



Orgasm Portraits
By Nikita Coulombe

The Seduction of Being Alive

"People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive." - Joseph Campbell, 20th c. mythologist

In every pursuit there are obstacles to overcome; the creation of *Orgasm Portraits* is no exception. The challenge that stands out most to me is when I stopped painting for a while and then started again. It happened right after I moved to San Francisco. I was torn between my desire for security and the risk of creativity - it was like I had approached the edge of a cliff. Do I turn around or jump? The prospect of receiving a stable income was tempting, especially after being thrust out into the real world after graduation. But getting a real job? You know, the kind where you give up your waking life to something you're not passionate about..... no thanks! I realized quickly I was going to sabotage any effort I made to live a "normal" life and knew following my heart was the only way to get out alive.

I rebelled against normalcy because deep down I knew all of the moments where I felt most alive happened because I chose to be vulnerable, and vulnerability and normalcy don't go together because normalcy needs security and vulnerability is unpredictable. The creative life needs that lack of predictability. And although making the choice to pursue a creative impulse can leave you exposed, it is all right, because once you jump the awareness of your flight overwhelms any fears and risks involved.

Some risks are worth taking. By that I mean the times when you choose to follow your heart. Taking risks that come directly from the heart means being authentic- and what is a bigger turn-on than being yourself? When are you more motivated than when you are pursuing something that mirrors what is inside your heart? If you can find anything sexier than authenticity I'd like to know, because I don't know anyone who is not hopelessly seduced by it. Raw intention strips away our inhibitions and casts aside our egos. There's no trying to control it; the only thing you can do is surrender and let yourself be seduced by it.

To allow ourselves to be seduced, we must relinquish at least some of our control and thus, power. I think for many people that comes as a relief; at some point all of us want to be held captive by the moment and give into something so utterly beautiful we are rendered helpless in its presence. The giving up of power actually becomes empowering when it is given up freely. When we recognize the truth in ourselves and give it expression we have created a situation in which we are both the seducer and the seduced, and that is the sweet-spot of life.

For me seduction invariably involves an idea or an experience. Seldom do I encounter a material thing and have to have it; things don't make me feel alive, things make me comfortable. People provide comfort too and I think it is the idea of what a person is or does that has the greatest appeal. Ideas are at the heart of everything, and going deeper, perhaps what's at the heart of ideas are possibilities - and anything which highlights or contributes to the boundlessness and expansion of this existence is like catching a glimpse into the collective, the greater "us", what lies beyond (or underneath) it all.

The moment of inspiration is similar to the moment of seduction. Both involve surrendering to something more powerful than oneself. In a way, inspiration is seductive and seduction is inspiring. I'm not sure what the relationship between them is, if one comes before the other, whether we are seduced by the inspiration or inspired by the seduction, but something is compelling us to leap forward and it is in this state of vulnerability that our ultimate creative forces are unleashed.

Perhaps sexual climax is the pinnacle of surrender- the most seductive and vulnerable moment- and consequently the most inspiring. This kind of vulnerability may be the most efficient (and sometimes most intense and difficult) position one must surrender to in order to make realizations, grow, and connect with the authentic self. Creation and self-expression evolve naturally from these experiences. With the impulse to create I expanded my comfort zone to connect with other people. The process of making the orgasm portraits was extremely challenging and uncomfortable at times. Sometimes the weight of my choice to pursue this idea was totally exhausting; sometimes I questioned everything I was doing. But it worked out. I couldn't be more grateful because doing this empowered me to make my greatest discoveries and gave me the courage to see this project through.

Every person I interviewed went out on a limb by talking about orgasms with me. Discussing our most personal experiences and intimate philosophies isn't always easy, but I think because of my intentions and their curiosity people told me things that nobody else knew, things they had kept secret from their spouses, memories that were decades old! Needless to say their contributions have taken this exploration of sexual energy to a whole new level with every portrait providing new insights about the true nature of our desires and thus, our very essence.

People always ask me about the interview process and how I ended up connecting with the people I did. On the whole I would say the selection was fairly random - there were only a couple occasions where I specifically sought a person or couple out because I felt like they had a really unique story. Most of the time I just asked people in conversation or posted information about the project online and then people had the choice to say yes or no. In an effort to make the project as inclusive as possible I used myself and friends as guinea pigs, then

reached out to strangers beyond my social circle. In the end I painted 41 portraits of men and women ranging from teenagers to seniors of varying ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, from different nations, with an array of sexual behaviors, beliefs, and orientations. The differences and similarities among people's stories were moving and fascinating and these interactions encouraged me to delve deeper into the project and explore the notion of orgasm.

Throughout the creation of this book my focus shifted from understanding what people express during sex to the essence of expression. How became why - why do we even have orgasms? What is the expression really about? Why should I care? Why should you care? I believe orgasms aren't really about sex or pleasure or pain, they are about being alive. I think it's important to reflect on our desires and how we express them, because if done mindfully, they can reveal things about ourselves that we can use to become more authentic people. The ability to express oneself is crucial in expanding our ability to love. So I'd like to invite you, dear reader, to gather courage, embrace your own vulnerability, and embark on a journey of discovery through *Orgasm Portraits*.

Evolution of an Artist's Statement

"One has to believe in what one is doing, one has to commit oneself inwardly, in order to do painting. Once obsessed, one ultimately carries it to the point of believing that one might change human beings through painting. But if one lacks this passionate commitment, there is nothing left to do. Then it is best to leave it alone. For basically painting is idiocy." - Gerhard Richter, visual artist

Artist Statement

I have created paintings of sexual energy via the experience of the orgasm by interviewing many members of society. *Orgasm Portraits* has been an exercise in transformation and an exploration of character intended to celebrate the similarities and differences among people in an unconventional way.

One of my original objectives was to make abstract art more accessible by depicting an experience we all share, but interpreting one of our more intimate moments, like orgasm, opened the door to many possibilities. A major theme this project is the sublimation of one kind of energy into another. I have taken the words and feelings that others have shared with me and turned them into a painting in an attempt to create a language that is unique for this series and for each portrait within the series.

The interviewees' description inspires the form, and the energy inspires the palette. Energy includes everything that is not said, such as tone of voice and body language. Orgasms themselves are raw and unfiltered, however, as they are verbalized they become more refined and manipulated. This affects how the paint is applied and layered. I take as many details as I can into account as I create compositions because it is morally imperative for me to remain as truthful as possible to the individuals whose portraits I paint, just as they have been generous in sharing such deeply personal experiences with me.

It is my hope that through these portraits and their accompanying interviews the audience will adopt a more positive attitude about the different ways people express themselves... I want to offer people another way to understand their desires while gaining a greater appreciation of themselves and each other.

"Sometimes questions are more important than answers." - Nancy Willard, children's author and poet

Orgasm Portraits started out as an experiment, I wanted to see whether it was possible to represent a non-visual experience. By their nature, experiences are

fleeting and cannot be replicated, so the best I could do was create an interpretation and pay homage to a memory. The accuracy of my interpretations are not nearly as significant as what is evoked in people who see my paintings and read the interviews. Are their paradigms expanding? Are they inspired?

I know the subject is not something you talk about with the neighbors, like 'Hey Bill, think it will rain today?', 'Hmm, well, I don't know, those clouds look menacing - say, what's your orgasm like?'..... Unless he wants to have an orgasm with you, Bill might become a little menacing if you ask him that. Maybe he'd be less uncomfortable with the question if he knew why you were asking or if he was more comfortable with himself, but it's difficult to express these things.

Despite how visible sex is in our everyday lives, discussing our most intimate moments and desires is still taboo. This is changing slowly and will probably continue shifting in a positive direction at a snail's pace because vulnerability is, paradoxically, a much avoided but extremely empowering place to be. We avoid vulnerability because we fear being hurt yet we are empowered by it because it is where we discover ourselves. Vulnerability is where we make our strongest connections, deepest understandings, and where we can push forward into the unknown. Although it is often interpreted as weakness, intentional vulnerability is really an undiluted version of courage; it's just you and your intentions.

Ideally we would all be vulnerable and agree not to reject each other but circumstances like that never last long because of the tension created from our conflicting desires combined with our inability to explain ourselves and understand each other. We can become less hostile and more loving though. Having an open mind and heart is a great place to start. It's like Indira Gandhi said: "you cannot shake hands with a clenched fist." How do we expect to move forward as a society if we are unwilling to acknowledge every perspective and facet of experience?

Sexuality is an expression of our basic abilities as humans; we are all sexual beings. Orgasms are an expression of something that could otherwise only be experienced in the abstract. *Orgasm Portraits* are abstractions of abstractions-metaphors of metaphors. My intention with the orgasm portraits is to get people to access the wild energy in themselves, to give it a tangible identity, and to blend art, psychology, and sex in a way that encourages people to learn about themselves and cultivate an appreciation for other perspectives. I chose orgasms as the subject to study because pretty much everyone has had one, and usually they are a very intense and vulnerable moment.

The intensity of an orgasm depends on how liberated the life energy, or sexual energy is within the body, and this was reflected in the portraits. Liberated energy is necessary for making liberated art. Liberated sexual energy is the most necessary part - it is like the foundation for everything else.

Halfway through the series I noticed that people who were sexually repressed had dull colors and broken lines in their portraits. There was a lack of unity. Sometimes I'd visualize a portrait and only see isolated blobs of khaki - there was no vivacity. It was as if they were taking shallow breaths. On the other side of the spectrum were people who could hardly be called repressed. They were open, compassionate, and charismatic, and their portraits were alive with color.

This observation suggested that if we are blocked on our most primal levels, then other aspects of our Self will surely suffer as a result. In fact when I was painting a portrait of someone who was unafraid of their sexual self, the process was intuitive because that person was able to let their energy flow through themselves naturally. The less constricted they were, the easier their experience would transfer to the canvas.

I also made the connection between vulnerability and sexual gratification in the way that people who were able to "let go" sexually and were able to engage themselves in the moment were not sadistic. This ability to surrender to the experience of orgasm permeated the rest of a person's non-sexual behaviors and I figured that anyone who could have an orgasm couldn't be totally uptight or closed off because even if it was the briefest moment, they had released control themselves and let the world around them take over. Their lack of inhibition implied that they were, on some level, open to the possibility of dying because dying is the ultimate release from control.

The origin of people's repression seemed to revolve around the fear of being left behind or dying. Wilhelm Reich summed up my suspicions pretty well in *The Function of Orgasm*. He said "Orgasm anxiety is often experienced as a fear of death or a fear of dying." Fear gets the better of people who are afraid to let go, which is unfortunate, because letting go always seems to offer new insights.

Inhibitions can either paralyze or drive a person. While one person refuses to submit to their perceived limitations another is consumed by them. Depending on our perspectives, these insights are interpreted as either burdens that cause us to recoil or catalysts that encourage us to grow. These moments of letting go have the capacity to generate huge changes - to inspire.

Inspiration seems to be the antidote to inhibition because it liberates us from the clutches of our fear; it allows us to take action and have the courage to reconstruct our reality. Inspiration isn't just about a person's ability to transform how things are- there are deeper, underlying issues that seem to influence our willingness to be inspired and our attachment to fear. In order to find out what motivates us we must first take a look at what inhibits us.

Fear and desire - which serve to satisfy our impulses - are generally thought of as the forces that inhibit and drive us. Fear of death, fear of boredom, fear of rejection, desire for sex, desire for money, desire for praise, etc. Interestingly,

when a certain urge exists, if we are not concerning ourselves with one side of it (fear or desire) we become occupied by the other. An example of this could be selfishness and contribution. Both begin with an impulse that communicates a craving for validation, except selfishness is contractive and contribution is expansive.

The same urge is present in each condition but the mindset of the individual determines which actions they take to become satisfied. The person who is selfish is validated by taking while the person who contributes is validated by giving. Selfishness is motivated by a fear of not having enough or losing what one has; in this situation the fear of not having enough is stronger than the desire to share. This person may want to contribute but doesn't because of a fear of being rebuffed, or they may feel like they are contributing to themselves in order to be less selfish with others at a later point. Others may be motivated to share, but their generosity could be motivated by a fear of being alone peppered by boredom and feelings of inadequacy. A person who contributes could also be motivated by a desire for praise and recognition, or have a fear of being selfish, so they simultaneously fear their desires and repress them out of guilt.

It doesn't matter so much whether we perceive selfishness or generosity, what really matters is how well the motivation behind the action and the consequences of the action are understood, because once we understand why we do the things we do we are free to do what we want to do rather than living at the mercy of something else, we are free to be ourselves.

We will suffer as long as we deny ourselves the opportunity to understand our impulses. This is because feelings that originate in a biological realm are extremely powerful. They are the subconscious drives that either clash or synthesize with our conscious feelings.

As humans there is a natural will to survive and a desire for at least the most basic material provisions like food and shelter, but the compliment of our biological desires is the fear of what will come of us if we don't satisfy those desires- either a physical or psychological death. Everything appears to revolve around the desire to survive and the fear of dying. Surviving doesn't go far enough though- ideally it's the desire to express oneself fully. Death isn't quite accurate either- it's really the fear of the unknown. Uncertainty drives people crazy. Loneliness can be totally depressing. Nothingness is another distressing topic to consider. Thinking about things we have no control over and the great vastness that we really need to admit is beyond our comprehension tends to raise all sorts of uncomfortable questions, mainly: What's the point? Without a purpose, what are we? Who are we? What are we supposed to do? We define things by what their functions are, so us existing without a specific purpose poses a tricky dilemma, it is disruptive and most people don't want to go there.

Orgasms are a nice way to go there. They allow us to check out the unknown

and then come back to our where we are. And we can use orgasms to go further and further out..... And further and further in. Figuring out who we really are is just as frightening as experiencing the unknown. A lot of the time we end up in limbo with our inner tension and look for meaning outside ourselves for comfort, hence so many elaborate and useless distractions like religion and television. This is where fear and desire define who we are and what our function is. But despite all of this, the urge to live and our inevitable death remains. And our impulses remain as long as we remain, so either we will acknowledge those urges, live and eventually die or inhibit those urges and die without ever living.

"Most of us can learn to live in perfect comfort on higher levels of power. Everyone knows that on any given day there are energies slumbering in him which the incitements of that day do not call forth. Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. It is evident that our organism has stored-up reserves of energy that are ordinarily not called upon - deeper and deeper strata of explosible material, ready for use by anyone who probes so deep. The human individual usually lives far within his limits." - William James, 19th c. psychologist and philosopher

The orgasm portraits allow people to consider their sexual energy and what is emanating from them in its most intense moment of expression. Orgasms are like a door opening- honest moments that can encourage a trail of thoughts leading back to the authentic self. Anyone who has ever overcome something or made a big change in their life knows that the place where their thoughts originate is a very revealing place. Going there means going back to yourself. If you have an insecure mindset the experience can be a confrontation with humiliating demons but if you approach your Self with compassion it is an invitation to go as deep as you can and build structures of integrity from the inside out.

The reason why I think most of us do not live on the edge of our limits is because we are unable to because of fear. Instead of letting our energy flow through us we condemn the parts we are afraid of and then dump those unwanted parts into our subconscious. As these bits of energy stagnate, we become "weighed" down by them. And the easier the toxic energy accumulates- like attracts like. One way to purge ourselves of this dead weight is to release it because releasing it is the only way to regulate it. Orgasms are a great opportunity to bring the stagnated sexual and life energy that causes emotional imbalances to the surface and let it go. Our emotions are clues, the tail ends, which can help us make realizations and lead us back to authenticity. And when you are courageous enough to be authentic, you will find yourself "awake" and full of love.

"Arise, transcend Thyself, though art man and the whole nature of man is to

become more than himself." - Sri Aurobindo, 20th c. yogi, poet, philosopher and writer

Love and understanding go hand in hand. It seems to me that we, as a society, do not appreciate each other enough. We are so quick to criticize that we now relate through insecurity and fear, and that is taking us further and further away from empowerment. I think getting in touch with our authentic self can change this because it will help us cultivate integrity and develop our higher levels of being.

Self-actualization is a term psychologists use to refer to releasing all of one's potentialities. Kurt Goldstein, the 20th c. German neurologist and psychologist who first coined the term, thought that self-actualization was the driving force of a person and every effort they made was meant to maximize their abilities. Abraham Maslow made the concept famous with his hierarchy of needs, which were predetermined in order of importance. Simply put, he believed self-actualization, which was at the top of the hierarchy, was the full realization of one's potential. Maslow thought that it was the desire for self-fulfillment, that self-actualization gave the individual a desire to utilize their energy to achieve a goal or pursue an ambition. Below self-actualization were esteem needs (which encompassed self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect of and by others), love/belonging needs (which encompassed friendship, family, sexual intimacy), safety needs (which encompassed security of: body, employment, resources, morality, family, health, property), and physiological needs (which encompassed the basics: breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis, excretion).

Interestingly, Maslow added another level on the hierarchy above self-actualization called self-transcendence, people who had reached that level seemed to be living at the level of Being; to have unitive consciousness and contemplative plateau experiences as well as illuminating or insightful peak experiences. Analysis of reality or cognitions that changed their view of the world and of themselves happened occasionally, sometimes as a usual thing. Maslow said that the peak and plateau experiences become the most important things in a Transcender's life.

I think a lot of people get caught up in their safety needs and never really get beyond them. Though this is not true in every case, from my observations and experience, orgasms can bypass the safety level and jump from the physiological right up to love/belonging, esteem, self-actualization, and self-transcendence, sometimes encompassing multiple levels simultaneously. People who I've spoken with who have really long lasting orgasms tend to describe the experience like a self-transcendence or spiritual experience, using words like plateau, calm, noetic, insightful, and life-altering. Some feel as though they have connected with divine energy. It seems that once you get to these higher levels of actualization and transcendence, you have activated your imagination and entered the limitless realm of the infinite. People who are unable to access their

imaginations will forever be stuck in a limited world, and probably, a boring sex life.

"This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall go after the death of the body. This world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. There exists in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, the Human Imagination." - William Blake, 18th c. poet and painter

Imagination is not only more important than intelligence, it is the glue that holds intelligence together. Without imagination our experience of life would be static and devoid of intelligent thoughts, decisions, and actions- we would be isolated! Imagination is necessary for expansion of Self, it is necessary if one wishes to see beyond where they are now. In the space where structure and wildness collide is where brilliance occurs because that is where imagination takes form.

The compliment of authenticity is imagination because imagination is what allows us to bridge the gap between where we are and where we want to be. But our imaginations are in a crisis; ironically, as we are using our imaginations to create amazing new technologies, those technologies are replacing our imaginations. It is becoming painfully clear how much we are neglecting our most precious resource: we don't write- we type, we don't use cues from our environment- we use GPS, we don't communicate- we watch TV, we don't create- we buy. People don't make us feel secure anymore; in fact people make us feel insecure. Our relationships are impermanent and people are unreliable..... But technology, on the other hand, has lifetime guarantees. Technology is what makes us feel secure and the need for security has become a predominant theme in our lives.

Ever notice how insecure our attempts for security have made us? Security is an illusion, and can be destroyed in an instant simply by the ephemeral nature of things or by other unforeseen variables. Benjamin Franklin was correct when he said there are no guarantees except death and taxes.

A genuine existence comes from internal flexibility and the willingness to connect with the realities of others. A person who is unable to adapt or are unwilling to change will suffocate their soul and lose their vitality. Flexibility is essential to our existence, but the less we rely on ourselves, the more inflexible and less adaptable we become.

