

Student's gallery exhibit explores symbolic boundaries

By Erin McWhorter
ARTS AND FEATURES EDITOR
EMMCWHOR@UNCA.EDU

Struggling to complete the artist's statement that will accompany her layered, gridlock-like paintings, Louise Davis anticipates the opening of "Symbolic Boundaries Revisited," her second gallery exhibit in Ramsey Library's third floor gallery.



Louise Davis

"I want to say something in my statement about these reflecting a transitional or liminal state," Davis, 25, said. "More than a transition, it's about these crossroads and the idea of grids."

The eight-piece series focuses on the composition of lines as grids, as well as layers, color coordination and emotional expression through acrylic paints and canvas.

"They're starting to look more like walls and nets to me, and like they can hold things and sustain things. They can also block things and things can get trapped in them," Davis said of her second series.

Davis is a senior at UNC Asheville majoring in sociology with a concentration in anthropology. Her first gallery exhibit, "Symbolic Boundaries," was featured in the Third Floor Gallery last spring. Inspired by comments written at her first gallery exhibit, she decided a second series would open up more opportunities for her to explore with acrylics.

"I read the comment book and it really helped me keep painting. It really made me think 'Wow, these people all support me and believe in me and see beauty in this.' That meant a lot to me," she said. "It definitely gave me that platform. I was ready to take it to another level. I was ready to go bigger, to think out of the box a little bit more and allow the lines to take on a life of their own."

The titles "Symbolic Boundaries" and "Symbolic Boundaries Revisited" stem from her studies as a cultural anthropology student.

While creating the second series, Davis said she allowed herself more room for experimentation with various techniques, including the direction of drips, depth through layering paint and less-controlled line composition.

"What I love most about painting these is just getting lost in the colors. Painting grids has been easy because I haven't had to sit there and really think about a composition. Instead, I can just play and create through color, which has become so comfortable for me," she said.

One specific piece, shown above, is



composed of three faces of a girl with expressive features displayed in a green hue and grid lines consuming the background of the painting. Davis believes the piece to be a raw extension of herself due to the relationships that influenced its construction at the time.

"A lot of these I've done in times of transition," she said. "I've had so many different transitional states these past two semesters with trying to figure out what I'm going to do when I graduate this May."

The painting she is most worried about fitting into the series reminds her of things in motion and getting stuck. She said it has an ominous sensation about it, especially since the piece features more black than she normally uses. It is also the piece whose composition spanned three months, compared to other pieces' completion that ranged from four hours to a couple of days.

"It's going to be really hard hanging the show and figuring out what order I want them in," Davis said. "I'm really worried about how all these are going to look together. It is challenging because it is scary sharing such a vulnerable personal expression of yourself. I'm constantly thinking, 'Is this good enough to show? Is this going to look right? Am I going to embarrass myself?'"

Davis is an advocacy intern at the Autism Society of North Carolina. Among her multiple responsibilities, she facilitates art sessions with adults with autism. She believes art is a good lifeline people can use to bond and connect with others and to explore various parts of themselves.

"The state I do art in really kind of replenishes me and nourishes me in so many ways, even though it might not do that for everybody. A lot of times when I'm working with others who might not do art as frequently as I do, I really hope



Photos courtesy of Louise Davis

Louise Davis works on a tentative acrylic piece for her upcoming Ramsey Library gallery exhibit "Symbolic Boundaries Revisited."

"What I love most about painting these is just getting lost in the colors."

– Louise Davis,

UNCA senior sociology student

they get that sense of relief and refuge in what they create," she said. "I like being able to share that and I like being able to see the creative process for other people."

She said many people ask a lot of questions about how she works as an artist, and conducting art sessions with other people allows her to see how their creative process differs from her own.

"Doing this makes me wonder more about others too. It makes me wonder what other people are doing outside of class work because I know a lot of people do a lot of amazing things," Davis said.

Davis began her journey as a self-taught artist by exploring with pastels and colored pencils. She then moved on to watercolor painting and finally settled on primarily using acrylics.

"I feel like I have a friend in acrylics," she said. "I know art classes could see my stuff, tear it apart and find things that are wrong. I'm just doing what I know

how to do. That's the great thing about acrylics, I feel safe with them. If I mess up, I just let it dry and I paint over it."

In the time the paintings for the series did not distract from school work, Davis said she felt empowered to know that she has skills that can still be to both her own benefit and the community's outside the collegiate realm, even if she does not intend to utilize them in a career path or for profit.

"What I really want people to take from it, more than anything, is encouragement to cultivate something meaningful in their own lives. It might be miniscule, it might not be profitable, it might not be the main focus of their life, but if it's important to them, it's important to pursue."

The opening reception for "Symbolic Boundaries Revisited" will be held April 19 at 6:30 p.m. in Ramsey Library's third floor gallery. The exhibit will be on display until May 7.