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## Viviane Silvera – New York, New York

Posted on July 15, 2014 by Frank Juarez Gallery



Film Interior No. 1  
Acrylic on canvas  
30" x 40"  
2014

### Briefly describe the work you do.

My last two series of paintings—*Therapy: Part I* (2011) and *Therapy: Part II* (2013)—investigate the psychological and the solitary, and the interplay between reality and dream.

I used film stills from *Ordinary People*, *The King's Speech*, and the HBO series *In Treatment*, as compositions for paintings. I overlaid washes and applied thick paint layers to transform specific figures into archetypal images exploring the human condition. The narrative is left up the viewers' imagination in this series of haunting and moody paintings.

My current work explores themes of connection versus disconnection, dreams versus reality, and the conscious versus subconscious. Using new mediums—including gouaches on paper and a film I shot using two actors—I create a dreamlike narrative, unraveling the central character's inner world.

I photograph my process and the paintings as they develop, and will splice together these images for a film. The paintings and film create a dreamlike mood, where time and season collapse.

### At what point in your life did you want to become an artist?

My decision to become an artist was very gradual process of immersion and exposure to the life of an artist. When my family moved from Hong Kong to Brazil when I was ten years old, I started to copy figure drawings from a book I found. I filled my entire sketchbook with drawings of hands, feet and faces. After seeing my drawings, my parents took me to meet a Brazilian painter, Roberto D' Oliveira. Although he mainly taught older students, 18 years and up, he agreed to take me on in his studio as a student on weekends, even though I was only 12 at the time. While I loved being immersed in a professional artist studio, and even showed a painting in an exhibition, but I didn't imagine pursuing art professionally. Yet, the materials in the studio made an everlasting impression on me.

After college, where I studied Psychology, Political Science, and Film, I moved back to New York . I worked as a script-reader and interned at film production companies, while taking painting classes at the Art Students League on the weekends. It was at the League that I realized I wanted to, and could, carve out a life as an artist. Being exposed to other serious art students and professional artists showed me how I could find my own path.



Therapy No. 30 (Dream)

Acrylic on canvas

30" x 40"

2013

**Tell us a little about your background and how that influences you as an artist.**

I was born in Hong Kong, moved to Brazil when I was ten, and came to New York City at fifteen years old. I have no country of origin. My parents are not American, and although I grew up in an English-speaking household, my parents speak Arabic to each other. Before moving to New York, I went to a British school, where my best friends came from many different ethnicities and nationalities. When we moved to Brazil, I went to an international school with a dual curriculum taught partially in Portuguese. I didn't speak Portuguese at the time, and my school experience constrained how I expressed myself verbally. So, I turned to visual expression. I started carrying a sketchbook with me everywhere and sketching constantly.

Growing up in places where I didn't speak the native languages created a sense of not fitting in. I think many people who become artists have formative experiences that place them in the position of observer, rather than participant. If I had grown up with a sense of belonging, a sense of place and easy communication, I think my art would be very different. I remember watching a documentary on Martin Scorsese where he describes being afflicted with polio as a child, and spending years isolated in his bedroom, watching the kids playing outside from his window—defining the way he watched the world—almost like scenes in a movie.

**What types of conceptual concerns are present in your work? How do those relate to the specific process(es) or media you use?**

Conceptually, I am interested in memory. In 2008, I did a series called *Borrowed Memory*. Attempting to reconnect with my blurry childhood memories I made drawings using white charcoal—(the white representing

memory)—on toned paper of old snapshots from my childhood in Hong Kong. I also used images I found on the Internet of other children in Hong Kong in the 1970's. Working from other people's photographs allowed me to borrow their memories, to incorporate them into my psyche as if they were my own.

I continued to explore memory in my 2011 series called *Therapy*. I painted from film stills from both television and movies that resonated in some way with my own experiences. I also became intrigued by the idea that light, in an image, could tell the story of the subconscious. Those paintings are about the ways that light reveals a mental landscape. In *Therapy: Part II*, I shifted my focus from memories to dreams. I used still images from *The Kings Speech* to explore the inner life of a solitary character (as opposed to a relationship between two characters which was the focus of Part I).

The mediums I used; white charcoal, dark toned paper, gouache, and in select paintings monochromes, distinguished my painted scenes from being mere illustrations of the film stills. I used these mediums to indicate light and mood. I chose to work from unmemorable stills—the split seconds you don't notice.

**We once heard Chuck Close say he did not believe in being inspired, rather in working hard everyday. What motivates you in your studio practice?**

I definitely do not wait for inspiration. As a mother of two young children, and director of On Art (an art tour company), I have limited hours when I can work in the studio; I just get to work right away when I am there. I have moments—when a body of work or a project is completely finished—when I feel as if I am at a loss as to what to do next. At those points I turn to writing. I always write down exactly what I'm feeling. For instance, when I finished *Therapy: Part II* I wrote, “I don't know where I want to go from here.” Once I write down my feelings of stagnation, a new realization comes. Using writing after *Therapy Part: II*, I realized I wanted to create my own moving images, rather than work from pre-existing movies.



Therapy No. 9 (Safe Passage)  
Acrylic on Canvas  
48" x 60"  
2011

**What artists living or non-living influence your work?**

I'm interested in Irving Petlin, whose work is often about memory. My other influences are Donatello, especially his Mary Magdalene sculpture, and William Kentridge, who is a huge inspiration. I once heard him say that “meaning accrues through process” and that resonated with me. While I start with a concept, the idea often changes as I work, and process is integral to everything I do. What I love about Kentridge is how he evokes memory and tells a story without being didactic. He combines the still and moving image, taking something old (drawing in charcoal) and making it new and exciting.

