

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

*Uncas Pond*, oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches, 2012 – 2014.

Inspiration, I believe, is often thought to be a singular influence that leads an artist to create. Perhaps because it can be quite difficult to rationalize and then articulate the thought processes that occur while an artist works, it has been sometimes referred to as “divine inspiration”. In fact, my dictionary’s primary definition of inspiration is “a divine influence or manifestation that qualifies a person to receive and communicate sacred revelation”. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if I had a divine muse! Perhaps I don’t have one because, as the definition implies, I am not qualified. After all, muses are exclusively female and I am a heterosexual woman. Maybe that’s why I prefer the second definition for inspiration, “the act of inhaling or drawing in”. For me, a creative work is the culmination of a process that begins with taking in lots of information from throughout my personal experience. It all percolates in my mind, often over a period of years, and then during the development of a piece a number of these ideas become evident. What follows is a sample of what I was “inhaling” prior to creating *Uncas Pond*, the latest large scale painting in my “Spectatorship/Voyeurism” series of works that reflects my ongoing interest in exploring the depiction of the human form and the role of the viewer in visual art.



To me, *Uncas Pond* is all about the girl with the sunglasses. The other figures in the pond are enjoying a summer’s day without regard to or awareness of any viewers. It is the girl, however, who acknowledges us as she idly floats. Her sunglasses add an element of mystery, they are enlarged mechanical eyes, unblinking, and omniscient like those of ancient Sumerian sculpture. The detail at left is an example of one of these votive statuettes from the Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia (ca. 2900-2600 B.C.) found under the floor of the Abu Temple at Tell Asmar. I first learned about these works back in 1992 when taking an art history survey course and what resonated with me was the importance of the eye to this ancient culture. When I look at figurative art, the eyes are of primary importance in interpreting the work. The eyes convey the psychological status of the figures; personality, emotions, and character.

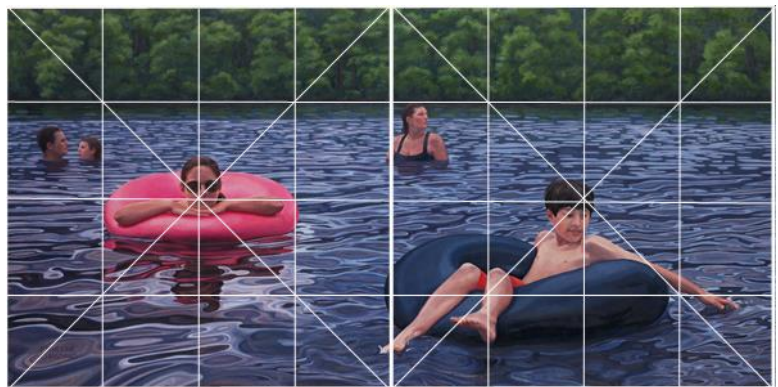
Newspapers, recent and old issues, are often found throughout our home and have managed to find their way into many of my works. When I read the paper I will often clip articles and images that I find interesting. The photograph at right by the photojournalist Yana J. Paskova appeared in the Travel Section of *The New York Times* in advance of the Sochi Olympics. As you may have guessed, I love floating on tubes myself and will never miss the lazy river at a water park!





One of my former teachers, Deane G. Keller, used to say, “Always thank the models” for they are often the unsung heroes of artists. The models for this painting were my daughter, Sophie, and son, Noah, along with some unwitting swimmers. I am always grateful for my family’s patient participation in my projects. They are in the photo at left of Uncas Pond, the great local swimming pond near my home in Connecticut that served as the landscape reference for this painting.

Keep in mind that when I begin to develop a piece, there are no requirements or restrictions other than self-imposed ones like the interior dimensions of my car that I will need to fit the finished painting into later on. In the early stages, a decision needs to be made regarding the dimensions. For *Uncas Pond* I wanted a large canvas, one that would allow the viewer to feel somewhat immersed in the scene. I also decided to use a double square compositional format. The overlaid lines added here reveal the image’s underlying structure.



I must also acknowledge Georges Seurat’s *Bathers at Asnières*. I’ve spent a good amount of time studying this carefully orchestrated painting. Seurat’s systematic organization of all design elements is impressive. Motifs including the seated figures, hats, vertical and triangular and curvilinear shapes, and colors repeat to set up a rhythmic movement both across and into the canvas. His modulation of values is meticulous and works together with the use of diminishing scale to create spatial depth. There is nothing spontaneous about Seurat’s work just as there is nothing spontaneous about *Uncas Pond*.

Finally, there’s caffeine. *Uncas Pond* is six feet wide and after all, that’s a lot of canvas to cover.

--- CATHERINE CHRISTIANO



Image information from the top:

Statuette from Tell Asmar (detail), Square Temple I, Shrine II, Early Dynastic I-II, ca. 2900-2600 B.C., gypsum inlaid with shell and black limestone, 40.0 cm H. Excavated by the Oriental Institute, 1933-4, The University of Chicago.

Paskova, Yana J. 2008, *The New York Times* November 16, 2008: Travel Section page 5. Photo.

Catherine Christiano, Uncas Pond snapshot, 2010.

Catherine Christiano, *Uncas Pond* with superimposed grid, oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches, 2012 – 2014. Photo credit Paul Mutino.

Georges Seurat, *Bathers at Asnières*, oil on canvas, 79 x 118 inches, 1884. National Gallery, London.

Catherine Christiano, *Coffee and the Paper* (detail), oil on newspaper on panel, 10 x 8 inches, 2005.