

Just Between Us, Dogs and Owners.



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IP Thesis

A dog is a man's best friend. It is such a common phrase that everyone might know, but why are they considered our best friends? There must be something that differentiates the relationship that humans have developed with dogs from other animals. As I was shuffling through some photographs that I took at animal shelters, rather than the photographs that showed the negativity, I found myself feeling more connected to the ones that show interactions between the dogs and the volunteers. Promoting awareness and educating the public is important, but at the heart of all that is the unique relationship that we develop with these animals. That was what fueled me in pursuing this topic and to remind others of that feeling might be better than trying to educate with cold hard facts and harsh images. I needed to acknowledge and share my reason of passion. Thus, my project evolved into combining two of my biggest interests, art and dogs. More explicitly, painting and dogs. Painting has always been a medium that allows me to incorporate my raw emotions, and thus was the perfect choice. My project focuses on portraying different types of relationships that dogs have developed with mankind. With the goal of helping people realize not only the responsibilities and morals, but also the strong bond and the love that might come with the companionship we gain from pets.

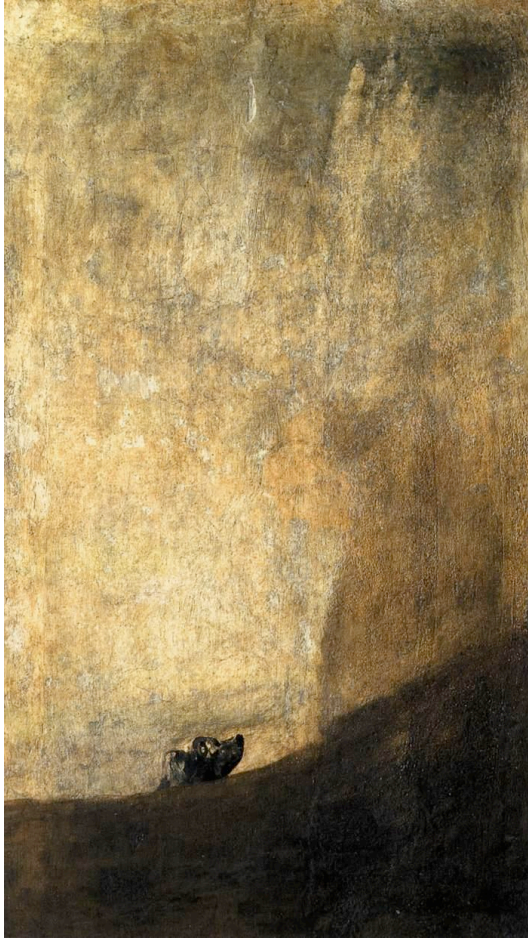
For all my life, I believed it was innate in a person to have passion for dogs. I've always grown up with a dog in the family and have since realized how big of a role they can play in a person's life. The companionship that a dog gives is unlike any other, they could assume any role that you might feel a void in and thus is truly unique. A person will always have their own personal lives to lead, whereas the life of a dog largely consists of its relationship with the owner. They are capable of molding to the owner's life. For example, when my sister went away to college, our dog was the one that took her place as a sister. When I had to go away for college also, our dog was the one that kept my mom company as a daughter. The roles they have in our lives are versatile, they are true companions, and companionship can also be a form of love. The range of emotions that are felt in the relationship is dynamic and broad, sometimes indescribable with words.

Looking back in time, owning dogs were considered a privilege only given to the rich and royalty. They are slowly but surely transitioning from "property" and icon of wealth, to companion and family, although there are many differences in progress over different cultures.

For example, the mindset that pets are properties is stronger in Korea than in the U.S. resulting in the lack of animal awareness. I grew up in Korea where there is very little animal awareness, if any. There are stray dogs literally everywhere, and it is a common practice to eat them, come spring and summer. It is not a surprising thing for an owner to abandon their dogs just because they grew out of their puppy stage or because they bark too much. It is not uncommon for owners to abandon their dogs due to maintenance cost, vet bills or even old age. It is actually a very common practice for owners to hit their dogs, sometimes even cross over the line and abuse them. I thought this was mainly because of where our culture derived from, where dogs were considered a food source in scarce times. However I soon realized it is largely because of the widespread stereotype that dogs are our possession and property, not a companion.

Over the past summer, I went to Korea and started volunteering at a shelter. I developed strong relationships with the abandoned dogs at the shelter and desperately wanted people to know how special these animals are and how serious of a problem is being caused. There were countless phone calls of stray dogs to be picked up, and no enough room for any more. This meant the dogs that came earlier had to be euthanized, and because of the shortage of shelter room, the life of an abandoned dog went from 30 days to a maximum of 10 days. But I wondered, Just because the lives spent were not human, is it okay for them to be treated as a “thing” with expiration dates? It led me to think, what makes me so passionate about this topic? What makes a person become so passionate about these animals?

