intertwining lives. In the middle of the painting there is a piece of paper, which introduces mixed media to the work. This piece almost feels like a combination of all of my own paintings. The blend of female figures, composition, textures, and mixed media makes me really identify with it.



And the Birds Looking for a Place to Land (2024)

This painting exhibits all of the things I was hoping to include in my own work: prominent figures, interesting composition, natural frames, beautiful colors, textures, and a large amount of symbolism. The blue and yellow contrast is something that immediately pulled me into this work, along with the hands on the side of the piece. The yellow hands motioning religious signals in contrast to the priest's blacked out fingers holding the bible. The outline of birds and the cowboy hat pull me in as well since they aren't things normally seen alongside religious imagery.

This painting tells an interesting story that I want to learn more about, it also isn't afraid to clash texture, colors, and imagery. This piece is a reminder to experiment and to not be afraid to think outside of the box. Blacking out parts of a painting while coloring other parts in with extreme detail can be something of interest, it is not lazy or immaterial. I also include religious imagery as well as hand symbolism, blacked out sections, and layered figures in my paintings. This work inspired me greatly and was a great reminder to explore outside of my comfort zone.

Portfolio

Artist Statement

Utilizing paint as a tool for explanation and representation, this painting series is a vessel for describing the nuance of lesbian film, specifically through the films: *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. This work explains the differences between the films and how lesbians are or aren't represented in the media. It gives a history and a backstory through mixed media additives that allows the viewer to gain context as to why films portray queer women in such a way. This artistic compilation was made with the goal of those who are underrepresented to feel seen throughout each art piece. Alongside this, is the objective of educating those who may not know much about the topic of lesbians in film. An important step to societal acceptance is educational information and subsequent understanding, which I hope to provide throughout these works.

Artist Biography

Lili Minato is a recent graduate of Western Oregon University, receiving her BA with a double minor in Film and Business. She specializes in portraiture and is often inspired by films, pop culture, and those close to her. Lili adores a range of mediums and often combines them together to create mixed media pieces.

Lili's work has been published in the Stapled Spine, an admired zine based in Portland, Oregon. Her work has also been displayed in galleries around Western Oregon University.

Post graduation, Lili hopes to continue to improve and expand upon her artistic journey, especially in the realm of film. She hopes to continue to make artwork in a variety of mediums that speaks to others and helps them feel seen.

Works



1. *Under the Eyes of God*

   Oil on canvas, paper collage

   20” x 24”

   2025



2. *To Survive in Secrecy*

   Oil on canvas, stamp, ink

   20” x 24”

   2025



3. *Show me Your Face*

   Oil on canvas, paper collage

   16” x 20”

   2025



4. *Show it All*

   Oil on canvas, fabric, felt, ribbon, chain

   16” x 18”

   2025



5. *Proof of Ownership*

   Oil on canvas, stamp, ink

   20” x 24”

   2025



6. *Only for a Select Few*

   Oil on canvas, gouache on paper, embroidery thread, collage paper

   12” x 16”

   2025



7. *No Spine*

   Oil on canvas

   20” x 24”

   2025



8. *Blissfully Silent*

   Oil on canvas, fabric

   16” x 20”

   2025

Self Critique

Process Notes

Appendix A, Figures 1-3: Planning

I started my project with a mindmap that was assigned to me in a thesis class. This helped me plan out each of my painting's "themes" and allowed me to keep track of the messages I wanted to convey in each work. When I had these major themes laid out, I then watched both films. My goal was to find scenes to reference that corresponded to my major themes. I took notes while I watched both films and I screenshotted a wide variety of scenes to possibly use as reference images for my sketches (Figures 1-3).

Appendix A, Figures 4-12: Collages

At this point, I found myself stuck. I was overwhelmed with the compositional aspect of my paintings. I didn't know how to set up my work in a way that expressed the major themes that I needed it to. I shared my concerns to my thesis advisor, he ended up suggesting that I collage in order to generate ideas. From this, I collected hundreds of images that I felt represented society, love, invisibility, solidarity, and tragedy in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Benedetta*. I printed out my favorites as well as all of the scenes I collected when I watched each film. Over the span of a couple of weeks, I created collages that I felt represented each theme and each film

(Figures 4-12). Many kept a symbolic color theme while others felt more random. Nonetheless, they helped me start generating ideas for my sketches.

Appendix A, Figures 13-27: Sketches

I started sketching very quick ideas down in a little notebook. This helped me formulate my very first ideas for my paintings. Once I was satisfied with these quick sketches (Figures 13-19), I then created more detailed versions in a larger sketchbook. These versions were more fleshed out, including the colors and symbols I wanted to be present in the finished pieces (Figures 20-27). Most of these sketched out ideas were accurately transferred onto the canvas while others were changed as my painting sessions progressed. I used my first and second draft sketches as a direct reference while painting, along with the reference images from each film.

I sketched, collaged, and then painted in a classroom on the third floor of Campbell Hall during the 2025 Spring and Summer term. I was set up in a corner of the older building where I normally had two easels, one for a current painting and the other for prepping the upcoming work. I had hung a makeshift curtain that covered a large window in my little corner with the goal of keeping out the heat. I also had a fan ready for when it got too hot in the classroom. Alongside the easels, I also came equipped with two smaller boxes of oil paint, a plastic bag that held my brushes, my glass palette, and a range of

oil paint mediums. With this space and my supplies, I was able to complete eight paintings in the span of four months.

Appendix B, Figures 28-37: Painting Process

The images associated with this painting process are just of one painting but all of the other works share a similar step by step process and are included in this written section. They are not listed in the appendix due to the sheer amount of numbers and subsequent confusion and clutter it would cause but images can be seen in each painting's respective sections listed below. My actual painting process stayed relatively consistent throughout each painting. I started with sketching out my figure with a red colored pencil (Figure 28). I did this so often that I went through two red colored pencils during this project. I then painted the canvas with a thin layer of oil paint. I usually used burnt sienna, burnt umber, or yellow ochre depending on the assumed color palette of each work (Figure 29). If I felt my painting was going to be very bright, I used yellow ochre. If I felt as though it was going to be a very dark piece, I used burnt umber. My most used color was burnt sienna, which was a happy middle-of-the-road color, in between yellow ochre and burnt umber.

After the under painting had dried, I would then start to paint the darks into the piece (Figure 30). I would often go over these areas with a mixture of burnt umber and black with a fast-drying medium. Once the darks were painted in, I would then move on to painting the brights (Figure 31). The

whites depended on the figures in the work but the colors were often mixed with a yellow or a titanium white. After they were done, I would begin to fill in all the middle sections (Figures 32-33). Getting the darks and the lights filled into the painting at the very beginning of my process made the rest of the painting less intimidating.

Normally at this point, I would start to fill in the skin color (Figure 32). There are only a couple of my paintings where no humans are exhibited. I utilized a glazing technique for my skin tones. I would start off with mixing a color range with india red. This red color would have a spectrum between light red, which was mixed with white, and a dark red, which was mixed with black. I would then paint the skin accordingly, only utilizing the small range of similar values. This, once again, allowed me to feel less scared and worried while painting. For many, including myself, painting the skin is one of the worst parts of the process.

This technique simplified skin and actually made me more adept at rounding out figures. After the shades of red had dried, I would go over the skin with an extremely thin coat of paint (Figures 34-35). This paint would include reds, yellows, browns, greens, and blues mixed with a fast-drying and thinning medium. I would glaze these colors onto the skin and they would create a three-dimensional skin tone as a result. After this step, I would move on to clear and bold painting.

After finishing the skin, I would normally move on to the hair, again if it was applicable (Figure 35). I would continue to color in what was left blank from my lights and my darks. From hair, I would work my way to clothes and props, which once again followed a similar routine (Figures 33-36). Lastly, I would work on the background. Sometimes, the background was just a flat color and other times it was much more intricate. If there were details in the backdrop, I would start small and then work outward. At the very end, adding in slight textures and dainty spots of pure white (Figures 34-36). After the painting had dried, I would paint the sides with a gold shiny acrylic paint (Figure 37). I did this with the goal of unifying all of the works.

While most of my paintings followed this routine, others branched out in different ways, this also includes the use of mixed media. Here are all of the pieces that diverged from the beaten path and how their unusual visuals were created.

Appendix B, Figures 28-39: *Under the Eyes of God* Painting Process

The first painting I completed was *Under the Eyes of God*. I followed a very similar routine to the one listed above, besides a couple of key points. After I had completed everything including the background, I then went over the right side of the painting with a very thin coat of black paint in the pattern of a metal fence (Figure 39). This was done to represent the clear line of invisibility versus visibility in the romantic relationship between Benedetta

and Bartoloma. The two are very clearly together but they are still shunned and hidden from society due to discrimination and homophobia. Along with the transparent bars, I also added a collaged element to this piece (Figure 38). Once the painting was fully dry, I cut out sections of *Immodest Acts* that referenced lesbian invisibility. I then used Mod Podge to stick them onto the completed painting. As a final touch, once the paper was successfully adhered, I went over it with an acrylic medium to seal the paper onto the painting.

Appendix B, Figures 40-49: *To Survive in Secrecy* Painting Process

To Survive in Secrecy is a piece that did not utilize collage as a mixed media tool. Instead, I used ink and a carved stamp as a storytelling instrument. I continued an extremely similar painting process with this work, the one exception being the utilization of a stamp I designed. The stamp is small and cut from a larger piece of eraser block. The symbols within the stamp represent a different aspect of society in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. The first symbol is the hands of a clock, this represents the passage of time (Figure 46). During the time period that *Portrait* takes place, women were forced to get married. These two characters felt that their romance was running out of time since the looming date of the wedding was soon approaching.

The second symbol is a simplified version of the sign for male. This speaks upon the patriarchal society that Héloïse and Marianne existed in. Even though there were barely any men in the film, they still have control over

the two women's lives. The next symbol is one of a spiral. This is done to represent repetition. The heteronormative and dominated society that Héloïse and Marianne live in does not allow for lesbianism to flourish. Their romance is not unique in the way that it doesn't end in a happy ending. Many other queer people experience social isolation that causes broken hearts. It is a story that is seen time and time again.

The last symbol is a simplified version of a lock without a key. This is done to illustrate the two women being locked away. Their love cannot be seen by the outside world and in order to survive, they must love one another behind closed doors. With these symbols successfully carved onto the stamp, I then used blue ink to print the imagery around the canvas to create a make-shift frame once the paint had dried (Figure 38). I ended this work with painting the sides of the finished piece with sparkly gold acrylic paint (Figure 39).

Appendix B, Figures 50-59: *Show me Your Face* Painting Process

Show me Your Face is a very textured painting. As stated time and time again, I followed a very similar painting routine. The differences started when I began to paint the background. I used white paint mixed with some warm tones in order to create a gallery wall-inspired backdrop. I then used a palette knife to create a choppy texture (Figures 55-56). Once that paint had dried, I added even more texture with the use of brown lines (Figure 57). At the end of

the painting process, I added a collaged element (Figure 59). By utilizing letters from pages of lesbian-related articles, I wrote out “show me your face” in French.

This piece is one that represents the invisibility in lesbianism as well as the intimacy that derives from it. The woman’s face cannot be seen in this work, she is an anonymous presence. She exists and is displayed in a public space because she is a woman but her true self is not shown to others. Her painting asks to see other’s faces with the hope of finding likeness in the women that view her. This piece is a lesbian calling-card of sorts, it is about finding loved ones while having to publicly stay untrue to one’s self. Similarly to “Under the Eyes of God,” I used Mod Podge to adhere the lettering and then I went over it with an acrylic medium to solidify its place on the painting.

Appendix B, Figures 60-75: *Show it All* Painting Process

Show it All is the most unique painting out of the batch. It was originally a fully painted piece but I scrapped it after feeling like the composition was messy and hard to read. I cut out my favorite part of the painting, the Virgin Mary statue, and decided to make something different with it (Figure 70). I ended up going with an orchid flower to represent sexuality, since the flower is often regarded as having a very vaginal shape. To make this flower, I cut out five pieces of white fabric in the shape of flower petals. I also cut out small pieces of yellow fabric to accentuate the flower

(Figure 72). I hot glued the fabric all together and then added the Virgin Mary on top.

After everything was well adhered, I added rounded pieces of red ribbon hanging from the flower. These ribbons were used to represent blood (Figures 73-74). I wanted to show the aggressive and violent nature of the sex scenes in *Benedetta* while also projecting a sort of innocence to the piece. I feel as though this work represents the term "nunspolitation" well. Benedetta and Bartolomea have their own religion used against them in harsh, exploitative sexual ways for male pleasure in *Benedetta*. Compared to *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, *Benedetta* doesn't use lesbian sexuality for good.

Appendix B, Figures 76-90: *Proof of Ownership* Painting Process

Proof of Ownership was painted differently only because it's one of the only pieces that doesn't include the human figure. With this work, I started normally with a sketch and a thin layer of burnt sienna. (Figures 76-77). Since I felt very intimidated by this piece, I started by painting each building with a main, general color (Figures 78-81). Once everything had been painted, I started adding details. I started with the sky, and then moved down to the windows. After that, I worked from left to right on all of the buildings (Figures 82-85). Since this work already had a lot of textural components, I added thick and thin multicolored lines throughout the piece (Figure 86). This, in my opinion, made the painting more interesting to look at.

Once I was done painting, I started developing a stamp (Figure 80). I wanted to make a drawing that looked like something one would stamp on a package or use as a sign. The design I ended up with writes: “Property of the Mother of God”. This is the church that Benedetta and Bartoloma belong to in the film and it is also the building that is being constructed in the painting. Once I was done carving the stamp, using the same materials as I did in *To Survive in Secrecy*, I used red ink to print the design multiple times on the painting (Figures 87-89). The red ink was meant to be bold and to also match with some of the red paint seen throughout the work.

