

CATHERINE CHRISTIANO

ARTIST'S STATEMENT – SPECTATOR PAINTINGS

These figure paintings, created over a period of years, explore my interest in the viewer's role in art. When looking at art, the viewer becomes a type of spectator with the freedom to peer into the lives and private spaces of the subjects depicted. The role the viewer is expected to assume may or may not be revealed within the work. With portraits, the artist and subject often collaborate carefully to create an image suitable for the public's gaze. However, for other forms of figurative imagery the expectations of the viewer in the finished work are less clear.

The importance of the eyes in images with figures is obvious. The eyes convey a person's psychological status, personality, emotions, and character. The significance of the eyes is recorded in some of humankind's earliest art and lore. In ancient art, the eyes often appear disproportionately large. The enlarged, staring eyes of ancient Sumerian figure sculptures appear vigilant and omniscient. They are curiously not unlike the sunglasses I have used in some of my paintings, along with binoculars or cameras. These contemporary devices become enlarged, unblinking mechanical eyes that block the viewer from seeing the figures' eyes, the "windows of the soul". Sunglasses lend mystery, binoculars add the power of their magnified vision, and cameras record what is seen.

When we approach art, we assume we have unlimited access to gaze and do not expect to be confronted with our own action. What happens when our gaze is acknowledged within the work? When it is intercepted, and returned by the subject do we experience discomfort or pleasure? We, as viewers, become part of the work and perhaps may feel exposed to the same scrutiny that the figure in the painting is subjected to. Are we, as viewers, the subject or spectator of the art, the surveyor or the surveyed?