Exercising the imagination promotes flexibility and integrity. My goal with *Orgasms* is to connect with and supercharge your imagination through the

creative expression of the authentic selves of many individuals. Sexual energy comes into play here as the medium of exploration.

In order to reach our full psychological potential, we need to take into account everything that influences our psyches. So many of our psychological inhibitions stem from our failure to incorporate our physical needs; our sexual energy in particular suffers from our unwillingness to acknowledge the huge role it plays in our lives.

Going back to *The Function of Orgasm*, Reich noted:

"The inhibition of sexual excitation produces a contradiction that steadily grows worse. The inhibition increases the stasis of excitation; the increased stasis weakens the ability of the organism to reduce the stasis. As a consequence, the organism acquires a fear of excitation, in other words, sexual anxiety. Hence, sexual anxiety is caused by the external frustration of instinctual gratification and is internally anchored by the fear of the damned-up sexual excitation. This leads to orgasm anxiety, which is the ego's fear of the overpowering excitation of the genital system due to its estrangement from the experience of pleasure. Orgasm anxiety constitutes the core of the universal, biologically anchored pleasure anxiety. It is usually expressed as a general anxiety about every form of vegetative sensation and excitation, or the perception of such excitations and sensations. The pleasure of living and the pleasure of the orgasm are identical. Extreme orgasm anxiety forms the basis of the general fear of life."

I don't think achieving sexual gratification via the experience of orgasm is the key to enjoying life but I do think they are useful way to diffuse inhibitions and anxiety caused by inhibitions. Orgasms are really more about being happy in our own skins.

Our attachment to our inhibitions and our need to be in control results in making us feel less in control because there are an ungodly amount of factors to consider in every situation. Try as we might, we'll never be able to control it all. So I ask this question instead: why not push our limits- why not go on adventure? When we are comfortable in our own skins walls become non-existent.

"To be enlightened is to be intimate with all things." - Dogen-Zengi, 13th c. Zen master in Japan

In the 1990's there was a "Ziggy" cartoon by Tom Wilson where Ziggy walks up a

mountain and calls out to the sky, "What is the secret of happiness?" And a voice from above responds, "Fasting, celibacy and poverty!" After pausing for a moment, Ziggy asks, "Is there anyone else up there I can talk to?" Do you know anyone who wants to starve, abstain from pleasure, or live on the streets? I don't. Why would we want to give up what makes us feel good - the point of all those activities is to make us turn our gaze inward and really examine what's going on inside us without all the distractions. We may feel like we've found happiness in deprivation because we feel as though we are becoming more intimate with ourselves, but how boring! Not to mention limited. Becoming intimate with our desires and the motivation behind those desires will help us figure out a lot more about ourselves than repressing those things.

People that aren't doing what they want to do always say that if everyone did what they wanted to do the world would be filled with chaos and disorder. I would say they are missing the point. If we get carried away from ourselves the more we focus on our desires, it is because we don't understand the desire itself. If we are being selfish we are no longer in touch with ourselves. Many belief systems propose that desire is the root of all suffering. On the other end of the spectrum are hedonism and materialism, which suggest that purpose can be found in indulging our desires. I think there's a balance somewhere in the middle, and a little structure goes a long way in maintaining that balance.

I agree with Krishnamurti when he said "You are a prisoner of do's and don'ts, they are the bars of your cage... It is only when you are afraid of something, when you are resisting something, that there has to be discipline; then you have to control, hold yourself together. Either you do this out of your own volition, or society does it for you- society being your parents, your teachers, your tradition, your sacred books. But if you begin to inquire, to search out, if you learn and understand without fear, then is discipline necessary? Then that very understanding brings about its own true order, which is not born of imposition or compulsion."

Carl Jung believed that every desire had a sacred origin, no matter how odd the desire seemed, and it was frustration and ignorance that distorted them into unrecognizable caricatures. He thought that the divine source of our desires could be traced back to our longing to be one with God. Another psychologist, James Hillman, offered a similar explanation: "Psychology regards all symptoms to be expressing the right thing in the wrong way... Follow the lead of your symptoms for there's usually a myth in the mess, and a mess is an expression of the soul."

Vulnerability sheds light on what is really happening behind our desires so we can make the connection between our impulses, thoughts, and behaviors. Happiness inevitably involves intimacy, and for most of us, that is scary as hell. People often use the word happiness when they are really talking about comfort. We would rather be comfortable than happy and we are lazy when it comes to

psychological maintenance and Self expression.

Being happy means paying attention to our inner and outer worlds and examining our options. It involves work, hard work, and taking responsibility for ourselves. Too often intimacy is seen as a hindrance to our paths when in fact its function is to fulfill our deepest desires. In order to move forward with this notion, desire and repression must be unveiled and our repressed energies released. If you can have the courage to discover yourself, you will probably engage with the world in a more creative, dynamic and genuine way.

Action Validates Inspiration

"Limitations live only in our minds. But if we use our imaginations, our possibilities become limitless." - Jaime Paolinetti, pro cyclist

Generating ideas may seem like hard work but that's really where the hard work starts. A lot of people have the fantasy that there's a flash of creativity that comes to them through the clouds like divine intervention and then everything magically falls into place, but in reality, inspiration seldom occurs out of the blue- you have to find it and then make it a reality.

Ideas are like seeds at must be absorbed and nourished in order to grow into anything useful. Most likely when an idea is encountered it has actually been forming roots and collecting itself beneath the surface of the mind for some time but it was just in that moment that it poked its head above ground in the conscious mind and you made the connection.

Where the idea of *Orgasm Portraits* came from and the creativity that transformed inspiration into action will be explored in this chapter.

It all began when our class was given the assignment to paint a self-portrait. Groan! I was excited because we had just finished doing still lifes and assumed we were past the boring stuff. As everyone was getting out mirrors and photographs of themselves, I was searching for my reflection in the blank canvas..... and the colors began to fly.

Creative processes are all the same. There's always something you want to do, an intention or goal, which serves as your motivation, and there's ingredients to give it life. In this case, the creativity was forced so there was a conflict of interests. Right away there was tension between the pressure to engage in something unexciting and my intention of having fun. This resulted in an imploding explosion of color.

Chuck Forsman, my professor and a very talented artist, came by and smiled, "What's this?" "It's me," I replied. "It looks like an orgasm," he said. "Yep, that's me, I'm an orgasm!" Delighted by the turn of events, I took the painting home and hung it in my bedroom. My friends and I laughed about it while I sheepishly told my mother it was a supernova explosion. I hardly knew what an orgasm was anyways.

Over the next few months I didn't really think about that painting, or at least I didn't think I was thinking about it. I was too concerned with getting through junior

year of college. Working and going to school full time was a lot of work, plus I had started Internet dating, which was like another full-time job. That year I learned a lot about people and, like most 20 year olds, was having many realizations about myself.

I ended up traveling quite a bit that year too, and thanks to the permanent "Threat Level Orange," delayed flights became a way to connect with all kinds of people.

While waiting for a flight to Vancouver, I noticed a gentleman beside me reading a thick book. He and I got into a debate about realistic versus abstract art. He was well educated, affluent, and thought abstract art was a joke and abstract artists lacked talent. I didn't totally disagree; I remember going to art museums as a kid thinking, "I could do that. What's the big deal?" But I knew there was something powerful lurking in all the great abstract artists, something very worthy..... but what? I was disappointed I didn't know what *it* was.

I was going to Vancouver to visit my grandfather who had Alzheimer's and was dying. After spending time with him in the mornings I would go on long walks through the thick clouds that blanketed the city. I wondered how my grandfather felt about his life and if he was still there behind his searching eyes. It's hard to say what a person thinks about when they are fading, losing your memories must be like drowning inside your own body. Thinking about that made me realize that all of our memories are constantly changing and none are truly reliable. I mean hell, I couldn't remember what I had eaten the week before and I knew my biases were always filtering out what they liked and didn't like. And memories change every time they are described! So really, feelings are essential to how something is remembered and are possibly more important than the memory itself.

During that visit I became aware that how I felt about an event, rather than what actually took place, seemed to be the most true way of remembering. The same goes for identity- identity is really a memory, a feeling about oneself. Feeling was central to my motivation, whether the feeling was the fuel or the desired goal, and everything I did was permeated by a concern for those feelings. Writing this now, I'm reminded of something Maya Angelou said: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Later that summer I started reading *Think and Grow Rich*. The author, Napoleon Hill, talked about how extremely successful people all seemed to possess that elusive *it* that I had been trying to figure out. I felt like a part of me intuitively understood what *it* was. I felt like *it* was not only on the tip of my tongue, but was stirring inside me like some kind of driving force.

I was bursting with enthusiasm when fall semester started. On the first day of painting class we were asked to describe what we created in three words-

immediately my response was: whatever I want. And when our professor told us that the assignment for the semester was to come up with a series of paintings, I set out towards the mountains with a notebook to think about what I wanted. What I wanted was *it*. My hand struggled to keep up with my mind as I scribbled down notes and after a little while, there *it* was: orgasms.

It wasn't orgasms, rather *it* was what orgasms represented: a powerful affirmation of being alive. The most interesting and intriguing people are the ones who are able to tap into their "aliveness" and give it expression either directly or sublimating it and expressing it indirectly. But orgasms are a distinct manifestation of aliveness because they are not limited to a particular group of people, they are an experience accessible to everyone. From the most basic form of physical orgasm to living life like it is an orgasm, everyone has the potential and thus ability to make this affirmation on some level.

Expanding on the idea by inviting other people to contribute their perspectives made for a unique challenge, so the idea quickly evolved into a very revealing exploration of human expression and identity through a creative metaphor. The disarming nature of orgasm has the effect of pushing the ego aside, which invited rich conversation and meaningful interactions. Allowing the depths of a person's being to shine through allowed me to discover the essence of their expression, which, to me, was much more interesting than tinkering around on the surface of a person's character. I've always found the surface to be so limiting, so two-dimensional. Sharing ideas is like going from two dimensions to three, injecting life into an otherwise dull pursuit.

An Invitation to go Deeper

The vast majority of the interviews I conducted were face to face. The process was informal; usually the interviewee and I would sit and chat for a while until they had said everything they wanted to say. It was usually easier to understand a person and create a portrait when they gave more details, but everyone was always welcome to say as much or as little as they wanted.

While people spoke, I visualized what they were saying in my mind. If someone was very deliberate in their actions or was very analytical and particular with their words, I would draw some lines or a sketch on the canvas prior to painting. But if a person was more impulsive and unclear, I would usually follow their lead and apply paint in the same manner, impulsively and ambiguously without much active thinking. Most of the time I would return to the colorful chaos and clean up the edges, refining the forms according to what they said. All of their behaviors-their words, the way they said them, and their body language - contributed to the final result.

The two questions I asked everyone were: what do your orgasms feel like to you (mentally, physically, spiritually, etc.)? And what are your favorite colors?

Some of the other questions I asked were:

- Where do you feel orgasms in your body?
- How long do they last?
- Are you physically warm or cold or do you feel anything else at all before, while, or after it's happening?
- Are any of your other senses heightened or weakened (scent, taste, hearing, etc)?
- How does it differ when you're with another person or when you're by yourself?
- Are you loud or quiet while it's happening?
- Can you think of an analogy to describe your orgasm?
- Are there any particular situations or positions you like best? Is there anything that needs to happen in order for you to feel pleasure or is there anything that inhibits pleasure?
- What is your favorite music?
- Do you think your sexual preferences and/ or experience of orgasm has influenced your identity or behaviors in a non-sexual environment? If yes, how?
- Is there anything you think is important or you'd like to share?

Interpreting energy and spoken words into a visual language was the most challenging part of creating a portrait. Our experience of sensations and feelings in their most basic form are unprocessed and unfiltered, and they become manipulated and fabricated as we try to put them into words. There are many

filters the experiences must pass through before they are articulated into words and because there are many facets to the experience of orgasm, there are many layers of paint. I tried to take these filters into account as I painted. Every filter put another layer of paint on top of the original feelings derived from the experience of an orgasm.

The colors that appealed to each person were what I used to represent their energy and the way their energy moved in the moment determined the color movement and interaction on the canvas. Bright colors definitely dominated my palette; I felt compelled to paint straight from the tube sometimes, not bothering to mix colors for fear of losing the radiating clarity of a pure color. This was most likely due in part to my personal preference of boldness but mostly due to the fact that I was painting such strongly sensational experiences.

The arrangement of form corresponded with descriptive words. Everything sort of fit together like a jigsaw puzzle - not because the experiences themselves were clean and simple, rather the paintings were like snapshots, stills if you will, of a set of stimuli moving so quickly that they had to be slowed down to be seen and fully appreciated.

I created a visual language specific to each portrait so there is no glossary to look up shapes and colors as the language is relative to each person. It would have been limiting to implement a standard system or a one-size-fits-all approach when I didn't know what I would encounter so I combined logic and intuition to translate an experience into visual representation. It's really just like any other language- all of us have an idea of what a word or character means, and none of our understandings is exactly the same as anybody else's. Essentially we speak highly similar languages, but not the same language. If I were to paint these portraits strictly from my perspective, then there would have been a more standardized way to "read" each portrait; instead I attempted to paint in the perspective of person I was painting. I attempted to paint each person the way they saw themselves. This is also why I didn't sign any of the portraits except my own - I wanted the audience to read in the first person perspective so they could get a more personal sense of what each experience was like.

There were general trends and similarities amongst people. For example blue seemed to be the most common favorite color people chose, and interestingly, many people described that blue as a bright and intense blue. Equally as interesting may be those individuals who were adamant that I not use blue, like Samantha or Glenda.

Coiling and circular forms often represent pleasure. At first I thought that pleasure was inherently selfish and, attracted to itself, curled in on itself until it had selfishly used up all the space available to it. The Ouroboros, an ancient symbol that depicts a serpent eating its tail whilst forming a circle, is an interesting example that embodies this notion of a self-consuming existence. I

kept that idea in mind, but midway through the paintings my perspective shifted and I then thought that spiraling forms probably represented both pleasure and anxiety. The qualities seemed to compliment, not contradict, each other. Pleasure and anxiety are both caused by tension even though anxious tension is contractive and generally perceived as unpleasant while sexual tension is expansive and is perceived as pleasurable. Sexual tension propels the promise of release while sexual anxiety impels us to contain, control and define our situation. They are both actions and reactions, thus the "evolved" spiral not only represents the tension of pleasure/ anxiety but the general tension of action/ reaction.

Spiked and more angular forms usually represent some kind of pain or tension. When two different aspects of a person's energy are conflicting, there is a lack in fluidity and instead of running smoothly side-by-side, the forms are putting pressure on each other or literally grinding into each other. The composition of flexible people's portraits tended to have rounder and more robust forms, and those with a healthy sex life or perspective seem to have less constricted and more expansive movements, meaning the lines and shapes would be opening up and maybe flowing off the canvas.

Repressed people and those with destructive habits had a less united composition, shapes and colors seemed forced, awkward or out of place. Their portrait looked inhibited! Aggressive and dominant people may have had flat and rigid, almost pointed shapes, like teeth or knives, whereas submissive people would have concave forms or shapes that appeared to bend or accommodate the shapes around them. I noticed that, whether it was a subconscious thing on their, or my, part, people that are really repressed seemed to have darker or duller colors in their portraits. People very comfortable with their sexuality and expressed their sexuality in a way comfortable to them often had brighter and more intense colors.

Something I wasn't actively thinking about in the beginning but quickly became aware of was *how* I was painting. A couple things stood out: the location and position in which I chose to paint, and the way the paint was applied. If a person was shy, I found myself moving the easel into the corner of room, whereas if a person was more sociable or attention-seeking, I'd stand in the middle of a room and work. If someone was very animated and used their hands and arms a lot when they spoke, that translated to how I painted, as would limited or constricted movements if I got that impression from their body language. At least in the first couple of layers I would adapt my own movements to the person I was painting and apply paint according to their mannerisms and tone.

One of the more obvious observations that only I would know was that there was more detail in the portraits of people whom I knew well. There were subtleties and hints that reflected a history of personal knowledge and interaction. If someone talked about specific body parts I would often include a more figurative

representation. In some cases it was really awkward for me because I was moving in a way unnatural to myself and was working against my own aesthetic. I have no doubt my attitude impacted the outcome of whatever portrait I was working on as I have a tendency to make things I like more sophisticated and things I don't like more cartoonish. But I tried to take the "I" out of painting because it was important for me to remain truthful to the interviewees. Their deeply personal experiences were worthy of nothing less.

So, without further delay, allow me to present the orgasm portraits!

Abbas' Orgasm



Abbas' Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 18" x 24"

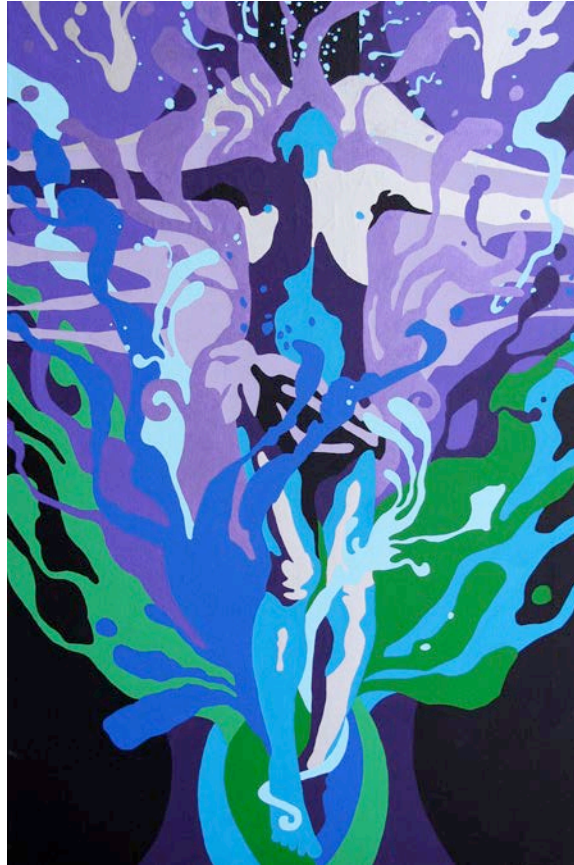
Favorite colors: "Any shade of green, yellow, cobalt blue, dark purple- almost silvery, black."

"Well they've actually been different over the course of the years. It's been a while. They're really deep, building up building up and just the whole time mentally straining. Not so straining but locked in mentally, where your mental clarity is at a level that it hasn't been before. Actually, no part of sex is straining, that was definitely a terrible word! You're getting deep in that zone and you have to get into the zone otherwise it's not going to feel as good. You have to shut down what's going on outside of you. It's like the champagne cork ready to go and then it's like the most amazing feeling like relief. The balloon has finally been deflated. Up to that point is just the most wonderful feeling. The toes start getting tingly and it goes all the way up, sometimes you get a cold sweat afterwards. The feeling of having two people be one at one time is what does it for me. It has to be the right situation without a doubt. If it's not the right person it's not going to feel right. I like it when the lights are low and dim but not so much that you can't

see your partner's emotions. I hate the standard positions- position is huge because when you're doing something standard that's too basic and plain you're not going to be there mentally. The longer it lasts the better it's going to be. Foreplay is key so if you don't have foreplay it won't be as good, and her orgasm won't be as good. Two hours is when you have the best sensations. Finally your emotions are into it, and you're trying to satisfy your partner and trying to be one, and then you get the orgasm. That's about it."

