Always Running at Sunset

Amelia O'Neill

Brigham Young University

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Always Running at Sunset

Amelia O’Neill

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Peter Everett, Chair
Fidalis Buehler
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Department of Art
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

Always Running at Sunset

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Master of Fine Arts

My thesis show includes paintings that depict scenes of the trails that my dog and I frequent in Utah. These paintings are a response to experiences I have in nature and explore my relationship with my dog and the surrounding flora and fauna along the local trails. The paintings include images of rocks, sticks, dirt, trails, dogs, clouds, and dried sunflowers in the wind. In addition to realistic depictions of nature, my paintings reflect on the psychological and emotional state of being in nature. The title of the show is Always Running at Sunset, which is meant to be taken both literally and figuratively because I usually run trails at sunset, but I also run to escape into nature when things that are meaningful to me—relationships or states of being—are coming to a close or a “sunset.” My painting process is deliberately intuitive, allowing room for emotional content to be infused into the paintings. My affinity for landscape painting came from my own experience and from the example of many artists who are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: nature, trails, painting, landscape, art
I want to thank my friends, family, and cohort who have supported me throughout graduate school. I am also grateful for the outstanding professors and their generosity in helping me grow both personally and academically during my time here at BYU. I would like to specifically thank my committee, Peter Everett, Fidalis Buehler, and Jennifer Watson for their guidance. I would not be the artist that I am today without them.
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Introduction

Utah’s Wasatch Mountains are home to an impressive network of trails, whose trailheads sit in the foothills, just minutes above major suburban areas. The unique proximity of these trails leads many people to use them year-round, despite the mostly unremarkable, barren scenery, which only improves at higher elevations. Over the past six years, I have spent an extended amount of time on these trails with my canine companion, Bessie. Bessie is a quiet herding dog that I adopted after a particularly devastating heartbreak in 2016. I liked hiking before I adopted Bessie, but when I started hiking with my dog in tow, I felt a newfound confidence that sent us to the tops of mountains and treading trails after dark. The familiar, reliable trails in Salt Lake became a refuge to me. We often ran at sunset because it was the most convenient time, and I fell in love with the sense of awe that overcame me each time I watched the sky shift to night.

Shortly after moving to Provo, my dog and I sought out new trails that would give us the same freedom and vitality we had found in our old ones. We quickly discovered trails in Utah county, including Bonneville Shoreline Trail and trails in Rock Canyon, Slate Canyon, and Provo Canyon. Our most frequented, however, was the Bonneville Shoreline Trail, which starts one mile east of our house, at the mouth of Slate Canyon. Most of the paintings in my show come from this trail.

My thesis show is about my experience with my dog on these trails with the flora and fauna we met along the way. The title of the show is *Always Running at Sunset*, which is meant to be taken both literally and figuratively because I usually run trails at sunset, but I also run to escape into nature when things that are meaningful to me—relationships or states of being—are coming to a close or a “sunset.”
The paintings in the show include depictions of objects such as rocks, sticks, dirt, trails, dogs, clouds, and sunflowers as well as simple scenes, such as a dog catching a fish, a girl extending a hand to a dog, and a dog traveling through burned trees. Occasionally, I push the paintings a step further and explore the idea of imagination as an escape from reality. These paintings are about the presence-ness of these things we meet and wanting to hold onto that presence. They are also about how spending time on these trails with my dog has helped heal my childhood wounds of abandonment. In this paper, I share a series of personal anecdotes that lay the groundwork for the healing that takes place through my relationship with my dog and nature. I also briefly reference some of my artistic influences and the patterns I have observed in my work while preparing for this show.

