

Helen Sparling
Third-year Miller Art Scholar
Spring 2025 Minigrant Proposal

Exploring daily life through oil painting

Project Summary:

I am a painting major. I am currently in a painting independent study in order to expand on the work I completed last semester. This body of work is based on photographs I have taken, and is characterized by loose washes of color and undisguised brushstrokes. As I continue this body of work during the Spring semester, I plan to further develop a mode of painting that captures the atmosphere and emotion of people and the spaces they occupy.

The photographs I base my paintings on are incredibly important for the development of my work. The photos I take are not meant to serve as a highly rendered image from which I can pull precise details. Rather, they serve as a guideline, and hopefully capture the atmosphere of the space and the personalities of the people. Often, these photos are taken when my family is visiting in a communal house space such as a kitchen or living room. I attempt to be discreet in order that the people in my paintings remain “in scene.” I am particularly interested in capturing spaces with a variety of colors, textures, and interacting elements. I primarily take photos of my family because I am familiar with the space and the people. I find that it is far easier to identify settings and images that are interesting to me when the people and space are familiar.

My painting begins with surface preparation. I paint on a masonite panel, a wood composite material. I first apply three coats of gesso using a paint roller to avoid brush streaks. Then, moving from 80 grit to 320 grit sandpaper, I sand the board down to ensure as smooth of a surface as possible. This is a critical step – the smooth surface allows for my brush to glide across the surface and create the gestural streaks that are so important for the body of work I am developing. A properly prepared surface allows for me to paint loosely. My painting process often involves multiple passes of thin layers until I feel that the piece conveys as much information as I want it to.

This semester, I plan to increase the size of my paintings in order to have the space to fully explore the modes of painting I use. Changing an element such as this provides new opportunities for exploration, and development of processes. I am particularly interested in identifying how my brush strokes change on a larger surface. At the same time, however, I cannot predict all of the effects that this change will lead to. This is precisely why I want to expand my work – the space for novel discovery within my practice is precisely my goal.

Critically, this development requires additional materials. Larger works require more, and sometimes larger, materials. My current supplies support small to medium size paintings, but will be entirely impractical for larger works. For example, the brushes I currently have are far too small to complete larger paintings, and sanding large boards by hand will be an inefficient use of my time. Additionally, I am in need of more oil paints, and gesso. With these materials, I will be able to complete my independent study, and expand my painting practice.

Project Timeline:

March: Complete 1 large painting with 3 sketches. Take notes on the impact of size on the painting process.

April: Complete 1 large painting with 3 sketches. Take into account notes from the previous painting.

May: Complete 2 medium size paintings summarizing work from the semester.

Total works: 4 total pieces, 6 sketches

Budget:

- [Gesso: \\$34.03](#)
- Oil paints
 - [Black: \\$7.5](#)
 - [White: \\$22.50](#)
 - [Alizarin Crimson \\$9.85](#)
 - [Burnt sienna: \\$22.50](#)
 - [Cadmium Red: \\$18.00](#)
 - [Cadmium yellow: \\$18.00](#)
 - [Cadmium lemon: \\$28.61](#)
 - [Yellow ochre: \\$27.50](#)
 - [Cerulean blue: \\$18.00](#)
 - [Cobalt Blue: \\$18.00](#)
 - [French Ultramarine Blue: \\$27.50](#)
 - [2 and 3 inch brushes: \\$147.59](#)
- Tax: \$20.91
- Subtotal: \$415.49

Amazon

- [Electric Sander: \\$34.99](#)
- [5 inch Sandpaper \(100\): \\$13.99](#)
- [Rollers: \\$9.99](#)
- [Handle: \\$7.98](#)
- Subtotal: \$66.95

Total: \$482.44