

Susan Grace – Artist Statement

In my paintings my primary interest throughout the years has been an exploration of the figure, in which I have moved freely between representation and abstraction, using fragmentation, layering, and complexity to create multiple possibilities for interpretation and experience. After living in Greece and traveling in Europe for some years, I also became interested in architecture, and some of my recent work has focused on abstracted elements of architecture and the urban landscape. Now that I am settled back in the Midwest, all types of constructed environments have become sources of inspiration. I tend to work in series, and although my urbanscapes are more abstract than representational, my treatment of the figure has varied widely. Employing a variety of approaches keeps me engaged and encourages me to explore new techniques and methods of expression.

I mainly work in oil on canvas although I have also used watercolor and charcoal. In a recent series that spanned several years, I focused on creating large-scale oil portraits of women referencing classical imagery but giving the work a contemporary sense by overlaying the figures with loose, free-flowing typography. By bringing this element into the composition, there is the sense that a viewer of the work responded by adding text or a hand-style tag on top of the images, thus creating a conversation between the new and the old. Sometimes there is transparent typography that does not simply lay on top of the figures but instead blends into them in a symbiotic relationship to expand the underlying narrative. And in some paintings a variety of images are fused within a single work, concealing and revealing various fragments while they meld together to form a new kind of coherence.

In my ongoing paintings, I continue to explore the subjects of both the figure and architectural space. Although I want the subject matter to be recognizable to some extent, I am employing techniques of distortion and camouflage while incorporating abstract elements to enrich images both formally and conceptually. These seemingly incongruous elements that appear in carefully constructed, detailed representational passages interrupt the expected flow, creating opportunities for a fresh perspective.

For many years I taught literature and theater in universities in the U.S. and in Athens, Greece before I became a full-time painter. Because of this background, it is natural for me to want to create work that suggests a narrative, but it is always an open one. I view all my paintings of imaginary places as a theater director or filmmaker might view a set before the actors walk on to begin the action. I hope there is a sense of heightened anticipation as one waits to see what might occur. And I see the figures in my paintings as participants in unfinished dramas in which they are continually evolving, exploring possibilities for metamorphosis, delighting in the fluidity of identity, and remaining indifferent to a final resolution.