This painting was made to reflect the society seen in *Benedetta*. During this time, women either were married off, like in *Portrait*, or they became a nun. The church in the painting is being built to accommodate the sheer amount of women joining the monastery, since it was much cheaper than getting married. Benedetta and Bartoloma were owned by the church, they were under the power of corrupt men who abused them when they spoke out. This painting represents that forced subordination and ownership.

Appendix B, Figures 91-103: *Only for a Select Few* Painting Process

Only for a Select Few is not only one of the most important paintings from this collection, but it was also the most draining to make. I had a lot of trouble painting this piece and it went through a ton of changes before it got to its completed look. The biggest technical challenge were the faces of Héloïse

and Benedetta, they were just too small and I was unable to find the happy medium between detailed and readable brushwork (Figure 96). After I had failed to paint the faces, I covered them up using a spiral (Figure 98). I deliberated for a little bit and then decided to cover up the spiral with a block of orange paint (Figure 99). Once I was done painting the clothes, fire, and background (Figures 99-100); I used Mod Podge and oil medium to adhere pages of *Immodest Acts* onto the previous faces of the two leading ladies (Figure 103).

I then painted over the paper with some acrylic medium to seal the pieces of paper. The bottom of the painting is the most important part of the entire work. It shows three hands reaching up towards the fire that burns Héloïse and Benedetta. I used gouache to paint these hands. I then used embroidery floss and a needle to fake sew the hands onto the painting (Figure 102). In reality, I used Mod Podge to glue them onto the canvas.

These hands represent the lesbians who are not represented in media. These are lesbians of color and masculine or butch lesbians. This work, originating with the name "Solidarity" was going to be about how both *Benedetta* and *Portrait* represented lesbians differently, they both still showed queer women on the big screen. After reading the articles listed in my literature review, I decided to reframe the meaning of the painting. I reflected while reading those articles and realized I was doing exactly what I was demonizing *Benedetta* for doing. I was only representing white, skinny, and

conventionally attractive lesbians. I was only painting lesbians that were widely accepted by the general public, lesbians that were easy to self-insert and fetishize. The fire, that previously represented freedom, now represented whiteness and societal appearance and its ability to overpower any other discrimination that could be faced.

These women are able to be represented because of how they look, while the women who are reaching up for such freedom of representation, are shut down because they don't fit the mold presented from the 1990s lesbian chic craze. This painting is a lesson and an apology, never settle for half-hearted representation, there is always something better out there ready to be created.

Appendix B, Figures 104-113: *No Spine* Painting Process

No Spine is the painting that follows my previously listed steps to a tee. The only difference with this work is the spine in the middle (Figure 112-113). Once all the other paint had dried, I freehanded a more abstract image of a spine with thick white paint. I used loose but hard brush strokes to make a textured yet free image. I added this spine to represent the lack of one between Benedetta and Bartoloma compared to Héloïse and Marianne. Benedetta and Bartoloma had the chance at a happy ending but Benedetta felt too connected to her church to leave it for her lover.

Comparatively, Marianne and Héloïse were torn apart by societal obligations, if the two were able to live together forever, they would have. The

differences and similarities between the two films and their endings may be personal plot preferences but they can also reflect a deeper lesbian media stereotype, where two women can never end up happily together. It's like if a crime is committed the character must be shown receiving punishment. It's the writers and directors themselves that also don't have a spine, exploiting lesbians without giving them the decency of a happy ending.

Appendix B, Figures 114-123: *Blissfully Silent* Painting Process

The last painting in this collection is *Blissfully Silent*. This painting is supposed to be a direct response to *Show it All*. The intimate scenes in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* stay intimate. The painting doesn't display any nudity or people in general, just a close up view of some bed sheets. The room is cold and comforting, nothing exoticized or overly erotic. Héloïse and Marianne's love story is for us to view, not to experience. That is the difference between *Benedetta* and *Portrait*.

This painting process was very similar to *Proof of Ownership* since there are no figures in the work. I simply painted the darks to brights to medium shades of the bed sheets (Figure 116), I painted the background in a similar way as well (Figure 117) . When it was all dried I felt that it was too vibrant, so I went over the work with a brown wash (Figure 118). Finally, I hot glued some white and blue flowers around the painting (Figures 119-121). Originally, I was going to fill up the background with collaged flowers but I felt

that it was going to be too busy. Similarly to *Show it All*, these flowers represent innocence but unlike the other painting, this innocence isn't taken advantage of. It is celebrated in *Portrait*, not exploited. The innocence of love remains after the sex scene as well, the characters aren't demonized or critiqued. They just continue to love and to live.

Appendix C, Figures 124-125: Exhibition

In Fall of 2025, I applied for a featured student gallery placement at Western Oregon University. I ended up receiving a spot in the Warner University Center during the Winter term of 2026. My show exhibited both my paintings and collages from this project (Figure 125), along with an abstract describing the meaning behind the works (Figure 124). The display stayed up in the public space from the end of February until mid-March. It was an incredible opportunity to be able to display my work in a gallery setting for all to see and experience.

Reflective Essay

This project brought me a lot of peace and knowledge. I feel very honored to be able to research two topics that I am very fond of: lesbianism and film. I am very thankful for all that I learned while working on this thesis, whether it be history or artistic techniques. There were many emotions and mental and physical milestones from the beginning to end of this project but I feel very proud at what I have been able to accomplish thus far. It seems that every step of my process opened up other doors for me to successfully walk through, starting with my research on lesbian history in and outside of film.

Reading *Immodest Acts* was my gateway into research within this project. I found the book extremely interesting and it helped me wrap my head around the things I found distasteful in *Benedetta*. It opened my eyes to the scarcity of lesbian history and allowed me to take the right steps towards what I wanted to specifically research for my artwork. Successfully reading a non-fiction historical text also gave me confidence to research similar topics in the future.

Finding articles for my literature review was one of my favorite parts of this project, besides creating the artwork itself. Reading a wide array of opinions and perspectives of lesbian history and media opened my eyes and helped me do some personal reflection as well. Fully reading articles that I didn't necessarily agree with was one of the most important things I did. I remembered the value of reading from perspectives that I normally wouldn't

even consider looking at. These articles impacted my artwork greatly, some even being included in certain pieces. These essays assisted me with looking inward and reflecting on my own views and assertions about the community. Which caused me to completely change my original idea for the artwork formally called *Solidarity*, which was then changed to *Only for a Select Few*. This research allowed me to grow as a human being and truly opened my eyes to the importance of unbiased research and guiltless empathy.

The collage process was one that I hadn't done before this project. It was not only super fun but I found it incredibly useful and important. From this thesis, I have found that little additions to planning such as collaging and sketching make a huge impact on my art and my creativity. I rarely felt stuck while designing my paintings and it was very comforting to have an easily accessible visual of major ideas and themes to refer back to. It also helped make composing sketches less terrifying since collaging is very reliant on composition. It was like a sketch before a sketch, a very cathartic practice that I will be introducing into my artistic routines.

The biggest part of this thesis was the paintings. I painted eight pieces throughout my summer break, starting in June and ending in September. This was already a huge leap for me since, before starting this project, I finished a couple paintings in a year at most. I felt a lot of fear at the beginning of my painting process. I was scared that I wouldn't be able to finish the paintings in time. I was scared that I was going to hate them by the time my graduation

came around. I put a lot of pressure on my artwork but after I felt the success of finishing my first painting, *Under the Eyes of God*, I began to feel less dread and more inspiration. There were paintings I attempted that once again conjured up that fear but the success I felt from that first painting allowed me to find the drive to not give up. This combined with a strict painting schedule allowed me to successfully complete eight paintings over the summer. An accomplishment that I used to only dream about achieving.

During the Spring term of 2025, my thesis advisor suggested I take one of his classes to prepare for my painting journey that was occurring over the summer. His class was about following the painting process and techniques that the master painters perfected. This is where I learned about the glazing technique that I implemented into my own painting process.

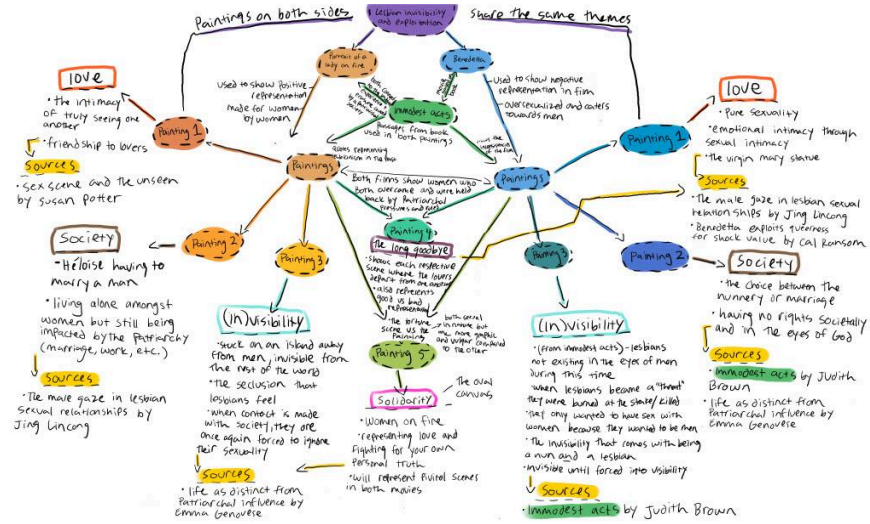
The painting structure I followed, that has been described previously, is one I now use while casually painting. Before this project, oil painting felt very strange to me. I thought I understood how to use the medium but I continually disliked the results I ended up with. My paintings often felt flat and took extraordinarily long to make. After taking the class, I started to understand oil painting better. I found a palette that I enjoyed and mediums that I liked to use. I learned that I was more interested in painting dry to wet and utilizing layers. My biggest stressor while painting was rendering the skin, which I was able to conquer by using the glazing technique.

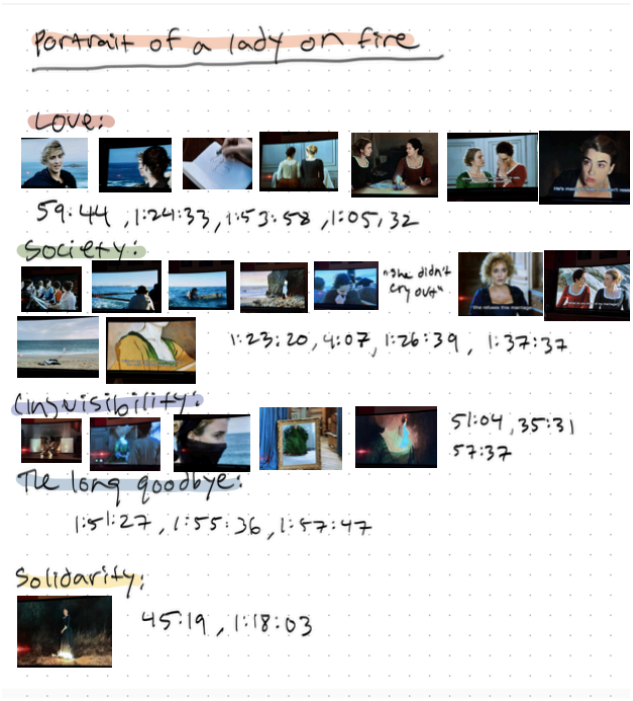
The class taught me everything I needed to know and I was then able to improve upon it during my summer painting session. With each piece, my painting style became more and more confident and fluid, until I was able to pick up the brush and paint like it was the most natural thing in the world. I am proud of this project not only because I was able to successfully paint a series of works but also because I learned skills that I can now use in the future. I experienced a lot of improvement during this process and I don't think I would be at my current artistic level without it.

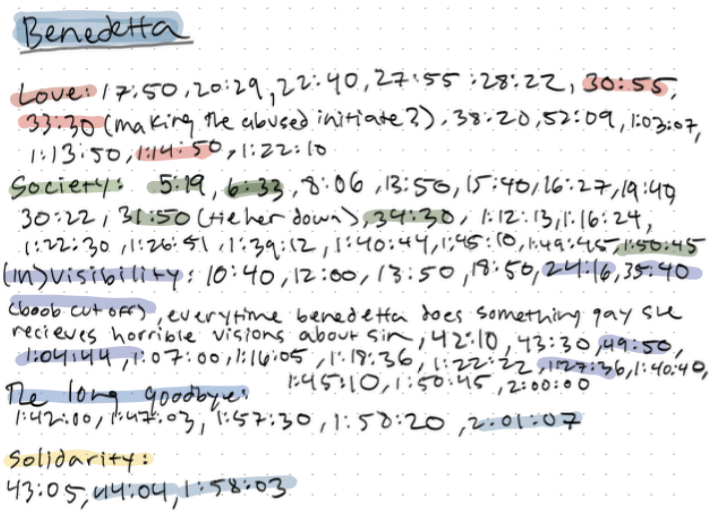
There were definitely highs and lows during this project. There were times while painting that I felt like a complete failure. Unlike other painting sessions where I would just give up, I employed a mindset where I simply could not give up. I gave myself a time frame to not only finish a project but to make something that was at least respectable. This was a hard ideology to get behind at first but once I did it, it was life changing. From this project, I adopted a new productive mindset as well as a new and improved painting process. It also gave me a newfound confidence around oil painting and art in general.