**Childhood, Moving, and Dogs**

There is a certain sadness that follows someone when they grow up missing one of their parents. It shows itself when the person least expects it. At times they feel alarmingly untethered and confused. An odd pang hits their chest, a pang that becomes an ache, which is housed somewhere deeper than memory or soul. Psychologists talk about this sadness, saying that early childhood abandonment can affect someone for the rest of their life, giving them an anxious attachment disorder which is chronic fear of loneliness—a psychological theory I disliked until recently, when I recognized its relevance in my life through therapy. I have had anxious attachment anxiety most of my child and adult life. However, I think for most of my childhood

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the so-called abandonment wound, or anxious attachment need, was swallowed up in the glee of running around in the sunlight, chasing snakes or rolling on the grass, and laughing with the neighborhood kids. I remember swimming in my cousins’ pool all day every day of summer until I had to be forced to go inside to dry off. I believe I spent the majority of my childhood anxious, but happy.

My biological father left our family when I was two years old, never to be seen again. But my mom was not the wallowing type, so she skillfully avoided Father’s Day, Bring Your Dad to School Day, and all other father-centric activities. I stayed with family and friends while she worked nights and weekends as a midwife. When she was home, she slept. I was happy when I was with friends, but I was worried and cried a lot when I was alone. I think some proof of an attachment issue is evident in my deep fear that my mom was going to die. In fourth grade, I called the bishop of our ward in hysterics because she was late getting home and I was certain that she had died in a car crash. I ran out of the theater during a class field trip to see the animated film *Jack Frost* because one of the parents dies and comes back as a snowman. One time I thought that my mom was smoking, and I cried because I had learned in school that smoking can kill you, and therefore she was going to die. She was not smoking—it was my imagination. I do not think I trusted people to stay. I slept in her room for longer than a child should.

Mary Oliver writes about the way in which children absorb surrounding emotions in her personal essay “Staying Alive”:

*Adults can change their circumstances; children cannot. Children are powerless, and in difficult situations they are the victims of every sorrow and mischance and rage around*
them, for children feel all of these things but without any of the ability that adults have to change them. Whatever can take a child beyond such circumstances, therefore, is an alleviation and a blessing.

I quickly found for myself two such blessings—the natural world, and the world of writing: literature. These were the gates through which I vanished from a difficult place.²

If Mary Oliver’s blessings were the natural world and the world of writing, mine were friends, dogs, and—as I grew older—the natural world as well. From ages two to seven, I bounced between the houses of my friends and grandparents. One house was that of my first best friend, named Bessie. Another was the home of a single mom named Jane, who had two boisterous labs that I loved. Another was my aunt and uncle’s house, which had a pool I could swim in and cousins and dogs I could play with. Another was my grandparents’ house, a quiet place where I sometimes felt lonely but also felt important.

I remember desperately wanting to belong to one place instead of belonging a little bit to many places. I liked observing the busy families, and I liked sitting at the dinner table while everyone argued and laughed while I could just be a part of it. I belonged to all of them, and I shared in all of their energy, which took the loneliness and sadness away from me. At the Hainsworth’s house (a family with six kids who my mom had been a midwife for), all of the

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siblings and I slept on the floor in one big room. I felt safe there. I’m sure I fell asleep with a
smile on my face.

While family friends’ houses and friends were likely my first attachment and blessing,
dogs were my next. The first dog to really steal my heart was Bailey. Bailey was a round,
white English Labrador who ate too frequently off of my uncle’s plate after dinner. He had an easy
temperament and always looked like he was smiling. I loved Bailey, and I followed him
everywhere. After everyone went to sleep, I crept out of bed to lay next to him on the floor. I was
with Bailey when he had a heart attack and died. We were on the way to the vet when he started
seizing. The movement scared me. I cannot remember if I was brave enough to put a hand on
him or not, and I’m worried that I was not. I just looked over the back seat at his seizing body
and watched him die. At the vet, my aunt, uncle, cousins, and I stood outside the car hugging
each other and crying.

When my elementary school teachers asked, “What would you do with a million
dollars?,” I wrote, “I would buy a giant house and fill it with all the rescue dogs in the world!”
My favorite movies were *Balto, Homeward Bound, 101 Dalmatians,* etc. I had dreams of running
with packs of dogs. I would write “BIG DOG” on my Christmas list each year. Between
childcare and student loans, my mother was barely making ends meet; a dog was unrealistic, but
I still hoped to get one.