Around this time, I was greatly inspired by the piece “1025: In Between People” by Seok-Nam Yoon. When she visited a shelter, she was inspired by the increasing number of abandoned dogs and decided to paint wooden sculptures of each of those 1025 dogs. Yoon filled the wood pieces in an empty room, so that when viewers walk in, they can feel an overwhelming emotional presence of these countless wood pieces of dogs, which allows you to have a glimpse of how serious animal abandonment is. It gets its message across without directly or openly criticizing anyone merely just by the presence. I also wanted to create a painting that doesn’t criticize nor praise any particular type of relationship, but still lets the audience carry a lingering emotion with them as they move on.



"The Dog" by Francisco Goya



"1025" by Seok-Nam Yoon

After looking more explicitly into paintings that portray dogs and their owners, "The Dog" by Francisco Goya and "Eli and David" by Lucian Freud inspired me the most. In Goya's painting the dog is looking up at his owner who is on his deathbed. The colors, all the void space and the smallest portrayal of the dog all add to a sense of loss, sadness or loneliness that the dog might be feeling. Also, in Freud's painting, at first glance it might not be clear, but when you study it you can tell it has a more emotional aspect to it just by the way the man is lying on the sofa. The look on his face as if he is dazed or nonchalant adds a more natural feeling as well as the dog on his lap clearly is feeling safe and relaxed. It gives the viewers a sense of safety, a relationship where the two are completely comfortable and trusting of each other. For my

paintings I wanted to combine the aspects I learned from these work and incorporate it into my work.

Eventually my project narrowed down to focusing on portraying the types of relationship and emotions that dogs might have developed with humans. I focused on portraying different situations that the dogs might face. There are people like me who have developed a relationship defined with love and compassion, and an occasional sourness here and there that comes along with emotional and physical attachment, etc. Then there are people who define their relationships with abandonment and abuse, such as those who view dogs as property, or an accessory, or even an outlet for their frustration. Throughout the course of the project, I realized that it is impossible to define a relationship that a person has with their dog with one word, or even any words in general. It is that “feeling” which I strived to explore and convey. One relationship will of course have a wide range of emotions attached, and sometimes the viewer might not even be able to pinpoint what words might come to mind.

My paintings include a variety of styles such as abstract lines with realistic renderings, composition styles that connect with the subject of the painting, etc. Although having consistent visual elements throughout a series of paintings is important, this project’s consistency lies on its subject matter most importantly. The visual elements are aspects that are added to the painting to help create the mood and ambience. For example, the painting that portrays a dog’s life in a shelter may have dimmer lighting, colors, strangely awkward compositions, etc. Some other elements such as lines, patterns, shapes and brush strokes will also help to enhance the mood of the individual paintings and their focus. The subject matter of these work of body will be the cohesive bond that holds them together.

Some examples of abstraction I used in my paintings include use of lines, blurred faces, awkward compositions, etc. For example, an abstract line that comes out from the dog depicts what his thoughts might be and is connected to a little girl who is the owner. I also attempted exploring the dog’s point of view and started focusing solely on portraying the dog rather than on the human, still trying various mixed media and painting styles. I started to incorporate patterns and various bold colors into the painting to see what kind of elements and pigments would give out what certain mood types or emotions. I began to think more of composition and what type of

relationship I wanted to portray. I also used mixed media such as newspaper and painted paper, pen, pencil, etc. Using multiple surfaces and layers expands the emotions and space that I can explore. For example, each layer contains different meanings and words, they are different to the touch, some rough and some smooth. Layering different colors on top of each other can mean an overlay of emotions or display a hidden meaning in the relationship that I am trying to convey. I attempted to portray a dog that feels trapped in a city where its priority is achieved as a accessory. These paintings focused more on visual elements such as portraying the mood of the surroundings and the overall painting via background space. Most of my body of work focuses in on the human-dog interaction/relationship. Thus, incorporating text elements that might aid the viewers in understanding what type of interaction lies between them. Some scrambled texts and phrases include “A relationship involves more than just one; it is a buildup of trust between two beings.” Abstraction allows me to be free with my work. Instead of thinking ahead and planning too much, my goal for this body of works was to dig deep into my emotions and put it on the surface.

As much as this project started out as a more hands-on promoting awareness idea, it has helped me get in touch with what I really love. I realized that focusing only on animal abandonment and abuse directly might be helpful in a sense, but there are many people who are out there who view posters and commercials of how bad things are and not feel a thing because they don't realize “why” they should care. As my project developed, I geared towards finding that answer, and arrived at a point where I believe one's experience with something is what changes one's perspective. By creating a series of paintings that depicts a range of emotions and experiences that an owner might have with a dog, I want to offer the audience an experience of their own.



Bound Together

Mixed Media

(Acrylic, oil, charcoal, pen on canvas)



A Conversation

Mixed Media

(Acrylic, oil, pen on canvas)





Kennel #35

Mixed Media

(Acrylic, oil, charcoal, pen on canvas)



Untitled #1
Mixed Media
(Acrylic, oil, charcoal, pen on canvas)



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