Appendix

Appendix A: Project Planning







Figures 1-3: mindmap and movie notes



Figure 4: *Under the Eyes of God* (*Benedetta*, (In)visibility) collage



Figure 5: *To Survive in Secrecy* (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, Society) collage



Figure 6: *Show me Your Face* (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, (In)visibility) collage



Figure 7: *Show it all* (*Benedetta*, Love) collage



Figure 8: *Proof of Ownership* (*Benedetta*, Society) collage



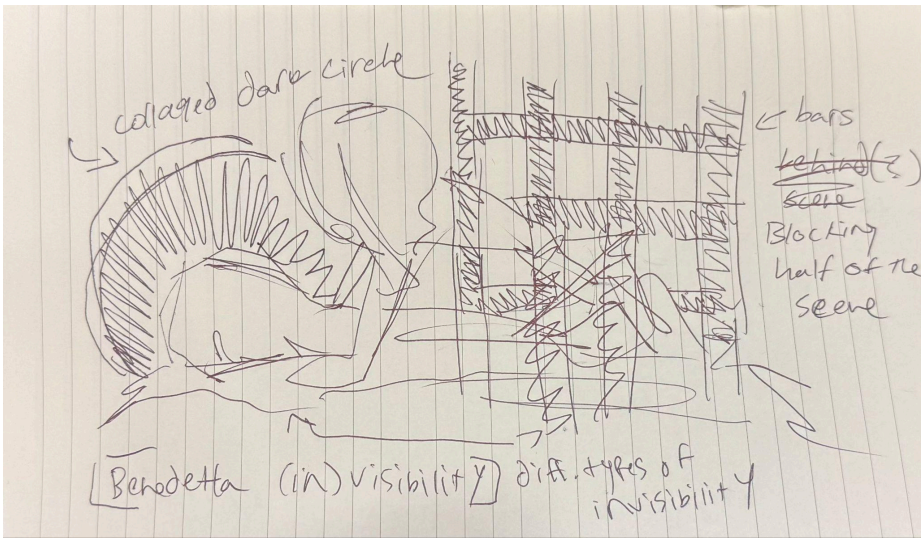
Figure 9: *Only for a Select Few* (*Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, Solidarity) collage

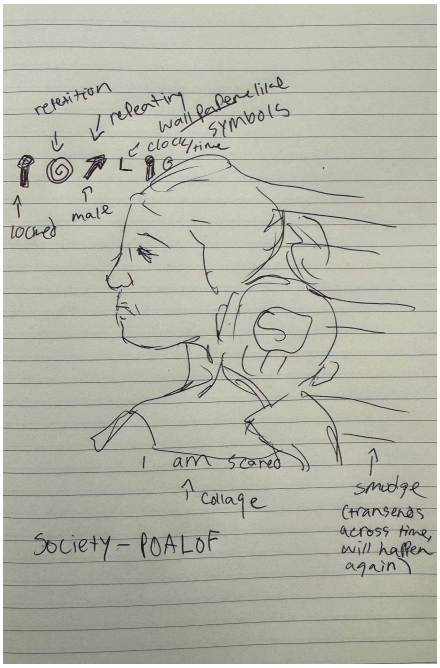


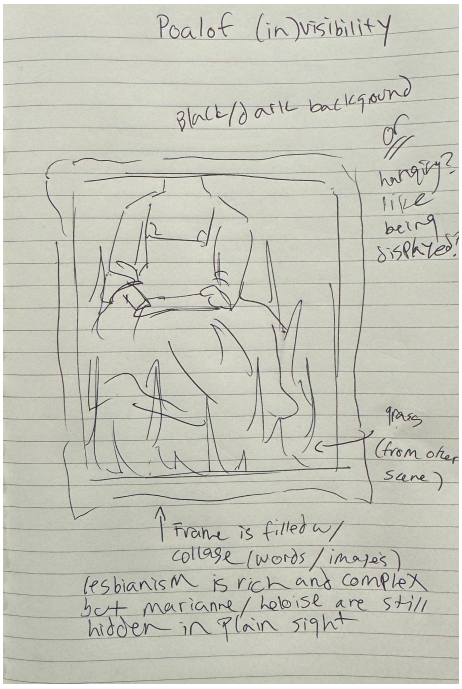
Figures 10-11: *No Spine* (*Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, The Long Goodbye) collage

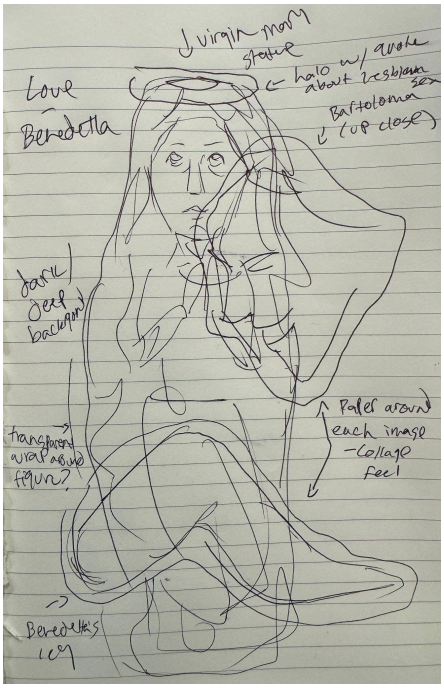


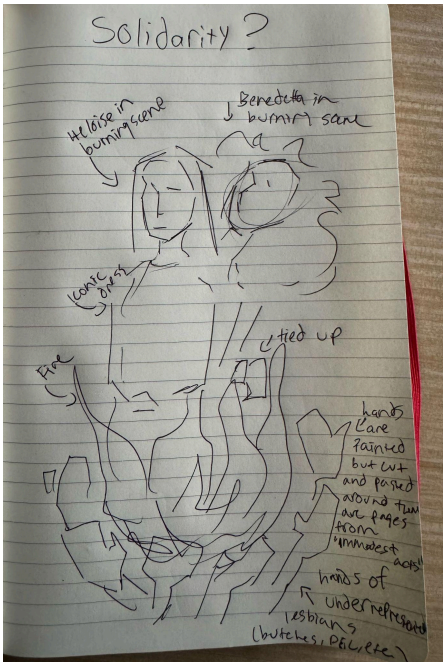
Figure 12: *Blissfully Silent* (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, Love) collage

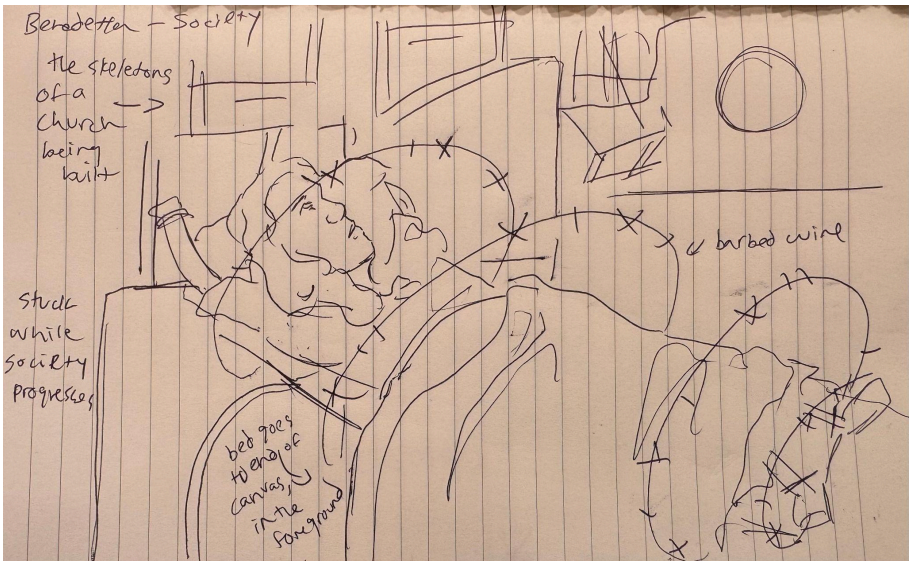

collaged dark circle
bars
~~behind~~ (?) scene
Blocking half of the scene
Benedetta (in) visibility
diff. types of invisibility

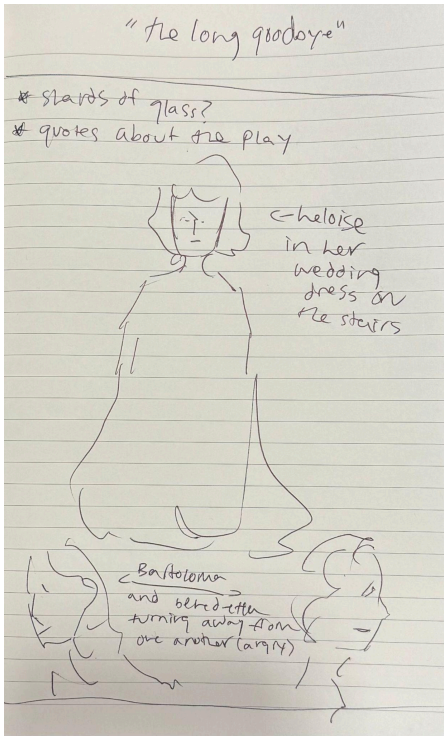

repetition
repeating wallpaper-like symbols
clock/time
locked
male
I am scared
collage
smudge (transcends across time, will happen again)
Society - POALOF

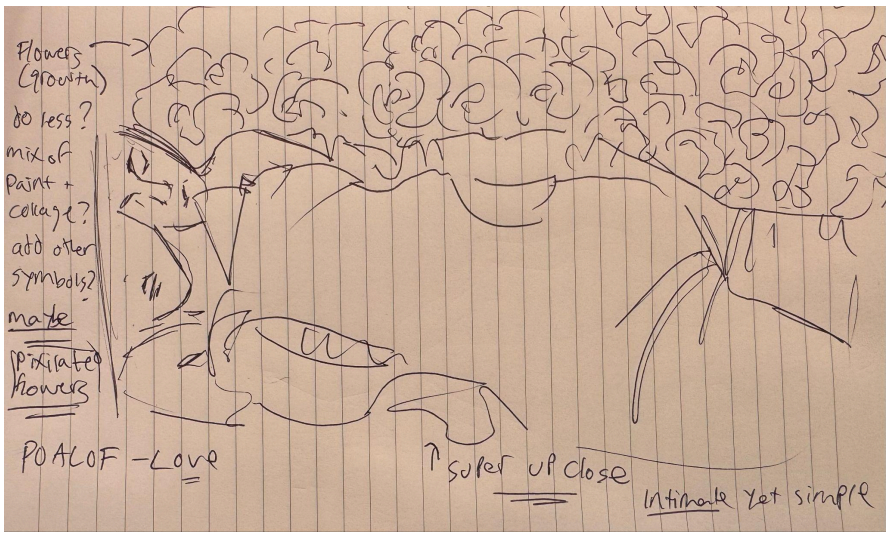

Poalof (in)visibility
black/dark background of hanging? like being displayed?
grass (from other scene)
Frame is filled w/ collage (words/images)
lesbianism is rich and complex but marianne/heloise are still hidden in plain sight


virgin mary statue
halo w/ quote about lesbian sex
Bartolomea (up close)
Love
Benedetta
dark/deep background
transparent wrap around figure?
Paper around each image - Collage feel
Benedetta's leg

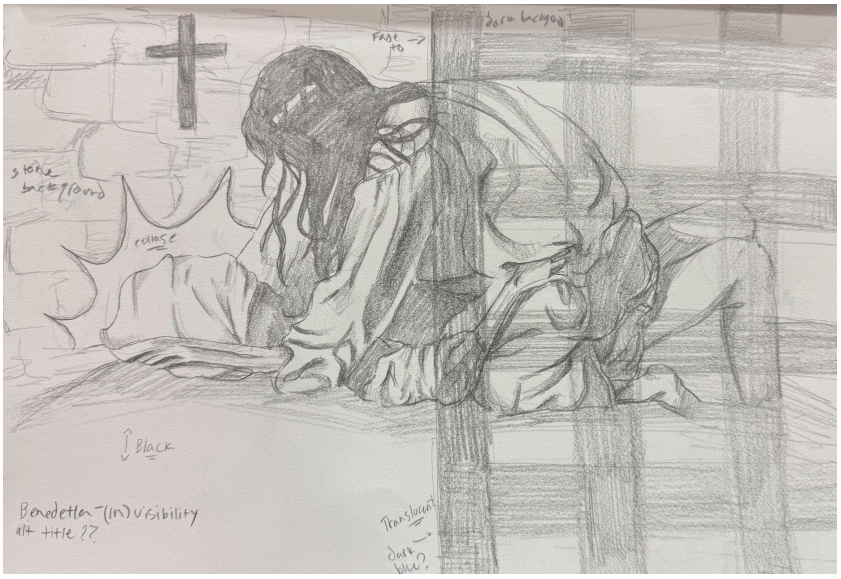

Solidarity?
Heloise in burning scene
Benedetta in burning scene
iconic gaze
tied up
Fire
hands/arms painted but cut and pasted around them are pages from "immodest acts"
hands of underrepresented lesbians (butches, POC, etc.)

