ANOCHECER

by

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Dedicated to Mom, Dad, Mao and Bryan.

Sin ustedes, yo estaría más desubicada que un brasier en la espalda.

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VITA

Erika Duque was born on February 11, 1987 in Flushing Queens, NY. She is the daughter of Fernando and Alma Duque. She graduated from St. Mary's High School in Manhasset, Long Island in 2005. She attended Tarrant County College, South Campus from 2005-2008 and then went on to obtain her Bachelors of Fine Arts with an emphasis in Drawing and Painting from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, IL in 2011.

In 2015, Duque was awarded with a Graduate Assistantship from Texas Christian University in studio art. While working towards her Master of Fine Arts degree, with concentration in Painting, she worked the Galleries at TCU (2015-2016), performed as a teaching assistant for Intermediate and Advanced Painting (2016-2017) and finally performed as a professor for Drawing 1 (2017-2018).

ABSTRACT

Anochecer, literal meaning to *become night*, is a rumination of the nightly phenomenon as the sun descends below the horizon. The fleeting sun creates a multicolored gradient of atmospheric light that also washes over the landscape tinting everything in warm smoldering oranges, lavenders, and blues. As a child I feared the sun setting, the night represented the witching hour. As an adult I welcome it, it is the calmest time of my day and every night the sun gives us a variant of colors, no two nights are the same. El anochecer is now comfort, the soothing beginning of a resting period. Through panting I am trying to capture these changes of light and color on the landscape. Sequential moments of the sun light on flower petals or the slow and subtle change of the night sky becoming darker and the city lights become a little brighter. Rapid and frenetic brush strokes with deep matte colors represent the vanishing sun and its intense palette of oranges and blues spread over the landscape. By doing this, I am inviting the viewer to a walkthrough of el anochecer.

As the sun would begin to descend below the horizon and wash its deep orange hue over the landscape, a sudden sense of fear would wash over me as a child. I would clasp my small hands onto the cold metal window guards that lined the windows in my Queens apartment, slowly feeling my heart racing to an unbearable pace. *El anochecer* was my nemesis. It was when the ghouls and goblins came out, when the unknown and unseen presence felt heavy and ominous. As an adult, I have experienced quite the opposite; I welcome *el anochecer* (the night), I crave it. It is the calmest time of my day and the most vibrant, in regards to color. Now as I watch the fleeting sun sink below the horizon, the muscles in my body begin to relax and I slowly sink into a state of peacefulness. El anochecer is now comforting and it incites my need to paint not only what I look at, but how it makes me feel. This sensation is why I painted *Witching Hour* (Plate 10) which was one of the main painting in the exhibition.

The exhibition *Anochecer*, was focused on a series of paintings that emphasize the color changes of the atmosphere and landscape as the sun falls below the horizon. The thesis show was an attempt to walk the viewer through the change of light during a three- hour period in the fall when the sun begins to descend at 6:30pm and the night sky becomes night starting at 8:00pm. The gallery was separated into three spaces, the viewer had to physically turn around corners to see what was next, as opposed to having an open gallery plan.

I wanted the viewer to see the changes of light progressively as they walk through each space and not be met with all paintings at once. Similar to how one would view a sunset, we don't see the changes all at once, we see a gradual change happening. I have led the viewer through three stages of shifting light in the gallery: civil twilight, which is the warmest and brightest in color; nautical twilight, the coolest in color with a wide range of deep blues with

hints of orange and pink still present; and finally astronomical twilight, dark blues that are almost appear black.

As you walk into the gallery's entrance, to your immediate left you see a large painting of a brightly colored sunset. To your immediate right you are met with three brightly colored landscapes with a setting sun as the main focal point (Plate 1). Each have a slightly different palette representing the ever-changing colors the sun paints across the sky during civil twilight. Adjacent to these three paintings is the sequence piece *Willow Lake: Cherry Blossom Tree,* these small, paintings which wrap around the free-standing wall show the subtle change of light between civil and nautical twilight. As soon as that sequence end the astronomical twilight sequence piece, *Oakmont Park*, start up and it stretches out on the towards the end of the gallery (Plate 3). The middle walls separating the front and back half of the gallery had four medium sized paintings (two on each side) depicting the changes of color on the vegetation (Plates: 5-8). These 24" x 20" paintings act as windows into that moment of the fleeting change of color on the landscape through the stages of the sun setting. I purposely removed the sky and pushed up the horizon towards the very top of the composition in almost all these works, so that the concentration lied on the color of the plants. I then ended the show with *Witching Hour*. I wanted to give the viewer the sensation of being grounded in the painting at the beginning and end of the exhibition. So with the two largest works in the show I purposely brought down the horizon line to be about eight to ten inches long from the bottom and opened up the sky to take up most of the space in the composition. At times I improvised and allowed my recollection of the location to lead the direction of the painting. For these pieces it was important to look inward and use my research merely as a loose reference. The other smaller pieces in the show relied more on the

objective rather than the subjective. In order to get the light or color right, I had to rely on my notes and research taken on the field.