Artist interpretation: Here is a guy who is pretty comfortable in his own skin. Abbas is really able to get into the moment and enjoy the experience of sexual pleasure. Because he blocks out his surroundings I focused on the interaction between him and his lover and the background is simply blue. His desire for being "in the zone" is represented by the harmony of lines at the base of the painting. Inside the lines are these sensual purple and green curls that condense as they move upwards between the two rounded forms (representing him on the left, and his partner on the right). This signifies the increasing intensity and pleasure from foreplay. The curls then release out of the top of the two rounded forms, depicting the popping of the cork. Right where all the lines come together in the middle is the most intense moment where two are becoming one.

Adam's Orgasm



Adam's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"

Favorite colors: "Cool colors, purple, green, blue, black, white."

"My orgasms are really tense and tight. My muscles constrict a lot. Sometimes I will throw out my neck! It's like I'm being stretched like taffy, it can be painful. It's like my veins are being filled with syrup and it goes down into my legs. My upper body spasms and I make choking noises, some guttural gasping. Usually I'm concentrating on not hitting my head on something hard. I like to think of my toes and what they're doing. There was one guy I was with who always called attention to his feet so I can't help but think of that. My emotional state is like a stasis. I'm really conscious of what my face is doing, it's a ridiculous expression- it should never be seen! I have no idea what's going on inside of them but I don't think they're having as much fun as me. My body's like a little spring. Orgasms are better by myself because I'm not thinking about how I appear to others. Afterwards it's like I'm not tired, I could eat some popcorn or call my mother. There's been one or two that have wiped me out though. I feel like I have wings that are growing out of my back and my shoulders get thrown back. The energy

level is like a quick ascent and then a plateau, it goes down, goes up, and then down again. I was Mormon so religious imagery seems fitting; it's hard for me to talk about sex without feeling blasphemous."

Artist interpretation: Adam is an extremely charismatic person, so a powerful image was required to compliment his personality. When he mentioned he liked religious imagery I immediately visualized his portrait as you see it now- Jesus in rapture. Although, in this case, he's being healed rather than crucified. Because he doesn't like his facial expressions to be seen, I hid his face. There's a subtle hint of silver wings coming out of his back, and a little curl of pleasure around his toes- areas that he's paying attention to. He also said that the pleasure rises and then plateaus and then rises and falls again, which I represented in the movement of the waves swirling around his body. They eventually dissipate around the top of his head because for him the pleasure usually tapers off after climax.

Alexei's Orgasm



Alexei's Orgasm. acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30"

Favorite colors: "The absence of color. Muted colors, black, white, gray."

"I am filled with extreme regret (for ever letting it happen in the first place). It doesn't matter if I reach that point because there's some sick twisted pain in not letting myself get there and I like that. I don't think you can feel so much pleasure and regret at the same time. It's like accidentally base-jumping. I'm unworthy; I don't deserve it. If it happens it's like I've lost control. I feel it mostly in my toes, the tops of my feet, right behind my eyes, and the obvious location. The intensity is behind my eyes. My hearing becomes echoed for about 20 seconds; it sounds like I'm in a funnel. Then it transfers to my vision, and it's like there's little fireworks off in the distance that I could see if I was in a very dark place. The fireworks are like a code or a message. It's a faded image. I feel like I'm about to fall over. My skin becomes pale and ghostly. I don't like the male ego. I was raised by a very strong woman; I was raised with so much equality. I've always hated the stereotypical guy who becomes more of a guy when it happens. I hate to be associated with them; it's like they could be in a zoo! I'm happy being a guy,

I just don't like thinking like a guy."

Artist interpretation: Unlike many of the other men I spoke with, Alexei doesn't derive a lot of pleasure or relief from letting go. For him, losing control is not a desirable situation because it makes him feel more affiliated with the kind of "stereotypical guy" he despises. That is why the black form in the middle, which represents him, is being pulled back down to the base of the canvas- his feet are firmly planted on the ground. There's also a lot of blue and gray lines around the black form putting pressure on it to stay in its place and make sure it doesn't go anywhere. I represented the pleasure he feels around his feet and behind his eyes with a gold tone, the only warm color in an otherwise cool hue painting. There is a lot of internal tension in this portrait, almost a self-sabotaging sort of feeling, yet the eye in the center is captivating and looks as though it would be able to overpower its surroundings if ever it chose to.

Anna's Orgasm



Anna's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 48"

Favorite colors: "All colors depending on the circumstances. Deeper colors to light during orgasm."

"Oh God, I've never been asked to describe this on the spot before. I like all orgasms; I like the awkward ones and the ones where we come together. If I don't trust a guy I can't orgasm with him. Trust is huge! It feels like all the events in my life culminate in this hot, warm explosion! Everything travels through me; secrets that my body stores. Each one is different. It's an affirmation of life. You forget yourself, and through that you realize yourself. When I'm with a partner I feel pure unity that I can't experience any other way. The possibility that it might hurt excites me. It starts as a warm tingly caress inside of me and then shoots to my lower back and thighs, down to my feet and up my torso. Then my body is totally relaxed. Generally it comes from really intense movements that result in this total stillness and calm. It's like you experience different selves. The goal isn't necessarily to orgasm, it's to continue feeling pleasure. After you orgasm you change, it's like you're a different person. It's like running through a mud

puddle. When it's happening there is so much agitation and there is just one muddy color. After it settles, everything goes back to its individual state. I'm loud, which is interesting because typically in public situations I'm not loud. It's funny, it just comes out, I don't think about it."

Artist interpretation: Anna is very able to express herself and I think her portrait is very easy to relate to. Essentially I divided the canvas in half diagonally with darker colors on the lower half and lighter colors on the upper half because she said she feels like a different person before and after orgasm. This transition is also emphasized by the shading of blue to white. Because she talks about the pleasure circulating and then unfolding in a hot warm explosion I alluded to the image of a flower blossoming. There are two "leaves" on either side of the bottom of the canvas. As the lines loop around they send energy into the center of the canvas where the tension eventually results in the yellow and orange "petals." The culmination of her (and her partner's) efforts and the beautiful possibilities of their experience produces an expansive movement which shoots right off the canvas.

Ariel's Orgasm



Ariel's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Cool colors, lime green, dark green, sky blue, metallic blue, navy, lavender, violet, pretty much all those colors. My sexual energy colors are different though, they'd be like dark red, maroon, a layer of luster and a high-pitched pink on top."

"I'm really difficult to interpret, I'll tell you that from the beginning. I'm not in an awake state, I'm in a different tier during most of my orgasms. Verbalizing uses a different part of the brain... it's difficult to think of details because I'm in a different level of consciousness. I'm not quite asleep but I'm not quite awake. I hate sleeping after homework. I know homework and orgasms aren't the same, but orgasms are like a way to get my mind off homework. Orgasming by myself is a way to bring myself to a state more conducive to sleep. I'm in this physical body, more like a shell. I'm existing in this shell. I feel like a vessel, and there's this gas inside the vessel. My energy is like this gas in the physics sense.

As far as physical ways, joining together is the closest you can get. When you orgasm you're connecting the two; you're reaching inside as far as you can get inside that shell. When you orgasm you're putting heat inside the gas and that

makes it expand. My view is the inside surface of the vessel. You're getting more pressure on the inside so it's like you're pressed up against the inside of the vessel, trying to get outside yourself. The pressure builds and builds and my consciousness is trying to get out. When I orgasm it's a really intense release. All this energy goes out this little tiny hole and it's an elated release of the high energy gas from the vessel. I never leave the vessel though, and I've always wanted to. I'm half asleep by then anyways.

My point of consciousness is the inside of the vessel and it stays there even though the energy is getting released. I feel like I'm in this space, like the sky kind of, but it's not so bright. It's not gloomy but it's in a non-physical world. The energy that's released joins the space in the non-physical world. It's really positive, the energy is a positive release. And obviously it's really exciting because naturally it's that way. The others I have are much shorter. There's this interesting technique I came up with- I suck in, breathe in, taking air and pulling it up to my head and then push with those muscles as I breathe out. Sucking in and out becomes like a meditative process, and you have to focus because you have to isolate those muscles. Those are more intense sometimes because the exercise makes them more pronounced. It's a meditative rhythm like you're running, and then you run off a cliff but you're floating in air still, like those cartoon characters that only fall after they've realized that there's no ground below them. It's really cool because the feeling lingers. It's like "is it happening? Is it happening? Oh my gosh it's happening!" And then you fall. But it's a wonderful flying fall. The only part that sucks about falling is landing, but you don't land here, you fall asleep!"

Artist Interpretation: This woman is full of energy! But during orgasm she is in a semi-awake state. In an attempt to capture her essence, I represented her as an orgasmic vessel fusing with her gaseous surroundings. The vessel, represented by a variety of colors, the outermost layer being a metallic turquoise, is surrounding her almost entirely and her hands are pushed up against her face to give a sense of the pressure she feels. The bright green band round her face represents the movement of her breath and her point of consciousness is depicted by the silvery gray figure of a woman falling in front of her face. The lighter silver is the energy escaping out of her physical body (the face) and/or her consciousness (the falling woman). Since she is the vessel and she is releasing energy into the non-physical world, there is an opening at the bottom of the portrait where the energy can leave.

Aron's Orgasm



Aron's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

Favorite colors: "Bright colors. I like the flamboyancy and depth of color."

"Orgasms are spectacular. I don't focus on the feeling of the orgasm. I focus on the moment that I'm in. Orgasms come second to the connection of sharing my body and having someone share their body with me. The apex of lovemaking comes in complete openness and comfort. They start well before I'm actually in the literal process ejaculating. There's a very enjoyable sensation telling me the orgasm's coming. It goes away and then comes back again. It builds from enjoyable to climactic and amazing. There are intervals. It builds and builds and builds! There's a second climax within the orgasm, this is the magical part where everything gets released. When the second climax subsides, there are instances where I lose my hearing. I can hear my own breathing though. I'm almost completely shut off to things around me; it brings me into my own inner being for about 30 seconds to a minute. There's a medium-tone humming sound that drowns everything out. Afterwards the only things I hear are really obscure things like the neighbor's AC unit, things that I would not hear normally. The head of the

penis is where most sensation takes place. The other sensation is a beautiful, magical floating energy or aura that's around my partner and I. The best ones are when it's simultaneous with my partner. I am quiet. I'm resistant to being loud; it's a turn-off to myself. I'm calm. I'm sensitive to my partner's needs and communication is huge. I want to be exploratory, so knowing what she likes is really important. It must be mutual."

Artist Interpretation: Aron asked for bright colors and he got them! The white wavy bits in the middle represent the two climaxes he feels within the orgasm. The second wave in the top left is a little less neat because that's the one where "everything gets released." All the "clues" that indicate an orgasm is coming are the playful shapes surrounding the phallic form that is moving diagonally from the top left to the lower right area of the canvas. This portrait has an underwater feeling because in the moment he has shut off the outside world and been brought to his "own inner being." But because he generally focuses on experience he and his partner are sharing, the composition, like Aron, is very open and receptive to energy around himself. Everything is harmonious and the forms are almost dancing with one another.

Ashley's Orgasm



Ashley's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

Favorite colors: "Bright red, all shades of blue - I adore the color of the ocean, lilac."

"It depends on whether I'm giving them to myself or someone gives them to me. I have a hard time during intercourse- I've had maybe three orgasms that way and I have to do all the work. I can't figure out if it's their fault or mine because the sex is good, but the climax is always because of my efforts. Oral sex is different because I come hard and quite frequently. It's intense, almost painful. I have a hard time letting guys do that to me because to me it's the most intimate sexual act on the planet! I can't think of anything that would make me feel more close to a person. Only two people have done that to me. I often wonder what it would be like to have sex with a woman because we'd both be doing the most intimate act to each other. I've been giving orgasms to myself since I was three. I can remember the first time too, I was on the piano stand and I was rubbing my pelvis against the wood of the stand thinking I had to finish before my mother got out of the shower. Now there are three ways I usually do it. I'm either grinding against

something, using a toy, or using my hand. When I'm grinding into something and clenching my muscles the orgasms are really intense. I don't use this method unless I'm about to go to bed because I get tired afterwards. I also have two vibrators because I can't get that feeling on the inside. Those orgasms feel shallow to me. They're surface orgasms and I'm not satisfied afterwards. I'm the least comfortable touching myself with my hands. Every woman should be comfortable with her vagina, but I'm not quite there. I'm a big advocate of masturbation, but when I do it with my hand I feel kind of dirty afterwards. Growing up I felt quite guilty about the whole thing but after taking Social Constructions of Sexuality in college, my sex life totally changed. It made me more open and now I tell all my friends to masturbate all the time.

With guys I tend to be louder. It's not fake- I don't fake, ever. Maybe one time in my sexual career I did. I feel like part of it has to do with the privacy, at home I keep it quiet because I care about my pleasure more than some of the gentlemen I've been with. I once had a guy tell me I was the loudest girl he'd ever been with. I don't like it when guys are like "Shhh." I'm like "No, I want to be loud!" I met this guy in Spain. He was a Romanian model. He was by far the most beautiful man I had ever seen, but an asshole in every other way. I saw him outside a bar and gave him a once over. He stared back at me and then followed my friend and I down the street. I was startled that he followed me and while I was looking back at him I stumbled over a dancer and into another bar. He kissed a girl on the cheek, who was actually his girlfriend, and then came and found me. This guy was, in general, thoughtless. He took me outside behind the bar and kissed me and then took me to the park and finger fucked me. I was moaning out loud because I couldn't help it. People were walking by and I didn't care. It was so public and I was having a lot of fun. We had a three-day affair. We were at his apartment and he wanted to keep it quiet, saying he wanted to be respectful to his roommates, but I didn't want to censor myself. He insisted on doing it without a condom, and called me a child in Spanish if I wanted him to wear one. Doing it without a condom made it intense, but yet again I couldn't come. I didn't orgasm with him once. What made this experience a great was not the sex, but because I was alone in a foreign country and did what I wanted, how I wanted, without worrying about what others thought. There was no shame, it was extremely liberating. I met this beautiful stranger and had some lingering body issues, but I put that aside and just went for it and have never felt sexier."

Artist interpretation: Her orgasms may be elusive sometimes, but Ashley is a very sensual person. Her orgasm, represented by the red ball in the middle of her portrait, is central but somewhat secluded from other aspects of her portrait. The sensual energy of the red and purple permeate the rest of her portrait and inject warmth into an otherwise cool painting. I represented her lovers in black- they're almost a garnish on her blossoming sexuality. And the black lines (lovers) never quite reach the red circle (her orgasm). There's a kind of isolated quality to her experience, but I interpreted her energy as becoming more and more liberated, so the composition radiates from the middle outwards.

Cary's Orgasm



Cary's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 30"

Favorite colors: "Muted colors as opposed more vivid ones, blues, greens, browns, grays, but a vivid yellow and red, a kaleidoscope."

"Thinking about it, there are orgasms where I masturbate, orgasms with someone I'm close to, and orgasms with someone I'm not close. Each of those are very, very different. I could go through a whole litany with you here, but think I'll go over the ones where I really have a close connection. In terms of that and thinking about the orgasm, there's a number of avenues to attain it. Basically, I try to leave as much free and open as I can, so I'm not caught up in some odd fetish to get off, rather some healthy interchange. It's important to me to have my partner feel the same and perhaps share the rare moment where you both attain the peak moment simultaneously. That being said, I think it's much easier for a female; women can have multiple orgasms and I am unable to. It's in the same form, but I can't come and then come again. I think it's important for me that my partner, if I care about the person, experience pleasure. Their experiencing pleasure heightens my experiencing pleasure. It's really important for me to

approach each sexual experience as a new one, because otherwise it will become routinized. Whether it's with the same person or with another person, it becomes more fertile and full of possibility. Ezra Pound's admonition was, "To make it new!" It's easier said than done though, right?

This conversation has really revived Reich for me. In terms of the experience, thinking about Wilhelm Reich and the whole idea of entering the really powerfully charged field, there is a real release of energy. I can't quantify or explain it in terms of coming, however, I know sometimes I'll wake up in the middle of the night with a hard-on and will have to jerk off in order to get back to sleep and release the tension. With another person you feel like you're entering this kind of primal zone, you feel like you're going to this portion of your brain where you're reverting back to a more primitive form. Thinking about that, you obviously possess the potential for creating life when engaging in the sexual act, which is a very powerful thing. You're in a powerful zone! It leads me to think there's some Darwinian notion, like God or nature attached, an incredible amount of pleasure there to ensure the survival of our species. On a personal note, I do feel a really incredible energy release, on a genital level, my cock is spurting and this goes into another human being. You're trying to really get some force behind it to reach the egg, it's an involuntary thing, you're giving yourself over to something unconscious force. Many people are so blocked up and too scared to make it happen.

Gary Snyder has this one thought that resonates for me: "To gain the self, you must lose the self." Having the ability to give yourself over to this powerful, involuntary release can really allow you to gain some insight into evolving the self. Obviously, control is a really powerful thing, and in society today, control is a major element, with the government, relationships, work... it's scary! To have the ability to enter a situation where you're going to give yourself over to something you don't control reveals some mastery, some level of self awareness. To enter the situation with a "come what may" attitude, this experience that two human beings will have, it's not predetermined- I'm there with this person and hopefully you're going to be so engaged that ultimately it's going to lead to you giving yourself over to the experience and through that you'll come away from that with a greater awareness of yourself. Incredible!

There is the idea of moving the energy up through the chakras, but I'm content with it remaining in the genitals. I can think of situations where I've come with another person or I've fallen asleep after climaxing or falling asleep or grunts, groans, moans, or screams, it's about making a real connection with another person. They respond to something you say, it could be a command or sound. In terms of life, I do see that pattern where as soon as I met somebody and made love I lost interest, it's easy to fool yourself. After the first time, how do you keep the sense of tension, continue to make it build? With every person it's going to be a new experience, you're there with this person and you've got an incredible opportunity. Beyond your own pleasure, when you're bringing this pleasure to

another human being you're really achieving something. All the elements involved in getting a sense of them, fuels you, and charges you, the whole dynamic is fluid. The other person could take control of you, there's a myriad of possibilities if you go into the situation open. I do find language can really open the doors and allow you to get to these incredible places that you're not going to get to any other way. With words you can establish an incredible bond. The whole state of energy is liminal and transforming. You think about those even more dramatic transformations where spirit becomes flesh, and when you're in those moments you have the opportunity (although you could stay on the straight and narrow and have a suburban life) to lose yourself and lose control. The trick is somehow reaching a point between the extremes where you can live a creative life and feel alive in the moment."

Artist interpretation: Cary is a man who has a real appreciation for nature, and the natural way of being. His portrait is like a force of nature, pushing and pulling, flailing out of control, yet retaining its composure. I wanted to encapsulate that idea in his portrait by using primarily earth tones and organic shapes that kind of support and feed off of each other. Although Cary definitely engages his mind in his approach in a sexual situation, the pleasure he experiences during orgasm remains in his genital area. And because he is "content" if it stays there, there is a grayish blue bar at the top of the canvas that implies that the pleasure is below. The coiling blue/ black and green/ black forms toward the bottom of the composition represent the masculine energy and the ovarian shaped green/ gray/ brown forms represent the feminine energy, and the dynamic combination of these elements brings about the tension that allows one to both lose, and gain, the self. There is a tension in the middle between these energies, represented by light gray, that is being released outward. From this tension of uniting energies comes both the loss of environment but the newness of experience. The bright red and yellow areas are intended to add moments of heightened intensity and represent opportunities for psychic growth.