In 2015, I married a charming, fun California boy who swept me off my feet. My whole
family came to the wedding, including my grandparents from Maine. A groomsman split his
pants from dancing too hard. A few months into our marriage I knew something was off; he had
the ability to manipulate and lie, which reminded me of things my mom had said about my
father. But because of my fear of being abandoned, I clung to him even though I knew it was hurting me.

In 2016, my husband started talking about leaving, so to cheer myself up I started going to the Utah Humane Society to walk and pet the dogs there. I wanted one but knew it was wiser to wait until things settled down, until I had a house with a backyard not a tiny, shared apartment with a grumpy husband for a housemate. One afternoon, I went to the shelter after work and saw a newly arrived border collie with reddish brown fur huddled in the back of the cage. The sign on her cage indicated that she was a year and a half old and liked to get out of backyards. I liked her immediately. When I took her outside, she just huddled next to my legs, then behind my legs, and at one point she wrapped the leash around my legs while trying to secure herself to me. As I petted her, she relaxed a bit. I asked the front desk if they could hold her for the next 24 hours. I called my husband: he “didn’t care.” I called my mom: “It’s a bad idea.” I brought her home the next day. I named her after my very first best friend, “Bessie.” I taught her how to play fetch and swim. I took her on a sunset hike the day my husband moved out, telling me he wanted a divorce as he left. That is when we started hiking and running on trails together. I have had her for six years now. I finally had the dog that my inner, anxious child had longed for. This began my healing, I realized I could control my own circumstances. She is my constant.

**Bessie, Running, and Trails**

My dog Bessie runs on trails in a way that might strike some as peculiar. She runs between twenty and fifty feet ahead, often disappearing behind curves in the trail, but she never runs farther than fifty feet. It never makes me nervous. We developed trust on the trails early on. I would allow her off leash if, in turn, she would report any findings on the trail up ahead—
which she does dutifully. This unspoken agreement forms the basis of our trail relationship. I occasionally call her name to remind her of our pact, but she usually senses that she is getting far and comes back around the bend, sees me, pauses, and cocks her head at me before turning back to the trail. It is this little engagement that makes me imagine that she is protecting me, guiding me on our journey together. When I reflect on my childhood and on my current life, I like to imagine that Bessie was with me the whole time. I like to imagine that when I moved four times in one year, she was with me too, making me less afraid. In my painting *A Meeting in the Forest* (Fig.1), a young girl and a dog meet in a pink and green forest. The girl is kneeling, with her hand outstretched to the dog who is slowly creeping toward her. I intentionally made it fairytale-like and do not give specific signifiers that it is me or a version of me I am revisiting. I am hesitant to ever make a painting too visually about me for fear that it excludes the viewer from allowing their own narrative to come through. I included this painting in the beginning of a story that I painted and wrote about a girl and her dog Bess who travel together. They are both a little scared, but they find comfort in each other’s presence on the journey. This imagined story is one of the deepest tenets of my work—the active healing that takes place as I go through life with a dog instead of alone. This story represents what happens both on the trail and as I navigate the unknown in life’s non-nature-based challenges.

All who spend time in or study nature begin to see how unforgiving it is. I recognize nature’s fierceness when I am on the trail. There is a comfort in nature but also a wildness, a sharpness, and sometimes a fear that interests me. When frightening moments arise, they have given me opportunities to exercise newfound bravery. In my painting *Slain Deer* (Fig. 2), I painted an incident of stumbling upon a freshly slain deer with Bessie. We were alone on a foggy October day in the Uinta National Forest. The deer had been eaten. Its muscles were visible, red,
and fresh. Its neck was resting at an acute angle across a blood-stained rock. I was scared initially because I thought that whatever killed this deer might be lurking nearby. With Bessie at my side however I felt comfortable enough to study the remains. Although I am usually squeamish the open body captivated me. I’m grateful I did not come across it alone.

