

Do I make your faucet leak?



Max McMillen, B.F.A. Thesis Defense, Painting 2021
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As a woman there is this feeling that a spectator is ever present, looking upon your body at every moment, every day. From an early age women are trained to ensure their body is beautiful unless they would like to be shamed by these spectators. The expectations placed are this: *be neat, be clean, and put on the air of a well maintained appearance. Be attractive while you eat, and while you sleep, also when walking or even sitting down. Don't slouch and always smile. Stay pure as a flower, don't be a slut. Make sure to never leak. Emotionally, physically, what have you. Always be smooth and shaven, too, another aspect that indicates whether you are clean or not.* This becomes an internalized expectation causing women to have an overwhelming feeling that they must be posed, controlled, and perfect to avoid this shame. All of this because of the patriarchal view that the female body is for male consumption, meaning that the women involved are obligated to abide by these particular standards of maintenance and control. My paintings and drawings explore the concept of bodily consumption through portraits that depict women from a variety of viewpoints within bathroom and bedroom settings. These works maneuver around the ever present patriarchal male gaze and they take the time to process by fighting it, challenging it, or simply accepting it while ignoring or rolling its eyes at its presence.



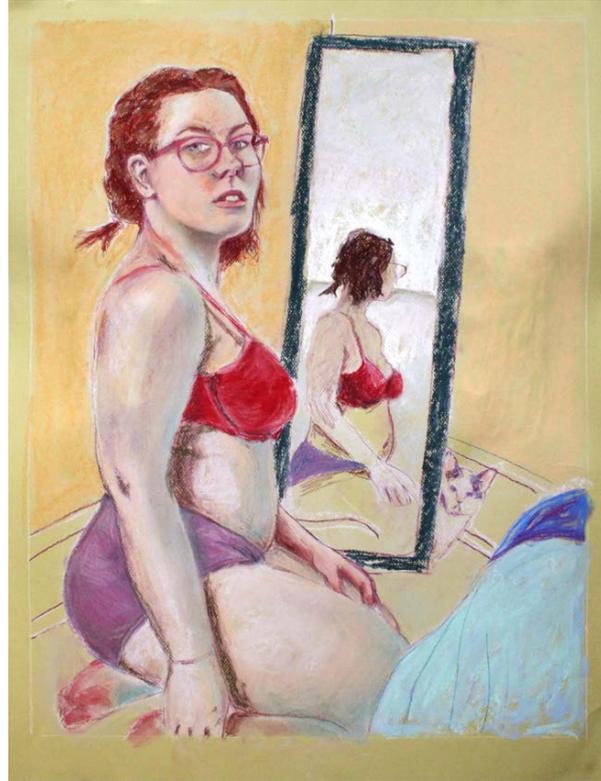
The question at hand is this: does the female nude exist as a passive sex object to intrude upon as titillating and simply as a compositional element to a painting or does it have a place in exploring how women view their bodies without the involvement of man? By depicting different points of viewership, I set up key components in understanding how the female nude was once used in the history of painting that finds itself carried into contemporary culture. I reference paintings ranging from 1555 to 2006 to gesture towards an historical arc of paintings of women through compositional elements and framing of figures. My work challenges viewership against the body as a place of sexual desire by situating the figures in assertive rather than passive postures, ensuring active eye contact from the depicted figure to the viewer. By utilizing the genre of portraiture, the sitter is given agency and their personhood is forefronted. My artwork also challenges the historical role of the male artist who commodified vulnerable moments of women bathing. In my artwork, renderings of faucets symbolically reference these male artists turning them into the passive figure in the bathroom.

