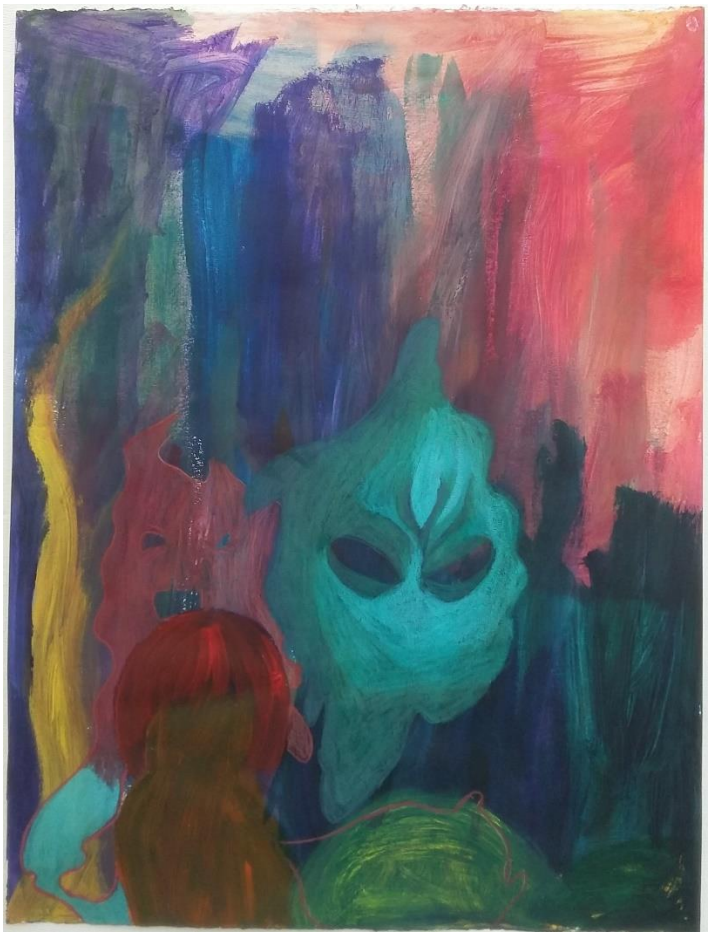
Mariella Reich

Senior Project

Artist Statement

Through the use of abstract figures and landscapes, I enjoy creating and exploring the uncanny within my art. The uncanny is defined as the psychological experience of something being odd or mysterious. (Royle) It is often used to describe things or situations as strange or unsettling. (Royle) In *First Impressions* I focus on the way that artists can create mood through the use of the uncanny. This is often conveyed through subject matter and the technical elements of the artwork. I am interested in the mood these figures in my work portray and if the figures are portrayed as simply odd or if they embody other moods.

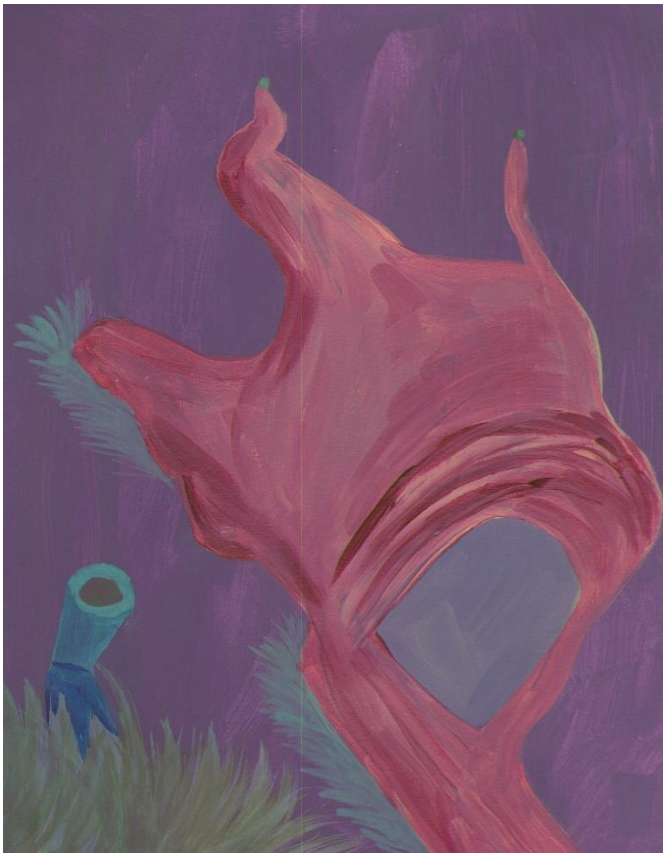
My work depicts abstract figures in surreal landscapes. I use saturated colors to help create the mood I want to portray within my work.