Another time my hiking with Bessie helped me control my anxiety was when we were on a moonlit hike coming down from the steep Mount Olympus trail. I painted Moonlit Hike (Fig. 3) with this newfound bravery partially in mind because I became less afraid of the dark with Bessie. We would often start our hikes in the afternoon or at dusk in order to see the sunset on the trail, but this sometimes resulted in having to hike down at night. In one such instance, we were rapidly coming down the trail in the dark (my phone had died and my headlamp was in the car) when Bessie froze in front of a bend in the trail with her paw hanging in the air. I stopped behind her and waited. She did not move, and my heart started to pound. She had never done this before, and I suspected that something or someone lied waiting for us up ahead. I told her to come back to me, and she did. When she reached me, I grabbed onto the loose puppy fur on the top of her neck and waited so we could confront whatever it was together. In the limited moonlight, I could see a silhouetted tree and a boulder. I paused a while and then slowly started to hum as I kept her close to me. I took deep, calming breaths as we walked slowly down the trail. We lost the trail down and had to bushwhack our way to the car. Some rocks slid, and I scraped my elbow, but when we got to the car, I felt a thrill. We were together, and we were safe. It could have been nothing; it could have been something—but we survived. Anxiety like the kind I faced on this trail can raise a fight or flight response. Often when my anxious attachment anxiety is triggered, I feel an urgent need to connect with someone. My unresearched feeling is
that by being there in my conscious, fearful moments on the trail, Bessie is teaching my subconscious that I can withstand perceptions of loneliness or even death.

**Trail Flora**

These dramatic memories are just as important to me as the mundane ones because I value both growth and comfort. One of the results of moving a lot as a child is that I cling to just about anything that stays still. I feel safe when I am surrounded by familiar objects, which is why each time I move I hang up the same gold-framed cloud painting, a petrified honeycomb and other sentimental photos. Once they are on the wall, I am able to settle into my new safe haven.

In the same way, the seemingly mundane Bonneville Shoreline Trail has become a safe and familiar place for me. To most, it is an unremarkable trail with a few sharp turns and some steep hills. It is brown, gray, and pale all year round and is filled with dried, invasive grass and low shrub oak trees. One side of the trail features views of the city and the other offers mountain vistas. Over time, this trail became familiar, with its distinct twists and turns, plants, and rocks. Like the familiar objects I kept in my room, I became attached to the trail’s objects and features, and I developed an urge to examine them, collect them, and keep them with me in some way.

To satisfy this urge, I started painting these distinct features of the trail that I have grown attached to. *I Don’t Know Their Names* (Fig. 4) is a painting of dried, frozen sunflowers that go without petals for nine months out of the year and *Rocks Twirling, Swirling* (Fig. 5) captures the cream and red quartzite rocks that cover the sides of the trail. In *Shoreline Trail While Listening to Maya Angelou* (Fig. 6) and *Pup Leading the Way* (Fig. 7), I painted the curves of the trail around bends. In the small square painting *A Patch of Bristle-y Flowers* (Fig. 8), I depicted the dried tiny white flowers that I see throughout the trail. In *Spiky Soft Dusty Miller* (Fig. 9), I show
the littering of dusty miller on the trail. Dusty miller is a soft, spiky green plant that looks like a dandelion with thickened, fuzzy leaves. And finally, Recent Sagebrush (Fig. 10), the largest of the paintings, features a sagebrush-laden trail at sunset.