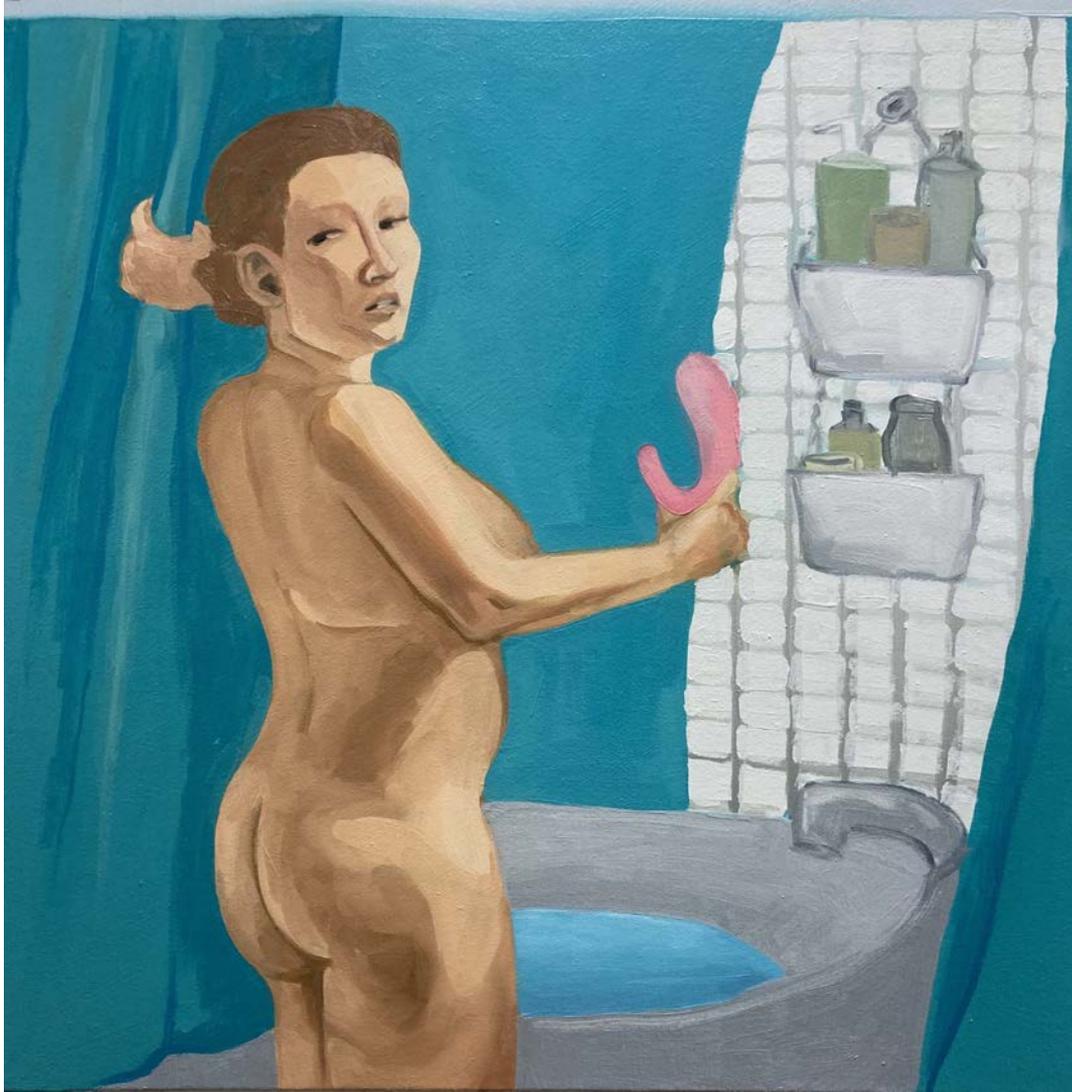
My artworks employ soft pastel and oil pastel on paper, as well as oil on canvas and oil on Yupo. Through these mediums I experience an immediacy in creating, causing something raw and primal to occur in the translation from viewing the sitter to thought to hand. Marks are rough and aggravated, harsh and scratchy. In other moments the marks are soft and buttery. In the pictures I create, realism spotlights the figures then dissipates through the background, implying a façade exists within the picture, thus breaking the illusion of actual lived space set up through the realistic portrait. This way of rendering implies to the viewer that reality is malleable. The soft pastels continue the malleability by adding a dreamy and ethereal tone to the work. My artwork escapes the viewer from being something easily accessible and understood to the other side of something fleeting and difficult to hold onto. Tangibility, something that painting so heavily relied on once before, is twisted and used to my own advantage. This is echoed through my goals to upend the art historical expectations upon the female nude.