Hanging Out, 2020

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint and colored pencil on paper, 22x16.5



Fish Head, 2020

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint, 9.5x12

First Impressions, 2021

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint, colored pencil, collage, 10.5x16.5

An artist that does this well is Judith Linhares. Linhares is an American painter who works in oil paint and often places blocks of saturated color in her artwork, which give them a distinctive quality and mood. This unique quality is displayed in the painting below entitled *Dawn*. (Yau, 2019)

Dawn, 2017

Judith Linhares

Oil on linen, 48x78

Along with color, I use mixed media to enhance the ambiguity of the figures within my work. I combine acrylic paint, colored pencil and collage to achieve this effect. I work on paper, as mixed media works better on paper. I start by painting the paper with a solid color of acrylic paint, and then either paste on collaged paper or start drawing with colored pencil. The collage below entitled *Landscape* is an example of this. The background is a wash of acrylic paints while the figures and foliage are a mix of collage and colored pencil.

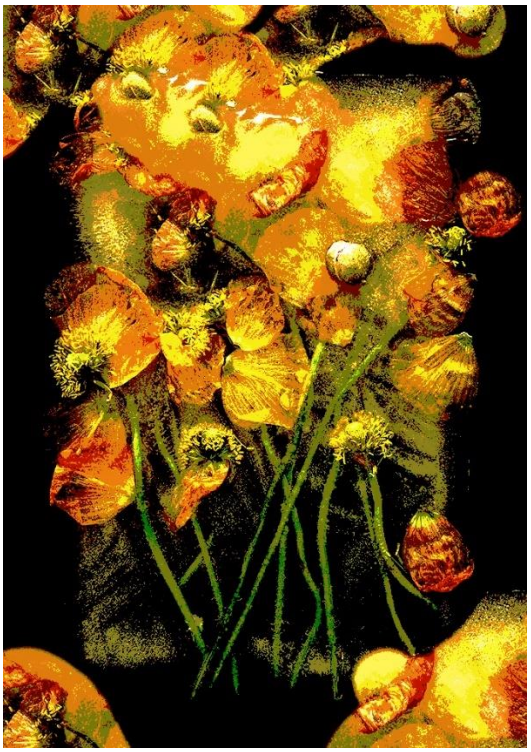
Landscape, 2020

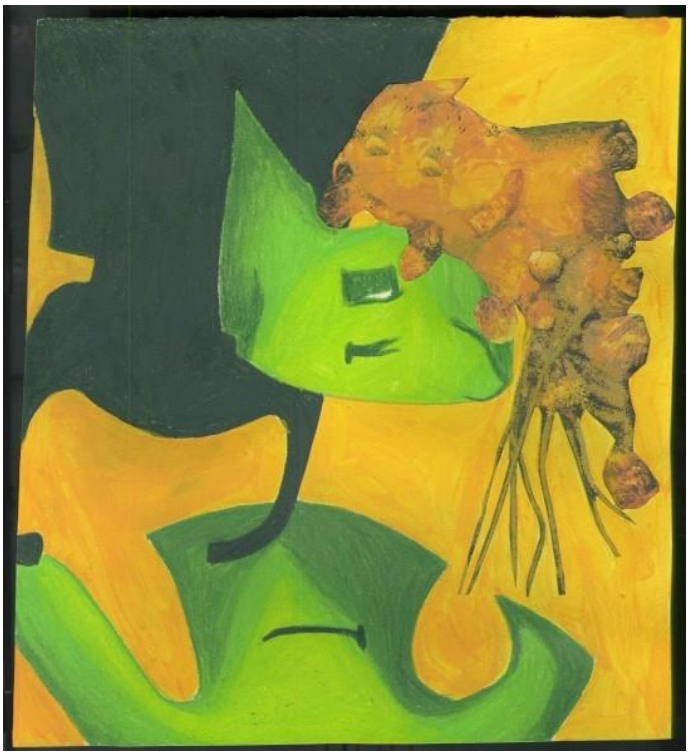
Mariella Reich

acrylic paint, colored pencil and collage on paper, 22x16

These steps are interchangeable. Often, I go back and use paint to create definitive shapes. Paint can be a more effective in some instances. Paint is also a more forgiving medium compared to colored pencil, and can be used as a trial layer before the final layer is either covered with collage or colored pencil. The ratio of paint, colored pencil and collage changes with every piece.