In my practice I tend to focus on the idealized landscape: sunny, bright, and full energy charged by the sun's intense beaming white and yellow light. I was interested in painting landscapes that would mimic the same rhythm and pattern that I was experiencing by looking at all the shapes, colors, shades and lines that made up the environment around me. I also wanted to ease the viewer into feeling a sense meditation akin to Soft Fascination or Attention Restoration Theory. These terms/ideas are related to the study of using the natural world to restore the brains natural function and encourage "effortless brain function, thereby allowing it recover and replenish its directed attention capacity." [1] The effects of outdoor activity for attention restoration and anxiety had proven to more successful then indoor activities according to a study done in 2014 led by two Taiwanese researchers. When it came to indoor activities such as browsing the internet and exercising, their subjects still suffered from anxiety.[2] When a person is presented with images of nature and the color green in general, that person will most likely begin to feel a lot less anxious and more serene.

My interest in twilight and nocturnal landscapes began to peak when the seasons started to change from summer to fall this past year. In the past, I did not pay much attention to the leaves turning and the seasons changing. This past year my mother, who is my kindred spirit, became ill and I forced myself to slow down and to pause. This moment helped me to look, to meditate and to watch the landscape change from bright green to chartreuse, bright orange to burnt sienna and finally different tones of van dyke brown. I was more attuned the cycle and

[1] http://www.ecehh.org/research-projects/attention-restoration-theory-a-systematic-review/
[2] Pei-Yi Weng, Yen-Cheng Chiang, *Psychological Restoration through indoor and outdoor leisure activities, 2014*

changes of the plant and tree life. When the sun would begin to fall, these colors would intensify in a subtle way and capture my newfound attention.

For my thesis exhibition, *Anochecer*, research began with observing the light changing in the atmosphere and on the landscape during a two-hour period. This period starts the moment that the sun begins to descend below the horizon. I began this process in late January and my observations ended a week before the opening of the exhibition in mid-March. Nature has a way of creating a state of profound absorption, which I experienced during this research. These moments of awe can only happen while physically present in the landscape. Most of my field research and observation was done in Fort Worth, Texas at Tandy Hills Natural Area and around southwest Fort Worth close to where my parents reside. The landscape is flat with subtle hills; it is littered with bushes and twisted mesquite trees growing towards the ground and out on to the land like roots. Your eye travels for miles out into the horizon and because of its lack of tall trees and forest, the sky feels immense and all encompassing.

As previously mentioned there is a need to represent and recreate the sensation that I feel or have felt being in nature. The process for my paintings begins with: taking photographs, collecting specimens (if allowed by park service); capturing video snippets of the landscape, to remember it's sounds and movements; make a series of sketches and taking notes of colors, sounds, or anecdotes. Most importantly, I directly observed the changing of the light. Almost every evening, the sun would fashion an array of colors differing from the night before. For instance, some nights as the sun start setting the sky would have a lavender hue that would eventually intensify into a magenta. I also noticed as you look around the sky the colors are warmer around the sun, and as your eye circles around in the sky in a 360-degree motion you notice that the colors in the atmosphere farther away from the sun are more pastel in nature;

these colors include pinks, corals, lavenders and blues. I kept note of all these changes and I bring field notes and material back to the studio and use it as a loose reference. I decided to let my memory of the experience dictate the outcome of my paintings. I put a lot of trust in my memory and imagination to recreate one on one moments that have put me in a quick trance, which is why I chose not paint *en plein air*. By doing this, I am allowing room for colors to be more exaggerated and keyed up in tone as I try to allow the viewer to experience a moment of Soft Fascination and feeling of calm and relaxation. To ensure that I was going to reach my goal of enticing the viewer to slow down and have a meditative moment with the work, I had to look at paintings that evoked the same sensations within me.