Untitled (After Psycho)

Eco-Solvent ink on shower curtain,
shower rod, shower rings, 50" x 70", 2021





***I'm Busy:
It's Called "Alone Time"
for a Reason***

Oil on canvas stretched on a panel,
23" x 23", 2020



I'm Busy:

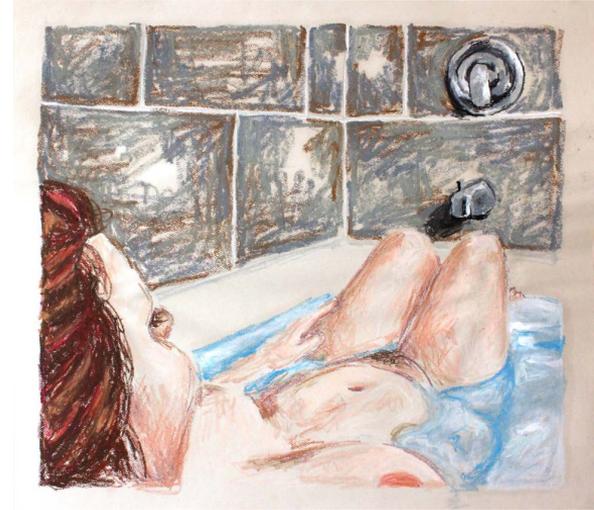
Just Five More Minutes

Chalk pastels on Fabriano paper,
20" x 25", 2021



***I'm Busy:
I Didn't Invite You
for a Reason***

Chalk pastels on Fabriano paper,
20" x 20", 2021



Bathtime Series



Bathtime:

21st Century American Gothic

Chalk pastels on Canson paper
glued to oil on Yupo,
19" x 24", 2021



***Bathtime:
Full Throttle***

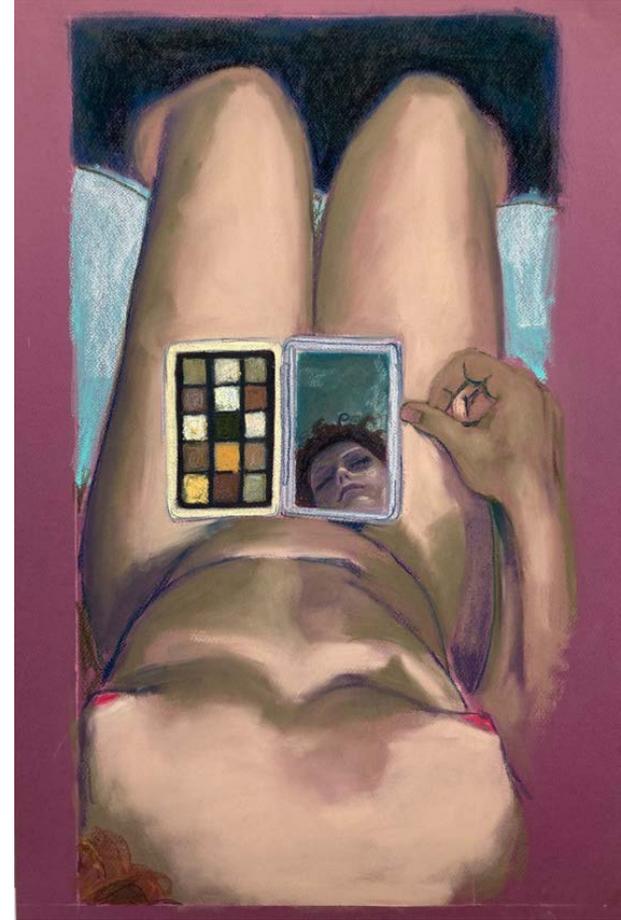
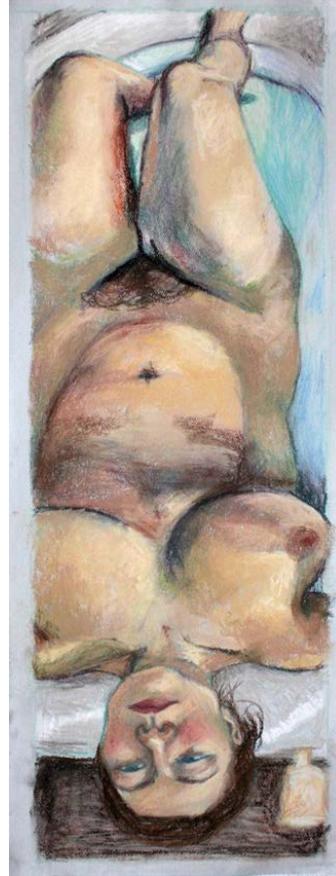
Oil paint and oil pastels on yupo,
18" x 24", 2021