Chris' Orgasm



Chris' Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 40" x 30"

Favorite colors: "I'm very fond of blue. In particular a deep dark rich blue called "glossy sea blue," a color used on some WWII planes, and the clear blue of the sky at high altitudes. I also the jet black of the night sky over the ocean punctuated with bright white stars on a moonless night, Sante Fe red, and the brilliant oranges and mauves of a sunrise or sunset."

"There's a lot more to our being than most of us are able to acknowledge. I'm coming to the conclusion that there is probably a universal energy. There was a time when I was younger where it was about the physical act and releasing the gratification I got from that. But I've grown beyond that, and it's absolutely not about the ejaculation for the guy and physical pleasure for the girl. I had my first sexual experience right before I was twenty-one, and would have done things a lot of things differently if I had known a tenth of what I know now! I can't say there was a defining moment but I've evolved a lot in the last thirty years. I've come to believe that orgasm is the sensation you feel when a window is opened between yourself and the energy of your partner and/or the energy of the universe.

The opening of a channel between you and the universe and your partner allows you and your partner to lose yourselves in the moment and be a couple in an

intensely powerful way. Achieving that kind of union is rare, but its pursuit is absolutely worthwhile and hence, I've got a lot more to learn. I believe there are those who really understand that feeling and are able to summon it at will. But I also believe there are multiple paths to open the window of your personal energy and that of others.

I have felt sensations of joy, elation, and oneness not only in sexual union, but also in some instances while flying, riding horses, and roping cattle, which are not sexual at all. At a ranch roping clinic there was a oneness I began to achieve with this one particular horse where he could kind of read my mind. The feeling I got when I rode my first calf and the achievement of being one with this horse and accomplishing something was so exciting I had a release of energy where the energy just flowed. I don't know how to differentiate this feeling from the center of my being and the sexual pleasure of my genitalia. It's things like these that tell us there's a lot more to it than a physical act.

I don't know how it is for women, and as much as I love sex, it's much more gratifying when you've got something in common with your partner. Not that being with a stranger wasn't a whole lot of fun when I was a kid, there was just a lot of emptiness afterwards. I think that had to do with exchanging energy only with the universe and not with your partner. I believe every individual is responsible for their achievement of orgasm. What works for one person won't necessarily work for another. Each individual has to guide their partner in achieving their own pleasure and it's not fair to expect the other person to know how to give you pleasure. You have to be at peace with yourself. It's not necessary to have an orgasm but it's a whole lot better when you are at peace with yourself.

Sex is a very primal urge that's been around for many millennia. If we lose that, I think we will cease to exist. I do believe we have gotten too far from nature and we have lost touch with our spiritual selves as a society. It is interesting that some of the users of some of the highest technology have found some of that spirituality as they have left the earth and set foot on the moon. Edgar Mitchell comes to mind. He has publicly stated he has found something beyond our physical world. It gets very very intense and there's something that horse trainers talk about and that is "being present," living in the moment. When I'm about to achieve orgasm I'm extremely present and the rest of the world doesn't exist. I've had partner's tell me "hey, you're supposed to be happy, smile!" because my face is contorted in agony, but it's from the intensity of the energy surging through me in that instant.

The recent heart attack has caused me to be less inhibited and talk about sexuality and being alive. After I got a chance to talk to the doctor I asked him about the three things worrying me; my concerns were in this order: will I be able to have sex again? Can I fly again? And am I going to be okay? It's intensified my desire to live well and has added intensity to my being. I'm very grateful I have a

second chance to live life and I'm living more intensely in part because I've realized how fragile life is."

Artist interpretation: I took a risk with this painting by not strictly adhering to his preferred set of colors. For some reason I kept gravitating toward a more vibrant pallet, it felt appropriate for him. It could be metaphorical, like through the darkness of the "jet black" sky springs forth this renewed vivacity. I got this sense of rebirth and chose to represent this renewed sense of life via the butterfly-like form exploding out of the middle. Using the idea of a butterfly also fit with his love of flying and also his realization of how "fragile life is." There is a lot of blue in this painting and I thought it was appropriate because he talked about the importance of being at peace with oneself and blue is a very relaxing color. The purple and light green colors represent his partner. The white and black strips on the right and left sides of the canvas signify DNA, the basic building blocks which code life. I wanted to have his energy intimately nestled in between the two strands to show how Chris has literally transformed his attitude about life and is moving toward this new direction, essentially he's cracked open the code and is re-writing it. The squiggly lines in the middle also represent the opening up of the channel between him, his partner and the universe.

Dan's Orgasm



Dan's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 30"

Favorite colors: "Blues, oranges, grays, not really bright."

"I would compare it to a sunset over the ocean. Wow. There is no other place I'd rather be. It's the perfect situation. It's an explosion of adrenaline and good feelings. It's a really hot feeling but at the same time cool. It's complete relaxation, but also an intense, hot experience. I feel it in the base of my neck, and probably my arms. My vision goes black right as I'm coming. Even when I have my contacts in, right as I start coming my vision goes blank. Touch is heightened for sure throughout sex. Maybe my memory goes too- like I can't think of the orgasms associated with the best sex I've had. I can remember the positions and what was said, but not the orgasms. I won't get off unless I know my partner is having just as good a time as me. I don't moan, but if the girl likes dirty talk I'll do it. When it comes to sex, it's way better when it's spontaneous. I don't like planning it out."

Artist's interpretation: Dan is a little conservative, and so is his portrait; unlike some of the other portraits, his has more uniform lines. There's a central cavity in

which much of his energy is contained and is released from. This area represents his torso, and the energy shooting out the sides and up signifies where he feels pleasure (arms and neck). The places where the white fades to black represent the moment where he comes and his vision goes black. When you meet Dan, he looks like he could break you in half, but he's a gentle person, so I made a lot of the edges rounded and used soft colors.

David's Orgasm



David's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

Favorite colors: "Gray- philosophically the median path of life, green, blue."

"Different situations prove different outcomes. I wouldn't say I'm loud, but I wouldn't say I'm quiet either. I feel like there's all the tension that builds up, like it's pressurized. I think I hold my breath, or I stop breathing in the moment. It's like blowing up a balloon and then letting it go flying around the room. Afterwards I'm shot, everything that made it an interesting thing is gone. I want to lie down. Masturbation is more intense, but being with someone else is much more satisfying. When I masturbate I could go right back to my routine, but when it's with someone else, I have to sit down afterwards. In that moment though, it's odd, I have to close my eyes. Everything goes black. I don't recall feeling anything at that moment. Obviously it's something that makes me come back for more."

Artist interpretation: This is one of the few portraits where I was a little confused by the result. To me, the painting felt like David (he was my friend and I knew him

pretty well), but it didn't necessarily correspond with his words. At the time he was taking lots of photographs of buildings at night, so I think that contributed to the dark and industrial feel of the painting. One can get a sense of the tension building in the lower right corner of the canvas as well as in the lines shooting out from underneath the slanted cloud-like shape. The pressure from the tension moves upwards as little "balloons" and as the pink column on the left side, which erupts in the top left corner. In the top right corner is the climax where he closes his eyes and everything goes black- there's almost a disconnect between his head and his body at that point.

Glenda's Orgasm



Glenda's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 36"

Favorite colors: "Fall colors; I'm all about the lower chakras."

"I am sedate in everyday life; sex is the area where the more extremes come out. I'm not very serious about sex, it's just a hoot! I've been known to laugh in the middle of it. I'm very vocal, and goofy, there are some weird sounds. It's like having dinner at an Indian restaurant, you bring your own flavor to the table and pass it around. Some combinations work. There are many different kinds of orgasms and mini-orgasms. I call them "almost orgasms." They are centralized in the genitals. They're kinda fun, kinda fluttery. It's like riding the wave of an orgasm. There's a quiet intensity and something really powerful about not going over the edge. There's a tension, like a rolling sensation, and a thundering power that keeps going and going.

Solitary orgasms are really quite powerful. I use technology, I can get more for the time. Masturbation is about letting the body rip. It's just to get off- the point is to have an orgasm. Sex with a partner is more holistic; it's a whole body experience. Kundalini - really letting it loose and yelling about it. My head is always busy, [but when I'm with someone else] I completely lose the ability to speak and think coherently. I love being in touch with my partner. I like the feeling of someone inside me. It just rocks! It's really powerful. I'm so energized afterwards. My body is capable of things that a lot of people would be freaked out at. I can come more than once, and the pleasure builds with subsequent orgasms. The moment of penetration is orange. It's like a snake-like movement.

The best orgasm I had was when I was hog-tied and being fingered from behind. It was like a half-hour orgasm. I was along for the ride, and there was a powerful sense of being out of control. I could never do that to myself. Everything gets filtered through the pleasure center. I realize things afterwards. It would have to be abrupt to be distracting. Group sex is distracting; I can't focus on any one person enough."

Artist interpretation: Glenda's is the largest portrait I've made so far, and is one of the brightest and most complex. She lives an exciting life and her sex life is thriving too, her life is kind of an orgasm. I tried to capture some of the different situations she talked about by using the left side of the canvas for her solo sessions (represented by the orange curls), the middle for when she is with a partner (represented by the abstracted orange figures- one of them is her in a hog-tied position), and the right side for the chaos of an orgy (orange lines flailing every which-way). I used orange to represent her because she said the "moment of penetration is orange" - it's the moment where she's connecting sexually. And I used primal, rhythmic inspired shapes to convey how in touch she is with her primal self. I incorporated those shapes with rolling, "snake-like" movements, and the occasional explosion of an "almost orgasm" (represented in gray and red) moving outwards. The most explosive and intense part of sex for her is when she has "a powerful sense of being out of control," so I splattered paint in the area where she is hog-tied. This painting sat in my room for a week or two before I figured out that it needed the splatters- without them her portrait would have been way too controlled. I remember getting out a stool and standing above the painting with tubes of paint thinking "this could destroy everything you've worked so hard for!" and then saying "ah, screw it," and squirting paint everywhere. It was awesome.

Jen's Orgasm



Jen's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

Favorite colors: "Royal blue, maroon, wine color, light blue, red."

"It's always with someone else for me. It's very VERY intimate. Sex is the closest way you can know someone; people are so vulnerable. I love it. What's an orgasm like to me? He he. It's kind of like tense- all the positive and negative things combine and are then released. I'm closer to cold physically, at the moment. I prefer to be loud. The good ones are long-lasting and it's best when it happens at the same time with the guy. That's when they last the longest. My toes curl up, I always feel it in my toes. It goes up my legs and into my center. When I climax it's in my core. During it my senses shut down because I'm so internally focused, even touch disappears, but afterwards my senses are heightened and I'm so sensitive. Orgasms are one of the most human feelings that we have, I don't even know how to describe it. Humans function on a level where we don't get to feel that way that often so to share that with someone is the coolest thing ever. [It's] very primal. We've been doing it for thousands and thousands of years. It's what we rely on. It's the closest thing to magic."

Artist interpretation: Magic doesn't work without mystery, so the middle, or internal part, of her portrait is somewhat ambiguous with the shading almost providing a mask for the composition and movement underneath. Surrounding the shading are rich blues, turquoise, red, black and white. I wanted these opposing colors to blend together in the center to show how the "positive and negative things combine and... Then release." The red curl in the bottom right corner of the canvas highlights how she always feels pleasure in her toes; the red then moves up and to the left, injecting life into the core.

Joe's Orgasm



Joe's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 12" x 36"

Favorite colors: "When I was sixteen they were black, orange, green like a healthy grass green, and yellow, in that order."

"People go through a number of stages in their lives, and unfortunately, it is only when someone gets old that they really begin to appreciate that saying about youth being wasted on the young. For me, orgasms have gone from a sport, a necessity of life, a source of entertainment, to a cherished reward for having lived a healthy enough life that I can still have them.

A half century ago, the sexual revolution of the 1960's was nearly a decade away; Vietnam, "the pill," free speech and skirts above the knee would not become part of our universe for four years; abortions for any cause were a Class "A" felony tantamount to manslaughter; gays and lesbians were at risk of imprisonment if found in a facility where alcohol was available. The slightest hint of homosexuality extinguished careers, ruined marriages, prompted religious excommunication and rendered the victim a social leper. Stakes were high, harsh

and reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition.

One beautiful Spring morning, without a word to anyone, I left my algebra class, walked over the Golden Gate bridge and went North as far as I could before the tunnels squeezed away the shoulder of the roadway. As a 195 lb. 6'4" testosterone driven macho athlete, the walk was easy, but came to an abrupt end below a sign warning against hitchhikers and pedestrians. Having been a runaway before, nothing was going to dampen this pursuit of adventure. Yet, twelve hours of standing there with my thumb out and a couple of big dives into the culvert to avoid the highway patrol had begun to take its toll. As such, I was totally grateful when this short fat ugly little man with thick glasses and cigar pulled up and asked if I wanted a ride. My sense of delight was only surpassed when he asked if I cared to drive his new Mercury automobile. What sixteen year old with a suspended drivers license for drag racing would not be overjoyed at such an opportunity?

Once behind the wheel, it wasn't long before the fellow, who introduced himself as "Tom" advised that even though he was only going to Santa Rosa some fifty miles north, he "worked on the docks," was "dead tired" and desperately needed to take a nap. Tom's "nap" began innocently enough as he rested his head down on the bench seat. It wasn't long, however, until his right hand accidentally flopped onto my thigh. With my elbow, I shoved his hand back off my leg. In what probably seemed like an eternity to him, and a nano-second to me, his hand was back again, this time with his fingers just below my testicles. With my elbow, I shoved his arm off my thigh, and ever so tenderly- extremely tenderly, he was soon be extending his fingers slightly further under my balls. At this point, I began having those thoughts about what to do now. Do I just stop the car and beat the shit out of this guy and then stand beside the highway all night?

Overwhelmed by my situation, I did nothing. By the last San Rafael exit, his whole hand was under my testicles. With the tight Levi's I was wearing, I didn't realize what a firm grip he had. That is, until I again used my elbow to shove his hand away. This time, his hand didn't move. Rather, he tightened the grip to just one notch below inflicting serious pain. I applied a little pressure with my elbow, and he gripped a little tighter. The message was clear. While not a word had been said throughout Tom's "nap", the heavy silence was broken when he asked politely if I minded that his hand was there. I said "No": meaning "No, I don't want your hand there." Tom took it as "No, I didn't care," so his hand stayed. Little did I realize that I had passed through a threshold from which there was no putting it in reverse.

The style in those days called for very tight Levi's and buttons instead of a zipper for the fly. I was in style. By driving with my thighs as wide as I could in those tight Levi's, I was able to maneuver the heavy thick denim away from my flesh. In my juvenile naivety I rationalized that the space between my Levi's and my rather tight brief shorts would isolate me from be touched. For what seemed like hours,

that strategy worked well. Tom felt the air between my Levi's and underpants while I chalked off each tenth of a mile closer to Santa Rosa. I was rather proud of myself in that we reached Santa Rosa uneventfully. When I asked which exit to take, Tom replied that I should just go a little further. As my strategy was working I continued driving just under the speed limit. I was not willing to risk getting stopped by the highway patrol without a driver's license. Suddenly, however, as we passed the last exit for Santa Rosa, I felt the bottom of my five button Levi's come undone. It merely exposed the vacuum of air outside my shorts and I recall thinking that as long as I don't get hard, one undone button at the bottom is no problem. My brain, however, is not always on the same page with my body! When I'm told not to think of a red corvette; guess what, the only car I can think of is a red corvette.

That spiritual betrayal that each of us seems to have buried deep in our psyche chose this night of all nights to let me know who was boss. Other than the pressure initially on my testicles, Tom had not touched me. But I felt myself getting an erection. I could not have that for a multitude of reasons on all conceivable levels so consciously began thinking about all the non-sexual things in my life, i.e., the time I tried out for being an alter-boy, my grandmother who I loved dearly and would never want to disappoint under any circumstances, my grandfather who used to beat me, my uncles who were the epitome of bar-room brawlers, and I saved the big gun for last: Mother. What would she think? What would my friends think if they knew I was getting hard? What would my girlfriend think? Would she feel betrayed too since we'd committed to "save" ourselves for each other when the time was right? I paid attention to the sound of the wind, consciously was aware of colors, the black of night penetrated by yellow lines and signs along the highway, visions of grey as the scenery whizzed by.

By this point, I concluded "to hell with getting nabbed by the highway patrol!" If only I went fast enough, surely a highway patrol office would stop us and I'd be rescued. With that thought in mind, I pressed the accelerator down and deliberately exceeded all rational bounds of speed for that shiny new vehicle on that dark two-lane highway. I can recall thinking that if I can just scare myself, that will cure any "erection problems" if I don't die in the process. Besides, if I died, so what? I was due to be "damaged goods" for life anyway. Tom seemed oblivious to my plight. No matter how fast I drove, he didn't look up, didn't change positions, didn't vary the pace and rhythm. Somehow he had discovered my rhythm, my pace, my heart beat, my internal sense of timing. It was like those rare, once in a life time experiences, when dancing with a partner and you just click. Every step, every motion is choreographed perfectly to fit neatly with your partner and your partner with you.

There were still a couple of buttons to go, and a belt, but that second button was traumatic. Not only could I feel the pressure against the underside of my penis, but I realized that it felt good! That was a shocker, big time. Did that mean that I too was a "queer", a "homo", a "fag"? As much as that idea disgusted me,

offended my sense of values, and was just plain repulsive, I still liked what he was doing. At that point, I decided not to worry so much about what that implied and concentrated on getting as many miles up that highway as I could. We passed Healdsburg, the Russian River, Asti winery, the logging mills, and gas stations as one striking blur of light. With that reasonably straight road, I was going as fast as that new car would go, all the while, with Tom rubbing a now almost pulsating penis. To still try and salvage my identity, my sense of internal integrity, and what I considered the core essentials of my then life, I recall trying to distract Tom with jokes. Tom said nothing, and then, as though it was an almost highly anticipated shock or surprise, the third button popped open.

At this point, I knew I had a problem, but not an insurmountable one as long as my penis stayed in my underpants. Ever since military school, I had worn very tight briefs and try as he might, Tom could not get through the double cloth with heavy stitched borders. I remember feeling good about that at one point. Finally, a piece of armor that could not be penetrated. But as caravans of thought go, the next one was "but my penis deserves it!" Even though Tom could not pry my penis out of those tight white briefs, he didn't have to. Almost without knowing it, I recall reaching down and somehow the next button miraculously unsnapped, exposing my penis. I put my right hand down to help extricate what at that point was psychically, emotionally, logically, and physically, my lifeline to sexual relief.

It occurred to me, however, that: 1) I knew what was going to happen, and almost couldn't wait for it; and, 2) that the more miles I could get up that highway before it happened, the better. With that thought in mind, I slowed to a reasonable speed, all the while Tom kept that rhythmic pace of his thumb up and down. It felt good, I wanted that feeling to last forever, I didn't care who thought what, I was in a tranquil state of high intense sexual arousal.

Before long, the pragmatism of accumulating miles toward my goal, yielded to the then much anticipated state of bliss. With the head of my penis protruding up toward the steering wheel, I began stroking it as if masturbation was the order of the day. Even though it was something I'd done a million times, I did not have the rhythm of Tom. That, however, became a moot point as he brushed my hand away and took the head of my penis into his mouth. It was almost as though some invisible force were sucking all the air from my lungs and chest. I felt light headed, I felt relaxed, I felt my shoulders drop with a sense of undetected tension suddenly being released. I recall trying to breath and wondering if I had the energy to suck in air. Tom reached his middle finger back between my rectum and the beginning of my scrotum and briskly massaged it forward. With that motion, came a second wave of warm voluptuous ejaculation.