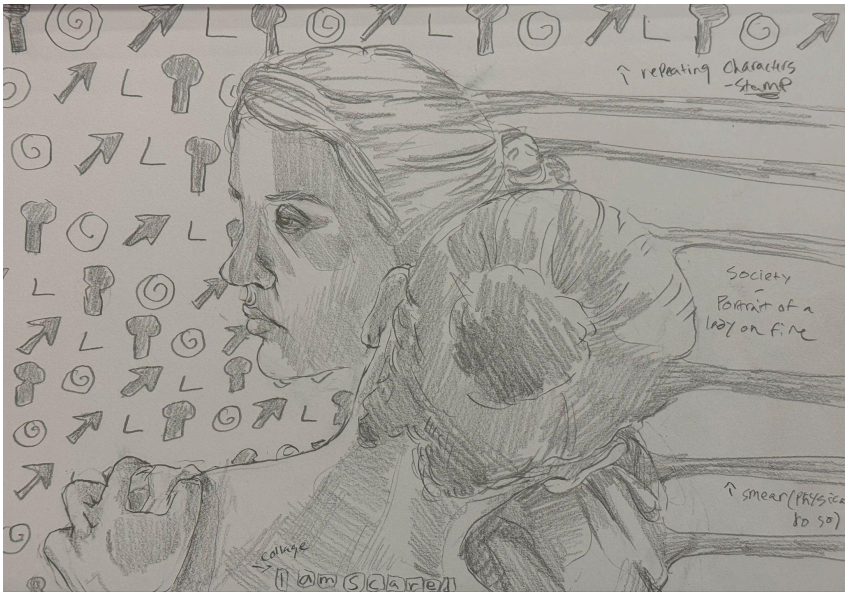

Benedetta - Society
the skeletons of a church being built
barbed wire
stuck while society progresses
bed goes to end of canvas, in the foreground

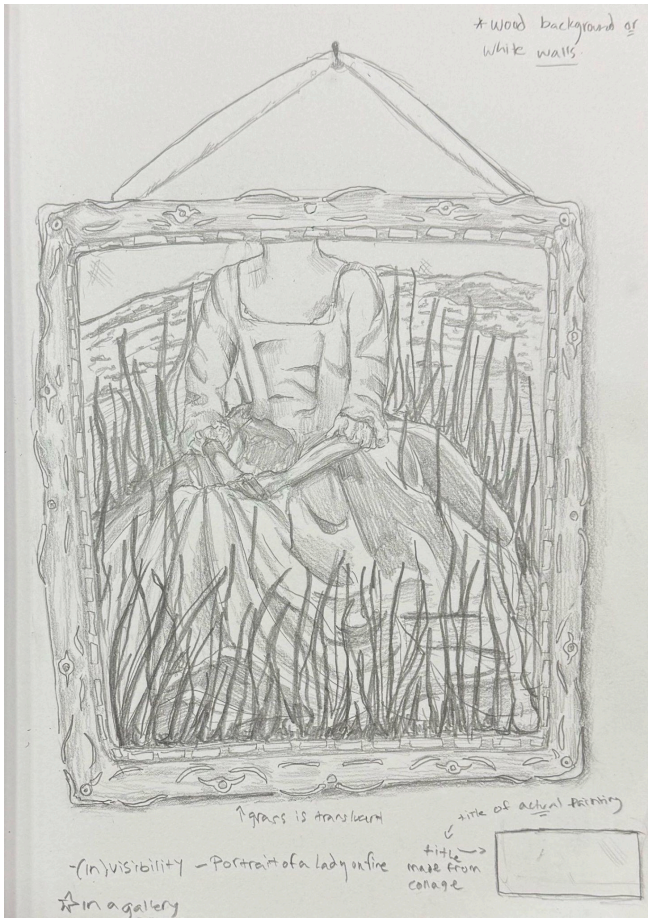


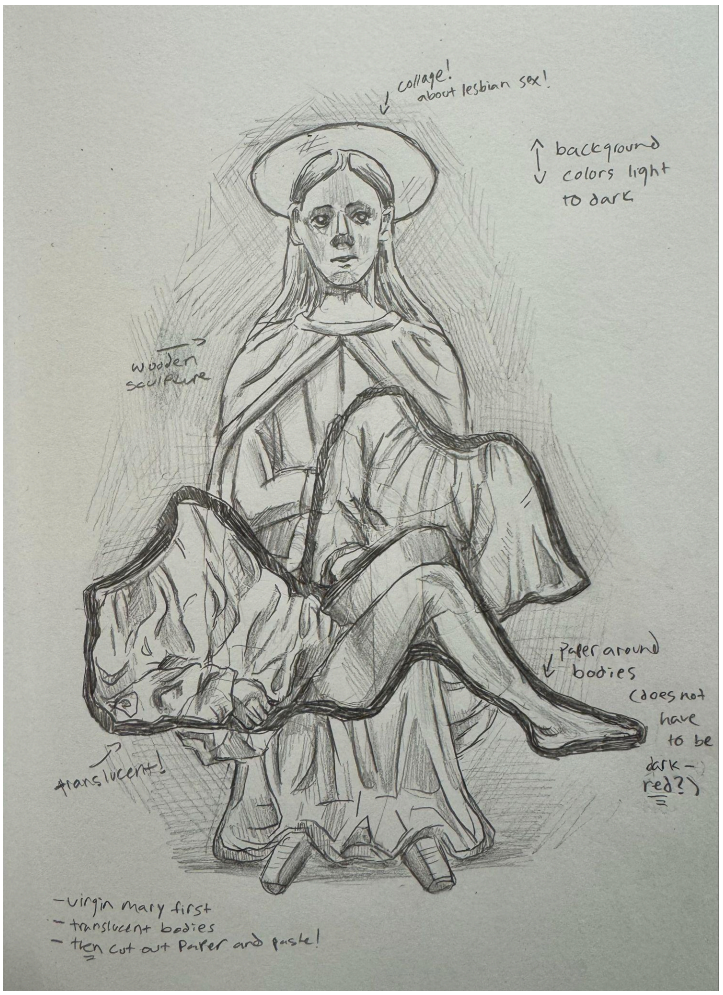


Figures 13-19: rough sketches

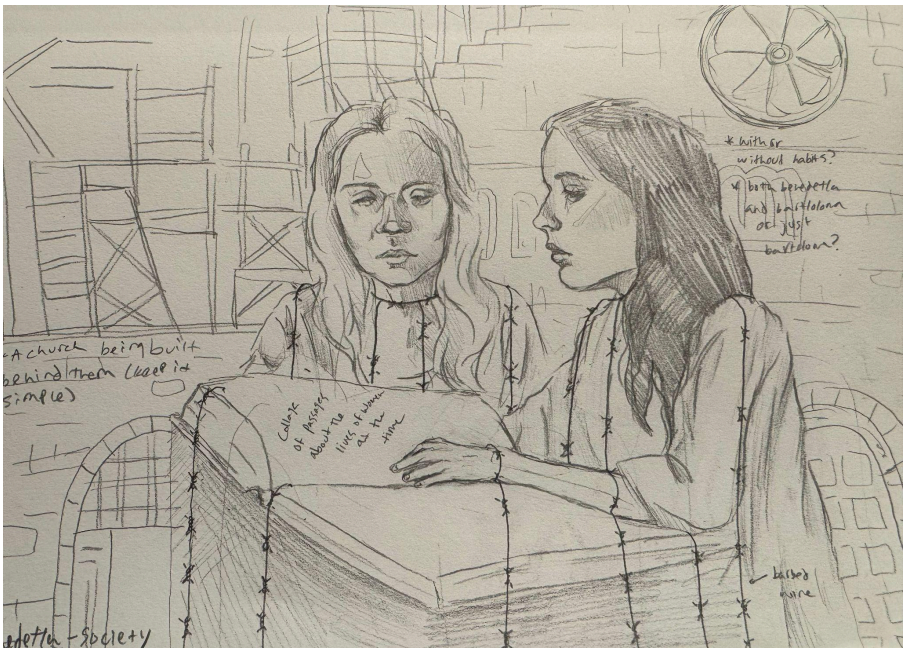


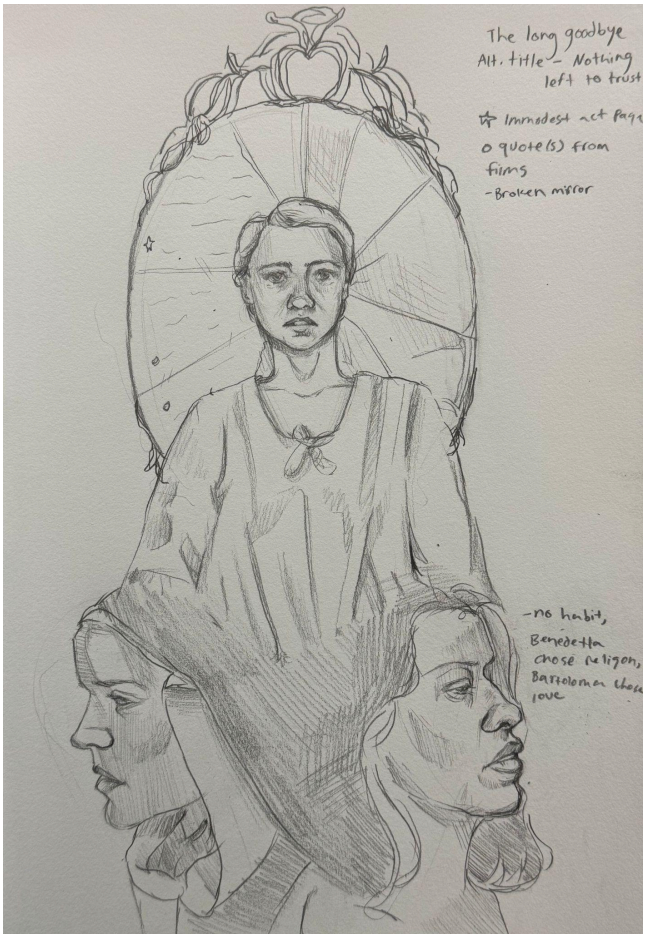

↑ repeating characters -stamp
society
-
Portrait of a lady on fire
↑ smear (physica
to so)
collage
I am Scarlett

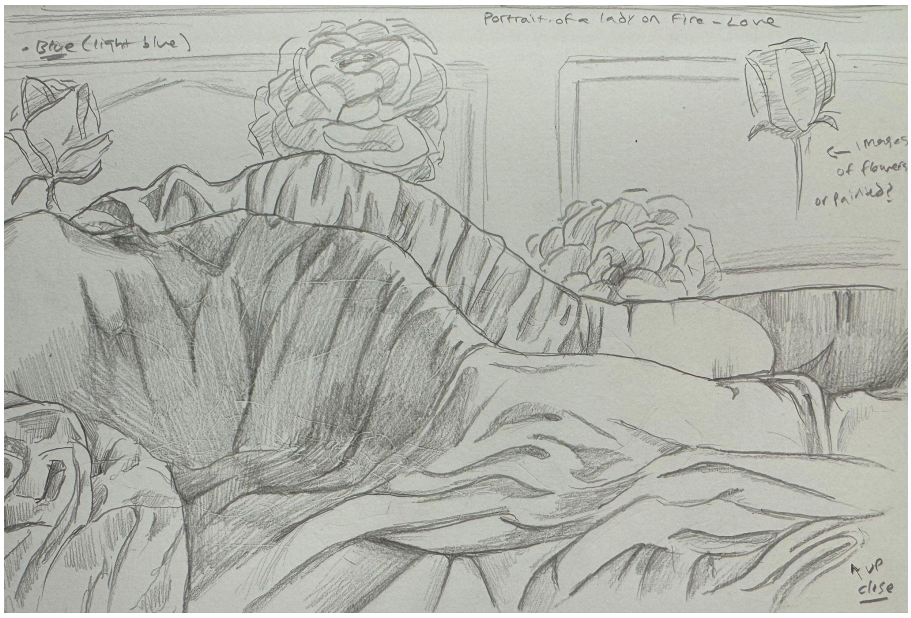

* wood background or white walls
↑ grass is translucent
title of actual painting
title → made from collage
-(in)visibility -Portrait of a lady on fire
☆ in a gallery


collage! about lesbian sex!
↑ background ↓ colors light to dark
wooden sculpture
paper around bodies
(does not have to be dark-red?)
translucent!
-virgin mary first
- translucent bodies
- then cut out paper and paste!