The first plants that stood out to me on the shoreline trail were the mysterious, Dr. Seuss-looking brown plants. They were rigid and had stems that zig-zagged at odd angles and then lead to a hard, thistle-looking top. I could not resist taking photos of them as I ran past. Their frozen forms struck me as mischievous. They came up about waist high and made excellent subjects against the backdrop of sky or, as in my painting I Don’t Know Their Names, an abandoned basketball court. I copied the plants with their skinny, winding stems and multiple heads on an under-primed, thirsty panel that contributed to the subjects’ dryness. As I worked, I thought about Andrew Wyeth’s painting Trodden Weed (1951; Fig. 11), in which he painted nearly every blade of brown grass in dry egg tempera.

I was also drawn to the wild sunflowers. Though the trail is completely littered with blooming wild sunflowers in the summer, I grew to love them in the off season–before I ever saw their petals. Because of this, sunflowers make small appearances in several of my other paintings. In Tired Sunflower Leaves (Fig. 12), the petals were unimportant to me; it was the leaves starting to decay that held my interest. In Shoreline Trail While Listening to Maya Angelou, one of the few paintings in which I included sunflowers with petals, I placed them in the shadow of a slope.

These paintings may appear observational at first, but they carry a wealth of meaning. For me, they capture the facilitatory role of this trail in the healing of old attachment wounds. The familiar plants contribute to the healing that taking Bessie on the trails with me started. In order
to infuse my paintings with this meaning while I paint, I flow freely between emotion and looking at photos that I take from the trail.

Though nature is always changing, I try to stall it anyway—the plant, stick, rock, mountain, or dog. I work with urgency to capture the fleeting essence of the object I’m painting. Like an entomologist, I keep, I observe, and I search for meaning. I befriend the flora that I see on the trail. They comfort me, just as they are—thorny and spiky. I am trying to hold on to them, to keep them with me in some way. I think to make me feel less lonely.

I paint what catches my attention, translating moments I experience and objects I encounter on the trail into paintings. I have tried to analyze what it is that draws me to this rock over that, or these sticks over another set, wondering if it has to do more with aesthetics or meaning. Sometimes I am pleased by the shapes of leaves, the light, the multiplicity of buds, or a strange color. Other times it is a presence that the object seems to hold. Whether I am driven by meaning or aesthetics, I always want to carefully paint from these trail sightings in order to keep me connected to them. As such, my painting methods vary. Sometimes I paint an object as it is presented to me, such as in *Two Dried Branches* (Fig. 14), and other times I embellish encounters on the trail, as in *Hidden Sunflowers* (Fig. 13).

I embellish as a way to imagine fictional scenarios with the trail subject matter. I imagine upon experiences and objects that I see on the trail. This started with the very first painting I put in the show, *A Meeting in the Forest* (Fig. 1; described previously). Painting fiction provides a way for me to imagine a healed version of myself, and even a healed version of my dog, who was also abandoned. Similar to EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing)—a mode of psychotherapy used in trauma recovery—imagining and painting from these scenes
seems to brighten my hurtful memories. I access dormant pain and infuse it with the playfulness of the trail, transforming harmful memories into a safe place.

This type of transformative expression is evident in *Hidden Sunflowers* (Fig. 13), where a trail guides the viewer into an archway where two mammoth sunflowers reside. They are painted in diffused lighting to indicate that they are celestial, or spiritual. They represent safety and peace. I surrounded these sunflowers with small staccato marks similar to Pierre Bonnard’s garden scenes. For me, this surrounding or decorating seals in the power of the imagined image; the mark making process itself becomes a healing meditation for me.

**Running**

I was small as a child, and I felt small as a child. Most would not consider me big as an adult, since I am 5 foot 2 inches and barely 100 pounds. I think I felt small as a child because a lot happened beyond my control. As Mary Oliver said, “Adults can change their circumstances and children cannot.” My dad left, my mom worked, I made and lost friends, I moved four times in the second grade, and I could not get the big dog that I wanted so badly—I was not in charge of much. But a miraculous thing happens when I run: I feel big. This phenomenon is most common when I am running downhill. There is a part of the Lake Blanche Trail where ferns and tall flowers crowd the path in the spring. This is important because as I run, their leaves and flowers swish or prick at my body, making me feel held by their surrounding and alive by their pricking. One time when I was running this trail alone, the lushness of the trail was so thick that I could barely see where my feet should go next. The air was beginning to transition from warm to cool, and the sun cast a light haze over the mountains. I ran down switchbacks. I started gaining speed as I ran because I felt bigger and stronger with each step. My momentum carried me up the
side of the berm, angling my body nearly sideways because of my speed. I reached out my hands to feel the plants as I ran, and I felt free and strong, like I was in charge of what was happening to me. All of this nature was pushing against me, making me stronger. I felt like I could soar.