Before I could move to catch it from staining my trousers or the seats of his car, Tom's mouth was there again to resuscitate my penis from drowning. I was, for any and all purposes, in a state of total bliss. I was relaxed. Colors had never before been so vibrant. The stars had never been brighter, it was almost as if I

were looking at them from atop Pike's Peak on clear night. Even the temperature was accommodating. My penis felt pleasantly warm, and with all it had gone through, it felt clean and healthy. With the windows down, I could smell the sweet aroma of grapes mid-season and a very gentle massage of my face and arm with the breeze from driving a moderate speed. I had almost forgotten about Tom. He wasn't quite so ugly as when I'd first seen his face, the glasses were gone, as was the cigar, and I detected a faint odor of after-shave lotion. To me, he seemed to be pretty normal for a guy who had just swallowed some mouthfuls of cum from a high testosterone donor.

While I'd never tasted sperm or the ejaculation juices, I could only imagine that it was horrible, slimy, and right up there with raw oysters on the half shell. The whole idea of how somebody could swallow that, and then come back for me, was beyond me. So, when Tom announced "pull over here, it won't take us long," a bolt of sheer terror shocked me right out of my state of blissful delight to one of horror in anticipation of something terrible. I had no idea what it was, but I knew it was terrible. Was he going to break my arms? Was he going to try to make me suck his dirty little penis (I imagined him to have a short fat, smelly little prick with sweaty black kinky pubic hair)? The trip from fear, alarm and concern had been long and eventful, and the transition from total bliss and contentment to "what horrible thing is going to happen to me now" took only seconds and was indescribably pregnant with the prospects for pain and permanent damage.

Alas, I was rescued. Just as Tom said to "pull over" and I started for the shoulder of the highway, I saw the red light of a highway patrol cruiser. Never before or since, have I been so delighted to have the presence of the police.

They gave me a ride in back seat of their patrol car to the next town North. Tom turned around to drive south, and that's the end of the story. In the nearly five decades since this incident, I recall it vividly, right down to the odors, the sounds, the colors, the temperature, the sense of being drained, etc. Part of that sense of "shame" stemmed from the fact that that was the best orgasm I've ever had. I've been masturbating since I was in the second grade. My mother had an old Electrolux vacuum cleaner and it did just wonders! While the vacuum cleaner was fast, efficient, and absolutely delightful, it was never as good as that night with the creep. I think it was the anticipation of it taking so damn long."

Artist Interpretation: This story was so horrifying and captivating, I felt like I was there with them in the car. This is one of the more literal portraits. I represented Joe's energy in green and Tom's energy in orange. There is tension, a kind of a push and pull, between them as they travel further and further along the black road winding up the canvas. In the beginning, at the bottom of the canvas, orange hasn't entered the equation yet, but it quickly penetrates the composition. The black "tunnel" at the bottom signifies Joe hitchhiking on the side of the road, it also represents the point of no return. The yellow background is the physical situation, which takes place mostly in and around Joe's pants. As they set out on

the road, Joe and Tom are in harmony, just two guys that are supposedly going to the same place. Tom offers to let Joe drive and he is happy to oblige. Then things get weird when Tom starts to make a move on Joe- see the sharp turn halfway up the canvas on the left. Joe is definitely taken off guard. He tries to "protect" himself by putting barriers between himself and Tom but Tom manages to penetrate through them and make the situation unexpectedly pleasurable- notice the green and orange entanglement halfway up the canvas on the right. The five yellow circles outlined in black represent all the buttons popping off Joe's Levi's but also the signs and markers along the side of the road. As Joe's erection bursts out of his pants Tom is there to receive it, and eventually Tom's energy overwhelms Joe's almost entirely as Joe relinquishes control. Joe has a fleeting moment of total relaxation before Tom proposes they "pull over" and that is where the road ends. When Joe talked about this experience I didn't get the sense that he had any animosity about it or Tom, but the memory had definitely stuck with him because he remembered every detail. I don't know how much it effected his sexual development, but from everything else he told me I think the very accepting attitude he developed toward sexuality was greatly influenced by that night.

John and Suzanne



John and Suzanne, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 40"

John's favorite colors: "Black, red, purple."

Suzanne's favorite colors: "Black, red, blue, silver."

John said: "I was thinking that having sex was so right... but doing it straight away might go all wrong... I was so nervous... I only wanted to please her so I would not lose her. I was anxious to get to the end even though I enjoyed every second of it. I know I shouldn't be driven towards the final orgasm alone, but this was our first and in some ways mine too. I wanted us to have this bond of energy, of openness and of immortality together. I was so desperate for it as it sealed us together. I was very conscious of myself but on occasion I drifted away in my own bubble of ecstasy, making me feel utterly invincible. I began to feel so powerful and so dangerous to everyone and everything but to her... but as I felt the very final force and heat in me building, my focus suddenly changed and was entirely on her. I became very aware of every part of her and I wanted to see everything.

There were no barriers or boundaries at this point. I connected to her in every way, trying as much as I could to be a physical part of her. I was aware she was happy and enjoying it, wanting herself to make me orgasm... I stared straight into her eyes; I could not do otherwise and braced myself for what was coming. At that point I think it's hard for anyone to describe; I was strangely acute to the area inside her, almost letting my conscious mind flow to that very part of my body as I now lost control. My body literally exploded in every part as a wave of energy from my center. Whilst expanding and contracting at lighting speed, my muscle strength boosted to ten fold of what it was. I tensed to try and control the primal wild beast instinct, which took hold of my body and soul and mind. The movement of us and our bodies was now entirely instinctive.

In a way, I had lost complete control. The feeling was so great that my mind has difficulty accepting it as reality. I held her protectively under my body as a dome of power and energy; I am the epicenter of a nuclear blast personified and I feel like I have the same capabilities. It doesn't last long, but neither short. It's a small taste of heaven, which the gods left in us to remind us of what it felt like, some believe. Later it dies down and we become human again, but still as one. We have gone to a place together, an unearthly place yet in a very natural way. It felt so right and so liberating, my mind free of inhibitions and doubt. We drew each other close, eyes still connected."

Suzanne said: "The first time he and I made love I was weary because I wasn't sure how we would react to each other. I haven't had a lot of sex; physically it's never felt that amazing to me, it's always been better psychologically. At first I was a little insecure about my body, but I was very confident about my feelings for him. I so badly wanted it to be perfect for both of us. With the fluttering of a million butterflies I stood by his bed, thinking about whether we were bold enough to do what we both wanted to. It was like shaking hands, but with our bodies. Although he and I didn't know each other that well, I knew we were following our hearts. I guess we weren't that nervous, but we wanted it to be good and we didn't know each other's tastes.

I remember him being on top of me for most of the time and I was hugging him with my legs. We were looking each other straight in the eyes. I felt like we wanted to know each other in every possible way. We wanted to give ourselves completely but parts of ourselves were still holding out. He had difficulty keeping his erection and I had difficulty letting him see me in my entirety. I felt less vulnerable as I became more comfortable with our bodies together. Towards the end I opened up and started to let the primal urges take over. I wanted to come with him but it's not easy for me to orgasm strictly from intercourse. He came first, and then I did afterwards."

Artist interpretation: This one was funny because their stories weren't necessarily consistent. On the other hand it made it kind of difficult to paint. John's energy is

more dominant so I represented his "dome of power" in red on top of Suzanne, who was represented in the aqua color and blue. His orgasm is more striking with intense physical feelings while hers is more diminutive and aloof. The forms that bend downwards represent the "difficulty keeping his erection" and the dots represent their chemistry. There is a lot of black in the painting because they were talking about their first time together and there was a lot of mystery, a lot of unknowns.

Josh's Orgasm



Josh's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Brown, blue, green, muted colors."

"It's a disembodiment of self; the being comes unhinged within yourself. It's the moment of synthesis; no boundaries. I get the sensation of being spread out. During climax, there's a physical cessation, and absolutely nothing occurs. It's at this time that I feel most disconnected. It's like the deepest breath. You know when you've done a lot of nitrous, you start to die. You're detached. You have the slightest, most tenuous grasp of the world around you. There's a hiss, but nothing, just darkness. Then there's a slow bleeding back in of reality. I feel joyful and thankful. The pleasure is mostly in my chest, my heart, and it comes out through my head. Touch is magnified, and the skin all over my body is warm. My hearing and vision decrease. I'm quiet. Sensation is internalized; the detached sensation is contained within the body. It goes from an experience you're sharing with someone else to something totally individual."

Artist interpretation: Josh is a very mellow guy, which I think is reflected in his portrait. The composition is "spread out," much like how he feels. The blue dot in the upper right area of the canvas represents the moments between inhale and exhale of "deepest breath." The blue lines encircling the dot are like contour lines on a topography map, and they can be either a peak or depression depending on how you interpret what he says. There is nothing around him in this moment except black "darkness." The pleasure that's coming out through his head is

shown in brown. There's a little blue upside-down heart dancing in the middle of the canvas and some abstract movements of legs and arms overlapping it in the aqua and blue. There is a lot of ambiguity because he feels detached in the moment.

Kane's Orgasm



Kane's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"

Favorite colors: "I don't have a favorite color. I love color combinations - blue and orange is my favorite."

"It's such a paradox for me because it's mentally wanting something, wanting something, and then checking out once I get it. Physically it's a peak state almost like tension and relaxation hit a harmonic frequency. Mentally I relax where I physically get tense. Sometimes I feel like it's the last day of a vacation- I'm the most relaxed but I know it's over tomorrow.

There's a sadness that occurs because I know that so many things are held in anticipation and then when it's actually there I know a part of me is gone and it's like I want to hold that anticipation forever because when I have an orgasm it's like giving up. A part of me gets a little depressed because I feel like I gave into impulse. It's like a slide, if I climb higher it will be more fun but at some point I want to give into the fun. Afterwards I feel like a part of me has died. There was a time that I could hold my orgasm and not ejaculate and pull it in and up to my

heart. And when I let it go it wasn't merely a tension I let go of, it was a ripple felt throughout the entire body. The pleasure itself was felt in the belly but the ripples were felt throughout the entire body. Afterwards I think a lot of guys feel tired, but to me it's more intimate than that. The pressure that's supporting my heart is gone. Physically I feel this spot right under my heart that's usually full is now empty and it almost burns.

Now it's different because my wife and I are so afraid of having more babies. I'm so concerned that even the littlest bit will make a baby that I pull out and have it done with as soon as possible. I know my wife is less satisfied and I know I'm less satisfied. It's like the wild versus the civilized, or instinctual desire versus conditioning. The wild part wants millions of babies and sex because I want to spread my seed but then the civilized part of me goes, "No, you've made a commitment, you can't support more children." I want so badly to let the wild be free but the thought of the consequences keeps it caged. I feel caged, but at the same time I feel like my cage has forced me to perceive freedom in a way that's closer to the essence of myself.

Although I'm caged I feel I'm no longer dependent on seeking freedom externally, rather it's forced me to meet myself. It's like a majestic tiger which you can't let loose because you're afraid it's going to eat everybody. I think as a tiger it's somewhat comforting to know I'm caged because if I was let out, I'd eat them all and so I feel like this cage isn't really a cage but I keep myself there because if I got out and ate everyone there would be nothing left to experience. I will have eaten them all."

Artist interpretation: Kane, although a very liberated person, cannot express himself fully sexually because he is hindered by the situation he's in. Although he and his wife's relationship is positive, there is inhibition in the bedroom because of their fear of having more children. All this comes into play in his portrait. There is a general movement outward yet there is a trio of loops (responsibility to husband, wife, child) pulling him back in. His wife's energy is represented in the burgundy and orange ovary-like forms on the upper right side of the canvas. His energy, represented in blue, weaves its way between the "ovaries" like a slide but then juts out to the side because it knows what will happen if it keeps going. The spiral in the top left signifies the pleasure he feels from orgasm and the larger spiral in the lower middle signifies the pleasure he feels from meeting himself.

Katy's Orgasm



Katy's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Green- it's amazing, vibrant, and happy."

"Aside from the obvious good feelings, I think that I'm also really interested in biology and how the brain interacts with the body. It's like the reptilian brain; it feels very primal. I don't know how to put it into words. It's elusive- it's kind of like hunting. It's not like a lightening bolt, it's gentler than that. I think waves are probably the most effective way to describe my orgasms. It's elusive I guess, it still takes me at least half an hour to get there; it's worth it though. The orgasm itself is very primal, tribal, and going back to our collective past. We're becoming part of the same essence as everybody else. Ninety-nine percent of everyone can get to that point, and I think that's why I like it. It's something that unites everyone.

To get an orgasm it pretty much has to be me on top. When I'm by myself I usually lie on my stomach. Usually I have sex or masturbate in the morning because if it's at night I'd rather be sleeping. I've been masturbating since I was six, and I used to do it every day of the week but I haven't been doing it as much lately since I've been taking anti-depressants. I'm impossible to get off if I'm not

myself. I need to be in a deep committed relationship. I had a fuck buddy and I didn't feel like a person to him. I was never able to get off. Whenever we did have sex it was quiet, we'd just make out and have sex. It didn't work. I've had two long-term relationships in my life and the first one was horrible. If I didn't want to have sex with him it meant I didn't love him. Sex became a chore and that carried into my other relationships. It's like I'd rather please him than myself, which is just stupid. And, it goes against everything I believe! I want to be with someone who's worth my time. I feel like placing my feelings elsewhere allows me to think rationally in the presence of those around me."

Artist interpretation: The reptilian part of the mind reflects impulse and subconscious decision making, and that is where Katy's mind wants to be in the moment. The black shape in her portrait represents the limbic system, the reptilian brain is everything inside the limbic system. The small gold circle represents the mind and the large gold circle represents the body; they are connected because of her interest in the mind-body connection. There is some tension, or strain, on the connection between the mind and body (see the jagged lines) because the anti-depressants she is taking are affecting her libido in a negative way. This is also part of the reason why the greens are not very bright- her experience of orgasm has been dulled by physiological and psychological complications. Based on the experiences she discussed, her orgasm alone was better than her orgasm with others and the difficulties she had with others was not the same kind of difficulty she had on her own. Aside from the effect of medication, it seemed as though when she was by herself she could really enjoy the primal irrational part of her mind and there was no inhibition from her rational mind, whereas when she was with others she felt she had to dissociate herself from the irrational, which is where the tension arose. The last thing she said, "I feel like placing my feelings elsewhere allows me to think rationally in the presence of those around me," to me, communicated that she was having difficulty integrating the rational and irrational parts of her mind- probably because of the negative situations and disrespectful lovers she encountered.

Kelly's Orgasm



Kelly's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 48"

Favorite colors: "Cobalt, burgundy, eggplant."

"Orgasms are elusive. They're always evolving and changing. They've been different my whole life. I'm coaxing out something; this wild animal that's afraid to come out. I'm very warm usually, and my cheeks get flushed. If it's a good one, they start in my feet. My feet go numb. I'm very detached from them, it's like they're a separate entity that is not a part of me. I'm very masculine, meaning I'm a selfish orgasm-haver. I become closed when I have them, and I have to fantasize heavily (not even about the guy I'm with). I feel lots of pressure to have an orgasm. I don't have them like I used to, and I'm never after it. I'm after sex and sexuality but not the orgasm. It's such an afterthought! It takes a long time to get an orgasm and they're short too. The three to four seconds right before an orgasm are by far the best. I get a tingly numbness in my legs and muscle spasms in the back. I'm a busy thinker while it's happening; now it's such a mental thing. I love sex though. Being a good lover to someone else is what I care about the most, that's what gets me off and satisfies me. I love sensual

acts."

Artist interpretation: This portrait is one I think can really be read like a book. The burgundy line in the middle of Kelly's portrait which goes up through the middle of the two "labia" represents the length of time it takes to bring her to orgasm. The line starts at the bottom and is narrow because she said the good ones start at her feet and she doesn't have them like she used to. She'd rather focus on sex and sensuality, represented by the large labia. Atop the labia sits a female figure and behind her is a turquoise shadow of the woman, the "wild animal," which is afraid to come out. I chose to paint her in orange and red because they are warm colors that reflect the physical heat that she feels. The orgasm itself is scrunched up in the upper left as the red spikes on either side of the burgundy line. The spikes also represent the pressure she feels to have an orgasm- it's a mental rather than physical pressure. The dark purple form that encloses the top of the canvas represents her ovaries and pelvic area, and metaphorically, the closed feeling she gets when she has an orgasm. The blue and brown lines underneath the ovaries have an outward movement because of her desire to be a "good lover to someone else."

Kurt's Orgasm



Kurt's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 40"

Favorite colors: "Blue, black, yellow, silver."

"Even though the orgasm itself is only a few seconds, I get the greatest rush. I know an orgasm's approaching because I'll feel these waves of energy... it's like I'm immersed in these waves of energy! It's an anxious energy combined with a powerful force that creates a very complete physical feeling. I feel all my muscles in my upper body become warm and tense and then it's like BAM! It's one of the only times where I feel truly vulnerable, and I think that is what makes it so intense- the lack of hang-ups. There's all these levels of arousal I can go through and in that moment I get an extremely pleasurable euphoric sensation which gradually diminishes. The physical nature of what is happening almost overwhelms everything else that is happening. Ejaculating is the most important thing for me... it's like "here I am!"

Artist interpretation: Kurt's portrait is very literal. This is one of the few portraits which incorporated a figure, I did it in this portrait because Kurt talked quite a bit

about his physical sensations, saying "the physical nature of what is happening almost overwhelms everything else that is happening" and was "one of the only times where I feel truly vulnerable." He feels very uninhibited, like he has revealed his true self, in the moment. The layers of blue, gray, copper, and orange waves represent the "waves of energy" as well as the climactic ejaculation.

Lindsey's Orgasm



Lindsey's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 48" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Cerulean blue, phthalo blue, raw sienna, burnt umber, rose trylen, yellow ochre, sap green, jet black."

"Oh my God! Yes! My orgasms are amazing, like an earthquake within or an internal rocket launch! They are highly addictive, like crack to a crack head. The rush, the high I get from my climax has left me a victim in my addiction. I have often told people I love sex, and I do; but what has consumed me is the high I get when I cum. WOW! I wouldn't consider myself a sex addict, I mean we all have our vices, I do, however, find it difficult to keep my hand away from the flame. When I climax my mind is in its most blissful state. I am without thought and catapulted into euphoria. Sometimes I only see colors, other times I try to recall how I got to what happened to me and how I got there.

Spiritually it is the most intimate, peaceful, blissful place I can reach with my partner. It's the only shared ecstasy! Physically my body jerks and tingles. It's like a bottle rocket launched through my insides and exploded into my brain causing a quake to occur throughout my whole body. This is often accompanied by what I would like to explain as aftershocks, not unlike the miniature quakes that rolls beneath your feet right after an earthquake. The epicenter is somewhere between my root and sacral chakras. The initial quake sends a strong current to my crown. Many aftershocks follow. They reverberate from my epicenter to the top of my crown and to the tips of my toes, but the lingering shock penetrates deep into my root, sacral chakras, and flush through my thighs.

