

Susan Hoffer
Artist Statement

I am interested in the experience of real or perceived isolation that is a result of geographical place and in the ways we use technology to form connections. In our digital age, new media have become a primary means of informational access for many people living in rural areas such as the Adirondack Park. In each painting, I aim to connect my subjects to their broader context, hinting at their engagement with global concerns. The figures are presented as thinking and introspective, and through their stories we may recognize that we have more in common than what our differences suggest.

Each painting is autobiographical in that they bring forth my shared experiences with neighbors and friends in the rural area where I live. Several contemporary painting concerns are evidenced in the presence of technology, the use of direct, thick brushwork, and invention—with some parts of some forms abstracted or fragmented by intense light. Just as a writer develops a narrative letter by letter, word by word, so too I develop each painting brushstroke by brushstroke, section by section, realizing that as I navigate in the world of other people's experiences my own story unfolds before me.

I paint small sections in thick, economical, *alla prima* marks often subtracting the excess information. These sections develop in the same way as the conversation with the subjects in them: at the center of each conversation lies a central thought, theme, or idea that helps me generate the narrative—the setting, the pose, the curated objects—in the image. Other times I paint a small area with little to no revision, strategizing from “general to specific” finishes or adding objects. These sections reflect other moments when little or no editing is necessary: where the subjects present themselves spontaneously and without artifice, where the image and idea are simply there and I capture and translate them in paint. And in other areas I explore impasto paint texture. For me, the thickly built-up paint texture, the objects and details, and the fragmented forms become invitations posed by the figure to slow down and pay close attention. If I consider whether or not I have a spiritual practice, I realize it is and always has been with the painting process.

Each painting begins very differently. Sometimes I have an idea that is triggered by my reaction to a recent news event—the death of another black man or yet another attack on a synagogue or mosque or school, or something someone in power says or does—and I consider who might also feel strongly about what just happened. And then I reach out in my community and begin to ask questions. Other times I might be just having a conversation with a neighbor or one of my students and they mention something that I hadn't known or considered. An example of that is our small Latinx community's apprehension about leaving their urban environment for the “deep north.” And sometimes I just stumble upon a beautiful image and have the presence of mind to use my phone to snap a photo. Often, and I'm never sure why at the time, I intuit that it will be a good photo reference at some point. Sometimes those spontaneous photos are prompts for paintings that are the most personal, such as the photo I took of my father just weeks before he died. And often, I go back to that setting and take more photos. These multiple photographic references are enhanced by my own perceptions of the figure and the space they inhabit.

Time and place—living in a rural, somewhat remote mountainous area—have informed this work. Those whom I meet speak of an interest to be engaged in culture and politics beyond their immediate locale; a reliance on often unreliable internet and cell towers; suspicion about how to tell which internet sources might troll or manipulate truth; and always pressure—pressure to piece together multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. It is evident, too, that there are frictions here that have resulted from acres of poverty with pockets of great wealth, and shifting and aging populations; all of this I express through ordinary objects and people, frayed cuffs and halos of light, non-traditional alignments of the pedestrian and the sublime. And through this body of work, I am becoming increasingly aware of the easy assumptions we make about ourselves and others.