The images I use for my collages are from nature. I find images from nature have a lot of potential for abstraction. The reference photo I used and digitally altered below was a photo of frozen flowers. Next to it is the artwork that incorporates a portion of the photo in it. The portion of the photo I used is an interesting abstraction, so I cut it out and used it in *Untitled*.





Untitled, 2021

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint, colored pencil and collage on paper, 11.5x10.5

Seaweed Queen, 2020

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint and colored pencil on paper, 11x9.5

In previous works I was using reference photos of deep-sea creatures for the past year, as they are uncanny. This has to do with the fact that deep-sea creatures evolve differently since they are deprived of sunlight, which results in their strange, otherworldly appearances. In an article about Steve DiBenedetto's most recent work involving octopi, John Yau mentions that octopi are "the closest we come to having contact with an alien intelligence". (Yau, 2020) In this body of work, I am using more general elements of nature. I use photoshop to digitally edit these images to the point where the images are unrecognizable. This is usually done by altering the colors, as well as cutting and pasting online before repeating this step on the physical copy. I incorporate collage into my art because it helps inform the landscape around the figures I create. John Kelsey accurately describes it as playing "a primary role in the artists' process—as the starting point or foundation of almost every one of his paintings". (Kelsey)

Another artist that incorporates collage into their artwork is Wangechi Mutu. Mutu is a Kenyan artist that works in mixed media and sculpture. Mutu often utilizes collage when creating representations of the female body in her work, as well as references to nature. In an article about Mutu, Allison Meier refers to Mutu's process as using "collage as repair" rather than destruction. (Meier) Instead of viewing this process as destructive, its viewed as the next step to creating new figures and bringing pieces together to make a whole.

Pretty Double-Headed, 2010

Wangechi Mutu

Mixed media, ink, collage and spray paint on mylar, 34x41

Sometimes I blend the figures and the landscape together to add to the abstraction of the piece. This can be seen in *Low On Energy*.

Low On Energy, 2020

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint and colored pencil, 17x22.5

An artist that also blends the figure and landscapes together is Steve DiBenedetto, an American artist who works mostly in oil paints. DiBenedetto creates large paintings of these abstracted figures while using mark-making and texture to aid in the blending of figure and landscape. (Yau, 2018)

In paintings such as Traipser, the handling of the brushwork becomes noticeable upon closer inspection. Clumps of dried paint and scratched out brush marks become visible on other layers of paint, which help give DiBenedetto's figures more weight in reality.

Traipser, 2018

Steve DiBenedetto

Oil on canvas, 65x60

The figures and the landscapes in *First Impressions* are an amalgamation of acrylic paint, colored pencil and collage. Collage, whether it's digital or physical, is helpful with generating ideas for new works, as well as new designs for figures. Not all of my art is mixed media, but I use it often because of the way the uncanny and the ambiguity can be translated differently through a mix of mediums brought together.

An of example of this is represented by the artwork *Fruit*, which employs the use of texture via colored pencils on both the creature in the center and the wood of the tree. The colored pencil allows for a stark contrast to the smooth acrylic background.

Fruit, 2020

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint and colored pencil on paper, 13x11

Next to the artwork is the sketch that gave me the idea to create the piece. I have been using the sketches in my sketchbook to help create the creatures that end up in my final pieces. Again, I use digitally altered images or collages to help with this process as it allows me to spot uncanny shapes within the images easier than regular photos.

Untitled, 2020

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint, colored pencil and collage, 11.5x11

Anonymous, 2020

Mariella Reich

Acrylic paint, 22x19

First Impressions explores the uncanny in art through the use of abstract figures and landscapes. This series depicts abstract figures in surreal landscapes. I have been using the sketches in my sketchbook to help create the creatures that end up in my final pieces. Along with color, I use mixed media to enhance the ambiguity of the figures within my work. The figures and the landscapes in my work are an amalgamation of acrylic paint, colored pencil and collage. Sometimes I blend the figures and the landscapes together to add to the abstraction of the piece. The process of applying collage, paint, and colored pencil are interchangeable steps. The starting inspirational images for *First Impressions* are collages from nature. In previous works, I was using reference photos of deep-sea creatures because they are inherently uncanny. In the current series, perception of these figures is important because the more abstracted the figures become, the more subjective they and the mood around them becomes. Aside from aesthetics, the work explores the mood that uncanny figures create and whether or not they are perceived as threatening, docile or even comical. Often these moods or qualities can apply to the work simultaneously. *First Impressions* depicts abstract figures embodying the uncanny and encourages the viewer to think about the mood and narrative of the work.

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