**When you are not making art what types of activities and interests do you engage in?**

When I'm not making art, I'm researching and talking about art. I run a small company, On Art, that provides independent tours—that include private talks with artists, curators, and dealers—in galleries and studios

throughout New York City. Learning about other people's work can be very inspiring. I alternate every three months between my own studio artwork and the art tours. I am also a mother to two great girls, Mia and Lila, who are seven and five years old. They fill all of my time—often with their own art projects—outside of the professional art-related work I do.

## About



Viviane Silvera was born in Hong Kong and was raised in both Hong Kong and Brazil before moving to New York City at the age of fifteen. After earning her BA from Tufts University, Viviane returned to New York City where she received her MFA from the New York Academy of Art.

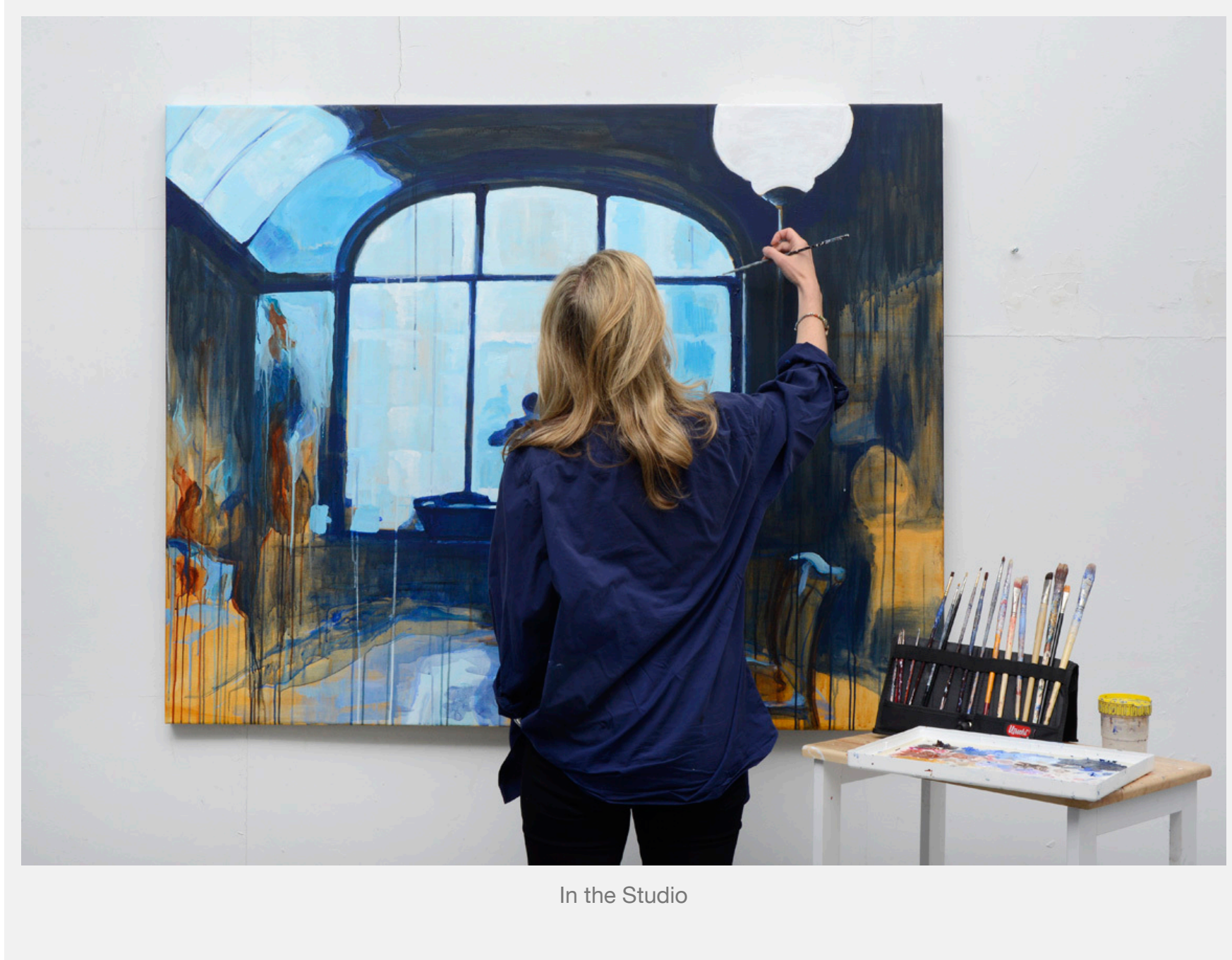
She has an upcoming show in Fall 2014 of new work at The Edward Hopper House. In 2013, she received the Award of Excellence at the Edward Hopper House, selected by Susan Cross, Mass MoCA. While in art school she received numerous awards and scholarships including the Chaim Gross Scholarship, the Valerie Delacorte Scholarship and the Harriet Whitney Frishmuth travel award.

She has been the recipient of grants from the Vermont Studio Center and the Newington-Cropsey Foundation.

Viviane has had six solo exhibitions in New York galleries. She has also exhibited in many group exhibitions including at the Museo de la Ciudad-Mexico, the Albright Knox Gallery and the Dahesh Museum.

Viviane's work can be seen in the Clinton Presidential Center art collection in Little Rock, AR, The Tullman Collection at Flashpoint Media Academy in Chicago IL and in Vanderbilt University's outdoor bronze sculpture collection in Nashville, TN.

Her work is included in many private collections and has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Gotham magazine, Time Out New York, The NY Press, American Artist and Sculpture Review magazines as well as in various catalogs and papers.





[www.vivianesilvera.com](http://www.vivianesilvera.com)

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