

Famaliens

Katie Greger

Famaliens

Inhale, breath in, puff out. Enter into the frame of mind. Enter into the space.

See in, Peer in, Look in,

You(I) find it.

It's an image, inspiration. It calls to **you**(me).

You(I) enter into **your**(my) work space. **You've**(I've) decided.

You(I) prepare, **you**(I) make, **you**(I) paint.

You(I) want to feel warmth. This warmth is **your**(my) family. The family **you**(I) were(was) born into and the family **you've**(I've) created. This is the image; this is the inspiration.

You(I) realize they're portraits. Portraits of **your**(my) family, but they've evolved.

You(I) made them evolve. **You**(I) created new beings.

You(I) believe in aliens. Aliens are imaginations of beings. **You've**(I've) chosen an environment for **your**(my) beings. This environment stems from **your**(my) imagination.

You(I) create aliens because of **your**(my) fascination with **yourself**(myself).

You(I) do not understand **yourself**(myself) unless in relation to others. **Your**(my) family consists of those **you**(I) love.

By altering **your**(my) loved ones **you**(I) see more into who **you**(I am) are.

You(I) place them into the environment of **your**(my) imagination.

You(I) understand **you**(me) more.

You(I) **yourself**(myself) evolves.

You've(I've) created a new family of ten.

Do you believe in aliens? Neil deGrasse Tyson, an astrophysicist, solidified my belief in aliens. In a lecture titled, Neil deGrasse Tyson On Life On Other Planets, he said,

“Are we alone in the universe? We are made of the most common ingredients there are and our chemistry is based on Carbon; Carbon is the most chemically active ingredient in the entire periodic table... So if we ask ourselves are we alone in the universe, in spite of my diatribe about UFOs, I'd tell you in the same breath that it would be inexcusably egocentric to suggest we are alone in the universe, chemistry is too rich... there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on all the beaches of earth... to say we are alone in the universe, though we have not found life yet outside of earth, we are looking... given the right ingredients, which are everywhere, life may be inevitable.”

He suggests that humans aren't really that special, how can we be? We aren't made up of anything particularly special, we are made up of the five most common ingredients that make up the universe: Oxygen, Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen and the fifth is interchangeable among a couple other elements like Potassium and Phosphorus. It's ignorant to believe that we are the only life in this vast universe in which we only have the smallest glimpse into seeing and understanding. So, do I believe in aliens? Yes, because I believe in the vastness of the universe and intelligence is subjective and not fully understood.

With this understanding of the potential for life outside of earth it intrigues me to imagine what life on other planets would look like. Having a limited understanding and interest in science provides for an interesting perspective on how life on other planets may appear. Alongside a belief in aliens, I also believe in evolution.

Evolution is the process by which organisms develop and diversify from common ancestors. Ancestors are organisms that come before. Ancestors have the general features that are shared by preceding generations. Evolution is important to me because it provides an ideology to base my work on. I knew I wanted to work with faces, then I realized I wanted to work with faces of my families. Family is important to me because in my experience family members are people that love you unconditionally. Family always sticks by you through thick and thin, at least for me that is how it has been. The family I was born into includes my mom Nancy, my father Matthew, my older brother Ben, and my younger brother Noah. My parents raised us as a tight knit group of five and we have always been there for each other, providing support and care when needed. But I have another family, the one that I've made on my own that expands my concept of family. This family includes my partner Jasper and my closest friends Hannah, Mara, Katie and Hallie. Working with the images of these people is important to me because it allows for a connection to base an evolution on. The people I have chosen are the common ancestors to the people I have created in each of the paintings. They are separate from who they began as, they

are no longer Nancy, Matthew, Ben, Noah, Jasper, Hannah, Mara, Katie and Hallie, but new organisms that share characteristics with whom they were based on.

My paintings express my idea of what life could look like on another planet. Life on other planets could extend beyond our earth and the potential that they may be made up of the same ingredients or variations of those ingredients means life on other planets could be variations of our life. I think of variations in terms of how we would evolve if conditions on our planet were different but still habitable to life. I placed each of my family members in an alternate world of my own creation.