Orgasms vary in length depending on the connection as well as the lover and

lovemaking involved; it also depends on personal pleasure making. Masturbation usually results in short to medium length orgasms anywhere from twenty seconds to seven minutes. Orgasms with my partner or lover vary widely; slower and more sensual experiences with lovers have deeper connections and will deliver longer lasting orgasms. This can also be said about more energized passionate experiences where more repetitious movements are involved. The sexual experiences or engagements that are rough, fetish in nature, extremely erotic, or perhaps lazy, sloppy or more cuddly are the ones that are usually shorter and less frequent. It's all so relative to the unique energy shared between my lover and I, or myself alone.

My personal experience is infinitely selfish; I am a dreamer and love where my imagination takes me. However, when I masturbate my orgasms are never as long as the ones shared with intimate lovers. Neither sexual experience could compete with the other but neither could share the same room. I enjoy all my orgasmic experiences and would be at a loss if I weren't able to experience this one freedom in my life.

I already have an extreme sense of smell and taste, and when I orgasm it is amplified like a hundred times. I can smell tissues and organs; I can taste dirt, oil, and what you ate last week because they're in every pore and tissue. It's intense! Things that would inhibit my pleasure would be adverse taste or smell, extreme physical pain, inadequate equipment and/or inadequate lover.

Before the Big O I can be warm or cold, both can be tantalizing and both can send me into climatic shock! But when the orgasm releases I am warm, totally warm. Depending on whether the orgasm is in a series or the last of the series is the factor in feeling cold or warm, on the last release I always feel warm. In a series I can almost always feel warm but sometimes I feel cold and my pleasure is heightened and I become more energetic, with an increased awareness and alertness- this is when I am usually most excited about doing it again and again."

Artist interpretation: For Lindsey's portrait I had to juxtapose the cool and warm sensations on either side of the canvas, as well as her experiences with someone else versus alone as she notes the difference between the experiences in her interview. On the right side are her and her partner, almost like a yin and yang, wrapped up in each other's embrace. He is yellow, she is underneath him in black. There are bursts of yellow close to the middle of the painting- that's where there is the potential to have multiple orgasms as a couple. The middle area is where the warm and cool areas meet, where the orgasm is at its most intense, and where the rush of energy is released. Then there is a fleshy pink shape on the left that barely resembles a leg- at the end it curls in on itself, which is representative of both her feelings of pleasure in the tips of her toes and the selfish nature of her experience by herself. Just to the left of that are the aftershocks that she feels following her orgasms. There are some really sharp

contrasts and bright combinations of colors mixed in with moments of softness and tenderness as Lindsey seems to embody both.

Lyrad's Orgasm



Lyrad's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30"

Favorite colors: "Orange, blue and red."

"I can say for sure that what I believed growing up no longer applies to me. I am not convinced that I need to live forever nor be afraid of death. I have come to the conclusion that you need no reason to be good and do the right thing. It is so simple and in stark contrast it illustrates to me that there is a lot of fear in the world for no good reason. This includes the popular rational and practice of marriage in my opinion. Somehow my wife has taken the one thing, sex, which was my mead, and turned off the tap. It has been years at times and even now it's going on months. That movie, "Raising Arizona," with Nicolas Cage, (shows where I lived in the desert for a time) mentioned the salad bowl years... these are not those days. I feel tricked and trapped and if I found a woman who could accept me for all of my faults and still show me a decent fraction of those things that I once took for granted, I would leave. But the inward pressures form every corner including a worsening economy conspire against me until the only reprieves I have are the joys of raising my well loved children, my fine art, and

imaginative romps with ten second clips of beautiful women having perfectly shaved sex with someone who could have been me. It was me just after the fact. But that is reality.

Have you ever noticed that the old gunslingers of wild west legend ended up in California somewhere and never left? The hardships of Arizona, the cold of the North like Maine or Wisconsin, hell even the hurricanes of the South, were their backdrop and finally they learned that there was a refuge from that kind of pace. That kind of hard living could be left behind, there were greener pastures and happy people who were lucky enough to have found a place to leave those problems behind. A place they stayed and died. Like an orgasm for me, that place of momentary refuge where everything in my life becomes perfect for that moment. All faults disappear. The weights of the world are lifted and the free expression of my ultimate happiness visits although it cannot stay. Knowing that no matter how fate deals its cards it cannot be replaced with another, there is sweetness in living.

If lucky, the moment will stay with me for a while after, confirming that I have made the right choices for that moment. Rolling over and sleeping is not an option when I have found someone who will care for me. There are no signals to retreat and the sex continues until I walk with a limp because I can't make myself leave the total acceptance of that hot embrace. Falling asleep still in the moment while having complete trust and bliss for each other is the best ending of a most remarkable orgasm."

Artist interpretation: Lyrad has contempt for his marital situation and that attitude is definitely reflected in his portrait. He is caught up in a mundane existence, one very different from one he would like to be in, so there is a lack of sensuality in his portrait, and the composition is fragmented. There are four beige sections, none of which connect with one another. This is supposed to represent physical experiences- they are few and far between. The little gratification he gets comes from impersonal external acts, but they are ultimately unfulfilling. The pleasure he derived from life definitely was outside the sexual realm, like the satisfaction he felt from raising children- this is shown by the black curls in the upper left corner. There is optimism in his attitude, a "sweetness in living," so the general movement of the forms are from lower left to upper right - his thoughts are moving in a positive direction. Yet he is still somewhat caged, or inhibited, by the absence of intimacy that he desires.

Maggie's Orgasm



Maggie's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Pink and yellow."

"I've never really had one. Every time I get close to having an orgasm I have the urge to pee and pull away. This bothers me because I'm not sure if I have to go to the bathroom or I'm actually about to orgasm but it's downright frustrating and I'm not sure how to get around it. My understanding of why I don't orgasm is very muddled. I like sex and the feelings that my partner and I share, I like the experience, but orgasming is always in the back of my mind, raising questions. When I'm with a guy I worry that he thinks something is wrong either with him or what he's doing, the connection we have, or with me, and I don't want him to think he's inadequate or to think I'm not enjoying it just because I don't hit a climax. I've faked orgasms before just to lighten up the mental pressure for both of us.

Orgasms can symbolize womanhood and because they are so closely associated with femininity I cannot help but be negatively affected by how our society depicts women who aren't able to orgasm. We're seen as lacking. I feel like I'm missing out and sometimes I think I have a problem. I get a little depressed when I hear about how great it is for everyone else and on some level

I do think it influences my self-confidence. When I don't compare myself to others I feel better about it. I don't think my experience needs to be like everyone else's, as long as my partner and I are having fun whether I have an orgasm or not is inconsequential. Sometimes I feel like I'm reaching out for something and I'm almost straining myself trying to make contact but I don't know how to stretch any farther. It's like I'm disoriented inside a thick cloud, I'm not sure what's out there, but if I move, I fall, and I'm afraid to fall."

Artist interpretation: Maggie, at the time that I spoke to her, had not ever had an orgasm. She had never tried touching herself, which made her dependent on intimate encounters with others. Though she enjoyed sex her portrait reflects her frustration about her anorgasmia. Essentially Maggie's hands are trying to grasp the pink and yellow "orgasm." There is a darker yellow wavy line that divides the painting in half and runs through the center of the orgasm represents her urge to pee. It is what is inhibiting her from letting go. When I was visualizing her portrait I was thinking about how little kids try and catch butterflies, which always seem to elude them.

Marc's Orgasm



Marc's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

Favorite colors: "Blues, grays, reds."

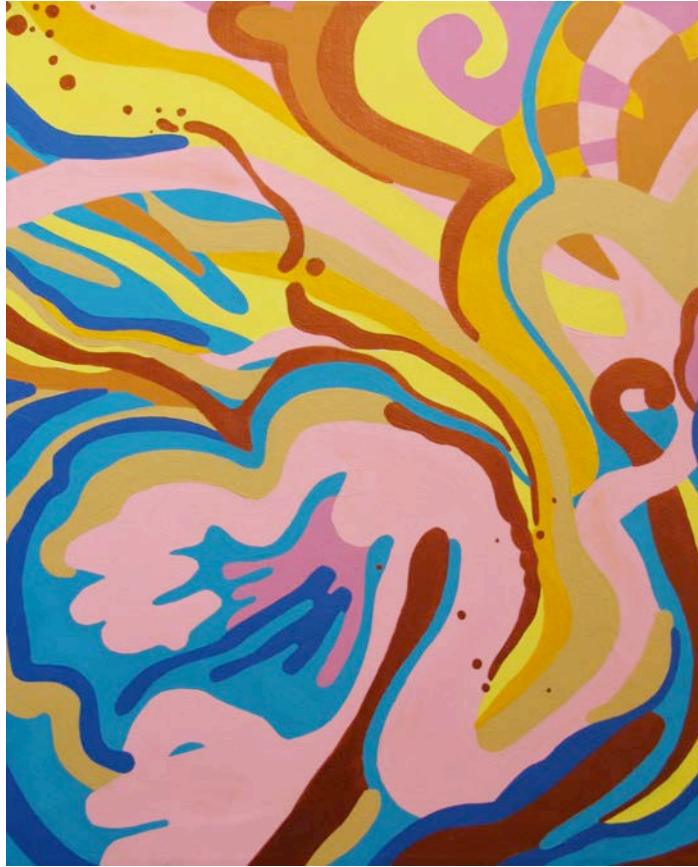
"An orgasm is a release from... what? From tension? From expectation? From self? Probably all three and other, un-definable, quantities. The loss of self is a welcome relief- I do not know or remember or care or need my surroundings, mores, or responsibilities. I am not there or here or anywhere. For a few moments - lethe. The lead up is the stripping of self- I start aware and, as excitement mounts and orgasm approaches, there is a stripping of layers of awareness. I lose the ability to measure and weigh, desire to judge. Precision is gone. I lose my senses- sight, hearing, smell, taste - not by measurable stages, for by then I will have lost the will or ability to measure, but at some sudden moment, I am alone. Soon after, the self-awareness itself fades and I am not me, but a simpler primal me. I do not like this me. And then, finally, even the primal me disappears. There is no me. For too brief a moment, I am no longer I but then I am no longer not I. I am not.

Moonless night
The creaking of a window
Dragonflies dart off

An orgasm lasts only seconds and is too quick. It is highway robbery- why must awareness return so soon? The lassitude and pleasant glow of the aftermath may last many minutes. Sometimes, to cheat memory and self, I do not orgasm, and stop just short, then the energy stays much longer, and I get the little dancing eye-crinkling smiles. I first feel them in the calves, the tensing of the muscles slowly creeping up, grabbing the thighs and groin and spreading to the stomach. It is then that I can decide about control- to stop or continue, to lose the self or retain control. Sometimes I do, sometimes not but both are delicious. When I am with a partner, the point of control is harder to locate, to capture. Many demands on concentration and sensation lessen the ability to capture the moment."

Artist interpretation: I wanted Marc's portrait to reflect a primitive version of himself as he described, so I used larger shapes, less layering, and a gradation in the bottom right corner to indicate the loss of self he feels in the moment as well as the lack of precision caused by the shifting of awareness. The colors and shapes kind of fuse together towards the bottom of the canvas which is intended to represent Marc's fusion with his surroundings, that is the "no longer me" part of his experience. For him there is more pleasure surrounding the moment rather than in the moment itself. The pleasure mostly takes place in the winding of the blue and black lines in the middle as well as the red spiral in the top left. The dots are the dragonflies in his poem. There is no real focus to his portrait or "point of control," rather all the elements are contributing to the experience.

Marcy's Orgasm



Marcy's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20"

Favorite colors: "Pastels, pink, yellow, and blue."

"I know it's weird, but sometimes there's a tingling all over. I feel it all over, but the intensity is in the core of my body. My hands will ball up into fists and I can't open them. I feel kind of sad when it happens. There's a lot of times when I'll cry. There's intense shame. Sometimes it's painful, and I don't enjoy that pain. It seems like there's so much external pressure when it happens that it's not that great. When I'm by myself it's better; it's almost like there's a spiritual connection. A rising up, almost out of my body. I feel a real connection to myself. Peace. It helps me realize that it's okay. I'm not judged at that point- it's like I'm singing opera."

Artist interpretation: This portrait has a special place in my heart because Marcy was making some courageous transformations in her life at the time when I interviewed her and I can see it reflected in her portrait. If you were to draw an imaginary line horizontally through the middle of this painting you would see what

I mean. The lower half is rather repressed; there is a little figure that is struggling with the experience, crouching with clenched fists, whereas the upper half is breaking free and thriving in its liberation.

Marissa's Orgasm



Marissa's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 40"

Favorite colors: "Turquoise, blues, red, purple, greens."

"The clit, head and heart are all connected. I'm really into it mentally. I feel spiritual for a second and kind of leave my body. It's like a dual reality. I'm a spiritual person so everything is spiritual for me. Being really present and aware- those are the best ones. There are times I come so hard that I push him out! There were times I squirted him up to his torso! It almost kind of scared me and I was like "dude, did you come?" And he's like "No - that was you!" It's cool when we come at the same time. The energetic exchange makes it better. Circumstances in our society are set up so you can do that safely.

My body contracts more when I'm by myself. Energy moves really refreshingly. I like the feeling of skin afterwards. Before, during, and after, breath is really important and the association of energy with it. With that breath there is a shaking; a rhythm kind of. A real primal beating. There might be a shuddering, and then it's like the dust settling afterwards. For me to even feel good, I have to

be warm- but the energy is so refreshing so it's warm and cold. With warmth there's almost a stagnancy, but the energetic exchange balances out those warm tones. I really like textures and I would associate that with the feelings I get, when I orgasm those feelings are amplified. I like textures and richness. My identity is mine, their identity is theirs, but we're exchanging energy consciously or unconsciously. I don't see it visually but I feel it. It's this whole intertwined, interconnected experience. For me orgasms are really powerful, but there's no one moment where it happens. I couldn't tell you when it started or when it ended. Boundaries are tricky for me. I feel everything really intensely."

Artist interpretation: Marissa really emphasized the energetic exchange between her and another person so there are two "lovers," the rounded white and blue forms in the middle, who interact through the composition. The white squiggly lines in the middle are supposed to represent her ejaculate, they span from one lover to another, expressing the "ideal" situation where they come together. This composition is meant to be playful, a mish mash of textures, shapes, warm and cool colors. There is no real focus and not many refined edges in this painting because "boundaries are tricky" for her.

Meagan's Orgasm



Meagan's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 22" x 28"

Favorite colors: "Blue, turquoise, greenish."

"They're piercing. I have to make it happen, I always have to tighten my muscles. If I was passive, I don't think it could happen. Usually they sneak up on me. It's kind of painful, like this satisfying pain. It goes up my spine and then my hands get goose bumps. As good as it feels, I don't know if I crave it that much. I can be loud. I like to make a noise; it just seems natural to me. My energy is cold, I feel chilled, as in refreshed. I always feel surprised when it happens. I get the sensation of being unzipped. It's like this dark hallway... then suddenly a blue light illuminates it. When I meditate I can get the same feeling on my neck. I'm very structured until orgasm, then it's chaos. I have very short orgasms, they're brief, and it's a painful release. I curl up into the fetal position when it's over."

Artist interpretation: Meagan is a very complex person so there are many intricacies in her portrait. In the moment of orgasm, she is cold and passive. There is a phallic form moving in from the right side that kind of "surprises" the

rest of the composition. Because she says her energy is cold, her portrait is composed of cool colors. There are two blue forms in the upper right and lower left that refer to her feeling of being "unzipped." As she opens up, a blue light (ie the metallic paint) provides contrast to the darkness in her portrait. As the metallic blue moves from right to left it folds in on itself to indicate that she curls up after the orgasm is over.

Michael's Orgasm



Michael's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Darker blues, darker colors, gold."

"There's that saying about males always being ready to go- that's me. I have the ability to orgasm without ejaculating and vice versa. I masturbate a lot. I masturbate or orgasm 8 or 9 times a week. You've just got to take care of it! I set aside 20 minutes minimum to an hour; 11:30 to 12:30 is masturbation time. It's my release. All the pent-up stress builds and then radiates out. I feel everything. When the blood rushes out I get a pleasant warm feeling; my arms get cold and tingly. My senses are alive, electrified! Pleasure shoots up my body around my head. It's like I'm dying. I would describe it as a black field with golden lightening. It's like having a seizure. A rumbling ocean right before a tidal wave. The pleasure goes straight through my eyes, and my eyes roll back in my head during the climax. Heat rushes out at climax.

I'm very visual. You're not going to find anyone as crazy as I am. Patience is a virtue, not one I have. I'm very responsible, I don't drink, and I'm very in control of myself and my surroundings. I tend to be manipulative when I'm bored; it makes for amusing situations. Even when I'm playing games there is a purpose. There

are boundaries to everything I do. I am a virgin. I'm also atheist. I'm very sensual with friends. I'm an amazing masseuse; I'm very good with my hands. Sometimes you just need something to do with your hands."

Artist interpretation: This portrait was one of the few which I made a full sketch for before beginning; I felt like it was appropriate to plan everything out before starting because Michael is intensely responsible. I felt it was my duty to be a "responsible" artist and take control of the canvas. He professed his fondness for manipulating others and his surroundings- this was represented by the gold threads extending from the fingertips of the dark blue creature. The creature represents Michael; he described his orgasm like he was wandering through a black field so the creature is lumbering through a dark cloud. The cloud rises up toward the sky with escalating intensity. The vertical lines in the background represent the rigidity of his routine and need for control. He expressed that he was not necessarily happy being a virgin, so his need for control actually is inhibiting him from engaging in pleasure with another person. The background creates a lack of harmony and a disruption of flow. The gold lightening is emerging from his head and from the void in the sky. This is meant to emphasize the intensity he feels at the moment of climax. As his eyes roll back in his head there is a burst of energy, where his senses become "alive, electrified!"

Miranda's Orgasm



Miranda's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Deep purples, yellow, blue."

"It feels like everything goes quiet. It's quiet because when I feel like I make noise, it's not for me, it's for him. I forget about him. I breathe heavily, I can't hear it, but I can feel my heart beat. I was so infatuated with what I felt. It was glorious. You don't expect it coming and then when it starts to actually happen, everything goes quiet. Everything tingles too; my face, pinky fingers, and ring finger. My orgasms are very long-lasting and powerful. Other people probably think I'm quiet, but I wait until I'm comfortable to let people in. Once I open up, people think I'm a good listener and easy to talk to. I'm attracted to a lot of people. I slowly examine the way people move and act and I feel myself fantasizing about what we would be like together. Most guys just think I like to fuck with their heads, even if it's not intentional. I'm seldomly attracted to guys for more than a couple of weeks. I like guys that are suave, but I need a connection, otherwise I can't fantasize past kissing."

Artist interpretation: Miranda's portrait is very rich with color, very sensual. I wanted the composition to include a lot of different colors because Miranda is "attracted to a lot of people." Her energy is very seductive; it reaches out and invites you in. But it is like a flame, a temporary seduction, because her attractions pass quickly. Her experience of orgasm is selfish and takes place

internally- everything goes quiet and she can feel her heart beat. She is infatuated with her own feelings, yet she desires connection, so her orgasms are contractive and expansive.

Nikita's Orgasm 2007



Nikita's Orgasm 2007, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 24"

Favorite colors: "Cobalt, black and red."

"This was the very first painting that I did in this series of orgasms. I wasn't actively thinking about this painting as an orgasm until it was near completion. It originally started out as a self-portrait, but rather than painting a realistic representation of myself, an explosion of color was what felt most true. I remember thinking, "This is my energy... I am an orgasm!" Unlike the other portraits, I wasn't answering questions about my sexual experiences or including other aspects involved in having an orgasm. I was most concerned with feeling, energy and the interactions of the colors."