In my studio, I can feel similarly strong and free by indulging in uninhibited exploration during the painting process. I started painting what would become *Swift, Swift Running, Lake Blanche’s Flowers Swishing Me* (Fig. 15) on the floor of my studio. I poured watery acrylic all over the surface of a panel, moving it around with a large brush. I often do this because I want the paintings to start in an uninhibited way. I let my emotion or the music I’m listening to influence the painting without much resistance. I try to match the strength and wild I felt in that moment of running to my process of painting the experience. Some of my best painting experiences are when I “run downhill” with the paint and let myself feel strong and powerful. This protects and transforms the abandoned, lonely self into a healing, more powerful being.

**Painting Process**

When I paint, I am trying to harness the energy and emotion of these trail experiences while making them successful formally. My process is very intuitive, and it evolved throughout graduate school. After taking photos on the trail, I come to the studio to curate the images digitally and print off the ones that stand out to me. With the paper copies in hand, I pair down even further. Then I make thumbnail sketches before loosely sketching in vine charcoal. I notice that when I use vine charcoal, the painting following will be more expressive; when I use pencil, the painting following will be tighter. I hang up the printed photo near my workspace and look at it occasionally. In the beginning, I paint with dripping acrylic paint, often covering up the drawing I made. Then I go back in with a pencil again if needed, or I start painting. The
emotional strength of the message I’m trying to convey correlates with how closely I stick to the photograph. When I am capturing a scene as it is, like in *Bess on the Trail* (Fig. 16), it is meaningful to me, but less emotional, so I stay more closely tied to the photograph as I work. Other times, I paint in more of a frenzy, like in *Rocks Twirling, Swirling* (Fig. 5) and *Left Behind* (Fig. 17). The color choice is completely intuitive, and the object is floating in space. In other paintings, the paint application is a result of frustration. I might add a layer, sand it down, add another layer, scrape into it, and repeat.

I use acrylic as the foundation for most of my paintings. Acrylic is more portable, and I work faster in it. A quick dip in water suffices to change color as opposed to interrupting my flow to change color with oil paint. In my first year of graduate school, I resisted using oils because I did not trust them to work the way I wanted. However, in the past year leading up to my show, I put much more effort into figuring them out, which caused me to study other oil painters I admire up close. I copied the *Decor a Vernon, dit aussi La Terrasse a Vernon* (1920; Fig. 18) by Pierre Bonnard to see if I could layer paint like him. I studied the work of my peers Gwen Davis-Barrios and Jonathan Frioux as they made expressive nature-based paintings. This studying of paint application has pushed my painting to more intricacy in technique. In my painting *Recent Sage Brush*, I varied how I applied paint and the types of brushes I used (between rough bristle and soft) to imitate sticks crossing in the foreground. I was very pleased with it and am excited to paint like this in more paintings. However, I am still trying to understand when to keep adding paint and when to leave a wash underneath with just a few strokes on top, the way Peter Doig or A.J. Rombach (a young Bostonian painter) do in their art, specifically *Painting About Pleasure (And Reverence for the Intelligent Land)* (2021; Fig. 19).
As I work more in oil, some parts of my paintings become more about paint than concept, but I accept this as an honest part of my exploration.