solidarity?
-oil on canvas
- ripped "immorest ads" pages

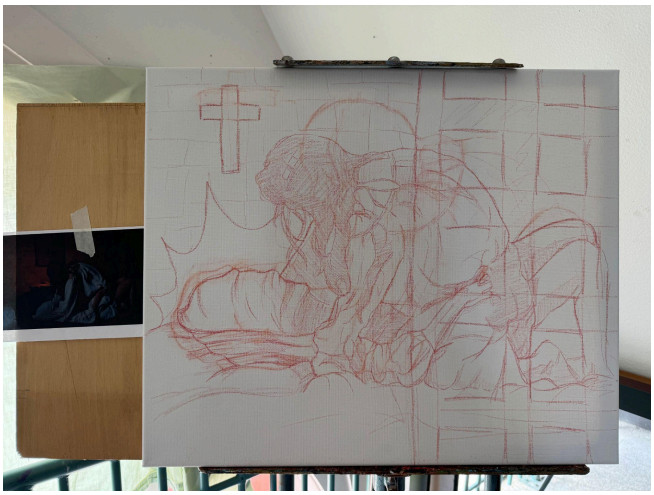






Figures 20-27: completed sketches

Appendix B: Painting/Creative Process



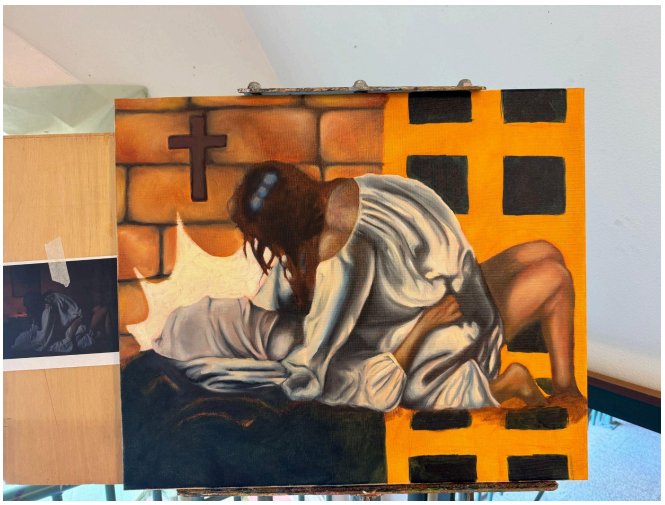
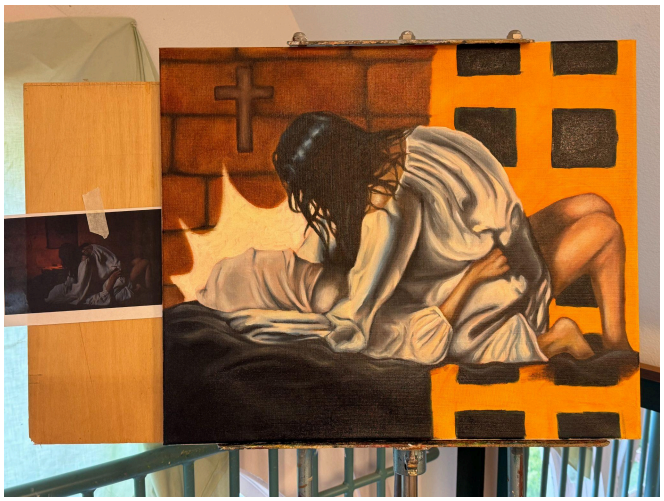
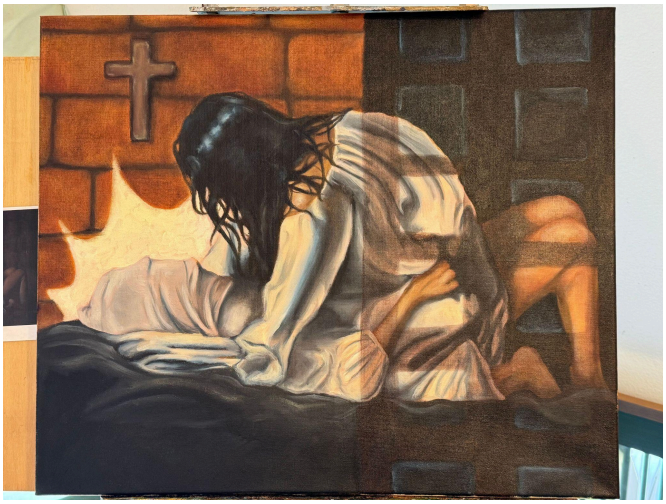
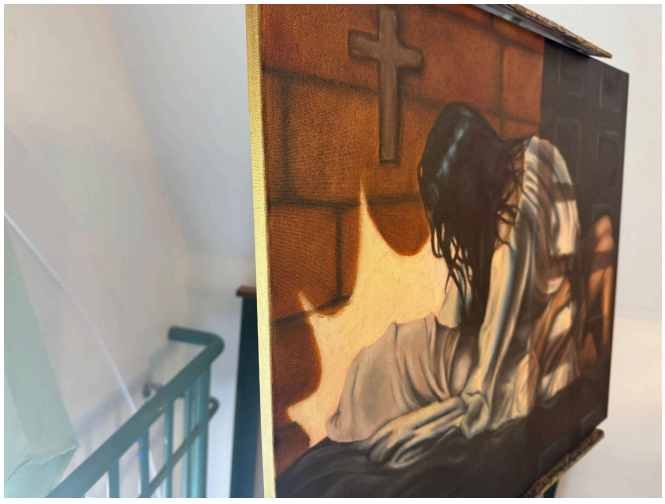




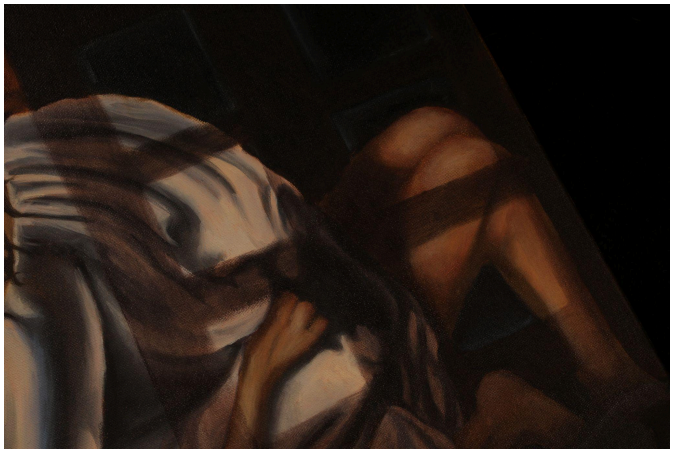




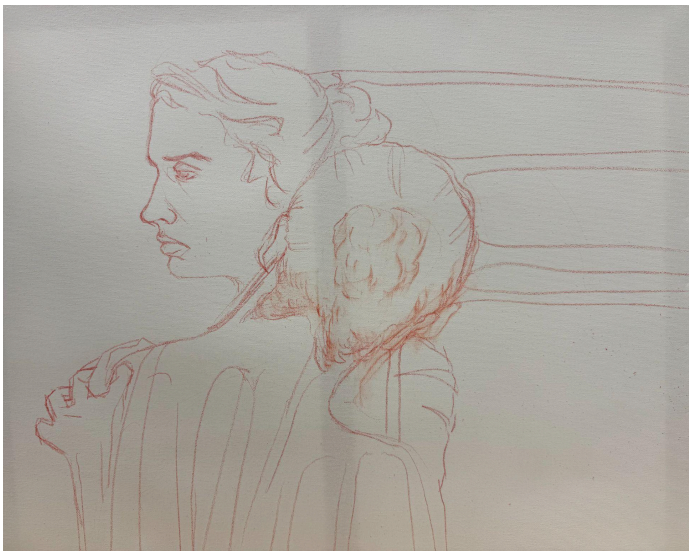


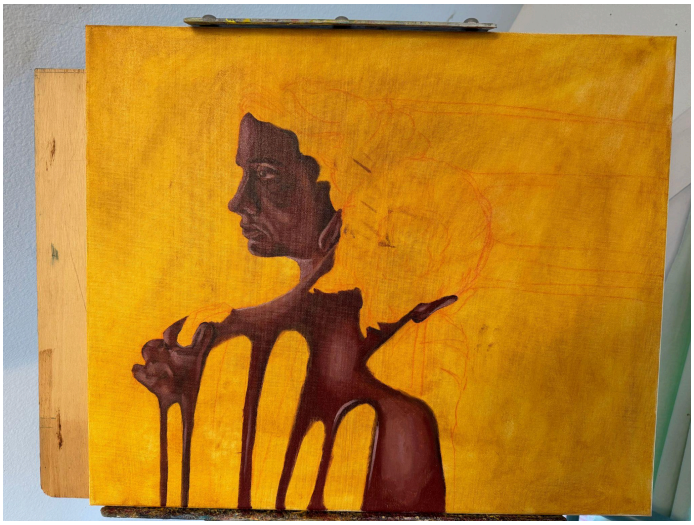
Figures 28-37: *Under the Eyes of God* creative process

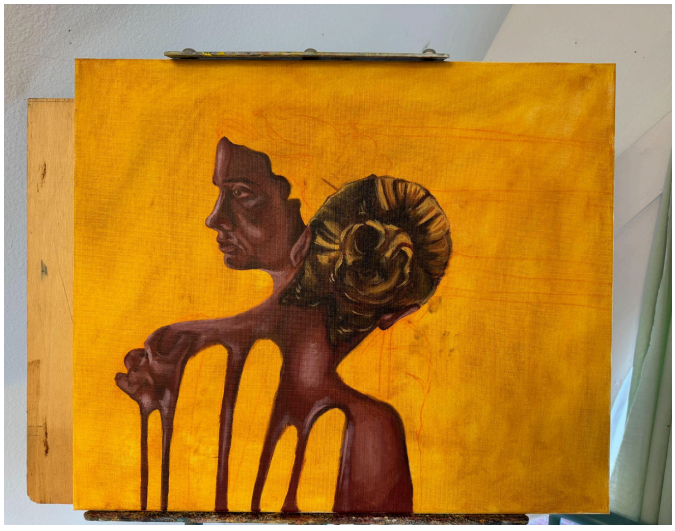



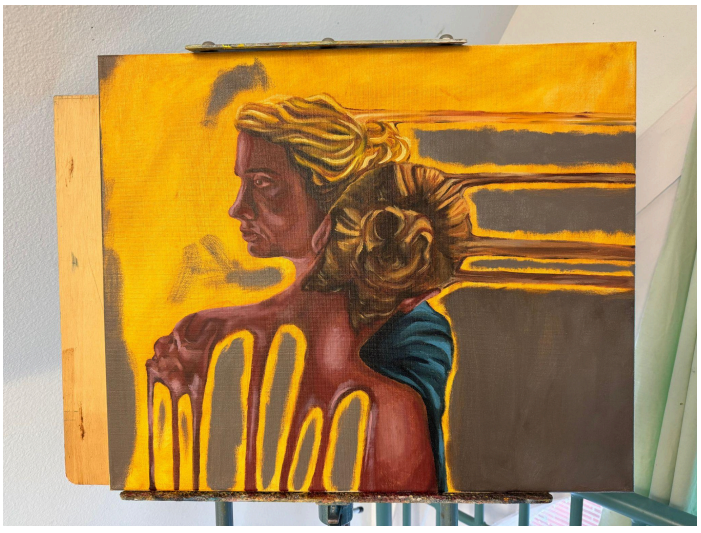
Figures 38-39: *Under the Eyes of God* close ups



















Figures 40-48: *To Survive in Secrecy* creative process

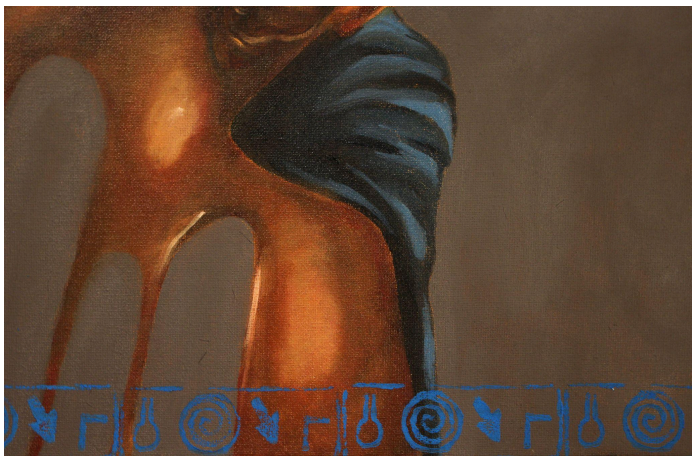
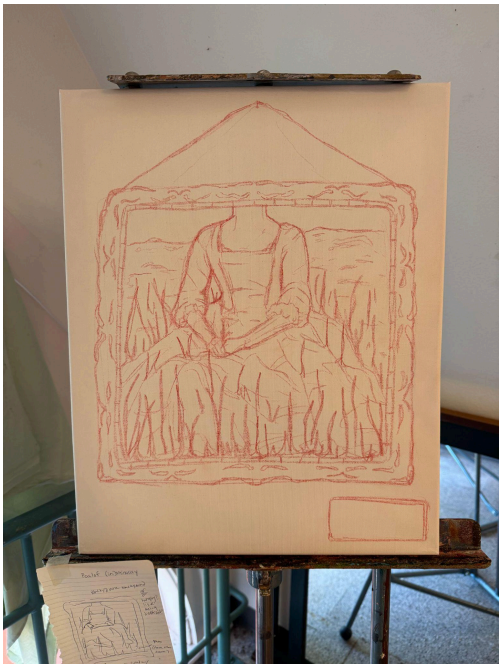
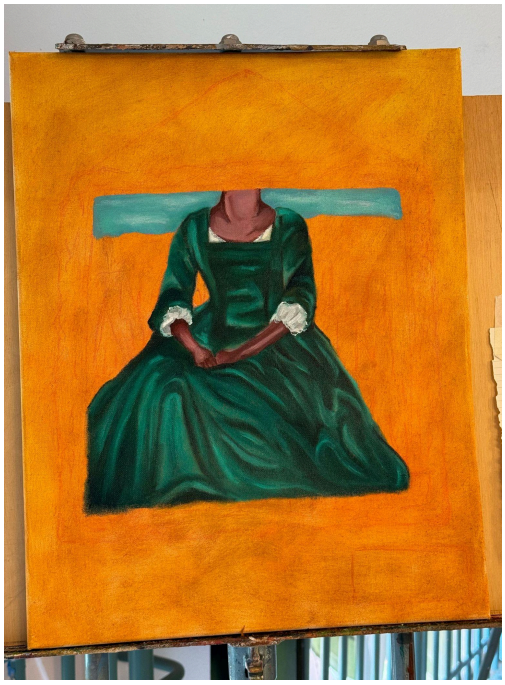
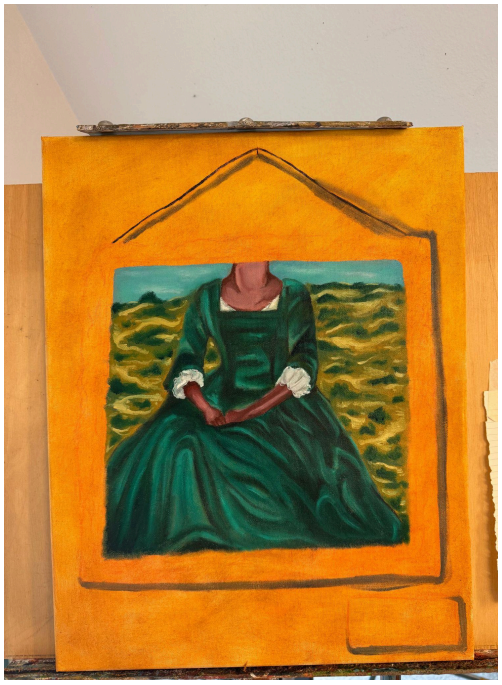
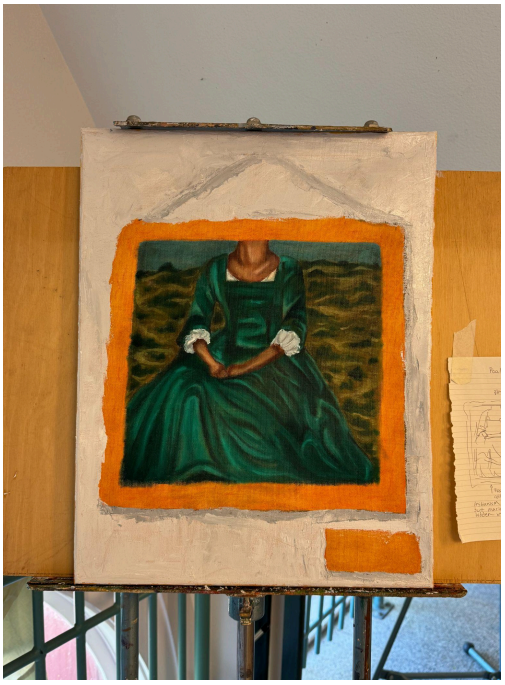