Each painting is made by tracing an oval on a sheet of canvas. Then each oval undergoes a rusting process. This process involves taking brillo pads, breaking them a part and laying them down on the canvas which I moisten with a solution of half distilled vinegar and half water. Then the brillo pads are sprayed with the same solution. The canvas is covered and left for a couple days for the rusting process to take hold. I fell in love with this technique when I learned how to do it my freshman year of college. The rust provides this natural and beautiful abstraction that attracts me. I felt this back drop was a good place for each of the heads I painted because it is otherworldly. I find the rust otherworldly because it isn't typical to find a painting of someone against something so strange. I find the rust strange which works perfectly with the strangeness of each evolution of my family members.

From the rusting process each canvas is stapled and stretched to a wall where only a section gets primed. Each face is then mapped out in charcoal, then again in acrylic paint, then lastly the painting is finished in a few layers of oil. From there the painting dries and encaustic monotypes are sown around the perimeter of each painting.

I knew I wanted to work with encaustic in some way in addition to the canvas because I love the medium. It is a medium like no other and I wanted to continue working with it while I still had the equipment and studio space available to me. I knew by only priming portions of the canvas there was going to part of the canvas



Example of a piece in front of a window with the light showing through exhibiting the halo/nimbus.

that would be transparent and let light in. I wanted light to be a part of the work and I knew encaustic monotypes would be a great addition. To get light through the paintings in the final installation of the pieces, it was important for me to hang them in front of windows. The light through the monotypes creates a halo around each of the images. I find the halos to be

important because it allows for the beings I created to be of an important status. Halos have a long tradition in art making and are generally used with a religious connotation to depict someone who is holy. The halos could also be considered nimbuses, which much in the same way suggests power in the way of creating an aura. With the halos or nimbuses created by the use of light, I've created images that have become powerful. We don't know where these beings come from but we know they are important in some way.

I drew inspiration from the varieties of way portraits are painted and the intentionality of traditional portraiture. "The sheer number and variety of portraits drawn and painted over the centuries provides a fascinating source of imagery, lending insights into changing social conventions and tastes and bringing the past to life... While portraits are intended to display specific features or reveal the character of an individual, they often, perhaps surprisingly, reveal as much about the artist and the artist's relationship with the subject" (Harrison et al). My paintings are



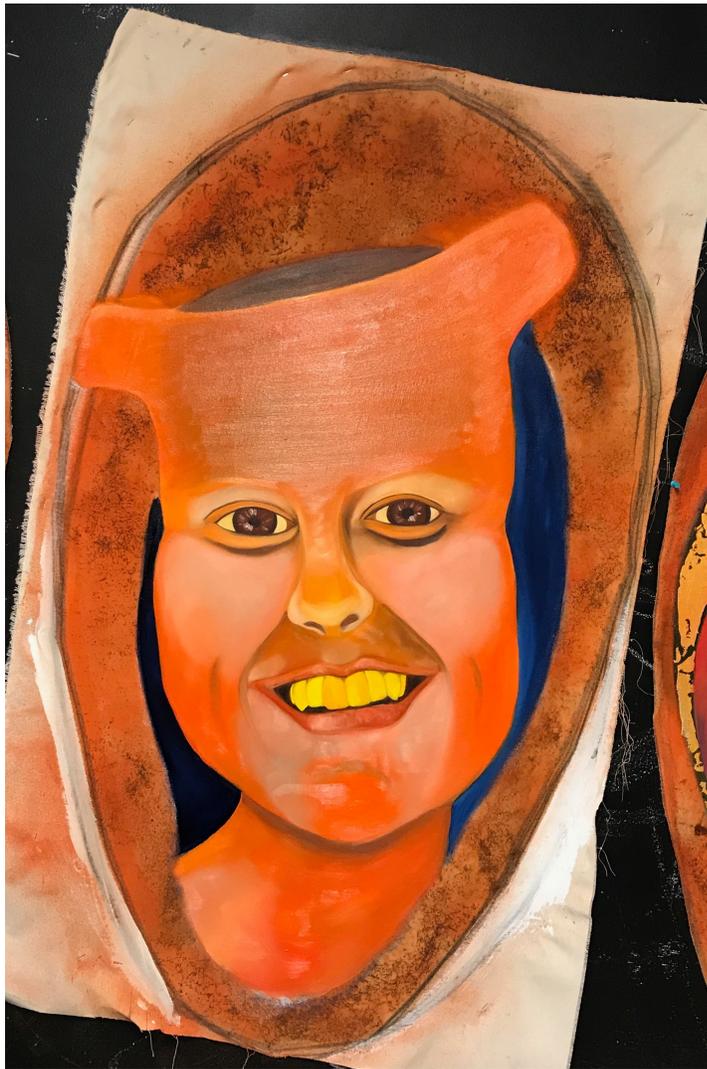
Painting I did of myself.

very much about me as much as they are about the people they are painted of. That is why I also chose to paint an evolution of myself.