**Thesis Show Curation**

I curated and set up my show to help the viewer feel like they were on a trail themselves. The first painting hanging next to the title of the show is *A Meeting in the Forest*. To introduce fictional elements to the viewer at an early stage, I intentionally hung this fantastical painting of a girl and a dog at the beginning. I did this because it is very important to me that my show be viewed as something more than a pretty, Utah landscape show. I hoped that by immediately being acquainted with two dependable characters, the viewer would carry a narrative notion through the rest of the show.

In order to mimic my experience on the trail, I hung paintings in groupings. As I walk, hike, or run on the trail, I often look up, down, and sideways—almost simultaneously. In *Installation Shot of Seventeen Paintings* (Fig. 20), I put over seventeen paintings together in an attempt to saturate the viewer’s field of vision with different viewpoints from the trail. I frequently experiment with hanging different paintings together to see what kind of new narrative they create together.

I hung the small *Sunset Silhouette* (Fig. 21) painting next to *Spiky Soft Dusty Miller* (Fig. 9) to emphasize the strangeness in the scale of the subject. These paintings, when juxtaposed together, push the viewer to ask questions about why a sunset on an 8 × 8 inch panel is placed next to close-up of a plant on an 18 × 18 inch panel; if the paintings were imitating real life, the sizes would be opposite.
I want to do more than imitate representational aspects of nature in my show, so I arranged the show to mimic the emotional journey I have on the trail. In the group of seventeen paintings, I emphasize franticness. In *Swift, Swift, Running, Lake Blanche’s Flowers Swishing Me*, I depict the elation and joy of running. In *Recent Sagebrush* (Fig. 22), a large, 4 × 6 foot sunset scene blends thunderous movement in the sky with quieter, carefully painted sagebrush in the foreground. This mimics the stillness that comes over me at different times on the trail. This peace comes over me when I pause to look around after heavy exertion, or when color leaves fades following sunset. *Recent Sunset* is displayed on the left section of the wall with *Moonlit Hike*, a small, intimate, painting sitting in the middle—cushioned by five feet of blank wall on either side—with *Two Dried Weeds*, a paper work sitting above a poem on the right side. I designed this wall to have the most amount of white space as to create space for contemplation with each painting and give breath to the exhibition as a whole. The wall and the paintings meant to reflect the stillness I feel on the trail.

**Conclusion**

The stored loneliness of childhood led me to search for connection in order to find stability and peace. This search for connection led me to my dog Bessie, who led us on trail experiences that bonded me in a deep and healing way with the local Utah landscape. I paint to process this connection, to deepen it, and to pay tribute to the land and dog that provided it. I am grateful for the soul strengthening and healing that has resulted from this work.
FIGURES

Figure 1 – A Meeting in a Forest, 9 × 12 inches

Figure 2 – Slain Deer, 7 × 10 inches
Figure 3 – Moonlit Hike, 8 × 10 inches

Figure 4 – I Don’t Know Their Names, 14 × 20 inches
Figure 5 – Rocks Twirling, Swirling, 8 × 10 inches

Figure 6 – Shoreline Trail While Listening to Maya Angelou, 18 × 20 inches
Figure 7 – Pup Leading the Way, 9 × 12 inches

Figure 8 – A Patch of Bristle-y Flowers, 8 × 8 inches
Figure 9 – Spiky Soft, Dusty Miller, 18 × 18 inches

Figure 10 – Recent Sagebrush, 40 × 50 inches
Figure 11 – Tired Sunflower Leaves, 8 × 10 inches

Figure 12 – Hidden Sunflowers, 10 × 14 inches
Figure 13 – Two Dried Branches, 11 × 14 inches

Figure 14 – Swift, Swift Running, Lake Blanche’s Flowers Swishing Me, 30 × 36 inches
Figure 15 – Bess on the Trail, 18 × 24 inches

Figure 16 – Left Behind, 7 × 10 inches
Figure 17 – Installation Shot of Seventeen Paintings

Figure 18 – Sunset Silhouette, 6 × 6 inches
Bibliography