Fig 49: *To Survive in Secrecy* close up



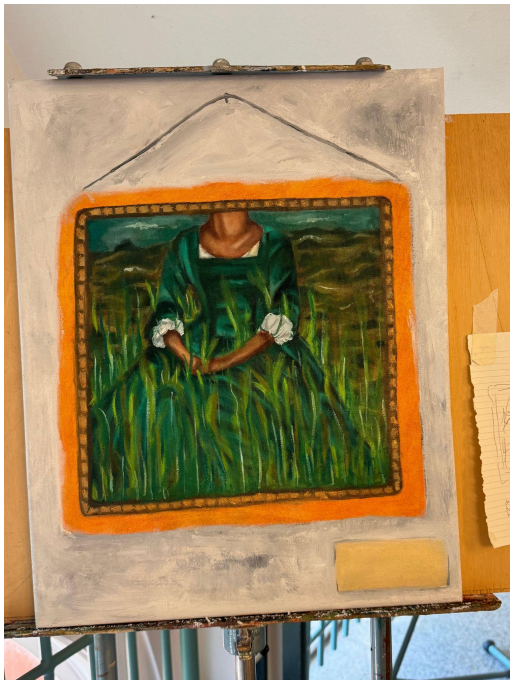
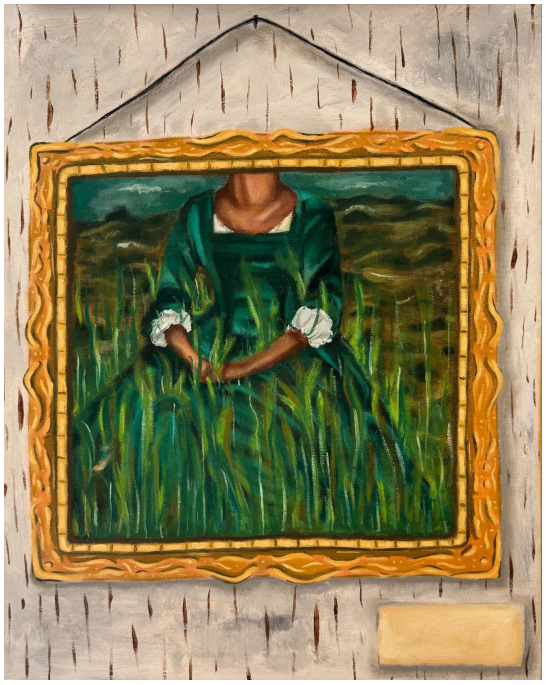
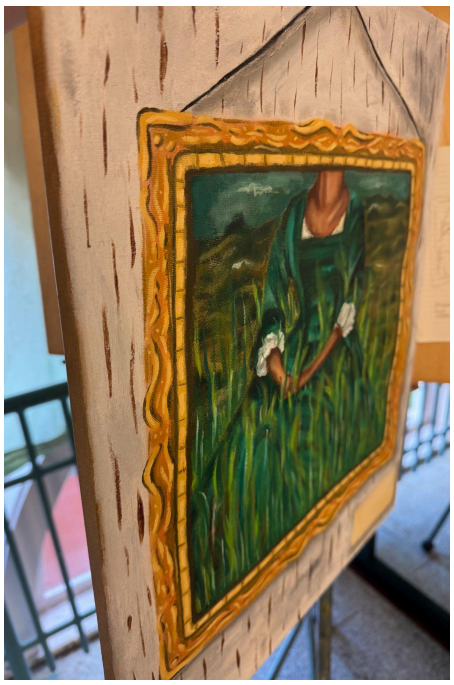
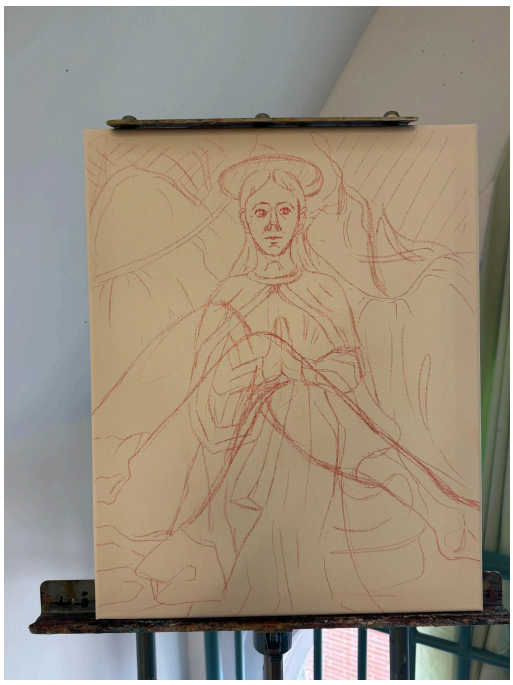
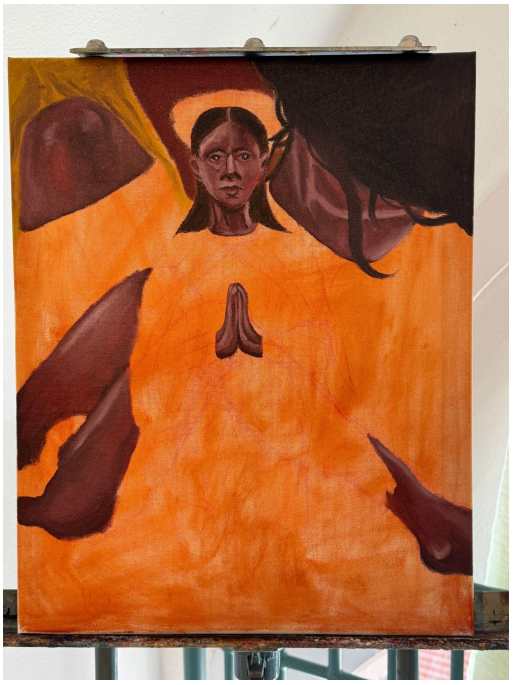




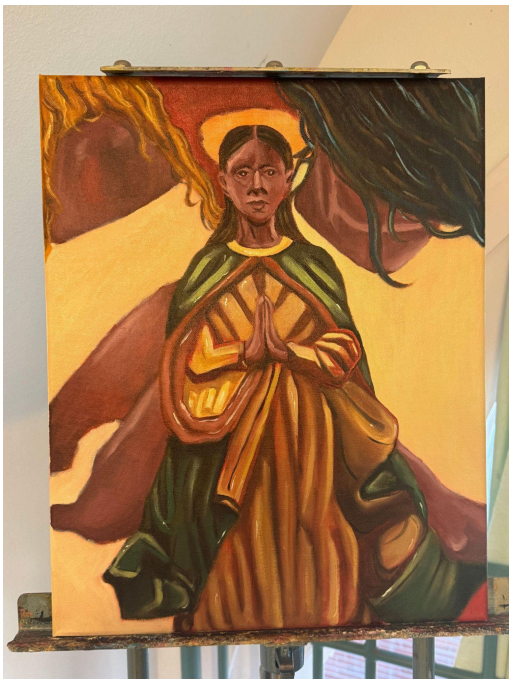
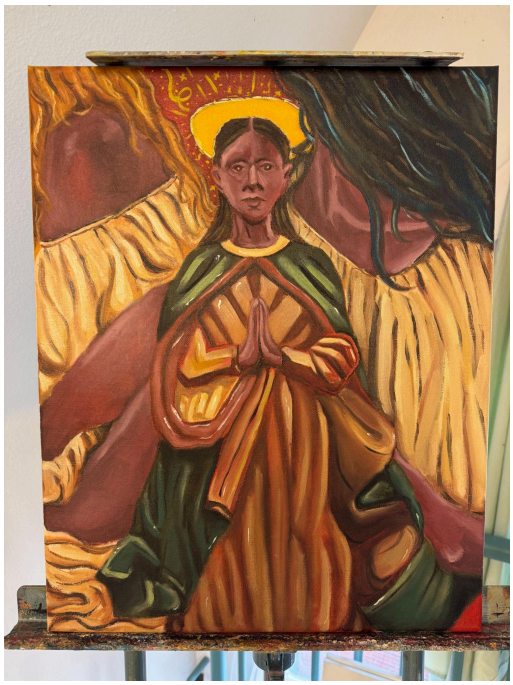
Figure 50-58: *Show me Your Face* creative process

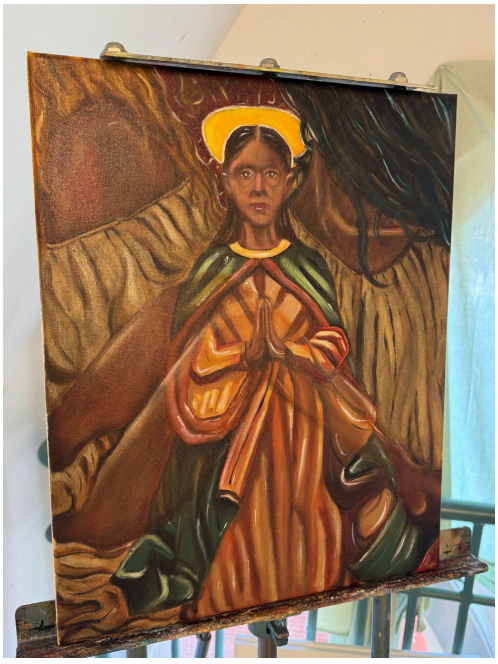
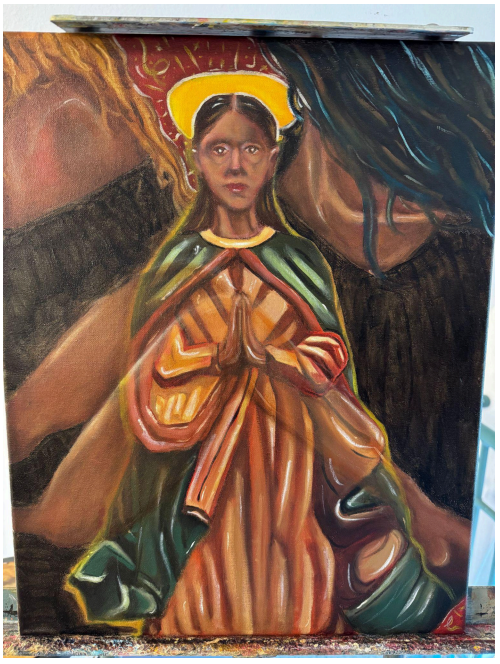
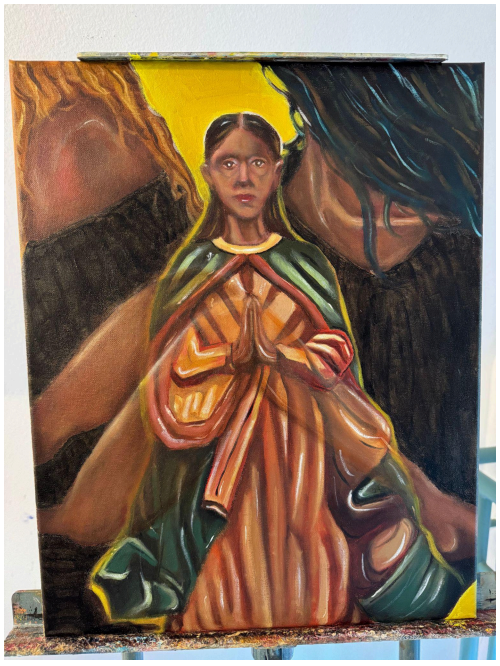
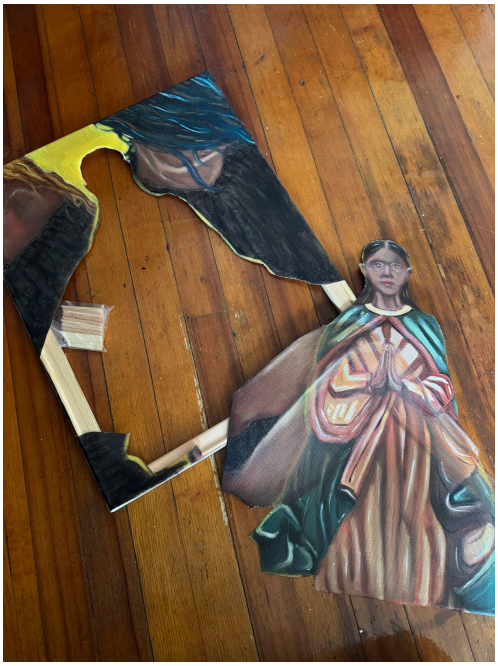