Artist interpretation: As you know, this was the beginning. The painting was primarily based on feeling. Nothing was consciously planned; instead it unfolded as every brushstroke was a reaction to the ones before it. Rather than representing my sexual energy, I focused on who I was under all the layers - under my clothing, skin, language. I wanted to get to the core and express that. I

used whatever colors I had nearby that struck my fancy.

The sense of exploration I had whilst painting this reminds me of my first orgasm. I digress.....

Betty Dodson said that masturbation is our first and most natural form of sexual activity and if that's inhibited or damaged, then we suffer for the rest of our lives; I had experienced my first orgasm nearly two years earlier in the dorms at University and thankfully my first successful attempt occurred uninterrupted.

I was sitting at my desk and was supposed to be writing a paper. I was procrastinating; I don't even remember what I was supposed to be researching. It was so close to the end of the year and I could taste the freedom. My pants were unbuttoned and one of my hands rested on my lap as the other one clicked between pages on the computer screen. The light switch went on in my head and I started rubbing myself under the desk - I looked over and saw my roommate was fast asleep on her bed. I quietly continued, half paying attention as I continued reading the same paragraph over and over. Finally I concentrated on myself, and after about ten minutes I came. It was a perfect feeling, short, but sweet.

I started to laugh victoriously, and then ran out of the room and up the stairs searching for my best friend so I could tell her what had happened. We had debated about whether you could get yourself off without help - she insisted she needed a device- I felt like a whole new world of possibility had just opened up. Anyway, I saw her down the hall and I started exclaiming "You can do it yourself! You can do it alone!" She looked confused. I started waving my hand as I got closer and then quietly motioned - "I just had an orgasm with my hand!" She was shocked, curious; it took her a moment to process the words before her confusion turned to enthusiasm. She was like "I wanna try," so she went to her room - luckily her roommate was gone, and I went back to writing my paper.

Half an hour later she knocked on my door, smiling. I knew. We started nodding our heads like we had it made. We gave each other hugs and high fives. We were two girls without a care in the world.

Nikita's Orgasm 2008



Nikita's Orgasm 2008, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30"

Favorite colors: "Blue, red, and black."

"My orgasms become less mysterious as I become better at making them happen. When I'm by myself, I'm usually lying on my back, looking down my body at my legs in front of me. I tend to compress my body because the compact feeling adds to the intensity of my orgasm. An explosive tension gets created when my arms are tightly pressed against my sides, my legs are bent and my feet are scrunched up by my butt... basically, the tighter the position, the better! As I'm coming the tension is released through my limbs. When I come it's like my lower abdomen is exploding out of my body with a feeling of pure energy.

Sometimes I masturbate before I start doing something because I'm procrastinating or I need to clear my thoughts, kind of like when you turn an Etch-a-Sketch upside down to get a clear screen. If they're really good I get tiny aftershocks and I have to lie there and let my body shake itself out. I'm so sensitive to touch it would almost be painful to have any more contact. When it's

over I feel refreshed and refueled. Orgasms allow me to pause and relax, if only for a few minutes."

Artist interpretation: I painted this the summer after graduating from university. After making a few other portraits I decided it would be interesting to paint one of myself by myself without a partner (to keep it consistent) every year until I died. It would be a diary of sorts. I can't say this is how I thought I'd share myself publicly as I am a fairly private person who likes anonymity, but I enjoy the idea of a longitudinal study of orgasms and have embraced the challenge. Anyway, same favorite colors as last year except a much different expression and application. I chose to represent a common experience I was having- one where I was lying on my back and looking up at my legs (which are shown in blue). Out of my torso in the foreground spring white ovarian forms and a pointed bird-like shape. There can be a lot of energetic tension in my stomach and a lot of my orgasms that year had the effect of loosening up that tension. This is signified in the forms becoming larger and more spread out toward the top of the canvas. There was a lot of intensity in my emotions that summer. I was angry because I didn't know how to proceed with life. I was actually mourning the death of the student and was angry that nothing was grounding me. I was probably most frustrated because I didn't know how to ground myself better. If you look closely you can see these feelings reflected in the portrait- the gray and white dots form eyes and a nose, and the circular black form in my belly is the mouth.

Nikita's Orgasm 2009



Nikita's Orgasm 2009, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

Favorite colors: "Black, deep orange, red, blue."

"I'm beginning to realize how delicate the state of one's sexuality is, how easily an event can affect the sexual self, which, no doubt, has a ripple effect throughout the rest of one's identity. The addition or subtraction of one element can completely change a composition - naturally it follows that the addition and subtraction of several elements can have even more dramatic effects. This year there has been some major life changes, I've graduated college, moved a thousand miles away from nearly everything I know, entered the working world and am immersed in my first real long-term relationship. I'm not sure if the external changes preceded the internal disruption but accompanying these changes is a sexual imbalance.

Lately my orgasms have not been spectacular. It's been taking me longer to get to climax too, and I'm not patient about it. I'm aware that my impatience is immature, that the "I want it and I want it now!" attitude isn't helping, but I can't

seem to get over how the techniques that worked well not too long ago no longer have the same effects. It's hard to let go because at some point the effects did fulfill me- and it's because of that past that I'm reluctant to let go of it. I'm reluctant to adapt, but I need to because what I'm doing is not working the way it used to. I think my orgasms have mostly been about relieving some of the pressure of what I perceive is mostly coming from the outside (however, perhaps what could be happening is that because I'm sexually imbalanced I'm allowing myself to be receptive to imbalances in the external world). Last year I felt much more free and not bogged down by details. Physically and mentally I had less concerning me, I could really just enjoy the moment. Sexually I was undistracted in the moment. Now I feel less able to express myself so freely; I feel scattered and a little lost. But amidst all this turmoil, I can feel a new form emerging, I'm definitely at a turning point. It's almost like the wild creature inside me cannot be contained anymore and is growing up and getting ready to leap into the unknown."

Artist interpretation: Out of a death comes life. My latest portrait is more psychologically focused than anything else. I know all the major changes I had made that year were inhibiting and distracting my ability to release sexually thus making it more difficult to orgasm. I was trying to figure out where I was in life and what I wanted to be doing, so understanding and sorting out immediate concerns took priority over orgasms. I think that if I had had a better sex life it would have helped me relax and enjoy exploring my options more, but I was very tense and defaulted to cooking or doing yoga to relieve pressure. The little beast leaping through the threshold of the composition is representative of me finally coming into my own, almost like I've accessed my authentic self and am giving birth to it and sending it out into the world. The shading of the creature and the shading of the background go from light to dark in opposite directions- in the middle they would be the same shade of gray, implying the balance I can sense on the horizon, the new form emerging, the shift in my energy. There are two spirals, one on the lower left and one on the upper left. The one on the lower left is the static pleasure that I feel I am leaving for the dynamic pleasure represented by the blue spiral in the upper left. The wavy black and white bit in the top right represents the pressure I feel to sort out my life, which can be very intense at times (notice the yellow and burnt orange creating heat in the area). The red form moving diagonally from left to right represents the general enjoyment and playful approach I take in life. Nothing is worse than taking oneself too seriously.

Nikki's Orgasm



Nikki's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 21" x 27.5"

Favorite colors: "Purple, blue, vibrant colors, NO dull colors or pastels."

"Mentally I usually have a heightened sense of thought. I notice colors really brightly but I don't really notice other things. I think my eyes are closed when it happens. Physically I get really tense. I'm really sensitive to touch. I think that I tend to push away right after it happens, I don't like a lot of cuddling afterwards or anything. A little bit afterwards I want to, but not right after. The actual orgasm part isn't very long- it's really pretty short but I can feel the effects long after. I think I'm loud if I'm allowed to be. Ideally I would be loud, but I have a roommate. I think because I have to be quiet that's why my physical sense is so heightened.

Sometimes it's really emotional, like I'm so tensed up and then it's released inside of me. Sometimes I feel very vulnerable, like I'm very aware of my body all of a sudden. I get very hot, not hot like a sweaty hot, but like a fire inside me. Almost like a fever: you feel it inside you and you're really sensitive to people touching you. Sometimes I have thoughts I'm trying to work out or some idea or a

solution to a problem and I figure out the answer after I orgasm. I really like the idea of the Aum symbol because it's part of my Indian culture and I really like the different chakras. I feel like my experience has gotten better. I think that being in love has heightened my experience because we can work out what we want rather than in a newer relationship where it's more difficult to navigate."

Artist interpretation: I'm sure you noticed the big metallic purple Aum symbol front and center. I wanted to highlight it because not only does she feel very connected to her culture, in Hinduism and Buddhism Aum is the most sacred syllable and believed to be the spoken essence of the universe. It is used as a mantra and in affirmations and blessings, which the experience of orgasm no doubt qualifies. There is a female figure situated behind the Aum, she could either be embracing it or the Aum could be emerging from her. Either way, they are right there together. Because she frequently has to be quiet and her experiences can be "really emotional," her orgasm is released inside of her. There is an implosion of blue and purple coiling forms inside her stomach. There are black spikes surrounding her most sensitive areas because she does not want to be touched directly afterwards, they are her defense. The red represents the fire she feels inside herself and the yellow and purple dots represent the feverish feeling she gets- the overabundance of heat rising through her body. The fact that she is able to "work out a solution to a problem" after she orgasms, I felt the need to show transition, with the clarity of her thought represented by shading in her core.

Renee's Orgasm



Renee's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 22"x 28"

Favorite colors: "Aqua, blue, green, silver."

"It depends on the situation. For me personally, I need passionate, full-bodied, full-chakra engaged sex. Like when it's cerebral. I need emotional stimulation for it to be gratifying. The intensity is in the navel down, the genitals, my heart. I'm physically warm. Typically I prefer an amazing physical connection. It depends on the partner. Verbalization - sometimes people need it, but I don't. It's all about chemistry, touch, and awareness of the partner. I totally love eroticism, but not weird masks or anything. Touch, scent, and sense of touch is heightened. The pupils dilate, the heart rate goes up. You kind of just go into this liquid, this nurturing liquid ecstasy. It's like a lava lamp consistency. The body is spinning and then the release. There's a warm bubbling fluid that's suddenly in your head, and then when you climax, it rushes out to my limbs."

Artist interpretation: Having a strong physical attraction is important to Renee so along with all the dots in the middle of the canvas (which represent "chemistry") I

used a golden yellow thread to represent this desire for connection. The thread can also represent the body spinning and then releasing because the connection breaks for a moment right up at the top. I tried to capture the "nurturing liquid ecstasy" with the many layers of color, which culminate in the white form in the middle of the canvas. Her favorite colors are cool colors but I used warm versions of purple, blue and turquoise and many rounded forms to communicate that warmth. I wanted there to be a lot of interaction between layers and shapes to get across the idea of a whirlwind of passion and entangled lovers.

Rose and Micha



Rose and Micha, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 36"

Rose's favorite colors: "Earth tones: blues, greens, browns; gray, black, cream, rose."

Micha's Favorite colors: "Royal blue, grass green, blood red, black."

Rose said: "It feels like a crazy release of hormones flooding all the pathways! It's a really intense release, literally a 'coming' or 'arriving' or 'peaking'.... It's unstoppable, so I want to keep the physical rhythm just right to maximize the possible pleasure in that climax. During orgasm I feel very warm. Immediately after the climax, my body tingles and flops down heavily at the same time, like it's properly worn out. Satisfied. The feeling radiates out from my epicenter, which wants really intense stimulation at the peak moment and then gentle touching as the after-contractions occur, and then everything slowly cools off and calms down for a while. It lasts about 30 seconds up to a minute. And the aftereffect is quite a while, an hour or more."

My eyes want to close, my legs to stretch out, my mind to wander, my head to hit the pillow or Micha's chest. My face relaxes. I smile, sigh, groan, just let it all go. Often I feel exhausted and want to pass out, or be indulgently lazy. Lately I've been more conscious of my breathing right at the peak and it plays really nicely into the physical thrusting movement. My exhalations make a nice rhythmic noise that accentuates the peak moment. I also like to close my eyes to really focus inward and enjoy the sensation of the release. It's interactive and quite intimate, surrendering my most uninhibited moment with someone else there. It feels so healthy and rewarding to share this with the particular person I share it with. It's quite a bonding experience.

It's more of a dirty little secret when I'm alone. Being cold, being tense, not being in the mood... ie, I like to have a nice anticipation going of fantasies or visualizations during the day so I'm already turned on and raring to go when it's finally time. Some days it's not on my mind, other days I have 'the itch,' Like we have just crested the top of mountain trail and are looking out over a gorgeous view! Something melodic yet driving; like rock. I see these rhythmic flowing patterns. I'm out of my conscious mind. I see a concentric, swirling thing. There's a pattern, you close your eyes you can see shapes or flowing patterns, like shadows, and that sort of thing. Your mind is in an organic rhythm, so you see through your mind's eye.

I think the intensity of pure sensation in orgasm definitely helps me feel all kinds of experiences more strongly in life and therefore appreciate each moment more. I have always felt deeply and sought out people who feel things. My thinking is, if orgasm can feel so strongly, other things in life can also result in that intense effect, and I want to try and experience that! Overall my experience of orgasm helps me be more present and alive in the moment, because I think I then have a higher chance of really feeling the moment when I concentrate on being present for it. Having and sharing orgasms is one of the best activities I can think of! The world clearly needs more orgasms."

Micha said: "Alone is definitely incomplete- it's more of a stress relief. It's a way to bliss out for a second or two. Together when we're truly on the same wavelength, it is almost a synchronized feeling, it has a lot to do with feeling. It's amazing when I am breathing out and she is breathing in, and when she is breathing out and I am breathing in; there is a circular pattern. If the pattern gets interrupted it throws off the sync that was there. We try and focus heavily on our breathing.

My orgasm starts in my core, in the solar plexus, and radiates outward extremely fast. And there's a couple of big events first, like boom, boom, BOOM, and then you kind of go into this blissful state between pain and pleasure and you're not really sure which one it is. As the feeling radiates out to the end of my limbs, it's like watching a wave break into the jetty and it all comes rushing back the direction it came and into the other waves. So there's a flowing, a push and pull.

But it's gentle. It's like all of the nerves in your body are stimulated all at the same time, radiating and then it going back in, like a heart beat. I guess it would be like when you're surfing, there's a point when you're paddling into a wave, there's a thrust that propels you forward and you're one with the wave. You're flowing with this supreme unbridled energy. You're not sure what it is or where it came from, it's spontaneous, joyous, absolute bliss.

It's more of a spiritual awareness not so much a taste, touch, scent thing. It's an awareness of being alive- vibrancy is the word I'm looking for. There's usually a gain in volume, I usually shout something... I'm not a word guy though, I'm visual. Sometimes afterwards if I drift off to sleep, I see these images of circles. It's almost like the vagina, they're very soft like a lotus blossom, but it's all black in the center and I can't see through to the other side. It's a moving image that radiates that emits in wave patterns which reflect my feelings from the orgasm. So it continues in my mind as a rhythmic wave pattern. It's like an alpha state.

If I haven't gotten her to climax, then usually the experience is not heightened for me. It still feels good but it doesn't have the full potential for what it is. I'm only truly pleased when I am able to please her, when I've been able to give something away to her. That makes the experience complete. It doesn't always work unless the other person is truly willing to release control to the other person."

Artist interpretation: Luckily Rose and Micha had complimented each other well so it wasn't too difficult to try and establish a pattern, or flow, in their portrait. They mentioned the words organic, circles, wave, rhythm, and release, multiple times. When Micha said his orgasms are "like watching a wave break into the jetty and it all comes rushing back the direction it came and into the other waves" and "a moving image that radiates that emits in wave patterns," I had the idea to make the gradated waves which are moving forward but curl back in on themselves. The waves are gradated to represent the layers of pleasure, each layer building on the last and becoming more amplified. Rose's sensations move from the left side to the right side, beginning with the brown "concentric, swirling thing" which surrounds the blue circles, and transforming through the "rhythmic flowing patterns" of gray and blue into the more concrete dark brown crested top of a mountain trail." The peak of the mountain is surrounded by an intense white- this is the place where both of them "bliss out" and release control together.

Samantha's Orgasm



Samantha's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 36" x 36"

Favorite colors: "Brick red, yellows, orange, browns. I hate purple and blue."

"Well, honestly, there's many different levels. I have kind of a negative relationship with sex, so this is hard to explain. I've had relationships where the sex isn't good and it's sucked. I forget to breathe, and I get secular headaches because of it, so when I orgasm my head explodes with pain. I have to remember to breathe, otherwise I get a splitting headache. There's a lot of sexual tension in me right now. I love having sex! I'm a lesbian; I've never had sex with a guy.

During sex I focus on the other person because it's more pleasurable for me. For me it's everything leading up to the orgasm. Knowing that they're allowing you to get to know every part of them. I need to be able to look them in the eyes. I like organic things. I feel a rush in the front part of my body and in my head (because of the headaches). It's like I'm strangling myself because I'm not breathing. I like my body being taken over, and I like it when it's mutual. I'm kind of quiet, not really loud. When I orgasm, it's much like watching the sun rising. It takes a while

before it seems like anything is happening, and then..... Afterwards I don't want to be touched at all; I just want to grab onto the other person and hold on as tight as I can."

Artist interpretation: Samantha's experience of orgasm is quite complex, so there's a lot going on in her portrait. First is her, represented by the yellow figure in the middle, being "taken" by the orange figure rushing in from the top right corner. Then there is the secular headache represented by orange spikes exploding out of her head. I wanted her portrait to resemble the sun rising, so there's a fire swelling underneath them and billowing around them. I used metallic paint to give the painting a sort of wet, or shimmering, look to compliment the heat. The pleasure she experiences is represented by the dark brown spiral in the lower right- which is somewhat overwhelmed by its surroundings. It's kind of difficult to follow the trajectory of the pleasure as it travels left and the diagonally right, looping around and then... wham! It kind of sneaks up on her.

Sasha's Orgasm



Sasha's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 27.5" x 21"

Favorite colors: "Orange, red, pink, yellow, deep rich colors."

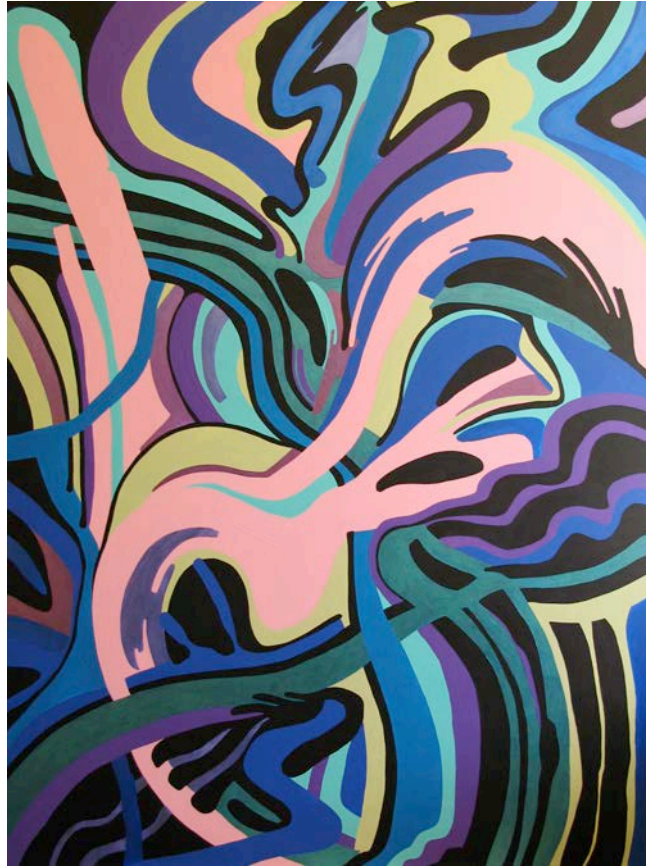
"To me they're very physical. They start physical and turn into a kind of Nirvana in an empty way, but not a bad empty. I feel it all in the lower chakras, my pelvis, legs, and head. I mean it's always better with someone else. I'm pretty quiet. For me I actually have to be lying on my tummy and it's very physically intense. Afterwards it's very relaxing, everything is just let go. I'm pretty sensual so I like a lot of touch and a lot of talk. I like it when my partner talks to me and I don't necessarily want to talk back. Isn't that funny?"