There is this exercise where you stare into someone's eyes for five minutes. This staring at someone for five minutes is an excruciating experience because you aren't allowed to look away from that person. Within those five minutes you experience this oscillation from looking at the person to looking at yourself from looking at that person. This exercise shook me. I partook in this exercise a couple times within my school career. I first learned about this from Adrima Abromovich's, "The Artist is Present," performance art piece. I was in art camp one summer and we recreated her performance with our teacher. I couldn't sit in front of her, it was too much and I didn't understand at the time what it meant. A few years later in my existentialism class we performed the five minute staring at someone exercise. I think the exercise lasted two minutes instead of five because the class started going crazy. I never realized until sophomore year of college that relationships with people were that important. I've never been very good at keeping friends. I'm probably only close with my family because I'm blood related to them. But I've gotten better with recognizing that I need people around me. I need my families because having people who know you and who are close to you opens your eyes to who you are as a person and that is important. It is important to recognize how you affect other people and how those people affect you. With this I knew I needed to make something that delved deeper

into my psyche and my understanding of my life and the people that have helped shape it.

I took liberty with how each person was going to evolve. Sometimes I knew right away the direction a face was going to go, while others took me days and many layers of paint to figure out their evolution. It really took me understanding my



relationship with each of the people to know what I felt and saw in order to be able to evolve them. Some evolutions resulted from a physical characteristic the person had, or came from an inward feeling I had. Ultimately they all stem from the same planet which could be considered the planet of my imagination.

The image depicted on the left is the evolution I did of Katie. Katie has a really intense brow line which I wanted to use in some way. I felt like it need to be exaggerated or extended out from her head to create like a plate of armor for a forehead, not literal

armor but armor like what a ram uses. I drew inspiration from a hammer head shark which influenced the end result shape of her head.

The image on the right is the evolution I did of Hallie. Opposite to Katie's I didn't use a physical characteristic for inspiration but rather Hallie's energy for her evolution. Hallie is a very intense and somewhat erratic person. Her energy can be all consuming at times and I thought she would be best as an orb. An orb to me best symbolizes the type of person she can be.



She's the type of orb, much like a planet/moon's gravitational pull, that grabs you and makes you a part of her world.

My paintings are of beings who I think of as aliens that come from another planet. What you see is a group of ten famaliens. They are a family considered of high importance. The imagery is swathed in my imagination, in my understanding of myself, in my relationship with each of the people, and in my creative process of art-

making. My work is removed from the traditional sense of portraiture on planet Earth, but the heads and faces I've made are traditional for the planet of my imagination.

I'm not one for remembering names and so remembering specific artists is a rather difficult task for me. But I love to see and experience art, as that influences my artistic imagery database and my inspiration. Within this past year alone I've been to a few museums and have been exposed to so many great artists. If I have the chance I like to write the names down of the artists who's work spoke to me in some way. Here are a few of those artists that I'd like to thank for adding to my ever expanding view of art: Meiji Furuhashi, Francis Picabia, Marcos Grigorian, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Clifford Still, Giorgio de Chio, Gino Severini, Faith Ringgold, Nan Goldin, Philip Guston, Kathe Kollwitz, Joan Mitchell, Deborah Remington, Ethel Schwbacher, Mary Lee Bendolph, Fred Wilson, Steven Knap, Reginald Marsh, Margaret Bourke-White, Kehinde Wiley, Sharon Hayes, Mickalene Thomas, Nick Cave, Liz Deschenes, Nalini Malani, Kara Walker, Doris Salcedo, Laurent Grasso, Tom Friedman, Verena Pavavel, Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Ryan and Trevor Oakes, Sol Lewit, Nina Katchadourian and Alex De Corta.

Sources:

If you would like to watch the video by Neil deGrasse Tyson here is a link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HO6ONMLfg5A>

Harrison, Hazel, Adrian Bartlett, John Devane, Stan Smith, and Linda Wheeler. The painting and drawing course. New York: Portland House, 1988. Print.