Figure 59: *Show me Your Face* close up

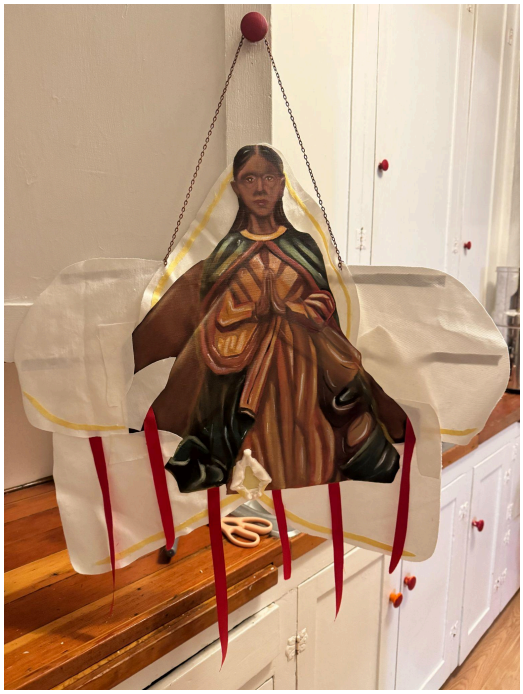






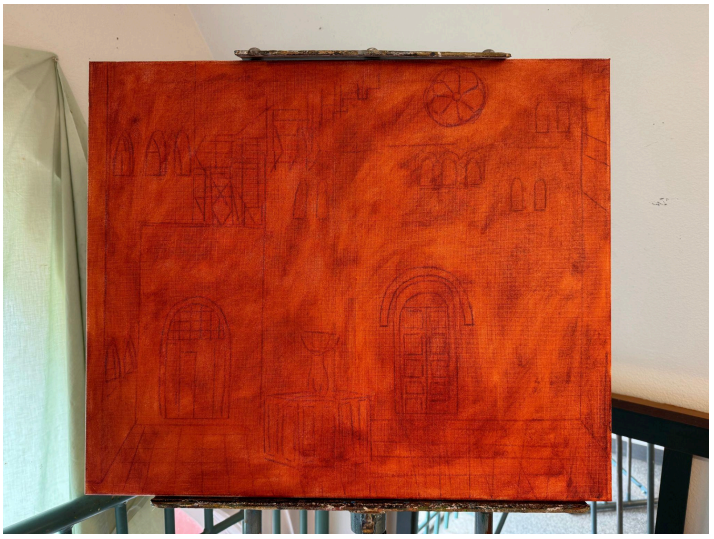


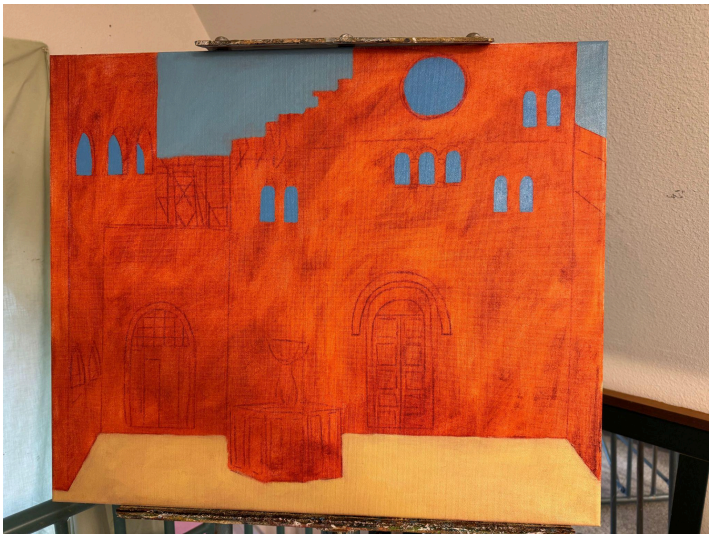

Figures 60-74: *Show it All* creative progress

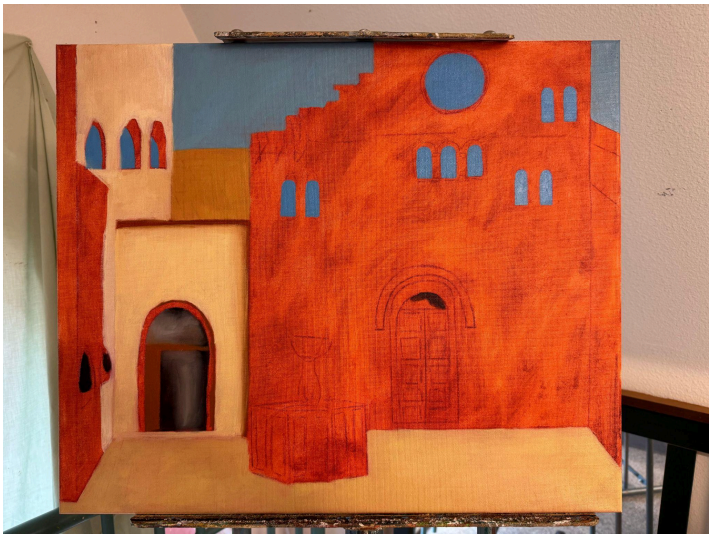


Fig. 75: *Show it All* close up



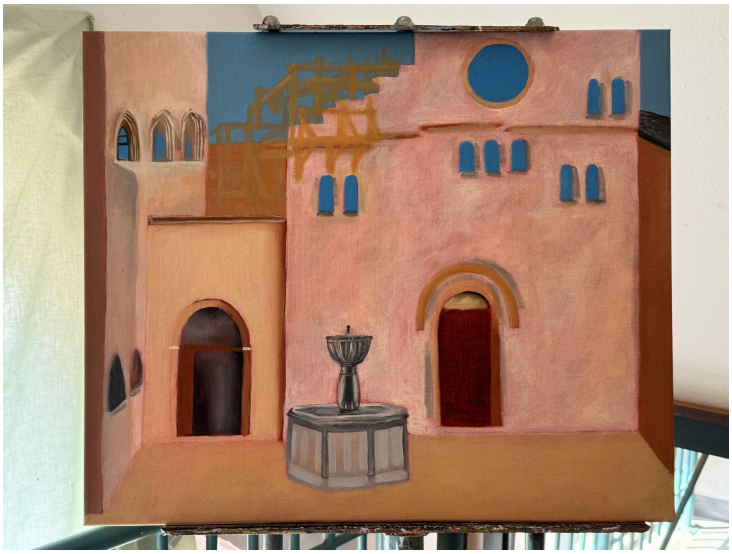
























Figures 76-88: *Proof of Ownership* creative process





Figures 89-90: *Proof of Ownership* close ups











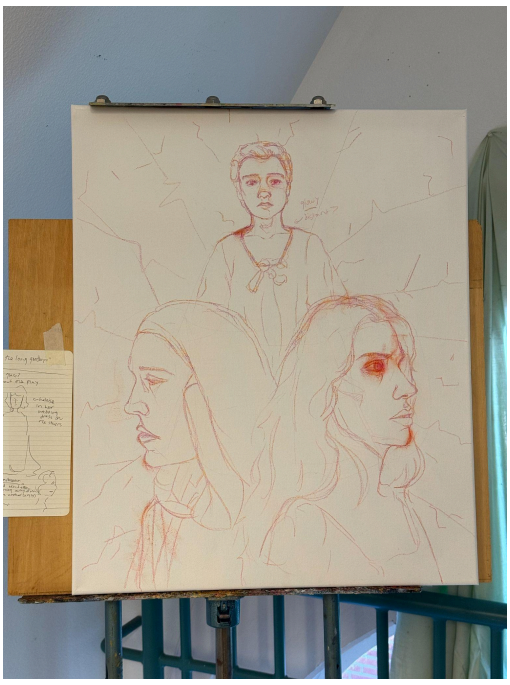



Figures 91-101: *Only for a Select Few* creative process

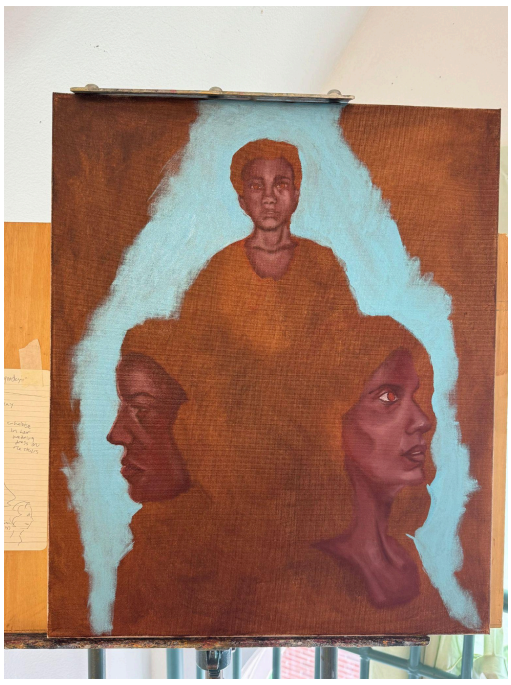


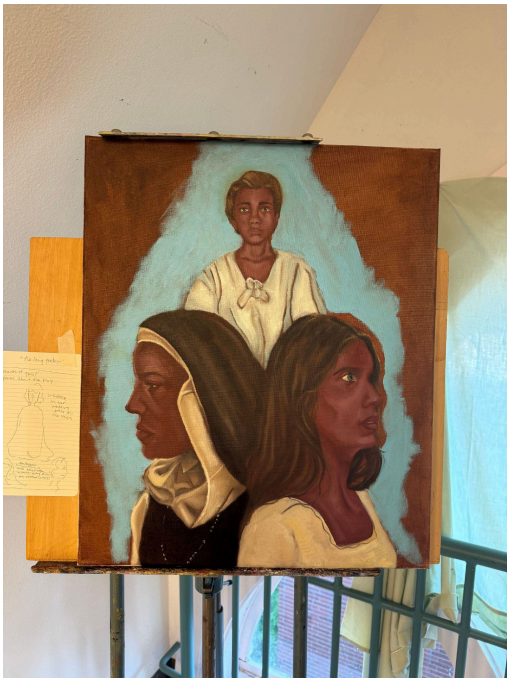


Figures 102-103: *Only for a Select Few* close ups







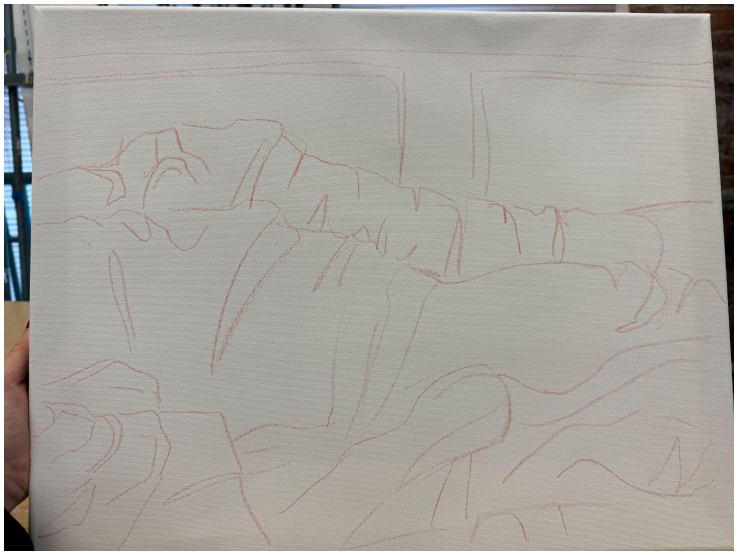





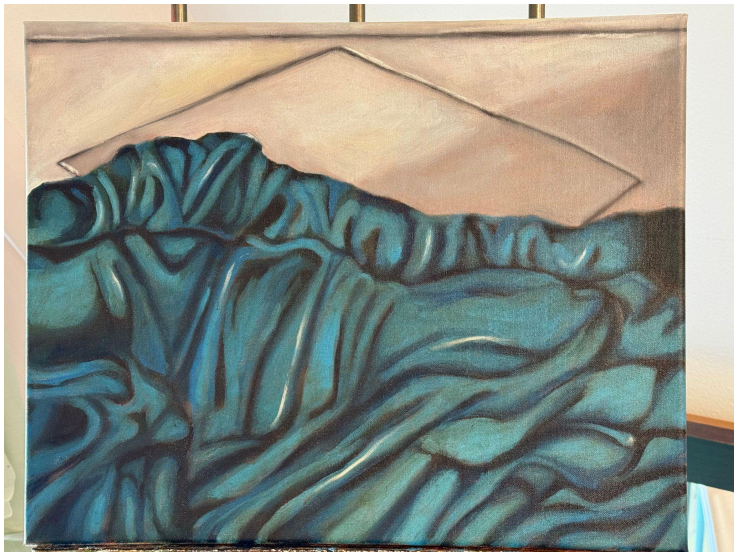

Figures 104-111: *No Spine* creative process

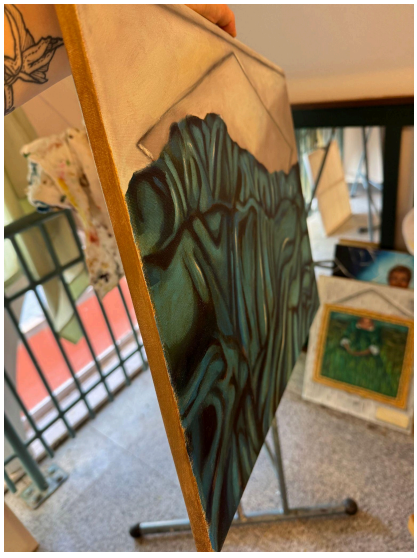



Figures 112-113: *No Spine* close ups








Figures 114-121: *Blissfully Silent* creative process





Figures 122-123: *Blissfully Silent* close ups

Appendix C: Exhibition





Figures 124-125: Featured student gallery

Bibliography

Angelus, Hyde. *Untitled*. 2020. *Instagram*, https://www.instagram.com/iliothermia/?hl=en.