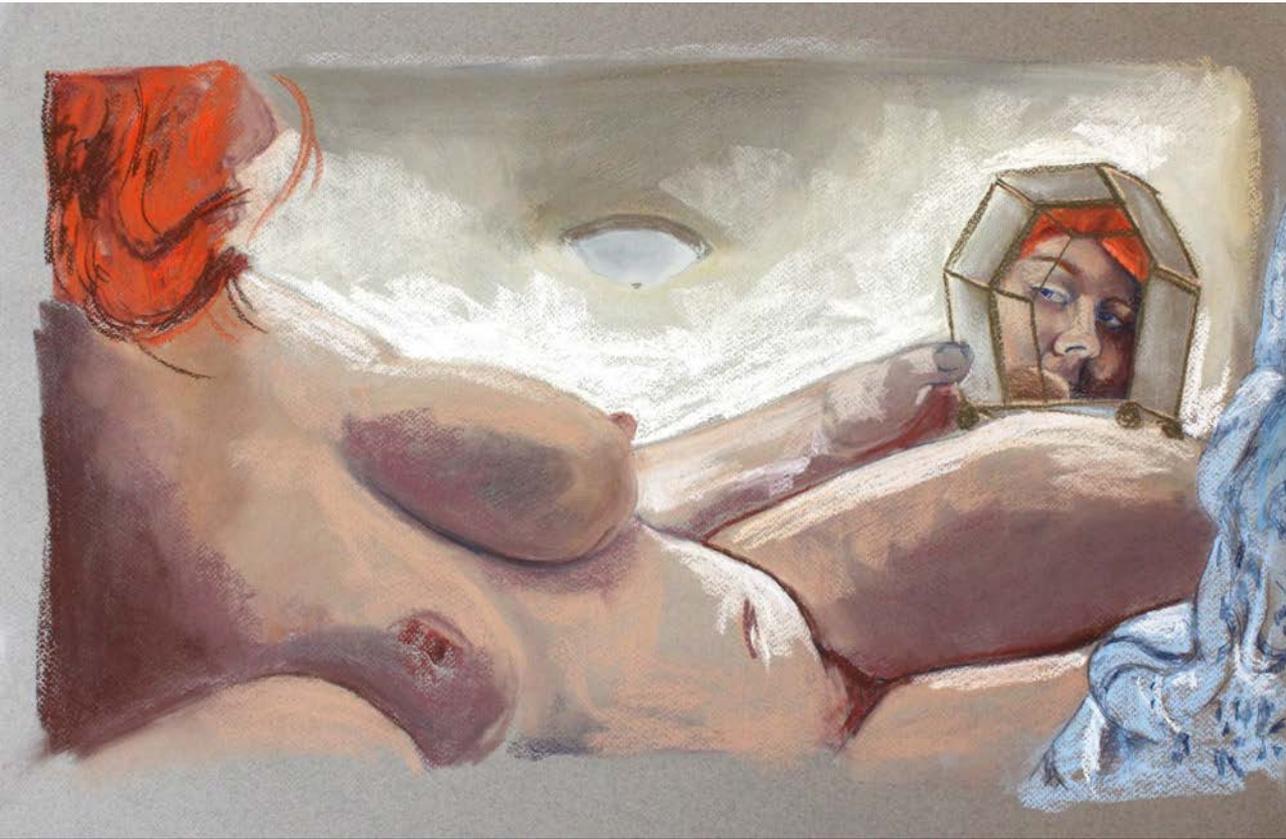
Bathtime:

But Maybe I'm the Artist Now

Oil pastels on Canson paper,
18" x 24", 2020



Self Observations Series



***Self Observations:
Boobie Light and I***

Chalk pastels on Fabriano paper,
15" x 25", 2021



Self Observations:

In My Entirety

Chalk pastels on Canson paper,
8" x 23", 2021



Self Observations:

Nicolette

Chalk pastels on Fabriano paper,
13" x 25", 2021