Painters like David Hockney and Alex Katz have always had a large influence and impact on my work. Hockney for his mark making and Katz for hassle-free and direct way of painting (Plates:16-17). Studying their works has helped me break down a landscape into shapes, blocks of colors, lines and textures. I now have an extensive visual vocabulary that I feel confident enough to work and pick from. As I look out onto a landscape, I am immediately dissecting and simplifying my surroundings. Most recently other more contemporary painters such as Katherine Bradford, Cynthia Daignault and a historic painter, Frederic Remington (Plates 18-20), captured my attention. Each one of these artists in their own right dealt with light, the passing of time and place.

Using local art resources, I began to search for nocturnes as the main subject matter within a painting. The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth had a Focus exhibition of Katherine Bradford's nocturnal atmospheric worlds. Bradford's paintings all had a source of light that beamed and illuminate through a buildup of thin layers of dark acrylic paint. The luminous quality of works captured my attention and forced me to spend more time with them. In a review

for her show, *Fear of Waves*, at CANADA in 2016, John Yau describes the viewer as being suspended, "…in a pictorial never-never land, between arrival and falling." [3] Yau is correct;when confronted with Bradford's large nocturnes, you are suspended and you are in her world. I wanted a similar sensation. Unlike Bradford, I was looking for my viewer to feel grounded and in a familiar place. I lower my horizon line in *Witching Hour* and *Sunset* to allow the viewer to feel large expanse of the sky that can be felt here in North Texas, but also wanted the viewer to feel as if they too were standing in the prairie at the foot of the hill looking out. (Plates: 2 & 10).

For my two sequential pieces, *7:30pm to 8:15pm: Willow Lake #1-9* and *Overton Park Bend* (Plates: 3&4), I wanted to show not only the passing of time but subtle shift of color and light as the sun is setting. For these works, I recorded that change of light at two locations I have spent the most time in recent months: my parent's house and a mile down the road from their house. Observing the change in light and color made me think of the Cynthia Daignault's paintings, specifically her more time-based works. When you work in multiples of the same subject, you are engaged in the painting in a different manner. Unlike the other pieces in the show which act more as window (Plates: 5-8) and or stage of a certain place, these works seem to be about reality. The works are not meant to be standalone pieces, they are meant to show a progression of light or lack thereof. I wanted to show the in between moments of "nothingness" that happen during the sun's nightly display of colors. "The sheer number creates an experience

[3] John Yau, "Nocturnal Worlds of Katherine Bradford", Hyperallergic, January 22, 2017 https://hyperallergic.com/353055/the-nocturnal-worlds-of-katherine-bradford/

which is greater than the sum of its parts, greater than any single part. All are needed. All are equal in the transcendental whole." [4] (Plates: 3 & 4)

I also looked to Frederic Remington's nocturnal landscapes at the Sid Richardson museum in downtown Fort Worth and the Amon Carter Museum of American Art (Plate 20). The way he described the colors of night were captivating and bewitching:

> *"Shortly after the turn of the century, Remington began to explore the technical and aesthetic difficulties of painting darkness. In a series of works that took as their subject the color of night, Remington sought to capture the elusive silver tones of moonlight, the hot flame of firelight, and the charged interaction of both. Technically dazzling, the late nocturnes are also richly metaphoric, for they were created just as electricity began to alter the character of night. They were also completed after Remington had returned from the Spanish American War haunted by his experience of combat and violent death. The late nocturnes thus reflect both the external beauty of night and the internal threat of darkness."*[5]

What I found curious about this quote and within my research was the reoccurring negative words used to describe the beginning of night and of the night. As a child (and on occasion as an adult) I was not alone in the fear of the unknown lurking deep within the darkness. Since we are not nocturnal creatures, we rely on light to survive and get around. Without light we are vulnerable and unable to see our surroundings, as humans evolved we have to had to come up with ways to compensate for not having the ability to see clearly at night. It is the darkness and

[4] Brandon Stosuy, "On not Commodifying Your Art", The Creativw Independent, October, 7, 2016: https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/cynthia-daignault-on-not-commodifying-your-art/
[5] Frederic Remington: The Color of Night, Nancy K. Anderson, National Gallery of Art, Washington

the inability to see through that veil of black that washes over the landscape that feeds our nyctophobia—fear of the dark. This fear has evolved into curiosity and acceptance.

