

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Catherine Christiano, *Backyard, Old Lyme*, 2016, Oil on canvas, 42 x 38 inches.

I thought you would enjoy learning a bit about my process in creating my latest large figure painting. While each new painting project begins with a blank canvas, threads of ideas carry forward from earlier works and provide a starting point. In this painting I again explore the concept of spectatorship in art and intend the viewer to serve as an active participant in the piece. Another artist whose work touches upon this idea is Robert Bechtle. His paintings, careful arrangements of the people, cars, and middle class neighborhoods from his ordinary everyday life, I find to be not only visually interesting but to carry a psychological charge. *Backyard, Old Lyme* is strongly influenced by Bechtle's self-portrait *Santa Barbara Chairs*. The seated male frontal figure with arms on the chair's armrests is not unlike that of Daniel Chester French's figure of Abraham Lincoln in the Washington DC Memorial which in turn borrows from Ancient Egyptian sculpture.



In gathering the visual resources for *Backyard, Old Lyme* I enlisted my son, Noah, who was just about to take off for the start of his fall term at college. He patiently posed for a multitude of photographs as I tried different clothing, sunglasses, and seating positions. Using these along with drawings and numerous additional photographs of the garden as resources, I then carefully arranged the major visual elements for the painting. The image at right with the superimposed lines shows how the linear elements within the painting are designed to align and direct the eye around the image and back to the figure's eyes.



Much of the painting was completed during a residency at the Vermont Studio Center. Over dinner one evening, when I described my process to one of the writers, he compared it to the scaffolding approach employed by writers that begins first with brainstorming and research, then a structured outline, rough draft, revisions and then finally publishing. In the end, the underlying inner framework enables the work to stand on its own.

Image information from the left to right:

Robert Bechtle, *Santa Barbara Chairs*, oil on canvas 48 x 68 7/8 inches. 1983. Collection Yale University Art Gallery.

Daniel Chester French, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1920, Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC.

Temple of Ramses II, Nubia, Egypt. Photo 2007.