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Artist Statement

In my current work I have reproduced eleven portraits of women by many of the great masters of the art historical canon; each painting has been altered with the addition of an animal. The source works range in date from 1485 - 1856, and are copied with traditional methods and materials. Though they span nearly 400 years and are from different parts of Europe and the United States, when viewed together there are striking similarities: all the women have almost exactly the same smile; they have similar postures and sit in three quarter view; the placement of their hands and the way they hold themselves are all clearly within an unspoken code of desirable poses for women in portraits.

The animals are inserted to act as the alter egos of the sitters. Mirroring and at times mimicking expressions, colors, and demeanors, they represent what has been carefully omitted from the idealized portrayal of these "ladies." In the original portraits, the women serve as objects of status for their wealthy husbands. In the altered versions, though still dignified, the women's improprieties are exposed: they have an ally who protects, befriends, enlivens, and belies their innermost secrets, akin to a power animal or spirit guide that pervades mystical and shamanic traditions. The animals are painted in a different style from the portraits: painted from photographs, they appear out of place. Instead, they are commentators, critics, pundits located somewhere between the viewer and the sitter, mediating the experience of each one. The titles of the paintings are narrative and often long, reflecting the commentary of the animal, such as, "Stroll in Garden With Small Dog and Large Ear Muffs That Double as an Estate Melodizer." They add further insight into the animal's purpose and lift the spirits of the women who are heavily laden with jewels, fabric, posture, and status.

In the process of repainting the source paintings, I have learned a great deal about the history of painting, the evolution of technique and the creation of depth and color in the methods of the great masters. I also have a newfound respect for these women of status and wealth, their burdens and painstaking efforts to portray an ideal for the sake of securing their position in a world of uncertainty.