Sex gets better as you get older. You get less inhibited and you get less worried about asking for what you need or want. It's less scary, it's more fun. I didn't have an orgasm with a partner until I was 28. I think it was being married. It was like "this is it!" The first time I orgasmed during sex I couldn't stop laughing! When I was younger I was too shy or I guess I thought someone would think it was weird. But that's what it's all about right?"

Artist interpretation: Sasha's portrait is playful and light, there's nothing too serious about it. There's a subtle sense of freedom, a lifting of burdens as none

of the forms appear "grounded." The oranges and pinks represent the openness of her attitude while the red figure stretched out on its belly in the lower half of the canvas represents her physical behavior. She said that for her to have an orgasm she has "to be lying on [her] tummy and it's very physically intense" which is why she is positioned in such a way. She lies there quietly while the colors and forms bathe her and dance around her body.

Sedona's Orgasm



Sedona's Orgasm, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"

Favorite colors: "Pink, light purple, blues, light greens."

"It's like... there's a build up. I get a tingly feeling in my feet. I get these waves where I know it's coming, bursts of energy, and then a freeing release. It only lasts a few seconds. The emotion behind it makes it really intense; it's only intense because I'm with someone I love. When I close my eyes, sometimes I see like a lava lamp type green. Other times there's these bursts. When I get reiki work I see the same thing. I'm not aware of anything else... it's like there's a little bubble around us. I get tingles from my feet to butt, then down my arms to my fingertips. They're strongest in the core- in my abdomen. I'm pretty shy, probably an introvert, but when I orgasm, I'm LOUD!"

Artist interpretation: Sedona is such a gentle person; I wanted to highlight this by using soft versions of her favorite colors. There are two pink humps in the middle of the canvas which represent the "bubble" she feels around her and her boyfriend. Their surroundings are somewhat fragmented, but there is a definite

flow, or movement, from lower right to upper left as well as from lower left to upper right. I thought it would be appropriate to have many smaller, isolated forms, that contribute to a larger movement because 1) she is not aware of anything else but the bubble, and 2) she experiences "bursts of energy."

Steve's Orgasm



Steve's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

Favorite colors: "An elusive blue, dark blue, and yellow."

"'Well,' said Pooh, 'what I like best,' and then he had to stop and think. Because although eating honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called." - A.A. Milne

"I remember my first orgasm. It was a most welcome surprise celebrating my induction into puberty. It was, as the poet Wallace Stevens wrote, " The intensest rendezvous... lighting the highest candle against the night..." But not long after, my orgasm became a problem and orgasms were soon my enemy. For some reason I thought of Einstein's theory of relativity, how each orgasm was like matter transformed into the purest energy... like the speed of light squared. But my orgasms were also like recalcitrant children, boundless and out of control, coming and going as they pleased. Ironically, or predictably, the better sex felt the less control I had of them. I could not allow myself to simply enjoy that all too

brief ecstatic state. Orgasms only brought with them the end of a particular love making session. Once I'd had one, I was finished and did not have even a remote interest in sex for several days after. And I did not want that.

The only time I was able to enjoy them was when I was alone. And then not because I wanted the orgasm; I generally created them in order to stop feeling so distracted. Even masturbation was a problem. Though I knew that my friends were doing it, I still could not escape the horror of thinking that I might be discovered performing my furtive urgent business. It felt like murder. I had no morality, but I was bursting with adolescent guilt and shame. Having an orgasm with a woman was of little more help. I was a premature ejaculator despite girlfriends' assistance and patience. As I grew older, though, this was no longer an issue. The problem simply went away on its own. In time I learned to control my orgasms, thus increasing their intensity. Still, I realized that this was a problem of its own. I was avoiding them again. I wanted to delay them and only regretted it after they arrived. I could not simply allow myself to feel, to luxuriate in their warmth.

Now, at 59 years old, I have grudgingly accepted an uneasy truce with my orgasms. This requires that I think too much, but that is me and I have stopped fighting. It requires that I weigh out each situation and make a decision as to whether experiencing an orgasm is worth the time I will feel estranged from sex. I read that Salvador Dali wrote that whenever he had an orgasm he believed that he'd lost another painting. I understand his sentiment, though I think it pretentious for anyone but a genius to make such a claim. Still, when I do allow myself to fully experience my orgasms, they are like a physical manifestation of God. They begin as a slight but increasing vibration which rapidly spreads from my prostate down my thighs to my curling toes, over my stomach and chest and actually expire in my head. I do see colors, or a color. I see a blue that I have never found in nature or art. That blue is a color that, at times I absently find myself seeking."

Artist interpretation: In the beginning, or in the lower left area of the painting, the composition is not very controlled (notice the flailing blue and black lines), but a little more structure is established closer to the center with the black line which is moving diagonally from right to left. The white on either side of this black line represents the undeveloped, and the premature ejaculation, which kind of naturally fades away. There's a period of excitement and build-up and release, but his sexual energy doesn't explode of the canvas, it's a little tamer because he wants to enjoy the sex. In order to do this he contains it rather than become estranged by it. I wanted to have the elusive blue be something Steve never quite gets to experience in its full intensity, so I have him searching for it, as the black squiggly line, in the top right corner. The search is bittersweet.

Veronica Monet's Orgasm



Veronica Monet's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 36"

Favorite colors: "Lavender and sage, all kinds of purple and green, except grass green. I don't like warm colors like orange and yellow or salmon pink. I like violet and blue and reds with blue in them- I love blue!"

"I have so many different kinds. My favorite ones keep me on edge until... it's like riding a wave, and there's really little orgasms that lead to the big one. Often I have female ejaculation followed by little orgasms. There's a lot of practice and skill that allows me to be able to ejaculate and be able to go back into the plateau state leading to the big orgasm. I have to constantly build energy and make sure not to hold my breath. What I consider a big orgasm is one that makes me feel like I have united myself with the universe.

The first time I was doing a tantric class there was a bunch of us in a room- all women, fully clothed. We were lying on the floor with our knees bent and contracting our PC muscles tilting our pelvises. Relax PC muscles, relax pelvis, breathe out. Breathe in, tilt pelvis, contract PC muscles.... breathing in through

the nose, out through the mouth. As I was doing this I was thinking to myself that these people are out of their minds! While I was plotting my escape I had a fire-breath orgasm. For me it was very confrontative to have this. I'm not sure how easy it would be to replicate this now as it seemed to have a mind of its own. It started in the base of my spine and then shot up through my spine and out through the top of my head and it felt like a ball of fire. I didn't know anything about kundalini at the time but I felt like I had sex with the universe. It felt deeply profound and spiritual and on the downside I felt I didn't deserve to be doing this. I stayed away from tantra for ten years. I became a believer in tantra but stayed away from it because it scared me.

Later on I started meditating and it changed my relationship to sex too. In masturbation I could female ejaculate or have an internal orgasm. Before meditation, my fantasies were about having sex, a lot of times it was about non-consensual sex and I had a lot of rape fantasies. It made me feel like I was being a bad feminist, but it also made it even more delicious because it was so taboo.

Orgasms that are related to taboo are contracted and the energy goes in. The fire-breath orgasm is expansive whereas shame based orgasms are more contracted. When I have a shame-based orgasm it's like I've stolen a cookie from the cookie jar, it has that kind of enjoyment to it. Like I've been a naughty girl. However, that kind of orgasm has a penalty attached to it in the way that it erodes my self-esteem, which is where most people's sexuality is. The taboo stuff has a place in my life, but right now it is an undesirable state of affairs. I would prefer to have an expansive state of affairs. When I masturbate now, I don't even think about sex, I might be thinking about world peace, or something specific like going to the Congo and meeting some Bonobos or talking to a live audience of 5,000 people. I'm asking myself if I can handle these situations, and I bypass all the doubts and go straight for the fantasy of these beautiful things. When I orgasm those things become a reality. In that moment anything is possible and those visualizations become an affirmation; I'm setting my subconscious up to accept these things as reality. After the orgasm I might start to cry or pray or repeat a mantra. It's like there's no social barriers and I tap into a part of myself that's pure passion and pure desire. That makes me feel whole, grounded, connected, and hopeful. My whole body becomes energized and I feel it in every fiber of my body from my genitals to the top of my head and the pleasure is much more intense than when I'm thinking the dark taboo stuff.

I was multiply orgasmic with my husband and he often entered me from behind. My husband was getting way, way up there to what is being called the A-spot at the base of the cervix. We were in this very open loving place and we both had an orgasm simultaneously... it felt like his sperm had gotten up inside of me in places where I felt like I've never had anything. I knew something special had happened and a few weeks later I found out that I was pregnant.

Expanding on this I would want to make a distinction between internal orgasms

and female ejaculations. When I female ejaculate there's sort of a "masculine" energy to it, and I use that for lack of a better word. It's less of an emotional thing and much more in the body. It's focused on me. When I have an internal orgasm it's a more vulnerable state of affairs and I feel much more bonded to my partner and I want the cuddling and the eye gazing. I've given a lot of men I've worked with their very first internal orgasms and there's usually a lot of tears. The minute your hand goes up their rectum they turn into a puddle of tears. We're all the same, and penetration creates vulnerability for most people. We have stereotypes that men can have sex with anybody and walk away and women want to be cuddled and held after sex, but it's nonsense. Instead of trying to associate it with a penis or vagina, I want to educate people that it's about whether or not you're ejaculating or having a G-spot orgasm. Ejaculation is a different kind of orgasm. It's kind of like going to the bathroom and it doesn't really make you want to be held; it's like "I'm going to go off and do something else now." Also, this current culture is hung up about is homosexuality. The other thing they're allergic to are females stepping out of traditional roles. One of the ways we can control women is by controlling their bodies. Freud's penis envy was ridiculous. As fetuses we all started off as females, we've all got the same tissues it's just been emphasized more or less. The clitoris runs all the way to the bottom of the labia and literally can be limp or erect just like a penis but it's just not exposed. The fact is so many doctors are being so resistant to this information. Skene's glands in a female are right where the prostate would be if you were a male. They produce female ejaculate, and there are ducts, like little tubes that run into your urethra, but right at the opening right where the urethra are two little ducts. Some female ejaculate comes from those ducts and some comes from the urethra. Nature doesn't make ducts if there's no liquid running through them!

I personally believe that sexuality and orgasms is where our power lies. All art comes from our orgasmic capabilities. Compare Pollock with Grandma Moses, if it doesn't make you a creative person it will at least change the way you make things. Contracted energy is less creative. A huge Gothic Tower has a lot of sexual expression. The clients I worked with went from timid to having sex with me for a few months and saying: "Screw my boss, I'm starting my own company!"

Orgasms can be therapy. One client of mine was so boring, all he wanted to do was smoke cigarettes, drink wine, and play strip poker. Finally I was able to give him an orgasm, he started to cry and he told me that he had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and he had a very short time to live. People can use orgasms to process death too. It helps you get in touch with your feelings; it helps you speak about things you don't know how to speak about. Sex makes you feel alive- it creates life! It makes us feel alive and vibrant. It is the opposite of death. We could be using orgasms as a way to attract the things we want, to heal old hurts; I recently used orgasm to process grief. It's not like I feel like orgasms are one stop shopping, but why not?

Sex is so much more than your genitals. We need to unlearn the shame that has been put upon us. I had something bordering on a kundalini awakening about two years ago. I had been doing a personal meditation practice for sacred sex, which raised my kundalini energy so I would be more receptive to sex. I abstained from sex for nine months and when I had sex with this partner, a union was created... at the moment at full penetration I did feel like we were one person for a brief moment. When he orgasmed I felt a very powerful energy, and that feeling lasted with me for a month. I had to look it up what it was and found out the energy that I was feeling was called: kriya; a spontaneous muscle contraction brought on by certain tantric and meditative practices which felt, for me, like being in the plateau stage of orgasm for an entire month. That taught me that sex is way more than sex. This tantric breathing thing is very powerful. It turns sex into something very expansive. It is a doorway into the divine. You're going to go places spiritually.

I've learned a lot about sex from watching my dogs have sex. One liberating thing for me was watching Shekhina, my female dog, who had no shame and was really in her body. I wonder how many females feel devalued by the fact that we have to sit, squat and spread our legs. We don't have pride in the way our bodies function, like we are malfunctioned or on the lacking side of things. An animal is not dirtied or perverted by politics or religion, rather her functions are natural. I watched her and my male dog play back and forth, and she would only do what she was comfortable with at her own pace... in human culture we'd call that being a prick tease. I thought, "now there was my role model that I can emulate!" Watching her gave me permission to say no. If I wasn't able to say no and given into other's expectations, I wouldn't have had the wonderful experiences I've had. Humans need to get off the pedestal we think we're on, that we're the pinnacle of creation and evolution. We have blind spots and problems. Bonobos solve a lot of their problems through sex. I'm all about getting back to what we can learn from nature."

Artist interpretation: The creation of pleasure, represented by the large green spiral, is a large part of Veronica's life. Toward the center of the spiral blue lines almost fuse with each other- this is where the creation begins. I chose green as the color of the spiral because it is a very healing and soothing color, and it acts as fertile ground for psychological growth. The light blue lines that begin at the bottom of the canvas curve around and branch off near the top of the canvas represent her sexual evolution and expansion of self through pleasure and self discovery. Eventually the blue lines reach a white zone at the very top of the canvas, which signifies her awareness of sensual energy and her mastery of sexual experience. The long lines in her portrait correlate with her ability to maintain pleasurable feelings and orgasm as well as her integrity. Sometimes people's portraits end up with a lot of small scattered shapes (because they're not able to focus their energies or their desires are not in harmony), but she has a lot of knowledge and ability in this area. Her energy is harmonious, everything

is working together to maintain synergy. The underwater feel lends itself to many things, like how she is in touch with her subconscious, the collective unconscious, sensuality, etc. I found it interesting that there are practically no angles in her painting, I think I made the forms so rounded because she has a really powerful feminine energy.

William's Orgasm



William's Orgasm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 24" x 48"

Favorite colors: "Bright red, yellow, deep shades of brown and blue, white."

"It feels like a deep and long-lasting sensation of ecstasy coming mainly from the lower extremities of my body. It's a sudden intense feeling of euphoria. If I had to describe it in one phrase it would be: an epiphany of pleasure. That would be the mental aspect of it. Spiritually, I feel I'm connecting with something higher, something earthbound and up in the heavens. Physically, orgasms are raw and intense. I would equate the feeling of climax with the finishing of a marathon. As you cross the finish line you see your name like "You're our winner!" The most intense place I feel it is the inner abdomen- it's like a roller-coaster right when you start to go down. "Roller-coaster syndrome," I call it. I'm more the kind of person who wants to make out for hours. I like the build-up. For me to really connect with somebody, it's got to start from the beginning and we must connect on an emotional level beforehand. It's not as good when the woman I'm with rushes into things. Going back to the analogy, she's got to be there miles one through twenty-six. In the morning if I'm sitting by myself, it's less intense than

when I'm with a partner. With another person the intensity is magnified by thirty or fifty. The most exciting part is discovering myself and the other people that are out there, like the opposite sex and their different ethnic backgrounds. I get to connect physically on a deep level and explore other cultures at the same time. Different ethnic backgrounds are more taboo sexually and I've been surprised by both ends of the spectrum. Life experiences have a lot to do with that though, on both her end and mine. Expression and finding out more about myself is what I want to work on this year. Maybe having sex with a man or being an exotic dancer. I'm open to trying new things."

Artist interpretation: William took me by surprise, as he is very soft-spoken; I wouldn't have guessed from his appearance and demeanor that he had such wild desires. I think he's really waiting for the right moment to break out of his shell, until the "dancer" has fully developed in his heart and mind. His emphasis on the longevity of the experience and the marathon metaphor inspired me to create an abstracted figure in navy blue that is dancing with rollercoaster-like slopes up and down the whole length of the canvas. The figure is almost bursting out of the background, from the depths of his soul, expressing and exposing his energy. William is really using his body like an instrument and I wanted to highlight that. The shading on either side of the figure represents this transition he needs to make internally to become this fully alive desired version of himself externally. His head, represented in red in the top left corner, represents him "connecting with something higher." A lot of intensity and pleasure occurs in the lower regions of his body, most of it is focused in his abdomen so I had explosive colors leaping from the middle of the canvas.

Metaphor for Life

"Logic is a very elegant tool," he [social anthropologist Gregory Bateson] said, "and we've got a lot of mileage out of it for two thousand years or so. The trouble is, you know, when you apply it to crabs and porpoises, and butterflies and habit formation" - his voice trailed off, and he added after a pause, looking out over the ocean- "you know, to all those pretty things... logic won't quite do... because the whole fabric of living things is not put together by logic. You see when you get circular trains of causation, as you always do in the living world, the use of logic will make you walk into paradoxes."

He stopped again, and at that moment I suddenly had an insight, making a connection to something I had been interested in for a long time. I got very excited and said with a provocative smile: "Heraclitus knew that!... And so did Lao Tzu."

"Yes, indeed; and so do the trees over there. Logic won't do for them."

"So what do they use instead?"

"Metaphor."

"Metaphor?"

"Yes, metaphor. That's how the whole fabric of mental interconnections holds together. Metaphor is right at the bottom of being alive."

(Retrieved from Fritjof Capra's *Uncommon Wisdom: Conversations with Remarkable People*)

The paintings of *Orgasms: Portraits of Sexual Energy* are representations, metaphors of experiences that offer extraordinary potentials for self-discoveries if we allow them to do so.

It's disappointing that education and awareness about sex, our most natural function, is not promoted and socially valued even though the consequences of this lack of education are all too obvious: the predictability of commercial porn, poor communication about anything sexual, mismatched and unhappy relationships, sexual abuse and violence.

It can be easier to protect ourselves from what we don't know by staying submissive to our existing conditions than rebelling and being vulnerable, but our

decision-making has been so overshadowed by our insecurities that our fears are now defining things for us. It is important to let go in order for us to know for ourselves what life is all about.

It is time we attempted to understand what we do and why we do it. It is time to stop repressing the knowledge of life and understand what happens to us when it is denied. It is possible to integrate new knowledge, experiences and perspectives into our lives- it is actually necessary to let new things come into our lives in order to thrive.

Nature and culture, instinct and morality, sexuality and achievement can coexist. A deeper understanding of our inner selves leads to new and expanded views of reality, where the objective and subjective fuse into a greater, more complete, understanding.

It has been truly rewarding for me to go on this journey of uncovering some of the complexities and the simplicities of human orgasms, to wed my artistic interpretations to the narratives of those willing to reveal this core experience to the world. I hope you have also enjoyed the metaphor that I have tried to create for you, one that will enable you to be more open about this domain of your existence.

With love, Nikita