I found this painting's ability to tell a story to be such an inspiration. Since I wanted to include a wide variety of symbolism in my own works, it was important for me to find art that is really successful in telling a story without many words. This work does that well especially in the realm of composition, which I admire greatly. The color palette and inclusion of birds is also something I found so visually appealing and it reminded me to think outside of the box when it came to figuring out symbols to represent and include.

Bacholle, Michèle. "For a Fluid Approach to Céline Sciamma's Portrait of a Lady on Fire." *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2023, pp. 147-160. *Sage Journals*, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/09571558221099637. Accessed 30 7 2025.

This source was not only incredibly useful in my literature review but also in my paintings. It was one that I expected to disagree with, especially because the author shies away from lesbian labeling but they do it for a good

reason. Many quotes from this essay are sprinkled into my literature review and they seeped into my own perception of *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and the paintings I made inspired by it.

Brown, Judith C. *Immodest Acts : the Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Immodest Acts was the first source I read for this project. It introduced me to the lesbian invisibility component of this thesis which also coincided with the lack of lesbian history. It presented me with the true story of Benedetta Carlini's life and gave me moments and plot points to reference when I rewatched the film. This book really cemented the idea that *Benedetta* was not directed for lesbian representation but to exploit sexuality and the historical story. It also gave me useful history that I was able to connect to *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. I quote *Immodest Acts* many times in my literature review and I also include pages of it in my paintings.

Cefai, Sarah. "The Lesbian Intimate: Capacities for Feeling in Convergent Media Contexts." *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2014, pp. 237-253. *Participations*, https://www.participations.org/11-01-14-cefai.pdf. Accessed 30 7 2025.

"The Lesbian Intimate" was a great article regarding lesbian sex scenes in film, especially when it comes to how audiences view bodies. This was one of the essays that started my thought process on my own inner biases that were at play when choosing the films I wanted to analyze. I chose movies with conventionally attractive skinny femme women, which is the type of lesbian that the media pushes to represent the entire sexuality. This article also referenced other monumental lesbian media that allowed me to once again, compare and contrast my chosen films versus other influential lesbian representation.

Ciasullo, Ann M. "Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2001, pp. 577-608. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3178806.pdf. Accessed 30 7 2025.

"Making her (In)Visible" was another article that inspired the invisibility aspect of my thesis. This work also introduced the concept of the lesbian chic movement which impacted my overall analysis and personal reflection greatly. While this article is an older one, dating back to 2001, I found that it had great significance to lesbian historical moments that have visible present-day impacts. The essay also allowed reflection, especially when considering the representation of butch lesbians.

Crémieux, Anne. “Exploitation Cinema and the Lesbian Imagination.” *Transatlantica*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2015, pp. 1-19. *Open Edition Journals*, https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/7869#notes. Accessed 30 7 2025.

This article is one that I personally found very interesting. It references exploitation cinema, like gore-centric horror movies, and its connection to queer culture. A lot of cult classic cinema is very homoerotic or loved by gay individuals and this essay reflects on why. I chose this article because I thought it would speak about the exploitation of lesbianism in the media but it ended up having a much more positive twist. It wasn’t the most useful source in my literature review but it was interesting and engaging nonetheless. And as most things do, it probably impacted my work in some way at some point.

Dillon, Diane & Dillon, Leo. *Rebecca*. 1968. *The Art of Leo and Diane Dillon*, https://leo-and-diane-dillon.blogspot.com/2019/03/daphne-du-maurier-rebecca.htlm.

This painting is one of the oldest out of my chosen inspirations. The use of storytelling and composition is what drew me towards the work initially. The utilization of scale was impactful and prominent. I wish I learned more

from this work, especially around the ability of bold collage-like composition. The color, shapes, and mixed styles makes this work overall super intriguing. I believe this piece inspired my collages more than my paintings, which I do find to be quite a shame.

Dollries, Abigail. “Lesbian Period Dramas: The Significance and Limitations of Historicizing Queer Narratives.” *CLAMANTIS: The MALS Journal*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2025, pp. 131-144. *CLAMANTIS: The MALS Journal*, https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1357&context=clamantis. Accessed 30 7 2025.

“Lesbian Period Dramas: The Significance and Limitations of Historicizing Queer Narratives” was a groundbreaking read for me. I never thought about the true significance of queer period pieces, only that there were stereotypically a lot of them. This article opened my eyes to the true reasons behind the sheer amount of lesbian period dramas and the positives and negatives associated with it. My favorite statement from this reading was how period dramas allow for queer people to see themselves in a historical context, since most gay history has been destroyed or long-forgotten.

Euphidyce. *And the Birds Looking for a Place to Land*. 2024. *X*, https://x.com/euphidyce.

From the title, to the contrasting colors and composition, I fell in love with this painting. I found it incredibly interesting. I wanted the mysterious story of this biblically-inclined cowboy slash priest to be revealed. There is so much to see yet so much is silhouetted. This work taught me to show not tell, to be illusive and mysterious. It also taught me to be brave with colors, which I'm not entirely sure I have fully learned yet. It is an artwork simmering with bold emotions and quiet dignities.

Garber, Linda. "Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance between Fact and Fiction." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2015, pp. 129-149. *Santa Clara University Scholar Commons*, https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=gender. Accessed 30 7 2025.

"Claiming Lesbian History" was another important read regarding, as the title states, lesbian history. This article was interesting specifically in the realm of the term "lesbian" and its origins. It coincided nicely with the information gathered from *Immodest Acts*. The history of the word "lesbian" connects very nicely to the idea of lesbian invisibility as a whole, which was extraordinarily helpful in this thesis.

McNicholas Smith, Kate, and Imogen Tyler. “Lesbian Brides: Post-Queer Popular Culture.” *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2017, pp. 315-331. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14680777.2017.1282883. Accessed 30 7 2025.

While “Lesbian Brides” wasn’t the most important source for my research, it was still an incredibly interesting read. It writes about a monumental lesbian wedding in one of Britain's biggest television shows. It was another point of reference for comparing lesbian media as well as the lesbian bodies displayed in such media. Especially in the cases of groundbreaking events, like the inclusion of same-sex marriage on a widely popular TV show.

Pramaggiore, Maria. “Fishing for Girls: Romancing Lesbians in New Queer Cinema.” *College Literature*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1997, pp. 59-75. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25099626.pdf. Accessed 30 7 2025.

This is another older resource that I felt was very useful and influential. This article speaks about “New Queer Cinema,” which paved the way and influenced the films I chose to write about. This article is a great source regarding lesbian film history, which is a wonderful thing to compare to the

very new films of *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. There is also discussion of independent films which is an interesting concept when considering lesbian bodies in smaller films versus bigger ones.

Rojas, Lizbeth. *Untitled*. 2023. *Instagram*, https://www.instagram.com/p/CrcfeFErTwv/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA%3D%3D&epik=dj0yJnU9UUhYVzZpLTM4S2NKZVp0UXlhemg0ckVjbEJQYU03eTImcD0wJm49bEtFOXdGdWcwcEh3U1M1WWRFYUNoQSZ0PUFBQUFBR2tTa2FR.

This was the first image that inspired my paintings. I enjoyed the composition and use of color and line. The subject matter of women also mirrored my own work. I feel that the range of shapes was something that impacted my own artwork, which I wasn't expecting when I first laid eyes on the imagery. There are other symbols and distortions in this art that I absolutely subconsciously put into my own paintings, like the hair of the two women forming into one.

Ryberg, Ingrid. "Carnal Fantasies: Embodied Spectatorship of Queer, Feminist, and Lesbian Pornography." *Porn Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2-3, 2014, pp. 161-173. *Taylor & Francis Online*,

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23268743.2015.1059012. Accessed 30 7 2025.

This was an article that really shocked me. I chose it with the assumption that it would speak about lesbian porn and its negative effects of society's perception of lesbianism. Instead, the author spoke about the empowerment of some lesbian pornography, especially in the situation of independent filmmakers. This essay offered a fresh new perspective to my research. It wasn't one that supported my case but it reminded me of the nuances of sexuality. Lesbian sex scenes are important and can absolutely invoke power and feminism. It is only when they are done wrong that it can cause irreparable damage to the community.

Saldago, Andrew. *Creature Comforts*. 2020. *Andrew Saldago: Works*, https://andrewsalgado.com/works/2020/.

This was another piece that truly stunned me by its ability to put so much in a small space without feeling cramped. The composition, color, and bold yet calm demeanor of this artwork was incredibly compelling. It is very shapely and textured as well which are two components that I absolutely attempted to include into my own art.

Sciamma, Céline, director. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. Lilies Films, 2019.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire is a film I fell in love with the minute I finished watching it for the first time. It deeply impacted me artistically and it inspired me to get back into oil painting. The cinematography stayed with me for days after watching. Both of these reasons made it a no-brainer when I was picking out films for this project. *Portrait* has fantastic lesbian representation because it is written by one. The relationship between Héloïse and Marianne feels real. The pain and the love is vibrant on screen, they show not tell. The sex scenes are brilliantly filmed in a way that isn't prudish or overtly explicit. The undertones of misogyny, patriarchy, and homophobia are present but still allow for some blissful romanticization at times. This film isn't perfect but it is a wonderful competitor to the latter film, *Benedetta*.

I picked these two films specifically because they have many similarities and many differences. Both are period pieces, which as stated previously is a very stereotypical lesbian genre. Both have relatively similar plots and, more importantly, endings. They include similar societal themes like marriage and convent life. They also both have lesbian relationships that have to be hidden from those around them with threats of death and/or societal isolation. Long story short, *Benedetta* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* are perfect films to compare, they share similarities but their impacts are vastly different. *Portrait*, compared to *Benedetta*, had plenty of insightful academic essays and analyses

to read and reflect upon. Some completely changed the way I viewed the film and vastly impacted my paintings of it.

Semochka. *A Kinder Death*. 2024. *ToyHou.se*. https://toyhou.se/23501440.a-kinder-death/gallery#79278993.

This piece's framework was really inspiring and I was actually able to include some frame imagery in my own paintings. Their use of space and ability to add so much symbolic imagery into such a small digital rendering was very impressive to me and immediately caught my attention. I really enjoy the use of space at the bottom of the painting which I sadly wasn't really able to include in my own works. This artwork is beautiful and holds a wonderful range of juxtaposition and emotions.

Soto-Sanfiel, Maria T., and Adriana Ibiti. "Lesbian Sex in Mainstream Cinema and Audience Enjoyment." *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2016, pp. 555-578. *Springer Nature Link*, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12119-016-9342-5. Accessed 30 7 2025.

This was an insightful study and was one that influenced my research greatly, especially because it supported some of my previously made claims.

This study follows people watching the film *Blue is the Warmest Color*, a well-known lesbian film but one that is also infamous for graphic, porn-like, and long sex scenes. Actresses leveled claims of abuse against the director for these sex scenes. The range of people watching responded exactly how I expected they would to such a sexually explicit film and I reflected on many of the statements I read when watching and painting *Benedetta*.

Speer, Ruth. *Wait Here*. 2024. *Ruth Speer: Work*, https://www.ruthspeer.com/work/.

I feel that this painting is slightly different from the other ones I chose as inspiration. I feel that the skill level of this work really drew me to it. The juxtaposition between the realistic figure and the magical creature is so intriguing. The textural components also add a level of depth to the already beautiful renderings. The woman and the colors that make up her skin and hair are what inspired me and my paintings. This work is definitely one that I want my paintings to personally look like, I strive to make my artwork as beautiful as the piece pictured here.

Verhoeven, Paul, director. *Benedetta*. Pathé, 2021. *Apple TV*, https://tv.apple.com/us/movie/benedetta/umc.cmc.1554i51i5961w8dcnqho5ls4. Accessed 30 7 2025.

Benedetta was a film that I felt so much disdain towards that it became a huge part of this project. It was an example of negative lesbian representation seen in film and I painted scenes from this movie to represent as much. *Benedetta* expressed imagery and ideologies that I inherently disagreed with but it juxtaposed beautifully with *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, a film I fell in love with.

After watching the film and reading the book it was based on, I was able to control my distaste and utilize it to create five pieces that represented my thoughts and feelings surrounding the movie. I reference images from *Benedetta* to relate back to the film itself. If one were to watch the movie and look at my paintings at the same time, they would be able to see where the two intersect and connect.

This film had very little academic papers written about it, so I came to my own conclusions with the help of articles that wrote about lesbian exploitation. While this film is one I would not recommend to others, it allowed me to venture into the negative aspects of lesbianism in film and how the sexuality is exploited and manipulated to create male-centered fantasies and make sapphic love taboo.