Because of a shocking and devastating situation that changed my family's life, I was forced to reflect and slow down even though everything around me seem to moving at a fast pace. My natural reaction to extreme stress is to paint, it is an easy and familiar escape and it is what feels the most natural and comforting to me. I had to face real feelings of grief and acceptance and with that came moments of stopping, observing and internalizing. For a month, from the hospital window at Baylor Scott & White All Saints Medical Oncology center, I sat and counted down the minutes until the sun began its nightly show, observing the sun's brilliant warm colors enhance and wash over the already orange, brown, and red fall landscape. It is the time of day that the sun directs us to relax. The deep dark blue skies gradually coax's us into a state of tranquility and finally to sleep.

PLATES

Plate 1: *Sunset's #1-3*, 7" x 5 ½", Acrylic on Wood Panel,

Plate 2: *Sundown*, 60" x 50", Acrylic on Wood Panel, 2018

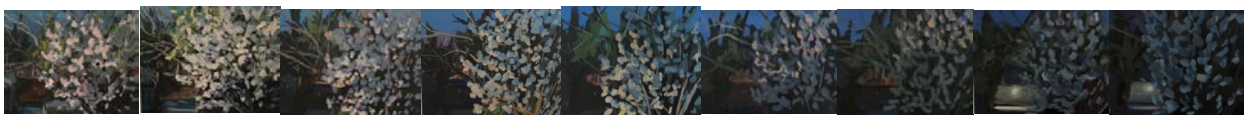

Plate 3: *7:30pm to 8:15pm: Willow Lake #1-9,* 7” x 5 ½”, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 2018

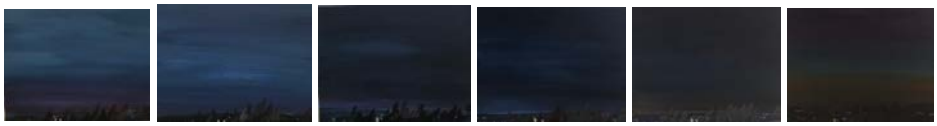

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Plate 6: *Twilight*, 24” x 20”, Acrylic on Wood Panel, 2018

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Plate 12: Installation view.

Plate 13: Installation view.

Plate 14: Installation view

Plate 15: Installation view

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Plate 17: *City Landscape*, Alex Katz, Oil on canvas, 305 cm x 610 cm, 1995

Plate 18: *Pool, Red Rim,* Katherine Bradford, Acrylic on canvas, 72” x 60”, 2017

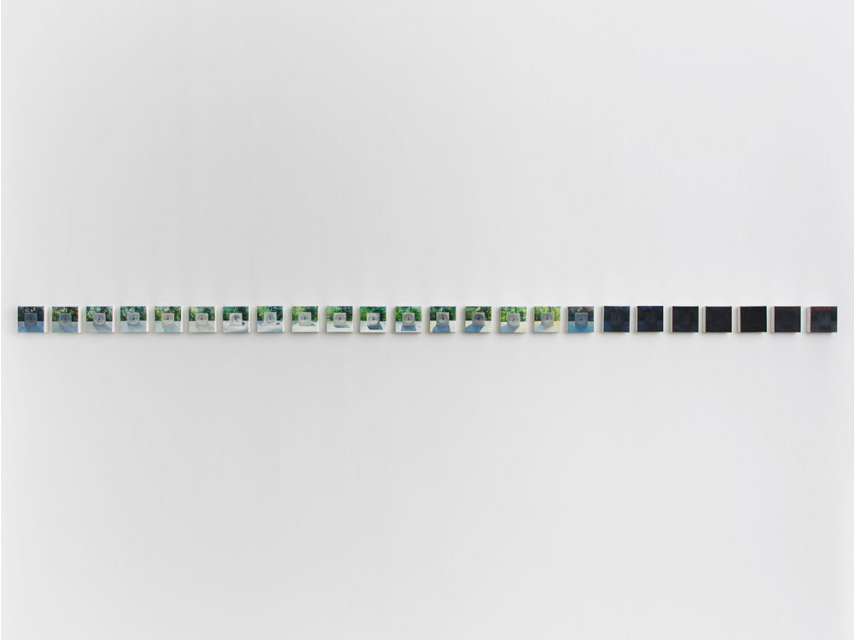

Plate 19: *Equinox Clock/Solstice Clock*, Cynthia Daignault, Series of 4. 24 canvases, 6”x 6”, 2014-1016

Plate 20: *The Luckless Hunter*, Frederic Remington, Oil on canvas, 26 7/8” x 28”, 1909

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